

✱ THE GLORIES
of
DIVINE GRACE ✱


REV DR. M. JOS. SCHEEBEN

50
• Ex Libris
Duquesne University:



Rev. J.A. Nee





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
Lyrasis Members and Sloan Foundation

THE GLORIES
OF
DIVINE GRACE,

A FREE RENDERING OF

The Original Treatise of P. Eusebius Nieremberg, S. F.

BY

Dr. M. JOS. SCHEEBEN,

Professor in the Archiepiscopal Seminary at Cologne.

Translated from the Fourth Revised German Edition,

BY

A BENEDICTINE MONK OF ST. MEINRAD'S ABBEY, IND.

With the consent of the Author and the permission of the Superior.

THIRD EDITION.

NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO:
BENZIGER BROTHERS,
Printers to the Holy Apostolic See.

~~2341~~

~~5315~~

B7761

533

1886

Approbation of the Ordinary.

FOR THE ORIGINAL.

Imprimatur :

Coloniae die 25 Aprilis 1864.

Vicarius Archiepiscopi in spir. gen. de mandato,

DR. BROIX,

Can. eccl. metrop.

FOR THE TRANSLATION.

REV. DEAR FATHER :

. . . . I very cheerfully add my approbation to that of the Rt. Rev. F. Abbot, and pray that the blessing of God may descend upon your loving labors.

Believe me, etc.,

✠ FRANCIS SILAS,

Bp. of Vincennes.

Indianapolis, Ind., Dec. 30th, 1885.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

“*Of making many books there is no end.*”¹ True, but if the world multiplies books without number for indifferent and evil purposes, why should the children of Holy Church be less zealous in propagating books, which are written for the noblest of ends, and upon subjects of the highest interest and utility? If learned men of the present age make such great endeavors to popularize theories of natural science, why should not ministers of religion ply the pen in explaining and inculcating the supernatural truths of Divine revelation? Among the teachings of Revelation there is one particularly of supreme importance and beauty; that, namely, on *Divine Grace*. Yet in the English, no less than in the German language, there exist but few works on this subject, and fewer still that are suited to the capacity of the people! The work, which is hereby offered to the English community, has for its author a very prominent Catholic theologian of Germany. It is written with his habitual depth and fertility of thought, thoroughness of method, aptness of illustration, and extensive erudite learning. Its style breathes the author's own warm admiration for the subject he treats, and thus lends an additional charm and value to his exposition. All these reasons have determined the translator, though little confident in his own ability, to venture to place the book into the hands of English-speaking Christians. He has throughout confined himself, as much as possible, to the letter of the text. The author, when kindly giving his permission for the translation, asked to be

¹ Eccl. xii. 12.

MAR 5

18496

1936

recommended to the prayers of the reader. The translator humbly joins in this request, and hopes that this prayer may draw down some blessing of God upon his imperfect attempt.

ST. MEINRAD, IND.,

Feast of St. Francis Xavier, 1885.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

TO THE FIRST EDITION.

The present work follows close upon two other similar works, which I have recently published, because it is intimately connected with them and is their essential complement.

In "Nature and Grace" I have endeavored to develop the doctrine of grace in a speculative manner, and by the publication of Casini's "Quid est homo" I wished to furnish the positive basis and support for the speculative treatise. It only remained then to issue also a popular treatise on the doctrine of grace and to explain its practical importance. The material for this was given in the two works mentioned.

In an article of the *Katholik* (Mayence, Dec., 1860), I have already called attention to the immense practical importance of the doctrine of grace, especially of the supernatural element in this doctrine. I have, at the same time, pointed out how in the pulpit and in literature this subject had not received the consideration due to it. It is, indeed, a matter of much surprise that, in the whole range of our literature, there is scarcely one popular dogmatical or ascetical work, which treats *ex professo*, or even with some thoroughness and completeness, of grace; and yet there is scarcely any subject more important, more beautiful and fruitful than that of grace. I will dwell no longer on this point, as I hope that the reading of this little work may at least prove that my undertaking has been both thankful and timely.

Perhaps many have been deterred from a similar under-

taking by the difficulties attending it, and I should also have been so deterred, had I not considered the present urgent want of such a work to indicate a call of God and the assurance of His assistance. Furthermore, I found an able preparatory work, which I could take for a basis, the book, namely, of the well-known P. Eusebius Nieremberg, “*De pretio inestimabili divinæ gratiæ.*”

To my regret I could not find the original or even a complete translation, though I sought it for years. I found only a very imperfect abridgment of the work with the title, “*Cogitationes solidæ de pretio inestimabili divinæ gratiæ,*” which was published at Würzburg as a New Year’s gift of the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin. I therefore could not think of translating Nieremberg, especially since the original, too, which I had seen many years ago, did not carry out the dogmatical explanation, from a supernatural point of view, as carefully and thoroughly as I should have wished.

Nevertheless, I supposed I could do nothing better than to follow Nieremberg as closely as possible ; I have therefore, on the whole, retained the division of the work, transposed but few chapters, and also added but few, viz.: Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, in the third book, Chapter 5, in the fourth book, Chapters 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, in the fifth book. Much matter, however, which was not so pertinent to the subject, I have omitted. Furthermore, I have taken over much material, sometimes entire, in free translation, particularly in the first and fourth book.

The dogmatic exposition in most, as well as the practical application in many of the chapters, is either entirely or in great part my own work. I have also added nearly all the longer passages from the Fathers. The second and fifth book I have recast almost entirely from new material, and thus I may call two-thirds of the book my own production.

If I, nevertheless, place Nieremberg’s name at the head of the work, it is out of gratitude for this great and

holy man, to whom I am indebted for the leading ideas in the work, and to whose prayers I consider all the blessing attributable which God has bestowed upon it, or may in future bestow upon it. At the same time it may serve to re-introduce this man into Germany (to which he belonged by descent, though he lived and labored in distant Spain), and to call attention to his other ascetical writings, which are unduly neglected and ignored.

Many readers will consider the teachings here proposed either too novel or too disputable to be used for the instruction of the people. But the principles from which we proceed are principles of faith, and all our propositions are at least the teachings of many holy Fathers, or the approved opinions of great theologians. In many places, where it was convenient, we have expressly demonstrated this, though generally we have omitted to do so, lest the book might receive too learned an appearance. He who desires a more complete demonstration, will find it partly in Casini's "Quid est homo," in Habert's "Theologia Græcorum Patrum de gratia," and especially in Suarez' "De gratia," whose approved teaching I followed in nearly all points.

My general endeavor has been to render method and style as popular as possible, so that the book might be accessible not only to theological circles, but also to those of the people who are qualified to understand the supernatural glories of grace, not so much by learning and science, as by the light of Divine grace and the docility of an ardent faith. This was required also by the practical end which I had in view, in common with Nieremberg, namely, to withdraw the hearts of men from the vanities of this world and to direct them to a higher, heavenly, supernatural world, to inspire them with love for the Author of grace and His institution of it, to lead them to an ever closer attachment to the Church of Christ, to foster and cultivate Christian life, and especially to exhibit to Christians the abundant cause they have for *rejoicing in their holy religion*. For the beauty and pride of the Catholic

faith consists precisely in this, that in the mysteries of grace it proposes to us an inestimably high elevation of our nature and an unspeakably intimate union with God.

I should consider myself happy if I had contributed anything toward the attainment of this end. I have at least the confidence that in this work pastors and teachers of the people may find a new and rich mine for the instruction of the people, which is scarcely yet opened, and that they may thus turn it to very profitable account, notwithstanding its defects. A number of my friends, competent judges, who had formerly read the work, have confirmed me in this hope. May the Author of grace realize it through the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin, the first-born daughter and Mother of grace, and especially, also, through the intercession of the venerable P. Nieremberg, who in his time defended and glorified the Immaculate Conception of Mary in as brilliant and magnificent a manner as he praised and proclaimed the glories of Divine grace.

COLOGNE, *Feast of the Nativity of the
Blessed Virgin, 1862.*

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

TO THE FOURTH EDITION.

I have only to remark, that I have again subjected this work, which is especially dear to me, to a careful revision. In point of matter I found little to change, but the expression has in many places been rendered more clear and precise.

May the book, with the blessing of God, lead many readers, in these troubled times, to be consoled and edified by the consideration of the glories and the blessedness of Divine grace.

COLOGNE, *Feast of the Epiphany*, 1885.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
Translator's Preface,	3
Author's Preface to First Edition,	5
Author's Preface to Fourth Edition,	9
Introduction,	15

FIRST BOOK.—*Of the Nature of Grace.*

CHAPTER

I. How deplorable it is that men should have so little regard for grace,	23
II. Grace should be prized very highly, because it is infinitely superior to all natural things,	28
III. Grace is still more sublime than miracles,	32
IV. We are elevated far above our nature by grace,	37
V. Grace is a participation in the uncreated Divine nature,	41
VI. The participation in the Divine nature is a supernatural similarity to it,	47
VII. With the participation in the Divine nature grace confers upon us the highest perfection,	51
VIII. Grace elevates man to the participation in the Divine cognition, to the immediate vision of Divine glory,	55
IX. Grace makes us partakers of the sanctity of the Divine nature,	61
X. Grace gives us a new, higher nature,	65
XI. Grace is in a certain sense infinite,	70
XII. Grace and the Incarnation of the Son of God,	74
XIII. Grace and the dignity of the Mother of God,	81
XIV. <u>How much God Himself esteems Grace,</u>	86

SECOND BOOK.—*Of the Sublime and Incomprehensible Union
with God to which Grace introduces us.*

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. By grace we receive the person of the Holy Spirit into our soul,	94
II. The whole Blessed Trinity is introduced into our soul by grace,	105
III. By grace the Holy Ghost communicates to us His own life,	110
IV. Grace makes us children of God, first by adoption,	118
V. The Divine sonship—Regeneration,	127
VI. The wonderful nourishment of the children of God,	136
VII. Grace establishes the relation of a true friendship between God and ourselves,	146
VIII. The ineffable love which God bears us, when we are in the state of grace,	157
IX. The heavenly beauty which grace confers upon the soul,	163
X. Grace makes our soul a true spouse of God,	173
XI. By grace we participate in the empire of God and His dominion over all things,	184
XII. The exceedingly intimate union with God which grace effects in us,	190

THIRD BOOK.—*Of the Effects and Fruits of Grace.*

I. Light, a symbol of grace,	203
II. The wonderful power which grace has to destroy mortal sin in us,	214
III. Grace infuses into our hearts the supernatural Divine virtues,	220
IV. Supernatural Divine Faith,	226
V. Supernatural Divine Hope,	234
VI. Supernatural Divine Charity,	239
VII. The supernatural moral virtues,	247
VIII. By grace we receive the Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost, which are accompanied by the Eight Beatitudes of Christ and the Fruits of the Holy Ghost,	253
IX. Sanctifying grace brings with it the supernatural actual graces of the Holy Ghost,	263
X. The infinite value which grace communicates to our works for meriting eternal glory,	272

CHAPTER	PAGE
XI. The inestimable privilege of grace, that by the works performed in it, we may render satisfaction for the punishment of sin deserved,	284
XII. By grace we enter into a wonderful communion of goods with Christ and the saints,	287
XIII. The wonderful power which grace manifests in the weakness of our nature,	293

FOURTH BOOK.—*Of some other Effects and Prerogatives of Divine Grace.*

I. Grace makes us worthy in every respect of a special Divine Providence,	301
II. Grace enjoys the company of numerous hosts of angels,	307
III. Outside of grace there is no true happiness in this world,	312
IV. The grace of God makes us far happier than does the grace of man,	320
V. In grace we find the highest enlightenment, the truest liberty, and the greatest progress,	324
VI. How much the angels esteem grace,	332
VII. We must have a greater esteem for grace in us than the angels and the saints of the Old Law.	338
VIII. How the saints of the New Law valued grace, and how much they did for its sake,	341

FIFTH BOOK. — *Of the Acquisition, Exercise, Increase and Preservation of Grace.*

I. The acquisition of grace,	347
II. Supernatural faith, the first preparation for the reception of grace,	353
III. The fear of God, the second preparation for the reception of grace,	362
IV. Supernatural hope in God, the third preparation for grace,	367
V. Contrition, the fourth and last preparation for grace,	372
VI. The supernatural life, which we must lead in the state of grace,	378
VII. The exercise of supernatural love of God,	388
VIII. The exercise of supernatural love of our neighbor,	397
IX. The exercise of supernatural humility and chastity,	401

CHAPTER	PAGE
X. Faith, the food of the life of grace,	416
XI. The continual progress we must make in the supernatural life of grace, and the facility of such progress,	424
XII. How careful we should be, not to stain and dishonor grace by venial sin,	437
XIII. The preservation of grace until the end. . . .	445

INTRODUCTION.

1. “ *All good things came to me together with her, and innumerable riches through her hands. She is an infinite treasure to men, which they that use, become the friends of God, being commended for the gifts of discipline.*”¹

These beautiful words which the Book of Wisdom speaks in praise of the wisdom that comes from God, may also be applied to Divine grace. The true and heavenly wisdom of which Holy Scripture speaks, is, indeed, that supernatural enlightenment which the sun of eternal wisdom infuses into our souls from the bosom of Divine light. This wisdom is itself a grace, or rather the most beautiful and glorious fruit of grace in our soul.

When, therefore, St. John, in the beginning of his Gospel, wishes to express in a word the whole plenitude of the treasures and gifts which the Son of God brought into this world at His Incarnation, he says : “ *We saw His glory, the glory as it were of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*”² Grace again it is which the Apostle Paul, at the beginning and at the end of his Epistles, wishes the faithful : “ *Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*” We do not hesitate, then, to say that grace is the most precious, and, since it contains all other gifts, is the only great good, which is the subject of the Gospel, that joyful heavenly message brought to this earth by the Son of God. By grace we are made true children of God and acquire the right to the possession of the highest gifts that God can bestow upon His creatures, even to the possession of God Himself, who wishes to be-

¹ Wisdom vii. 11, 14.

² John i. 14.

come the inheritance of His children, with all His infinite glory and happiness.

“*Most great and precious promises,*” St. Peter tells us, “*hath God given us by Him ; that by these you may be made partakers of the Divine nature.*”¹ They are *most great*, because they surpass all created things, be these ever so good and noble, and *precious*, because they contain the best that God, in His omnipotence, can give us ; they are infinitely precious, as is the price paid for them, the blood of the Son of God. The prince of the Apostles indicates himself the reason of this greatness, when he adds: “*that by these you may be made partakers of the Divine nature.*” Can there be anything greater for a creature than to be elevated from its natural lowliness and nothingness, to participate in the nature of the Creator and be associated with Him ?

This one word expresses the whole greatness and glory of grace, and tells what a great and sublime *mystery* grace must be. Grace is that “*mystery of Christ,*” of which the Apostle says: “*Which in other generations was not known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed to His holy Apostles and Prophets in the Spirit. That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and co-partners of His promise in Christ Jesus by the Gospel.*”² Grace is that mystery of which the same Apostle says, it hath not entered into the heart of man, but could be revealed to us by the Spirit of God, who searcheth all things, even the profound things of God.³ The more grace is a mystery, the more concealed it is from our natural eye, the more incomprehensible and ineffable it is ; the greater must appear to us its value, the higher its glory, and the more comprehensive its riches.

2. This sweet and sublime mystery is too little known even among Christians, although the teachings of Holy Scripture and the Holy Church sufficiently enlighten us about it, and the lack of this knowledge is the more lam-

¹ II. Peter i. 4.

² Eph. iii. 4-6.

³ I. Cor. ii. 9, 10.

entable, as the knowledge of the doctrine of grace alone can lead us to understand and appreciate our exalted dignity, our great hopes, and the inexhaustible wealth of the merits of Christ.

At the mention of the grace of God, we often represent to ourselves nothing but the restoration of God's favor, lost by sin, or such gifts of Divine love as will assist our weak nature in avoiding sin and in the practice of virtue. Certainly, *forgiveness of sins* and this *protection and assistance* must also be accounted effects of God's grace, but these effects alone do not constitute its highest value and its innermost nature.

Forgiveness of sin is a grace on the part of God and restores to us that benevolent love which God bestowed upon us before sin. But we must ask : *Which* love did God bear us previous to our sin ; was it a love equal only to the worth of our human nature, or was it a greater, an ampler love, that gave additional beauty to our nature, and elevated it to the heart of God unto a fraternal union with His Divine Son ?

Grace strengthens our weakened nature against the temptation to evil and in the performance of good works ; it facilitates the fulfilment of our duties and the attainment of our last end. But here again the question presents itself : Does grace unite itself with man in his natural condition, and, by co-operating with his inborn virtue, assist and strengthen nature, does grace only temper nature—or does it elevate and transform it, and communicate to it a new nature, a new force, a new life, and new laws of life ?

A correct solution to these questions is of primary importance, and we can arrive at it easily by a clear and distinct definition of the term "*Christian Grace* :

3. Grace means, in the first place, that *benevolent love* which a superior entertains for an inferior, for instance, a master for his servant, a sovereign for his subject, and in our condition, God for His rational creature, especially

when this love is united to the *pleasure* and *complacency* which the former takes in the good qualities and good deeds of the latter.

At the same time, however, we apply the word *grace* also to the *effect* of *that love* and to the *object* or the *cause* of *that pleasure*. Thus we say that we ask a *grace* of God or of man when we ask Him to grant us a *favor* on account of the condescending, benevolent love He bears us. Holy Scripture, likewise, applies the name *grace* to that beauty, goodness, and loveliness which render us worthy of the pleasure and love of God : “ *Grace is poured abroad in thy lips : therefore hath God blessed thee for ever.*”¹

But we must add another distinction of importance, viz., that we receive a *twofold* favor and grace from a superior person ; first, a certain *general, ordinary, merited, and necessary* grace ; and then, a *very special, extraordinary, undeserved, and gratuitous* grace ; and this latter alone is, *strictly and properly speaking*, grace. Let us illustrate this by the conduct of a good and noble sovereign. He will truly love all his subjects, though they are inferior to him, or rather on that very account, because they are his subjects, and all will share his favor and goodness according to their relative position and merit. If he does no more than this, he fulfils only his duty and obligation, and he may be called gracious and kind, but he will not be said to receive any one unto special favor. This will be the case, then, only when he loves all or some of his subjects in a greater degree and bestows upon them greater gifts than he is in duty obliged, and their position or services are entitled to claim. Especially, then, will he be gracious, when of his own free will he embraces his subjects with the full love that he bears his own children and himself ; when in his kindness he condescends to associate with them as with his friends, thereby elevating them from their lowliness and surrounding them with royal honors ; when he, in consequence,

¹ Ps. xlv, 3.

raises them above their original condition and makes them, as far as possible, equal to himself and his children.

Let us apply this example to the grace of God, of which royal favor is but a faint shadow. God is the highest King of Heaven and of earth, because He has created all, because all things are His and are destined for His service and glory. As He has created all things out of love, so He loves all His creatures ineffably and with most gracious condescension, but He naturally loves the rational more than the irrational, because they are His image and are capable of knowing and loving Him. His Divine complacency rests upon them, because He has created them good, as long as they do not offend Him by mortal sin and remain worthy of His first love by faithful observance of His commandments. In a certain sense, then, the rational creature can, even by its nature and its natural good works, merit the favor and love of God. For the same reason we may, according to the opinion of St. Augustine, call every natural good and gift of God a grace, since God was not obliged to create us and has given us all these natural goods out of gratuitous love.

But *when* once He has created us, He must, as a good and wise Creator, love us as His creatures, and grant us all those things that are indispensably necessary to attain to our natural destiny. That favor and grace, then, which we have just mentioned, is grace not in a particular and strict sense, but only in a general sense of the word. Nor is it the *Christian grace*, which Christ has brought into this world and which His Gospel, His Apostles, the holy Fathers, and Holy Church proclaim. This is grace in the highest and strictest sense of the word: *a very particular, gratuitous, condescending, and full grace of God, which makes us His particular favorites.*

By the first kind of grace God loves us, as we deserve it on account of our nature and our natural good works. By the latter grace, however, He loves us in a very particular manner, in a *supernatural* manner, infinitely more

than we would deserve according to our nature. From pure and spontaneous love He descends from the height of His royal throne to our lowliness, in order to elevate us infinitely above our nature. He loves us with an unbounded and overflowing love, as much, so to speak, as is in His power; He loves us as Himself and as His only begotten Son; He assumes, therefore, our soul as His child, His friend, His spouse, makes it the associate of His own glory and happiness, and gives Himself to the soul for eternal possession and enjoyment.

As we now, in a perfect and in the Christian sense, call only this supernatural love of God for us grace, so we in the same sense designate only those *gifts* of God as graces, that are entirely supernatural and precious above others and proceed from that supernatural love of God. In the same manner, not every *pleasure* that God may take in His rational creature is grace in the Christian sense, but that pleasure alone by which He delights in our soul on account of the supernatural beauty and loveliness it has received from Him by His supernatural love.

4. Here we must point out a very essential difference between the grace of man and the grace of God: man may love others more, and confer upon them greater gifts than they desire, but he is unable to make them more amiable and pleasing to himself than they are in themselves. God, however, by His supernatural love, confers a supernatural beauty and amiability on the soul, by which it becomes similar to Him in His Divine nature and reflects the image of His Divinity.

This internal, real, and supernatural *amiability* and *pleasingness* to God of our soul is also called grace, and that in an eminent sense, first, because it is the principal effect of God's supernatural love, and again, because it is the special object of His highest pleasure. It is that which we call habitual, sanctifying grace, the grace of sonship, or simply and directly grace, and which is described by the Roman Catechism in the following words: "*Grace, ac-*

according to the definition of the Council of Trent,¹ a definition to which, under pain of anathema, we are bound to defer, not only remits sin, but is also a Divine quality inherent in the soul, and, as it were, a brilliant light that effaces all those stains which obscure the lustre of the soul, and invests it with increased brightness and beauty.”²

We shall, then, in harmony with the use of the Church and the Council of Trent, speak of grace especially in the last sense, when we treat now of its glories and its inestimable value. We must observe, however, that the so-called supernatural *actual* graces and the virtues of faith and hope, which may be separated from sanctifying grace, are not made to suffer by this distinction, but rather thereby appear in the full lustre of their glory and value. As they serve only to convey sanctifying grace to the soul, or to increase or preserve it, it is evident that their Divine power and great importance is rendered more prominent by portraying the full greatness and glory of the latter.

5. Ineffably great are the mysteries that we are about to reveal, and it is difficult to describe them in a manner worthy of their greatness and at the same time suitable to every capacity.

Yet we are consoled by the words of St. Leo, spoken with reference to the mystery of redemption, but equally applicable to the mystery of grace: “Although this is difficult, yet the priest is not free to withhold from the faithful the ministry of his word in this great mystery of Divine mercy, because the very ineffableness of the subject furnishes matter for speech, and when that which we say can never suffice, enough always remains to be said. *May human weakness, therefore, always succumb to the glory of God, and always find itself insufficient to explain the works of His mercy.* May our sense be troubled, our understanding embarrassed, our expression deficient; *it is good that whatever knowledge concerning the Divine Majesty we do acquire, we find it less than we wish to possess.*”³ Moreover, we may

¹ Sess. 6, C. 7. De justif. ² De bapt. N. 49. ³ Serm. 11, On the Passion of our Lord.

confidently hope that the grace whose glories we describe will, if ever, especially now enlighten us and our readers, if we only approach its consideration with childlike simplicity, with a pure heart and deep humility. For as God “resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble,” so He will let the humble understand the greatness of this grace. To the mysteries of grace the words of Christ are aptly referred: “I confess to Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones.”¹

If, however, Christian reader, in the course of this explanation, now and then something should appear to you altogether singular, new and unintelligible, remember what St. Paul says of the riches of grace: ² “*God is able to do all things more abundantly than we desire or understand,*” and rest assured that we shall advance nothing that is not supported by the clear teachings of Holy Writ, or the distinct utterances of the greatest Doctors of the Church.

The following is a synopsis of the contents and division of this work:

The *first book* explains the *nature* of sanctifying grace, and shows that it is a supernatural quality infused into our soul by God, by which we are elevated above our own nature and participate in the Divine nature or become similar unto it.

The *second book* describes how our soul is *united to God* in a supernatural and wonderful manner by this elevation, and is made His child, friend, and spouse.

The *third book* continues to explain *the effects* which grace produces in our soul, especially the supernatural, heavenly, and Divine life it creates in us.

The *fourth book* adds some other effects and prerogatives which ought to lead us to prize grace very highly.

The *fifth book* finally indicates how we may acquire this grace, whose glories and prerogatives we have considered, and how, once having acquired it, we ought to guard and esteem it, and co-operate with it.

¹ Matthew xi. 25.

² Eph. iii. 20.

First Book.

Of the Nature of Grace.

FIRST CHAPTER.

How Deplorable it is that Men should have so Little Regard for Grace.

1.

THE grace of God, which we consider, is a ray of Divine beauty, infused from Heaven into the soul of man, and penetrating its innermost nature with such a bright and beautiful light, that the soul delights the eye of God, is most tenderly loved by Him, is adopted as His child and spouse, is elevated above all limits of nature from earth to Heaven. By grace the soul is received into the bosom of the Eternal Father, and at the side of His Divine Son participates in His nature, His life and glory, and inherits the realm of His eternal happiness.

But our intellect cannot keep pace with our tongue, whilst it proclaims new wonders at every word that it utters. And how should we be able to understand these sublime heavenly gifts, when even the blessed spirits, who already possess and enjoy these gifts, cannot fully comprehend and appreciate their value? They, too, in beholding the throne of Divine mercy, can but admire in deepest reverence His unbounded grace and goodness. But they must likewise marvel at our incredible, miserable blindness, when we esteem the grace of God so little, seek it so negligently, and lose it so easily. They sorrow over our un-

speakable misfortune, when we by sin cast ourselves from the throne of that heavenly dignity, to which grace had raised us, and which exceeded the natural dignity of the highest angels, into the deepest abyss, into the company of the brute and the reprobate spirits. And we are not horrified, we do not shudder, we scarce experience the slightest regret !

The Angel of the schools teaches¹ that the whole world, and all it contains, is of less value before God than the grace of a single man. Yea, St. Augustine maintains² that the whole Heaven, together with all angels, cannot be compared with it. It would follow, then, that man ought to be more thankful to God for the smallest share of grace, than if he had received the perfections of the highest spirits and were made king of Heaven and the whole world, with full possession of all power and dominion. How infinitely superior in value, then, is grace to all the riches of this earth !

And yet the least of these is often blindly preferred to grace, and the most detestable of them induces us to cast away grace sacrilegiously, and that, as it were, in playful jest. There are always men who wantonly surrender to the enemy of their soul this whole plenitude of gifts, which includes God Himself, only that they may indulge one sinful, unchaste look at an impure object ! who, more inconsiderate than Esau, lose an inheritance greater than the whole world, for a miserable momentary enjoyment !

2. “*Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this: and ye gates thereof be very desolate.*”³ Who would be so rash and insane, if one brief sinful pleasure should cause the sun to disappear from the world, the stars to fall from Heaven, and all the elements to be disturbed, who were so mad as to sacrifice the whole world to his lust ? But what is the destruction of the universe compared with the loss of grace ? Yet this loss occurs so easily and frequently with so many people, I will not say every day, but at every moment ; and

¹ Thom. 1. 2. q. 113. a 9 ad 2.

² Aug. 1. ad Bonif. c. 6.

³ Jerem. ii. 12.

how few are there that seek to prevent this loss in themselves or others, or that at least mourn and weep over it!

We are awe-stricken at an eclipse of the sun, that lasts not even an hour, at an earthquake that buries a whole city, at a pestilential disease that swiftly carries off men and beasts in great number. Yet there is an occurrence far worse, far more terrible and deplorable, which we behold thousands of times every day with tearless eye, without emotion, when, namely, so many miserable men lose the grace of God every day and neglect the most convenient opportunities of acquiring it again or increasing it.

Elias could not witness the overthrow of a mountain;¹ the prophet Jeremias was inconsolably grieved at the desolation of the Holy City; Job's friends mourned seven days in silence at his lost fortune. We, indeed, may then eternally grieve and weep; our sorrow will not even in a slight degree equal the misfortune that befalls us when sin devastates the heavenly garden in our soul, when we cast off the reflex of Divine nature, the queen of virtues, holy charity, with all her heavenly following, the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit Himself; the sonship of God, the prerogatives of His friendship, the claim to His rich inheritance, the price and fruit of the sacraments and our merits; when, in a word, we lose God and the whole Heaven, grace with all its innumerable, precious treasures.

The soul that loses grace may truly apply to itself the words of Jeremias in his Lamentations:² “*How hath the Lord covered with obscurity the daughter of Sion in His wrath? How hath He cast down from Heaven to the earth the glorious one of Israel, and hath not remembered His footstool in the day of His anger. The Lord hath cast down headlong and hath not spared all that was beautiful in Jacob.*” But who considers this great misfortune, who grieves over it, and who is restrained from new sins by this grief? “*With desolation is all the land made desolate; because there is none that considereth in the heart.*”³

¹ III. Kings xix.

² Lament. ii. 1-2.

³ Jerem. xii. 11.

Oh, how little do we love our true fortune, our true advantage, how little do we understand the infinite love with which God comes to offer us His most precious treasures ! We act in the same manner as did the Israelites, whom God desired to lead out of the slavery of Egypt and the barren desert, into a land that flowed with milk and honey. They despised the undeserved, inestimable gift that God offered them, despised even the manna that God gave them on their journey, they abandoned Him and longed again after the fleshpots of Egypt. The promised land, however, was only a figure of Heaven and the manna a figure of grace, which is to nourish and strengthen us on the way to Heaven. If, now, "*God lifted up His hand over them, who set at naught the desirable land, to overthrow them in the desert,*"¹ how great a responsibility do we incur by a disregard for Heaven and grace, since the contempt for the prototype was already punished so severely !

We disregard grace, however, because we permit ourselves to be too deeply impressed by our senses with the transitory things, and have but a superficial knowledge of the true and heavenly things. We must, therefore, endeavor to correct our error by a deep and careful consideration of both, and the esteem for the eternal things will increase in us, in the same degree as that for the temporal diminishes. We must approach as near as possible to the overflowing and inexhaustible fountain of Divine grace, and the glory of its treasures will so delight us, that we henceforth will condemn the earthly things. Thus we learn to admire and esteem grace, and he who admires and praises grace, says St. John Chrysostom, will zealously and carefully guard it.

Let us, then, with the Divine assistance, begin "*the praise of the glory of His grace.*"²

And Thou, great and good God, Father of Light and of Mercy, *from whom cometh every perfect gift,*³ *who hast predestinated us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ unto Thyself, according to the purpose of Thy*

¹ Ps. cv. 24-26.

² Eph. i. 6.

³ James i. 17.

will,¹ who hast chosen us in Thee before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in Thy sight in charity, give us the spirit of wisdom and of revelation, enlighten the eyes of our heart, that we may know what is the hope of our calling, and what are the riches of the glory of Thy inheritance in the saints.² Give me light and strength that my words may not be prejudicial to the gift of Thy grace, by which Thou dost raise men from the dust of their mortal origin and receivest them into Thy heavenly court.

Christ Jesus, our Saviour, Son of the living God, by Thy precious Blood Thou hast shed for us poor creatures, and which Thou didst not consider too great a price for us, grant me that I may in some measure reveal the inestimable value of grace to those whom Thou hast redeemed and restored to grace.

And Thou, Highest and Holiest Spirit, Pledge and Zeal of Divine love, Sanctifier of our soul, by whom the grace and love of God is infused into our hearts, by whose seven gifts this grace and love is developed, who givest us Thyself with grace, teach us what grace is and how precious it is.

Blessed Mother of God, and, therefore, Mother of His Divine grace, permit me to make known to those who have by grace become children of God and thy own children, the treasures to procure which thou hast offered thy Divine Son.

Holy angels, ye spirits filled and glorified by the light and fire of Divine grace, and ye holy souls who have already passed from this place of exile into the bosom of the heavenly Father, and there enjoy the sweet fruit of grace, assist me by your prayers, that I may for myself and others dispel the deceptive cloud before our eyes, reveal the sun of grace in brightest undimmed splendor, and by its transcendent beauty kindle in our hearts a living and everlasting love and desire for it.

¹ Eph. i. 5.

² Ibid. 4, 18.

SECOND CHAPTER.

Grace should be Prized very highly, because it is Infinitely Superior to all Natural Things.

1.



WE begin with the least prerogative of grace, namely, that it is infinitely above all natural things. "*Heaven and earth shall pass away*, according to the assurance of our Saviour," says St. Augustine, "but the salvation and justice of the elect will remain; the former contains only the works of God, these latter the image of God."¹ St. Thomas again teaches,² that it is a greater work to bring a sinner back to grace, than to create Heaven and earth. For the objects of the latter work are transitory and temporal things; the former work is so much greater, because it leads to the participation in the immutable Divine nature. In creation God erects for Himself only a dwelling; in giving man a rational nature, He places His servants and creatures in this dwelling; but when He gives man His grace, He receives him unto His bosom, makes him His child, and communicates to him His own eternal life.

In a word, grace is altogether a supernatural gift, that is, a gift which no created nature can possess by itself, or even lay claim to, and which properly belongs only to the highest nature of God Himself. This is so true that the most prominent and the greatest number of theologians maintain that God cannot produce a created being that would, from its nature, already possess grace; they even say, if we should suppose such a creature, this creature would not differ from God Himself.

Closely connected with this opinion is the oft-repeated and distinct decision of the Church, that neither man nor

¹ Aug. tr. 72, in Joannem.

² I. 2 q. 113. a 9. in corp.

any other creature bears in his nature even the least germ of grace, and that, as St. Augustine frequently remarks, nature is related similarly to grace, as inanimate matter is to the principle of its life. Matter in itself, without life, cannot give itself life, but must receive it from another living being. In like manner the rational creature has not of itself any grace, and cannot even acquire it by its own labor and merit; God alone can, from pure love, give this grace, by opening the abyss of His omnipotence and pouring out upon nature His Divine power.

How great, then, must that good be, which so eminently surpasses the nature, the power, and the merit of even the highest angels!

An equally learned and pious man¹ says, all visible things are far inferior to man, even if they were infinite in number, and St. Chrysostom holds that there is nothing in this world that may be compared to man. St. Augustine, however,² adds that it is better to be just and holy than to be a man or an angel; and St. Thomas teaches that grace is worth more than the human soul.

Indeed, we may well say that grace surpasses all natural things in a manner similar to God Himself. Grace is nothing but the heavenly light, which from the depths of the Divinity diffuses itself over the rational creature. The sun and its light are inseparable, and as the sun is far more precious and perfect than the earth, which of itself has no such light, so is the light emitted by the sun.

Let us apply this to grace. Our nature is only the earth which receives the rays of the Divine Sun and by them is so elevated and glorified, that it becomes Divine itself. Now, as God, whom we possess by grace, not only contains within Him the perfection of all things, but is infinitely more perfect than all things together, so grace is more precious than all created things. It is, as the Book of Proverbs says of wisdom,³ "*better than all the most precious things; and whatsoever may be desired cannot be compared to it.*"

¹ Lessius, de div. perf. l. 1. c. 1. ² Serm. 15, de verbis Apost. ³ Prov. viii. 11.

2. Let us, then, raise our eyes to these treasures and decide whether they are to be despised or to be sought with all diligence. Were we ever so rich in natural goods, in gold and silver, in power and authority, in science and art, all this wealth vanishes into nothing before grace, as a heap of clay before a precious diamond. And if, on the other hand, we were ever so poor, by the grace of God alone we are richer than all the kings of the world; we possess the best that the great God, in His infinite liberality, could give us.

How grateful ought we, therefore, to be to God for such a gift! We thank Him, that He has called us into existence out of nothing, that, as the Psalmist says, ¹ He has subjected all things under our feet, the sheep and the oxen, the birds of the air and the fishes of the sea, and we must for that reason exclaim with the Psalmist: ² “*What is man that Thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that Thou visitest him?*” How much greater thanks must we render, then, for the supernatural treasures of grace, and how carefully must we preserve them!

A learned theologian, Cardinal Cajetan, therefore says, we must not for one moment lose sight of the value of grace, lest we might also forget the great punishment prepared for those who despise the great gifts offered them gratuitously by God with such tender love. A similar punishment awaits them as awaited those men in the Gospel who were invited by the king to his banquet, but on account of another trifling gain or pleasure would not come. We frivolous and ungrateful men despise the invitation of God to His heavenly banquet, in order to follow the invitation of the world and the devil, who delude us with their deceitful, miserable gifts and pleasures. The devil not only gives us nothing better than God, but something infinitely inferior; and even this he does not give us to make us happy, but to ruin us for all eternity. God gives us gratuitously, with incredible love, a precious diamond; the devil very miserly and with implacable hatred gives us a bright

¹ Ps. viii. 7.

² *Ibid.* 5.

but false coin. What a criminal folly is it to give up the precious diamond and purchase the counterfeit coin, only to perish miserably and cruelly.

But the immeasurable distance between grace and the natural gifts should not only prevent us from losing grace by a mortal sin, but urge us on to a fervent practice of the virtues that improve and increase it. Even if you lose no grace by omitting to assist at Holy Mass on week-days, or by neglecting an opportunity of prayer, or a work of mercy, of mortification, and self-humiliation, you, nevertheless, suffer an immense loss if you do not increase your capital, when it is so easily possible, because the least degree of grace is worth more than all the riches of the world.

If a miser could, by a single day's fast, or a single prayer, secure a whole fleet laden with treasures from India, who could restrain him from the act or disturb him therein? Who could impress him by representing the difficulty of his performance, or the danger of his health? With what right, then, and prudence, or rather folly, do we pretend such a difficulty, when we are certain of a reward, the smallest share of which incomparably surpasses a thousand Indies, aye, a thousand worlds! Yet we remain idle and will not labor to cultivate a field that immediately yields a golden harvest! We are not required to shed our blood in this labor. One sigh is sufficient, one tear, one earnest resolution, one pious wish, the one word Jesus, by which we express our love for Him or invoke His assistance. Who would not gladly invoke Jesus a thousand times a day if he could thereby obtain as many coffers of gold? And yet this is nothing in comparison with what we expect with unshaken faith to receive from God. Oh, could we impress these glorious riches of grace deeply upon our hearts, we would then repeat, not thoughtlessly, but with deep and vivid conviction, the words of a pious teacher: Grace is the mistress and queen of nature.¹

¹ Gerson., *serm. de circumcis.*

THIRD CHAPTER.

Grace is still more Sublime than Miracles.

1.

IT were not enough if grace surpassed only the natural things ; it also surpasses all miraculous works of God.

Thus St. Augustine ¹ understands that remarkable promise of our Saviour, that the faithful would do greater things yet than He Himself had performed on earth. He says we might indeed explain this promise by the fact that, for instance, St. Peter had healed the sick by his mere shadow, which we do not read of our Saviour. But it is more probable, he continues, that we are to understand here the work of justification, in which we can co-operate for ourselves and others. For, although we do not produce grace in ourselves, yet we can, with the Divine assistance, prepare ourselves for it and make ourselves worthy of it, and may encourage and induce others to do the same, and thus we shall perform greater works than Christ in His miracles.

The working of grace is more sublime and glorious than the working of miracles, for God as well as for man. God works miracles usually only in visible things, when in a supernatural manner He restores health to man or raises the dead to life. But grace He works in the soul, and by it, in a manner, creates the soul anew, elevates it above its nature, plants in it the germ of a supernatural life and reproduces, so to speak, Himself in it, by the image of His own nature, which He impresses upon it. Thus the work of grace is the greatest wonder of God's omnipotence. It is greater than even the creation of the natural world out of nothing, and can only be compared with that unspeak-

¹ Tract. 72, in Joannem.

able act of God the Father, by which He produces from all eternity His own and equal Son, and in time unites with Him a human nature. As supernatural, sublime, and full of mystery as is the generation of Christ, so supernatural and mysterious is the infusion of grace into our soul, because, in the words of St. Leo, we thereby “participate in the generation of Christ.”

However, we must co-operate in this work more than the saints could co-operate in the miracles God worked through them. They could only suffer God to act through their mediation, without being able, of their own power, to contribute anything. But in grace God wills that we ourselves, with His assistance, prepare our soul for it, receive it from His hand, preserve, cultivate, and increase it.

2. O wonderful greatness which God has given us, taking our soul unto Himself as His spouse, that by the power received from Him she may produce in herself the image of God and become the child of God! O wonderful power which God has granted His Church, to communicate His grace to her children by her teaching and her sacraments! Can man desire anything greater, co-operate in any greater work? Will you perform a great, a wonderful work, not to be admired by foolish men, but by the angels of Heaven? Will you be made a spectacle to the world and to the angels? See, this is the greatest work: labor to acquire and increase grace for yourself and your fellow-men.

Oh, if men knew what a great deed it is, if by sincere contrition for their sins they abandon their past and begin a new life! They in reality perform a greater deed, than if they raised the dead to life or created a man out of nothing. “*If God has made you man,*” says St. Augustine,¹ “*and you make yourself a just man* (of course with God’s help), *your work is better than that of God.*”

If you could recall your deceased brother to life by contrition for your sins, would you be so full of hatred towards God, or of cruelty towards your brother, as not to

¹ Serm. 15, de verbis Apost.

do this? Now you may easily, by one act of contrition, raise yourself from death, not that of the body, but that of the soul, and from an eternal death to an eternally blissful life. And yet you hesitate and refuse that wonderful assistance which God offers you.

St. Chrysostom¹ also teaches that it is greater to revive a mortally wounded soul than a dead body. Who, in fact, that is not entirely blind, could esteem it greater to re-instate the body in a perishable life and the enjoyment of earthly, sensual, temporal pleasures, than to raise the soul to an eternal life, and the enjoyment of heavenly gifts, and to secure for it, as well as in and by it also for the flesh, an eternal happy life? But if we ask miracles of God for the preservation of our corporal life, why do we not co-operate ourselves with *that miracle* that will restore to us the life of the soul?

3. Not only contrition, however, which recovers the lost grace, but all good, supernatural actions, performed in a state of grace, are of great value and have a marvellous power. Every degree of grace that we acquire raises us higher above our nature, unites us more closely to God, and causes us to ascend ever more above all the heavens. Had we the power to work visible miracles, or at least to accomplish great things with ease, how zealously should we use this power, and what an honorable duty should we consider it, to turn this capital to profitable advantage! With how much zeal do great artists and poets practise their art, and continually produce new and more beautiful works!

If we only considered what power every good work possesses for the increase of grace and the gain of eternal happiness, we should let no moment pass by without loving God, adoring Him, and praying to Him, and we should be ashamed to draw one breath without sighing to God; we should even rejoice with the Apostles to suffer something for God's sake.² If we knew how greatly we may enhance our dignity by a single act of virtue, we should purchase

¹ Tom. 4, hom. 4, antiq. ed.

² Acts v. 41.

the opportunity at any price and we could not bear to lose one occasion out of a hundred that were offered us.

No man would be so cruel as not willingly to cure a sick person, or enrich a poor one, if he could do this by one small charity or a short prayer. But are we not much more cruel to ourselves, if we refuse to augment the heavenly beauty, glory, and treasures of our soul at an equally insignificant cost? Why do we not season all our actions with the spirit of faith and charity, since then we should acquire by each action a higher degree of grace, which is nobler than all natural things and greater even than miracles?

4. The infusion and communication of grace is itself a miracle of the highest order and greater than all other miracles. But why does it not excite our *wonder* and *admiration*? For this reason alone, because it is invisible to our corporal sight, and does not occur rarely and exceptionally as other miracles, but universally and according to fixed laws. These two circumstances, however, should make it more precious in our eyes.

It is not visible because it is a miracle wrought in the soul and not in the body; we cannot see it, because we cannot see God, with whom we are united by it; and as God would not be the infinitely great God, if we could see Him with our natural sight, so grace would not be so great and wonderful, if it were visible to us.

If, moreover, grace is given according to a universal and fixed law, so that we may acquire it by our ordinary actions, this only reveals still more the infinite love and power of God, who is so liberal that He accomplishes this great work not at rare intervals, on extraordinary occasions, and through a few of His greatest servants only, as He does with other miracles, but connects it with our most ordinary actions and lets it disappear, as it were, in the circle of our own daily activity. Great God! should we esteem Thy gift less for that reason, which makes us venerate Thee, the Donor, so much more, or should we appreciate it less, because Thou grant-

est it to all, and at all times, and with the greatest facility, than if Thou didst grant it but once and to one man only? But if Thou wouldst grant it to one alone and only once, how could this one entertain the wicked thought of renouncing the possession of this so singular gift? Yes, O God, Thy bountiful liberality must induce us always to remember Thee, O most gracious Giver, and to exert all our power to preserve Thy gift in us and to hold it in highest honor.

FOURTH CHAPTER.

We Ourselves are Elevated far above our Nature by Grace.

1.

HAVING shown that grace is infinitely superior to all natural things and even to miracles, we might add, that in a certain sense it is more precious than even the heavenly glory, which appears to be the highest good that God is able to give us. For the glory of Heaven, in which the blessed see and enjoy God, is nothing else but the full development of the grace that we possess. Grace is the fountain, springing up unto everlasting life; it is the root, of which the blossom and fruit is beatitude; it has, then, the special privilege, that this beatitude depends upon it and is founded upon it. "*The wages of sin is death, but the grace of God, life everlasting,*" says the Apostle;¹ but if, according to the Apostle, grace is life eternal, then it must not only lead to that life, but already contain it in itself, and as sin is a greater evil than its punishment, death, so grace must be a greater good than eternal happiness considered in itself, for we merit it by grace.

But of this we shall speak later. Let us now consider how grace is such a precious and excellent gift that it communicates its qualities and greatness to its possessor, and is not only itself exalted above nature, but also elevates him who receives it far above his nature.

"Place me," says an old philosopher,² "in a very rich house that abounds with gold and silver; I shall not, on account of these things, admire myself; for though they

¹ Rom. vi. 23.

² Seneca.

are with me, they are not within me. Such external treasures do not touch the nature of man; and though they dazzle the eye by their great splendor, they improve him neither in health, nor in the form of his body, and least of all in the appointments of his mind." That, however, is precisely the privilege of grace, that it raises its holder to its own exalted position; it penetrates the soul,—the true interior man—and unites itself so closely with it that it communicates all its own prerogatives to the soul. It weaves all its treasures together into a golden vesture studded with diamonds, and envelops the soul with it; and as it is itself the greatest work of God, so it makes the soul, which receives it in rich inheritance, appear as the greatest, noblest, and most glorious work of God. Therefore, St. Cyril of Alexandria says: ¹ "The grace of Christ clothes us, as it were, with beauteous purple and raises us to a dignity that surpasses all knowledge."

What an unheard-of honor and liberality is that, where man is lifted up from his native lowliness and obscurity and is placed, not only like another Adam, as lord over this visible earth and all the animals, but is so far elevated above all the heavens, that the natural nobility of the highest angels does not reach thither! For the angels themselves do not by nature possess the dignity that we acquire by grace; they also receive it as a gift only from the gracious bounty of God and without it they would rank so far, and even farther beneath us, than we naturally are inferior to them.

2. Who, then, could sufficiently lament our blindness by which we exchange this pinnacle of greatness for a detestable servitude! Meanwhile, we endeavor, by mutual quarrel, dispute, and envy, to ascend to a place blindly considered higher than the others; and if at our birth we were given the choice, we would certainly always select the highest position and be inferior even to no angel. What witchcraft, then, so blinds us, that when this honorable name and throne of grace is offered, aye, urged upon us by God, we

¹ In Jo. c. 1, v. 14.

scarcely notice it, or if we have accepted it, so easily and at any price surrender it again !

Recognize, O man, the splendor which you receive from grace ; remain true in life to the high position which your soul occupies by grace. What have you in common with the laws of the world, when this world is so far beneath your feet? You, who by the dignity of your new condition have been transferred into Heaven and there erected your throne, why do you still wallow in the mire of this earth ?

The ancient heathen philosophers were by natural reason even led to understand that love for the things of this earth is foolish if we think of Heaven and of the stars. "If," says one of them,¹ "we should give human reason to ants, they would in the same manner divide their small fields into as many provinces, as kings do with their countries. Above us are infinite distances, before which earthly space disappears as nothing." Another² remarks : If one should look down from the sun or moon upon our earth, the whole earth would appear but as a small disc, and the largest kingdoms, and much more the acres and fields, would appear but as small, scarcely visible points.

How, then, shall we, who in reality and not only in word or thought have been elevated above the heavens by grace, bear ourselves? What shall we think of ourselves, of grace and of these earthly things? The same, or rather a far greater distance and difference of greatness, than exists between the sun and the earth, exists between all earthly things and grace ; yet we will, after the manner of very stupid people, be misled by external appearances. As they imagine the sun to be only a very small surface in comparison with the earth, so we foolishly cannot understand the invisible greatness and sublimity of grace. But if we can disprove appearances by the certain calculations of astronomers, why should we not let the far more certain principles of faith remove our ignorance in regard to grace ?

¹ Seneca, præf. in quæst. nat.

² Lucian, in Incarom.

Few men only, mindful of the high condition and dignity they have received by grace, despise the lust and desires of their inborn nature, and as a peasant suddenly become king, are ashamed of the character, pleasures, and ways of their previous low condition. St. Isidor of Alexandria wept over the necessity to eat, because he was compelled, like the animals, to take bodily food, whilst he was destined for the banquet of the blessed in Heaven. St. Paul considers it wrong to yield to flesh and blood and appreciate anything else in us than the new creation, which God has established in us by grace, and He exhorts us to find pleasure only in the things that are above, not the things that are on earth.¹ What madness, then, impels us to forget the delights of Heaven and to follow even brutish instincts and beastly pleasures? Thither, thither let us direct our desires, whither our position has raised us, and if we desire anything upon earth, let us desire crosses, that thus crucified to nature and to the world, we may exhibit the conduct of beings belonging to another, higher world.

¹ Coloss. iii. 2.

FIFTH CHAPTER.

Grace is a Participation in the Uncreated Divine Nature.¹

1.

This certainly a great thing that man by grace should rise above all created nature ; but it is something greater still, that he should participate in the uncreated Divine nature ; or rather, to speak more precisely, man in the state of grace is so superior to all created things, because he is so near God. On account of this nearness he partakes of the prerogatives of God, as a body partakes of the light and heat of fire, in proportion to its proximity to the fire.

This excellent union with God is taught us, according to the unanimous explanation of the holy Fathers, by St. Peter,² when he writes, that by the *most great and precious promises God hath made us by Jesus Christ, we may be made partakers of the Divine nature, i. e.*, that the prerogatives which are, above all created nature, due to the Divine nature, are, as far as possible, communicated to our own nature.

The Saints cannot find expressions sufficiently worthy to describe this magnificent gift. The ecclesiastical writer, known by the name of St. Dionysius, says : “ Sanctity or sanctifying grace is a Divine gift, an inexpressible copy of the highest Divinity and the highest goodness,³ by means of which we enter a Divine rank through a heavenly gen-

¹ What is said in the following chapters of the deification of the soul by participating in the Divine nature will appear to many readers exaggerated, novel and dangerous. Here, especially, there is question of a great mystery, which cannot be passed over in silence, but must be considered with reverence and faith.

² II. Peter i. 4.

³ Epist. 2, ad Caium.

eration.”¹ The holy martyr Maximus writes :² “The Divinity is given us when grace penetrates our nature by a heavenly light and raises it above its natural condition by the greatness of glory.” These and most of the other holy Fathers teach, with St. Thomas, that by grace we are, in a manner, deified, and they apply to this mystery the words of our Saviour :³ “*I have said : you are gods, and all of you the sons of the Most High.*” In a word, we are by grace elevated in some measure to the highest order of things, to the throne which God alone occupies in virtue of His nature, and we thus ascend unto the highest Heaven.

2. If we consider the various classes of beings known to us, we perceive that the one class differs in its nature from the others and is more perfect than others, so that they all together form a ladder of many rounds, whose summit is occupied by God. Some things enjoy existence only without life, as the stones and metals ; others have a certain kind of life, as the plant, which by its own innate power from the root produces the blossom and the fruit ; the animals have, besides, sensation and motion ; man, finally, has even a spiritual life, so that he may know and love even immaterial things. But above him again there is an immeasurable gradation of pure spirits, invisible to us, each of whom has his own peculiar high perfection. Infinitely above all these natures is the Divine nature ; for none other is so purely spiritual ; none other has like it the power to behold God immediately or unite itself so intimately to His own nature by love. All other natures are darkness compared to the Divine Sun and cannot of themselves adequately represent the peculiar perfections of this Sun.

This sublime Divine nature now, by the infinite power of its equally infinite love, draws our nature unto itself, receives it into its Divine bosom, immerses it into itself as iron is dipped into the furnace, and thus we belong to God’s kind in the same manner as the palm-tree belongs to the class of plants, and the lion to that of animals.

¹ Eccl. hier. c. 2.

² Centur. cecon. I. 76.

³ John x. 34 ; cf. Ps. lxxxii. 6.

If out of so many millions of men and angels, God selected a single soul, and bestowed upon it this unheard-of dignity, this soul, if it were visible, would darken the beauty of the sun, of all nature, and of all heavenly spirits, and would so amaze not only mortal men, but also the angels, that they would be inclined to adore it as they adore God Himself. How, then, is it possible that we despise this same gift, when it is so profusely, we might say, extravagantly lavished upon all, and that our ingratitude increases in the proportion in which God will be more liberal towards us ?

Our ambition makes us purchase, with immense trouble, and with large sums of money, the society of the great, and we despise the communion with the great God ! If any one is expelled from the council of a king, he cannot endure the ignominy ; and should we not esteem it a bitter loss, an irreparable injury to our ambition, to be expelled by mortal sin not only from the society of God, but from God's family and relationship ? In fact, the man that despises this union with God's goodness and Divinity hates God Himself ; such a man is a deadly enemy to his own honor, his sound reason, his own person, and to God.

3. Other honors, moreover, consist in the opinion and esteem of men, rather than in the possession of intrinsic merit ; a person may, at the bidding of his sovereign, occupy the highest positions of honor, without being, on that account, more perfect and honorable in himself. But if grace communicates to us a Divine dignity, it grants us not only a high name, but in reality a perfection of the Divine order, for it renders our soul, according to the teaching of theologians, in a supernatural manner like unto God.

“ By the union with the Son and the Holy Ghost,” says St. Cyril of Alexandria,¹ “ we all who have believed and have been likened unto God, are partakers of the Divine nature, *not only in name, but in reality*, because we have been glorified with a beauty surpassing all created beauty.

¹ De Trin. 1. 4.

For Christ is informed in us in an indescribable manner, not as one creature in another, but as God in created nature. Christ transforms us, the creature, by the Holy Ghost into His image, and elevates us to an uncreated dignity."

"What is essential and substantial in God," says St. Thomas,¹ "exists in the soul, which partakes by grace in the Divine love, as a quality superadded to its nature."

This beautiful and sublime mystery is explained by the holy Fathers in various illustrations. St. Athanasius² compares the Divinity with ambergris³ or balsam, which communicates its fragrance to the objects that come in contact with it; also with a seal which leaves its own form impressed in the soft wax. St. Gregory Nazianzen says our nature is so intimately united to God, and partakes of His perfections, as a drop of water that falls into a cup of wine is absorbed by it and assumes the color, flavor, and taste of the wine. St. Thomas, following herein St. Basil, represents to us the iron, which is in itself raw, cold, black, hard, and without beauty, but when laid into the fire and penetrated by its heat, without losing its own nature, appears bright, warm, flexible, and liquid. If we remember now that God is the purest spiritual light and the fire of eternal love itself, we can in some measure understand how God, descending with His full glory to His creature, or receiving it into His bosom, can, without destroying its nature, penetrate it with the full glow of His light and warmth, so that its natural lowliness and weakness disappear and it is seemingly altogether absorbed in God.

4. If we could acquire the vivid mental activity of the angels as easily as we can increase grace, we should certainly not slothfully neglect the opportunity. But why do I speak of the perfection of angels? Those of the lower nature even attract us: the swiftness of the deer, the

¹ 1. 2. q. 110, art. 2, ad 2.

² Lib. ad Serap. de Spir. S.

³ A precious, sweet-scented perfume, used in the East.

strength of the lion, the flight of the eagle, etc.; how gladly we should seize them, if they were within our easy reach! But, O shame! the perfection and glories of the Divine nature, that not only enrich our nature, but ennoble it throughout, and raise it up to the infinite, these perfections are not great enough in our eyes to call forth a little exertion on our part! Where is our reason, our Christian faith?

Let us suppose the case, that God had wonderfully united in a *single* man all the perfections to be found in creatures: that this man were stronger than the lion, more beautiful than the flowers of the fields or the dawn of day, brighter than the sun, more enlightened than the cherubs; let us further suppose that this man hazarded all these gifts on one cast of the die; who would not shudder at the folly and meanness of such criminal ingratitude! Thus the folly of Samson was so much greater, the greater his strength was, which he betrayed to the hypocritical tears of a deceitful woman. And we surrender our relationship with God, the splendor of the Divine Sun, the might of the Divine virtues, to our miserable flesh, which is the daughter of corruption, the sister and the mother of worms! Here the pen itself is shocked at the sight of such a pitiable and yet common spectacle. Weep, O ye angels of peace, if ye may weep, over this cruel madness, that makes your brethren on earth turn against themselves and unworthily desecrate so many and such great gifts!

May those of us, however, whose eye is more clear, and condition of soul more normal, esteem and admire their own dignity, and embrace with the whole love of their heart its author, the Father of all light. If the planets enjoyed the knowledge of their beauty, they would certainly be inflamed with grateful love towards the sun, whose bounty bestows upon them their beauty, whose light gives them their brightness, and whose reflection makes them so lovely and wonderful! The prince loves the founder of his pedigree, the son his father, if he be a true son, and

everything loves its kind. Should not a similar sense of relationship and similitude draw us from this earth to God ?

Would that we Christians were not less impressed with our dignity, than heathen philosophers, through the mere light of reason, were impressed with the dignity of man! They called man a miracle, the marrow and the heart of the world, the most beautiful being, the king of all creatures. But if he appears so great already in the light of reason, how much greater in the light of faith ! Let us open the eyes of our soul and heed the warning of St. Chrysostom : “ I beg and beseech you, do not suffer that the extraordinary gifts of God (which we have received through the grace of Christ), increase our guilt and the punishment of our negligence by their infinite greatness.”

SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Participation in the Divine Nature Effects a Supernatural Similarity to this Nature.

1.



HE participation in the Divine nature is so sublime a mystery that we must more fully explain the manner in which it takes place.

A certain participation in the Divine perfections is found, as theologians say, in all things that God has created. All things, more or less, resemble God, in their existence, in their life, in their force and activity; in all things God reveals His glory, so that, according to the teaching of the Apostles, the invisible glory of God may be seen and considered in created things. But their similarity is of a very different nature. In corporeal, visible things we find only a slight impression of God's glory, as it were, His footprint only, as a man leaves a print when walking over soft earth. The print shows where a man has been; but it contains only an image of his foot, not of his whole form and nature. Now, since God is a spirit, corporeal things reveal themselves as the work of His hands and bespeak His wisdom and power, but they do not represent His nature. Our soul, however, and all pure spirits, are, by their very nature, a certain image of the Divine nature; they are, like God, spiritual, rational, endowed with free will. Yet their nature is finite, created out of nothing, and therefore very different from the Divine nature. They are similar to the picture of a man which a painter has painted on canvas, in various colors. This picture reveals to us the form, the features, and complexion of the person represented; but it always remains far inferior to

the likeness that a mirror reflects ; for in the mirror the person appears by his own light and not by that of another, in his whole natural beauty, freshness and life. In like manner, the rational creature, then only becomes perfectly similar to God when it has become a true mirror of the Divinity, which reflects the Divinity in its own peculiar beauty, when it has been penetrated and glorified by the Divine fire, and in a manner transformed into God, as, for instance, a bright crystal globe that collects the rays of the sun, or as the mock-sun, noticed occasionally in the sky, appears to be the sun itself.

The participation in the Divine nature, then, which we enjoy by grace, consists in this, that our nature assumes a condition peculiar to the Divine nature, and becomes so similar to the Deity, that according to the holy Fathers, we may truly say, it is deified or made *deiform*. “*Deification*,” says St. Dionysius,¹ “*is the greatest possible likening and union with God.*” Likewise, St. Basil teaches:² “*From the Holy Spirit springs a never-ending joy, the likening unto God ; to be made God, however, is the highest that man can wish and desire.*” We do not speak, therefore, of a dissolution of our substance in the Divine substance, or even of a personal union with it as it is in Christ Jesus, but only of a glorification of our substance into the image of Divine nature. Neither shall we become new gods, independent of the true God, and therefore, false gods. But, in truth, we are made, by the power and grace of God, something which God alone is by nature ; we are made His supernatural likeness and our soul receives a reflex of that glory, which is peculiar to Him above all creatures.

2. If we will better understand this likeness with God, we must examine in order the different prerogatives which distinguish the Divinity from created natures.

Let us first consider the *eternal existence and life* of God. God alone exists by Himself, eternal and immutable, and depends upon no one. Creatures, however, are of themselves

¹ Eccl. hier. c. 1.

² De Spiritu. S. c. 9.

nothing; they exist only because God has created them and permits them to exist. For that reason they are, even after their creation by God, as nothing compared with Him. "I am who am," says the Lord, and "all nations are before Him as if they had no being at all, and are counted to Him as nothing and vanity."¹ For all creatures, even the immortal spirits, would, in virtue of their nature, again sink back into their nothingness, if God's goodness did not sustain them.

Grace, however, is, according to the Apostle Paul, a new creation and the foundation of a new immovable kingdom.² By it we are received into the bosom of the Eternal God, into the side of the Eternal Word, by whose power the Father has created all, and who is co-eternal with Him. We are called to a more than temporal, to an eternal life, and dwell in the tabernacle of God's eternity, immediately at the fountain of all being and of all life. Here our eternal existence is as secure as that of God Himself; here we need fear neither death nor destruction, and when Heaven and earth pass away, when the stars fall from Heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be moved, we shall not be affected, because we rest in the bosom of the Creator, far above all creatures.

Hence the Book of Wisdom says:³ "*The just shall live forevermore, and their reward is with the Lord; therefore shall they receive a kingdom of glory, and a crown of beauty at the hand of the Lord, for with His right hand He will cover them, and with His holy arm He will defend them.*" Of those, however, who separated themselves from God and esteemed the transitory goods higher than the treasures of His grace, the same Book says: "*What hath pride profited us, or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow and like a post that runneth on, and as a ship that passeth through the waves; so we also being born, forthwith ceased to be. . . . and are consumed in our wickedness.*" If, then, we wish really to

¹ Is. xl. 17.

² Eph. ii. 10. Hebr. xii. 28.

³ Wis. v. 16-17.

exist, to exist eternally and exist as something truly great, why do we not go to the fountain of all being? Why do we rely upon our own nothingness and pursue other things as vain and transitory as we ourselves are? Why will we be great in a tawdry garment? Why will we immortalize ourselves in the mouths of men, and not in ourselves and in the bosom of God?

The sinner desires, as the first parents and the devil himself, "*to be as God.*" Yea, God Himself wills, that we be as He, yet not without Him, not outside of Him, not against Him; He wills not that we should make ourselves as other gods, to adore ourselves and be adored. He wills that we be as He, but only in His bosom, at His heart; He wills it through Himself and in union with Him as His own Divine Son, who is not another God, but the same God with the Father. How great, therefore, is the folly and the crime of the sinner, who instead of desiring to be one with God as His child, rejects this infinite love of God and will be His enemy independent of Him!

SEVENTH CHAPTER.

With the Participation in the Divine Nature Grace Confers upon us the Highest Perfection.

1.

H *WILL be like the Most High,"* said Lucifer,¹ when he considered the beauty and glory with which God had adorned him. He blasphemed God by speaking thus, because he would possess this glory independently of God. But we cannot praise God more, and render Him more acceptable thanks, than by confessing that by His grace He will make us similar to Himself in His highest perfections. The Saviour Himself says: "*Be you perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect.*" This is to be understood primarily of moral perfection, but from all that we have said it may be interpreted to mean, also, that we shall partake of the other perfections of God.

Consider, then Christian soul, who are called to the communion of God, the riches of His glory. Admire His infinite nature, which, for that very reason, because it is the purest being, and being itself, contains all imaginable glory and happiness, and before which all else disappears as smoke. Admire His infinite majesty, which like a sun emits so many rays, as we behold beauties and perfections within us, about us, over us. See how the great Architect has, with one word, created this wide world, so beautifully diversified, and not exhausted with this one labor, He might have created a thousand worlds besides with the same ease: how He called into existence, and ordered so harmoniously, the countless heavenly bodies, some of which are a thousand and a million times greater than this earth:

¹ Is. xiv. 14,

how He, who moves all things, is not moved himself, how He ordains the different causes, arranges the elements, how He produces all perfections, forces, and treasures of metals, of springs, of plants and animals, of the science of men and angels from His treasures. And if now, before such an immense multitude of riches and glories, you fall on your knees in adoring admiration and imagine yourself annihilated as a poor worm before the splendor of the sun, then, O Christian soul, be amazed also at yourself, who have been surrounded and clothed with beautiful gold and purple, by a wonderfully loving God in His grace.

All created natures have different perfections, and no one enjoys all those that are found in others. The elephant has the strength of the lion, but not his swiftness, the lion the strength of the elephant, but not his size. Animals surpass plants in the possession of senses, but are not adorned by such beautiful blossoming. Man is infinitely superior to animals because of his rational soul, yet these possess many corporeal advantages, in which man is wanting. God, however, in the simplicity of His being, contains in an eminent manner all the perfections of creatures together, as the sun in its simple light contains all the diversified beauty of the seven colors of the rainbow; and the different natures of creatures are only as the different rays, are only the refractions by the clouds of the one ray of the sun. Thus, too, the nature of our soul and of the angel, being spiritual, is indeed incomparably more perfect than that of material things, yet it is only as one refracted ray of the Divine Sun, which does not contain the perfection of all others, though it be the most beautiful of them all. But in grace the light of Divine glory is reflected, pure and entire, by the soul, which thus is made so sublime an image of God, that all perfections of creatures are gathered in it.

2. Though you were ever so poor in natural gifts, brother, envy no one, and were you ever so rich in treasures, in power, in influence, in knowledge, see, the poorest of your

brethren is by grace infinitely more perfect and happy than you ; he possesses in his heart the most glorious and beautiful of kingdoms, the kingdom of God, of which Christ says, "*The kingdom of God is within you.*"

But you answer : Of all these glories I see nothing, and what doth a treasure profit me, if I cannot enjoy it ?

True, you do not see your glory, and yet it is within you. If you have an unpolished diamond, you do not yet see how precious and beautiful it is, though it has the same value now as when it is polished. When you hold the seed of a tree in your hand, you would not suspect what a great and beautiful tree is contained in it. Likewise, the beautiful and Divine perfection, which grace communicates to you, is within you ; but it is yet hidden and concealed. "*We are now the sons of God,*" says St. John ; "*but it hath not yet appeared what we shall be, when we shall see God as He is.*"

As long as you do not see God face to face, you cannot see the image of His Divine nature in you. Grace is, so to speak, the dawn of the light of the Divine Sun; wait only until this Sun itself rises, until it develops in you its whole splendor, until it penetrates and glorifies you with the glow of its heat, and your glory will delight you the more, the longer it has remained hidden from you. Until then, you must, after the words of the Apostle, walk by faith and not by sight, believing the unfailing promise of God. For, "*by faith,*" says St. Peter,¹ "*we are kept unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time at the appearing of Jesus Christ,*" and by Him we have the lively hope of "*an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that cannot fade, reserved in Heaven for us.*"²

In grace you have the pledge, aye, the root of your future glorification in soul and body. If you still sigh in the servitude of the flesh, if you feel depressed by suffering and frailties, sigh with the Apostle after the freedom and glory of the children of God, where even your flesh will be spirit-

¹ I. Peter i. 5.


² Ibid. 4.

ualized, and, in the fulness of perfection, free from all suffering and fear of death, beautiful as the sun and swift as the eagle, you will feel the power of grace and possess in the fullest abundance all those perfections which you perceive in visible things.

EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Grace Elevates Man to the Participation in the Divine Cognition, to the Immediate Vision of Divine Glory.

1.

HAT you may learn at this point, my dear Christian, what glory and happiness is hidden in grace, I will now exhibit it to you in its entire greatness, in that condition wherein the light of grace passes over into the light of glory. From this you will understand how truly and perfectly we partake of the Divine nature by grace. Every nature is best known by its peculiar force and activity, for in every nature these are different. Thus, plants are distinguished from minerals by their growth, their blossom and fruit; animals differ from plants by their sensation and motion; man again from the animal by his reason and free will.

By his reason man is, in some degree, like unto God, but yet there is an infinite distance between the Divine and the human nature. For the reason of man, and even that of the highest angels, can directly only know the creatures, finite and created beings; but it cannot behold, face to face, the great and infinite God. God, the Creator and Lord, may be known by rational creatures, but only from an immeasurable distance (*“every one beholdeth Him afar off,”*¹) as the glory of God is more removed from the creature than the sun is from the earth. The creatures only see, as it were, the hem of His garment, the reflex of His own glory in His great and glorious creation. He Himself, however, *“the invisible King of ages, whom no man hath seen, nor can*

¹ Job xxxvi. 25.

see, inhabiteth," as the Apostle says, "*light inaccessible.*"¹ His light is too bright, His glory too great, His greatness too infinite for creatures to fix their weak eyes upon Him, without being dazzled. Even the Cherubim cover their faces and sink into the dust before Him, to adore Him in deepest reverence. God Himself alone can by His nature behold His being; only the "*only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father,*"² and is of the same nature with Him, beholds Him face to face; only the *Holy Spirit, who is in God, penetrates and fathoms His innermost nature, as also in man only the spirit, that is in him, knows and penetrates his inner nature.*³ To behold God, we must either be God or participate in the Divine nature.

Well, then, my good Christian, your spiritual eye must also become Divine, as it were, and your soul must partake of the Divine nature, if you will see God face to face. The veil which covers your weak eyes must be removed; the light of the Divine Sun must transform your sight, must make it sun-like and glorify it, that you may boldly gaze at it. And this the Holy Spirit effects in you, when by grace He makes you partake of the Divine nature. The Apostle describes this in beautiful words:⁴ "*Beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, we are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.*" St. John also teaches:⁵ "*We shall be like to God, because we shall see Him as He is.*" And the Son of God Himself says to His Father:⁶ "*Father, the glory which Thou hast given Me, which I had with Thee, before the world was, I have given to them.*"

In Heaven we shall, moreover, know God as He knows Himself and as He knows us. "*Then I shall know, even as I am known,*" says the Apostle.⁷ But it is again impossible that we should have knowledge like that which is peculiar to the Divine nature, if we are not really made to participate in the Divine nature, as a holy Doctor of the

¹ I. Tim. vi. 16.² John i. 18.³ I. Cor. ii. 11.⁴ II. Cor. iii. 18.⁵ I. John iii. 2.⁶ John xvii. 22.⁷ I. Cor. xiii. 12.

Church¹ says; the vision of God cannot be communicated to us, unless we are deified. And if, on the other hand, we in reality will partake of the Divine nature and be deified, that must be verified by our being called to partake in the Divine cognition.

2. What a miracle, my dear Christian, what grace! Must we not exclaim here with St. Peter: "*Into His marvellous light God hath called us*"!² Have you ever reflected upon the sublime greatness of this grace? We must thank God already for giving us our bodily sight, by which we may behold the whole visible creation, with all its beauty and magnificence. But this we have in common with the brutes; and it may and ought to be the subject of our pride and boast that we possess another infinitely superior light within us, the light of reason, by which we perceive not only the exterior qualities of visible things, their color, their odor, their taste, but also their substance, their beauty, their harmony, and their mutual relations; by which we, moreover, know spiritual things, our immortal soul, truth, virtue, and justice, and finally, God Himself in the image of His creation. How proud we should be if we possessed all the science that has ever been and is being discovered by human genius and application, or if we enjoyed the natural knowledge of even the angels! But all this would never give us an immediate knowledge of the infinite truth and beauty of God; so that we may thence conclude how much inferior our nature is to the Divine, and how no created eye can peer into the depths of the mysteries of God. It were even a godless temerity to desire to approach the unapproachable light of God: His glory would overwhelm us and death would be the penalty for our rashness. "*Man shall not see God and live,*" says Holy Writ,³ and again: "*He that is a searcher of (God's) majesty, shall be overwhelmed by glory.*"⁴

But, "*the things that are impossible with men,*" says

¹ Dionys. Areop. vulg. de eccl. hier. c. 1, § 3.

² I. Peter ii. 9.

³ Exodus xxxiii. 20.

⁴ Prov. xxv. 27.

St. Irenæus¹ in explanation of this, “*are possible with God.*”² He descends to us, in His infinite power and goodness, to elevate us unto Himself; He Himself introduces us into His admirable light; He fills us with His own light, that we may behold His light. “*In Thy light we shall see light,*” says the Psalmist.³ Only in *His own* light and not in *our* light can we see God.

What is all natural light of creatures compared with this Divine light? It is as the weak, dim light of a lamp, which illumines but poorly the narrow space of a human dwelling, compared to the glorious, heavenly light of the sun, which fills the whole immense world; and the eye of reason in the creature, compared to the Divinely glorified eye of the Saints, is as the eye of the bat at the side of the clear eagle eye, which fearlessly directs its gaze to the sun and is not dazzled by its light.

If, then, we experience in us a natural and inexpressible desire for the perception of truth and the enjoyment of the beautiful, why do we not seek to satisfy it where alone it can be entirely satisfied? If we seek with so much labor to acquire science, why do we not apply to the source of eternal light? All our natural knowledge is in the end only pitifully imperfect and we shall never be able to go beneath the surface. But the light of grace will at once introduce us to the light of God, when we shall know not only the shadow but the substance and highest cause of truth, and in it shall know, in the most perfect manner, all that we now seek or already know. And, if created beauty already delights us so much, how should we not, with the royal poet, always seek His countenance, who is the fountain and infinite ideal of all transient beauty.

3. In beatific vision grace makes us share in the *Divine happiness*, by raising us up to the immediate enjoyment of the infinite and highest good. As much as the Divine nature is above ours, so much the Divine beatitude must surpass that which is attainable and suitable to our

¹ Contra. haer. l. 4. c. 20, al. 37.

² Luke xviii. 27.

³ Ps. xxxv. 10.

nature. The animal is not capable of the same enjoyment as man ; it can only delight in sensual things and perceptions. Man delights in spiritual things, in order, harmony, and beauty, in that, particularly, which is found in truth and virtue. In like manner the pleasure and beatitude of God has an object accessible only to Him, whose beauty and loveliness eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and which hath not entered into the heart of man, but is evident only to his spirit—His own infinitely good, beautiful, and glorious being. But whilst God makes us, through His Holy Spirit, partakers of His Divine nature, He opens through Him also the mystery of His happiness, calls us to the enjoyment thereof, and makes us His associates therein. As He possesses Himself by His nature, so He will give Himself to us by His wonderful grace ; as He, by our participation in His nature, places us upon His throne and introduces us into His light, so He will let us feast at His table. According to our nature He might have left us standing at a respectful distance before His door ; there we might have admiringly contemplated the greatness of His works, the beauty of His mansion ; and this would have been for us a joy and honor, as great as our poor heart might desire. But He will manifest to us His own beauty, in the enjoyment of which He, with the Son and the Holy Spirit, is happy forever and ever ; that beauty which unites in itself the real and possible beauties of His works with all their wonderful diversity, that beauty which angels desire to behold and one ray of which suffices to make all created spirits intoxicated with joy.

In truth, not the highest creature could have imagined or desired, much less claimed, such a happiness ! How much more should we be thankful to God for this inestimable grace ! And what can the Lord demand less of our gratitude, than that we should have a great and burning desire for the gift which He dispenses so liberally ! Then we should always think and exclaim with the Psalmist : “ *My face hath sought Thee : Thy face, O Lord, will I still seek.*”¹

If we love Him as He loves us, then we shall, as the Apostle says, know Him as He knows us.¹

“I cannot express, O my God,” says St. Anselm,² “how happy Thy elect will be; certainly they will rejoice according to the measure of their love, and they will love after the measure of their knowledge. But how great will be their knowledge and how great their love? Certainly no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered, in this life, into the heart of man, how much they will know and love you in the life to come. I beseech Thee, O God, that I may know Thee, love Thee, rejoice in Thee; and if I cannot do so perfectly in this life, that I may at least progress from day to day, until I arrive at this perfection. Let my knowledge of Thee progress here and become perfect there; let my love increase here and be perfect there; that my joy may be great in hope here, and perfect in possession there. O Lord, through Thy Son Thou biddest and counselest us to ask, and dost promise to grant that our joy shall be complete. I beseech Thee, then, O true and faithful God, grant that my joy may be complete; may, in the meantime, my soul consider it, my tongue speak of it, my heart love it. May my spirit hunger for it, my flesh thirst for it, my whole being desire it, until I enter into the joy of the Lord, who, as the Triune God, be blessed forever. Amen.”

¹ I. Cor. xiii. 12.

² Anselm, in proslog. sub finem.

NINTH CHAPTER.

Grace makes us Partakers of the Sanctity of the Divine Nature.

1.

ALTHOUGH the glories already mentioned are so exalted and Divine, yet it would seem that this one surpassed all others. It is, indeed, a great thing to behold all nature and all miracles far beneath ourselves, to possess, next to God, and in virtue of His love, that same glory which He Himself possesses, to obtain the beginning and the root of heavenly happiness and immortality. But, since nothing is more eminent in God Himself than His sanctity, it is a still greater privilege to participate in this.

Those two remarkable images, in which the prophet Isaias¹ and the Apostle St. John in his revelation,² have represented the majesty of God, are thus explained by St. Cyril: The exalted throne of God signifies His highest glory, the jasper, His immutability, the rainbow, His eternity, the seats of the twenty-four ancients, His wisdom, the seven lamps, His all-seeing and His all-governing Providence, the thunder and lightning, the omnipotence of His will, the crystal sea of glass, His immensity, the covering of His head and feet by the wings of the Seraphim, His incomprehensible infinity. But in this fulness of glories, nothing impresses the Seraphim, who look on with a thousand eyes, so much as the sanctity of God; this fascinates their admiration, this they praise incessantly by the continual repetition of the song of glory: "*Holy, holy, holy, art Thou, Lord God of Sabaoth.*" There-

¹ Is. vi.

² Apoc. iv.

fore God is so frequently called the "Holy One of Israel," because this name includes all others. When the Psalmist describes the glorious, eternal generation of the Son of God, he says but this one word, that in the splendor of His sanctity,¹ He is begotten from the womb of the Father,² for by this sanctity all other perfections are heightened and hallowed.

Sanctity, indeed, signifies the highest quality of Divine goodness, namely, His *singular and august eminence, purity, and rectitude*. A creature may be good in virtue of its nature, and every creature is good as it proceeds from the hand of God. Thus the rational creatures also, for instance man, would be good in their nature even without supernatural grace, as long as they did not contradict this natural goodness by sin. But this is a very limited and finite goodness, connected with many imperfections, as with so many stains, a goodness which does not exclude separation from the highest good and may co-exist with sin. The Divine goodness, however, is the purest and most perfect that can be imagined, a light without any darkness or shadow of darkness, a light that never can be dimmed by the smallest spot. God is, Himself, essentially the highest good and can be separated from it as little as He can annihilate Himself. Hence we call God the alone Holy, the thrice Holy, thereby expressing the highest prerogative of His nature.

We shall therefore be perfect partakers of the Divine nature only when, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we participate also in its sanctity, and the holy Fathers identify this partaking of Divine nature, with being holy, as God is holy. They compare the sanctity of God with a great and potent fire, which seizes our imperfect nature, penetrates it, transforms it and cleanses it from all dross and stain, so that our goodness be similarly pure and perfect, as is the Divine. "Even the princes and powers of Heaven," says St. Basil, "are not by nature holy. The

¹ Especially the Hebrew text: In splendoribus sanctitatum.

² Ps. cix. 3.

iron, lying in the furnace, does not lose the nature of iron, and yet by its intimate union with the fire becomes fiery itself, and penetrated by the whole nature of the fire, assumes also its color, warmth, and efficiency. So the angels (and the souls of men) have, by their union with God, the essentially Holy One, this sanctity inoculated and implanted in their whole being, with this difference only, that the Holy Ghost is by nature already holiness, whilst their holiness is a participation in His natural sanctity.”¹

Do you now understand, my dear Christian, with what deep significance we call grace *sanctifying*? It not only signifies that by grace we obtain forgiveness of sin, and henceforth will observe the commandments of God and sin no more, but rather, that our soul is made a most beautiful image of the Divine goodness and holiness. It further signifies that grace is irreconcilable with sin, and cannot co-exist with it in the same soul. If you commit a mortal sin, you do not annihilate your nature, your natural faculties, and the light of reason; but grace and its accompanying supernatural faculties and virtues immediately depart from your soul. For grace, being of a Divine nature and kind, can co-exist with sin as little as God Himself. Aye, when grace has terminated in the light of glory and has perfectly united your soul with God and made it like to Him, then you will lose even the ability to commit sin, and by its inherent Divine virtue, you will be as incapable of committing sin as God Himself.

Yet how little do we consider the great preciousness of this gift and the superhuman dignity granted us by it! “If man alone had received sanctity from the Holy Ghost,” says St. Ambrose,² “we would, beyond doubt, be raised above all, even the highest angels;” and the Seraphim, who so solemnly praise God as the thrice Holy, would very properly all regard us with deepest reverence. Shall we alone, then, seek our honor in godlessness and impurity?

Even the most wicked and impious of sinners, in the

¹ Basil. contra Eunom. B. 3. ² De Spir. S. l. i, c. 7.

depth of his degradation, cannot, in his innermost soul, refuse admiration to that splendor of sanctity which shines forth in so many members of the holy Church of Christ, in whom God appears to live and act. But why have the Saints become so great and glorious, if not because they have co-operated with, and in their whole life expressed the image of that grace which we all may acquire? All true Christians, who are in the state of grace, are called Saints by the Apostle, because they are sanctified in the waters of regeneration by the power of the Holy Ghost, and possess, so to speak, the substance of holiness. We all may and must become saintly as they, if not in the same degree, yet not less really and truly, because we are brethren and children of the Saints, yea, children of the thrice holy God. What criminal frivolity is it, then, to soil this garb of innocence, which we have received in holy baptism, by voluntary venial sin! But what detestable wickedness would it be to rend it, cast it away from us, and trample it under foot by mortal sin!

Our nature already, though not annihilated by mortal sin, is averse to this great injustice offered to God, because it has been created by Him for His service. But supernaturally considered, what a monster must sin be, when we commit it after God has estranged us from it and so equipped us against it by a new nature, that to become capable of sinning, we must divest ourselves of this new nature and destroy the seed of God in our soul! Have pity, O audacious creature, have pity on your sublime condition and dignity, if you will not respect it. Be moved by the jubilant chant of the Seraphim, singing "Hosanna," and if you esteem it little to offend the sanctity of God, which you cannot injure, spare at least your own sanctity, which you ruin by sin.

TENTH CHAPTER.

Grace gives us a New, Higher Nature.

1.



YOU have seen, Christian reader, how high the grace of God elevates human nature. You ascend by it unto the bosom of God, to partake of His nature and the eminent prerogatives peculiar to Him, of His eternity and infinite perfection, of His knowledge and happiness, His goodness and holiness. But if you participate in the Divine nature, you receive a new nature yourself, and lay aside your former nature; you are changed and “transformed,” as the Apostle says, “into the image of God from glory to glory;”¹ you are, as it were, created anew, that you may receive a new being, not even the germ of which your nature contained before.

St. Cyril of Alexandria teaches us this in the following words:² “If we have once quit the sensual life, is it not evident that we, by surrendering, as it were, our life and uniting ourselves to the Holy Spirit, are changed into a heavenly image and transformed, to a certain extent, into another nature, and that we are justly called not only men, but children of God and heavenly men, having become participants in the Divine nature?”

What we here say of a transformation of our nature does not mean that our natural substance is destroyed or absorbed in the Divine substance; this would be an impious error. We speak here only of a transmutation, transformation, and glorification of our nature. You would, however, esteem this change entirely too little, if you supposed that

¹ II. Cor. iii. 18.

² In Joannem, l. 11. c. 12, al. 27.

grace makes us new men only in the sense in which a change of disposition or the acquirement of new habits makes us new men.

The change wrought by grace comes from God, not from the will or power of the creature; it is a miracle of Divine Omnipotence, which lifts us up out of the limits of nature (as the holy Fathers teach), and so elevates and transforms us, that we are not only made other men, but more than men, that we appear as beings of a Divine nature and kind.

That we do not lose our natural substance in this transformation the holy Fathers very often explain by that simile of fire already mentioned. Iron does not cease to be iron, when it is aglow with heat, as we may see from the fact that when it loses this heat it appears the same as it was before. But in its glowing condition it has no longer its natural hardness, inflexibleness, coldness, and dark color, it receives the brightness, warmth, and force of fire, and consequently enters into a condition that is not natural to itself, but to the fire, and if we say that fire consumes iron, we do not mean that it destroys iron; it consumes only its defects and imperfections. In a similar manner, as St. Cyril teaches, we do not put off the substance of our nature, but its lowliness and imperfection. "Those," he says, "who are called by the faith of Christ to the sonship of God, have *deposed the lowliness of their own nature and, glorified by the grace of God and adorned with it as with a precious garment, are raised to a supernatural dignity.*"¹ Our nature is not changed into another nature by grace, so that we lose what we already possess, but rather receives what it does not yet possess, as the Apostle well remarks: "*We would not be unclothed, but clothed upon; that that which is mortal may be swallowed up by life.*"

The garb of grace, however, is not only superadded to the soul exteriorly as is the bodily raiment, it invests and penetrates the soul at the same time, as the glow of fire penetrates the iron. Grace communicates a new quality to the soul,

¹ In Joannem, l. 1. 14.

² II. Cor. v. 4.

by which it is transformed into the image of God. This new quality is called the new, higher nature of the soul. The nature of a being is nothing else but the innate quality, by which it is distinguished from other things, has its peculiar forces and activities, and occupies its peculiar place among other beings. Thus we say that plants have another nature than minerals, animals another than plants, and man again a nature different from that of the brutes, because he is distinguished from them by the rationality and spirituality of his soul. The soul now receives in grace a new, heavenly, and Divine quality, which is as different and as superior as the human nature is above the nature of the brute. If man is naturally a servant of God, by grace he becomes a child of God ; if originally he was only above the nature of the brute, he now rises above his own nature, yea, even above the angels ; if before he possessed the light of reason, he now receives the light of God, at present in faith, but hereafter in glory ; if he by nature is a good creature, by grace he is made a holy creature. He ascends a new step on the ladder of beings, is placed in a new relation to God, to his fellow-men, and to corporeal things, and finally enters a new sphere of life more heavenly than earthly.

This new quality of his nature is the germ and root of a higher life. As a tree of ordinary kind by the inoculation of a superior bud takes the nature of this bud, and brings forth its blossom and fruit, so our soul is in the highest manner ennobled by the communication of God's grace, which is called in Holy Writ¹ the *seed of God*, and filled with the power of God, it assumes a Divine nature. It is raised from its natural abject position, is transplanted into the bosom of God as into a garden of Paradise, where in heavenly sunlight and in a paradisaic atmosphere it blossoms into a new life, which it never knew or imagined before. Or rather, to speak yet more appropriately with the Apostle of the Gentiles and our Saviour Himself, the soul, as a wild olive branch, is ingrafted upon a good olive tree ;² it

¹ I. John iii. 9.

² Romans xi. 24.

becomes a branch of the true vine,¹ the Incarnate Son of God, in order to partake of His Divine life, which is watered and nourished by the dew of the Holy Spirit.

2. But if grace, in truth, confers upon us a new heavenly nature, what pains ought we; then, to take to acquire and preserve this nature, and live according to it! How little esteem would he show for the dignity of human nature, who conducted himself as a brute and gave himself over to beastly lusts and pleasures! How utterly mean and abominable would that act be, by committing which he would cease to be a rational man, and would be lowered to the level of the brute! That cannot happen, because the likeness of God in our soul is indelible. But man may, by the giddiness of intoxication and the still greater giddiness of impurity, reduce himself to a condition in which he is more similar to the brute than to man, and here we involuntarily shudder at such unnatural conduct. How much more should we shudder at every mortal sin, which not only casts a passing cloud over our heavenly nature, but altogether destroys and eradicates it!

Man in his natural state is composed, as it were, of two natures, a corporeal and a spiritual; in him there are two men, an outward and an inward man, says the Apostle,² a mortal and an immortal man. Since we cannot serve both natures at the same time, we must subject the corporeal to the spiritual. But as the flesh should serve the spirit, so should our spirit serve God and His grace; for, as the spirit is superior to the flesh, so is grace superior to the spirit. If the spirit subjects itself to the flesh, it is drawn down from its eminence to the level of the flesh and becomes carnal itself; but if it gives itself up to grace and is penetrated and moved by it, it is carried up to God and becomes itself Divine. “Who loves the earth,” says St. Augustine, “is of the earth; who loves the world, is of the world; who loves God, what shall I say, brethren? Not I, but the Word of God will tell you! who loves God, becomes God: *I have*

¹ John xv. 1.

² II. Cor. iv. 16.

said: you are gods and sons of the Most High.'"¹ In the same measure, in which we co-operate with grace and tend towards the Author of grace, the Father of Light, we are filled with His light and glory, we are carried up to Him by His grace and partake of His nature. How detestable it is, then, to permit one's self to be dragged into the mire of sensual lust, when we may elevate ourselves so high on the wings of heavenly love !

We have far more reason to glory in grace than to disregard it. For what enthusiasm must animate our heart, when we consider the heavenly race to which we belong ! As true as this is, so true is it, likewise, that the sublime nature, which we possess, is not ours in virtue of our human nature, that we are not *originally* of the Divine race, and that we can obtain this so sublime nature only by the condescending grace of God. Lucifer forgot this when he beheld himself in the splendor of his heavenly light; Eve, too, forgot this, when she was misled by him through that same temptation. That we may not forget it also, God has not again given us with sanctifying grace those gifts which made the life of our first parents so happy and peaceful in the flesh, as if they possessed no carnal nature. He lets us feel very plainly that we are made of the slime of the earth, that we may not become conceited. Because we have, so to say, been caught up with the Apostle in the third Heaven, He has given us the sting of the flesh for our chastisement, our confusion, and our wholesome humiliation. ²

But even this confusion shall not rob us of the sense of our heavenly dignity. For precisely therein the power of our higher nature of grace is manifested, that it descends to our weakness and poverty, and overcomes this weakness, and hereafter consumes it in the heavenly glory. Therefore, we may say with the Apostle: "*I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. For which cause I please myself in my infirmities; . . . for when I am weak, then am I powerful.*"³

¹ John x. 34.

² II. Cor. xii. 7.

³ II. Cor. xii. 9, 10.

ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Grace is in a Certain Sense Infinite.

1.

THE new nature, which grace confers upon us, has above all other created natures that sublime prerogative, that, as a participation in the infinite, Divine nature, it is in a certain sense infinite.

In the first place, all other natures, as has been already explained, are only single rays of the Divine sun, refracted in different colors ; grace, however, is a pure, unbroken reflection of its infinite light.

Grace, moreover, enables the soul to raise itself above the limits of its nature and its surroundings, to behold the infinite God in His infinite nature, to possess and enjoy Him. How could it do this, if it did not contain something of the infinite power of God ? If it does this, however, must we not, then, attribute to it a merit and value corresponding in some degree to the greatness of that infinite good which we possess by grace ?

Besides this, all created natures have a circumscribed and distinctly definite limit of perfection, beyond which they cannot increase, unless they change their nature. If gold is pure from all foreign composite, it cannot become more perfect or purer gold than it is already. Every species of plants can attain a certain height and size, and beyond this it cannot extend. The different classes of animals grow only to a certain determined degree of corporal size and perfection, and if they have reached this, they can progress no farther. They have outlived themselves and necessarily succumb to an incessant retrogression and final dissolution. Even rational creatures, from their na-

ture, cannot improve in an infinite degree. Their progress lasts as long as the development of their natural faculties, and since these are finite, their development also must have a determined and limited end.

Grace alone knows no such restriction ; it alone is inclosed by no limits. Being a ray of the Divine nature glorifying our soul, it has its measure and end only in the infinity of God ; it may increase daily and hourly, and incessantly grow richer, greater, and nobler ; it never transgresses its appointed limits, because it has none ; it always remains grace and is always a participation in the Divine nature ; yea, it always becomes more and more what it is destined to be. What thing would be able, says the angel of the schools,¹ to place any limit to supernatural love (and the same may be said of grace, which grows in the same proportion), since it has its origin in the infinite and eternal power of God and is itself nothing else but a participation in the infinite sanctity of God ? Certainly the vessel of our nature, which receives it, is in itself narrow and limited. But grace, which is received, extends the capacity of our nature and every measure of grace received qualifies it for a still greater measure ; every degree of grace is the step leading to the next degree, so that one may ascend the higher, the farther one has already progressed.

Every degree of grace is in itself infinitely valuable, more precious than all created things in Heaven or on earth, a treasure for which we should, with the Apostle, count all things as loss, that we may gain Christ and His grace. But this treasure is a thousand times more precious, because it is, at the same time, a capital, which, if we understand how to invest it, may easily be increased and multiplied in an infinite degree. Every supernatural action, performed in the state of grace, every moment in which the given grace is utilized and made to bear fruit, merits another increase of grace from God, and it rests only with man to double this grace again in a short time. The greater this increased

¹ Thom. 2, 2. qu. 24. a. 7.

grace is, the greater is also the merit of our works, the easier and greater is a new increase and multiplying of our capital.

2. At the present day the world directs all its aims and endeavors, its whole speculation, as it says, to an easy and certain increase of fortune, especially by a shrewd manipulation of stocks and bonds, and in a wonderfully short time the poorest man often becomes richer than a king. But if the children of the world are so shrewd in acquiring temporal treasures, which do not render the possessor happy, and in the gain of paper, which the smallest spark may destroy, must not the children of God feel ashamed, that they in their kind are not only not wiser, but incomparably more foolish? For with them there is question of acquiring still more easily true, eternal, and heavenly treasures and bonds, which no banker, no king, but the infinitely mighty God Himself will redeem with the whole fulness of His immense wealth and His eternal happiness.

Grace gives such an immense scope to our aims and desires, and leaves them the freest possible play. At the same time, it has that advantage, that we need only desire it to find it, and to love its Donor in order to receive it. By this ardent desire for grace and heavenly happiness, and by a sincere love for the Father, we acquire and merit all good gifts, and that according to the measure of our love and desire. Why do we not here manifest a holy greediness and importunity? Why do we not, like St. Paul, forget the things that are behind and stretch forth our hand to those that are before? ¹ We should measure the profit and advantage of our soul, not by the treasures already in our possession, but by those still to be acquired. The Apostle ran the course of perfection with rapid stride; ² but we not only do not hurry, but often pause in our course, as if the smallest part of the eternal and highest good were already sufficient. The Apostle considers himself not yet perfect, when he possesses in so many and such

¹ Phil. iii. 13.

² Ibid. 12 seq.

great good works, in his countless sufferings and glorious miracles, the best pledge and evidence of an extraordinary perfection; he always seeks something higher and more perfect. That which we still want is infinite, that which we possess already is little and insignificant; but our God, who is liberal in dispensing His gifts and Himself, will cease to increase our small fortune, only when we tire of our progress and of gratefully uniting our love with His. Why do we commit such an injustice against God, and His grace, and our own selves? Let us remember the wife of Lot,¹ who, instead of looking forward, looked behind her and was turned into a statue of salt. Let this example serve as a grain of salt to season our hearts with prudence and spur us on to a holy zeal.

The miser delights not so much in all his possessions as he is annoyed and troubled by the least thing he does not possess; about the former he is quiet and secure, but the latter he pursues with a zeal that knows no bounds nor rest. "All other passions," says St. Isidore, "have a season of rise and decline; but the terrible love of gain knows no end, despises to be satisfied, permits no enjoyment; it always lives, or rather it revives from day to day, and seeks always to increase in strength and violence."

Oh, that we were at least equally zealous in the pursuit of the heavenly treasures of grace! How soon we should obtain them in greatest abundance! What can in this case excuse our indolence? Perhaps the fear that we should also become unhappy as the miser by such restless activity? The miser, indeed, becomes unhappy by his insatiable desire, because he never enjoys his acquisition and must lose all in the end. A holy desire for grace, however, leads us to an eternal rest in God, who will satisfy us the more, the greater our desire and hunger have been on earth. Grace, moreover, permits us to enjoy our possessions on the way to that end, since our desire is to grow continually, precisely because at every step we more and more experience, how sweet and pleasant the Lord is to those who serve Him.

¹ St. August. ad Ps. lxxix.

TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Grace and the Incarnation of the Son of God.

1.

THE glories of grace, hitherto described, are so great, so superb and Divine, that it would seem, outside of God and next to Him, there were nothing more sublime in Heaven or on earth. Indeed, because they are in a certain sense infinite, we could not, without a special Divine revelation, either by the light of reason, or even by the light of faith, discover anything greater. Now, God has revealed to us two other mysteries, which are doubtless greater and more glorious than that of grace: the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, and the mystery of the Divine maternity of Mary. But the more we consider these ineffable mysteries in the whole depth of their significance and importance, the more will we understand that, although grace is not superior or equal to them, yet it is placed in its true light by these mysteries, and receives from them a very special beauty and glory.

By the Incarnation the human nature of Christ was united with the Divine Word in one and the same person, so that henceforth God is truly man and one Man is truly God. The human nature is not changed into the Divine: but it loses its individual independence, and is so implanted and ingrafted in the second Person of the Divinity that it belongs to this Divinity and enjoys a really Divine dignity. By grace, however, we are not made truly God; we retain not only our nature, but also our personality, and are deified only in so far as we are made similar to the Divine nature by a godlike quality. Thus the elevation of the human nature of Christ to the infinite dignity of the true God is

certainly infinitely superior to our union with God by grace.

But if we consider closely, we see that this elevation of the human nature of Christ is not an honor accorded a human person, because there is no such person in Christ. It is rather an infinite condescension of God, who descends from His eminence to appropriate to Himself a created nature. Therefore, we do not say that a man was made God, but that God was made man. By grace, however, a created person, man, without being God or being made God, nevertheless partakes of the Divine nature, and this it is that makes us admire grace almost more than the Incarnation.

“Which is the more adorable mystery,” says St. Peter Chrysologus: ¹ “that God gave Himself to the earth or that He gives you to Heaven; that He Himself enters into such intimate union with our flesh, or that He introduces us to companionship with the Godhead; that He is born, like us, to servitude, or that He generates us as His free-born children; that He adopts our poverty, or that He makes us His heirs and the co-heirs of His only begotten Son? Certainly it is more adorably wonderful, that earth should be transferred to Heaven, man should be transformed by the Deity, and the condition of slavery receive the rights of dominion.” In another place ² the same Saint says: “So great is the Divine condescension towards us, that the creature knows not which to admire more, that God has descended to our servitude, or that He has transported us to His Divine dignity.”

2. The elevation of man by grace balances, as it were, the condescension of God in the Incarnation; as low as God descends, so high He elevates man. Between God and ourselves a wonderful exchange takes place, since He adopts our nature to make us partake of His Divine nature. Therefore, the Church makes the priest say at the Offertory in Holy Mass: “*O God, let us partake of His Divinity, who has deigned to partake of our humanity.*”

¹ Homil. 67.

² Ibid. 72.

And this equalization, this balance between the humiliation of God and the elevation of man by grace has so deep a reason, that the holy Fathers teach that the Son of God was made man on account of grace, to elevate us by grace. "*God was made man, that man might be made God,*" says St. Augustine ;¹ "*the Son of God was made the son of man, that the children of men might be made children of God.*"² Many other Fathers teach the same as this Saint, thus only repeating the sublime saying of the Apostle :³ "*God sent His Son, made of a woman, . . . that we might receive the adoption of sons.*"

St. Fulgentius gives a beautiful explanation of this passage: ⁴ "God was born of man that man might be born of God. The first birth of Christ, as the Son of God, was of God, the second of man ; our first birth is of man, our second of God. And because God, to be born of woman, adopted the reality of the flesh, He has given us, at our regeneration in baptism, the spirit of sonship. What Christ was not by nature at His first birth, that He was made at His second birth by grace, that we might also be made, by the grace of the second birth, what we were not by nature of the first. God, however, has brought us grace when He was born of man ; we, on the other hand, receive grace gratuitously, that by the donation of the Incarnate God, we might partake of the Divine nature." As truly, then, as God is born of man in adopting our nature, so truly is the Divine nature communicated to us, with this difference only, that the Son of God not only adopted the qualities, but the essence of human nature ; we, however, only partake of the Divine nature by a godlike quality.

If, then, the condescension and humiliation of God in His Incarnation are so infinitely great, as great as is the infinite distance between God and the creature, must not the elevation of man to God, which is placed on the same scale with

¹ S. Aug.. Serm. 13, de tempore et al. pass. See Petavius, de Incarn. Verbi, l. 2, c. 8.

² St. Athanasius in Petav. l. c. ³ Gal. iv. 4.

⁴ Ep. 17, sive lib. ad Petrum diacon., cap. 7. nn. 14-15.

God's condescension, aye, which is its cause and reason, must it not likewise appear infinitely and incomprehensibly great ?

3. But the humanity of Christ may be considered not only in its personal union with the Son of God, but also in the condition and qualities which it received on account of its Divine dignity ; and here again the inestimable greatness of grace is made manifest. God, in all His wisdom and power, could give the human soul of His Divine Son no more worthy condition than that which our soul receives by grace. This is the sublimest that can be found in a creature, for it deifies the creature and makes it, in the highest sense, a participant of the Divine nature. This difference only exists between the soul of Christ and our own : the soul of the Son of God has every claim and right to grace, and does not receive it as a gratuitous gift, but merits it ; it receives it directly and in exceeding abundance, and finally the soul of Christ can in nowise lose grace, whilst our soul receives grace as a gratuitous gift through Christ, in a limited measure, and may easily lose it again by sin.

It cannot, then, be denied that the Incarnation, in all its circumstances, is an infinitely greater and more sublime mystery than grace ; but since there exist between both such an intimate union and similarity, grace does not suffer from the comparison, but is rather placed in a still brighter light by it.

4. But besides this, grace, as we obtain it through Christ, receives from the Incarnation an additional and indescribable, a new and ineffable splendor.

The Divine dignity, which the humanity of Christ receives through the personal union with the Eternal Word, is reflected upon all the members of humankind. As that humanity was made the true body of Christ, so all regenerated mankind was made the mystical body of Christ. Christ is, indeed, as much and more than Adam, the Head of mankind, and we are His members. Inasmuch as we

are one with Him, we enjoy before grace already a certain supernatural dignity, and as He had a right to grace, so we acquire a right to it through Him. By Him mankind appropriates grace and possesses it as something which is due to it on account of its Head. Christ is the heavenly vine, permeated by the fulness of Divine life, and we are the branches, into which this life is diffused.

“O Christian soul,” St. Leo exclaims, “acknowledge your dignity; know that as a Christian you surpass the angels not only in nature, but also in grace! For the angels are kindred to God only by one tie, because they partake of His Divine nature; you, however, in a twofold manner, because God has also adopted your nature. If, therefore, these pure and holy spirits were capable of envy, they would envy us, because God hath taken upon Himself the nature, *not of angels, or archangels, but the seed of Abraham.*”¹ We may, then, what is not permitted to the angels, account Him as one of our own, and call Him our brother. “Very foolish,” says the venerable monk Job,² “are they who would rather be angels than men.” For although the angels are not subject to pain, suffering, and death, yet they have not God as their Brother, and if we are exposed to so many sufferings and tribulations, we are consoled by that supreme honor, to see God Himself assume this so direly punished nature, and share our misery with us. Oh, how wicked and foolish were the pride that would not appreciate and be satisfied with such an honor! But if you are able, Christian soul, to appreciate in some measure this honor, then beware, too, of desecrating this your Divine dignity by any conduct unbecoming it, lest anything be said of a brother of Christ that were improper even for a man or an angel, and suitable only to the character of the devil. You ought to belong, in thought, word, and deed, to none but Him, who, entering into relationship with us, has adopted us unto His own. “Let us esteem our Head,” St. Chrysostom tells us,³ “and always remember of

¹ Heb. ii. 16.

² Lib. 3, de Incarn.

³ Homily 3, ad Ephes. 1.

what an adorable Head we are members. It is certainly proper that we should surpass even the angels and archangels in virtue, since God, by assuming the human nature, has placed all things beneath its feet." The Saint then continues to speak in this strain, and concludes with the sorrowful but just complaint: "Is it possible that the body of such a Head is cast before the devils, to be abused or trodden under foot by them, and that we do not shudder at such a horrible crime?"

5. By holy baptism we are incorporated in the mystical body of Christ, and in token and pledge of this union with Christ, we receive the sacramental character. By this character we are Christ's and He is ours; by it we are really Christians; we are, as it were, Christ Himself, in as far as we, the body, and the Head form one whole. The character is indelible in our soul and gives us, as long as we live, a right to the grace of God; for the body of Christ must also be filled by Christ's life of glory. But it leaves us this right only so long as we live up to His command. If it is, then, a great crime to banish grace from our nature, because it is in itself such a great boon, how much greater is the sin, when we deprive a member of the body of Christ of its heavenly life! And if it is a criminal neglect to permit ourselves to be robbed of grace, how much more criminal is it to cast it away, now that it has become our entire property, that we have, in the character of our soul, Christ Himself as a pledge that no power in heaven or on earth can wrest it from us, now to dispose of this grace and of ourselves to the devil! Let us, therefore, hear how St. Gregory Nazianzen teaches us to meet the attacks of the devil: "If he tempts you to avarice, and at any time represents to your eye all the kingdoms of the world as belonging to him, and offers them as a reward to you, if you will adore him; then despise him as a poor beggar, and in view of the holy seal of your soul, say to him: I also am the image of God, and am not cast down from the glories of Heaven through pride, as yourself; I have put on the Lord Jesus Christ; it is meet, rather, that you should adore me.

Believe me that these words will conquer him and make him retire with confusion into darkness.”¹

Consider, finally, Christian soul, that however high and exalted the dignity may be, which you possess as a member of the body of Christ, this dignity becomes truly precious for you by grace alone, and that without grace it will profit you nothing, but will, on the contrary, work your greater perdition. Only inasmuch as you partake also of the spirit and life of Christ, will it be profitable to you to belong to the body of Christ by the seal of baptism. To be a member of Christ is certainly a great, an infinitely great honor; but the dishonor, too, is so much greater to be only a dead member; as such, you will finally be utterly cut off from the body. Even then you do not lose the mark impressed upon you by it, but it will not be a mark of blessing for you, but one of malediction and damnation. Grace, however, makes you a living member of Christ, by participation in His Divine nature. It can be a sign only of blessing, not of malediction. It effects that you not only take part in the sufferings and death of Christ, whilst on earth, but that you are also glorified with Him hereafter, to be united with Him for all eternity, and to live in Him and through Him the blessed life of Heaven. With grace you gain Christ entirely, without grace you entirely lose Him.

Say, then, what should you be unwilling to do, suffer, and sacrifice, that Christ the God-man, the King, Father, and Brother, the Head, the Crown, the Delight and Joy of mankind, be not taken from the world? All this, however, is lost for us, if we lose grace. Let that be, then, our only fear, to be separated from Christ, and that our only desire, to be united with Christ by grace; for all things, says St. Gregory Nazianzen, we should count as shadows, vanity, and dreams, because, when opposed to grace, they are pure nothings.

¹ Or. 40 in s. lumina.

THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Grace and the Dignity of the Mother of God.

1.

IN the mystery of the Incarnation not a human person, but a *human nature* only, is elevated to a Divine dignity. The Divine maternity, however, is a supernatural dignity, which was communicated to a *human person*; it is, therefore, more easily compared with the dignity granted us by grace.

To prevent any misunderstanding, we must, above all, faithfully hold that in Mary grace cannot be separated from her Divine maternity. That precisely is the deep meaning of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception so solemnly proclaimed but a few years ago by the Church amid the joyful applause of all her children,—that the Mother of God cannot be supposed to have been despoiled, for one moment even, of God's grace. "*God is inseparably united with her,*" says the holy bishop and martyr Methodius in the third century. Because she communicated her human nature to the Son of God, she has a right, as none other, to the participation in His Divine nature by grace. As Mother she forms one person, as it were, with her Son, who was conceived of her flesh, and dwelt nine months in her chaste bosom. His rights are her rights; His gifts are her's; His sanctity is her sanctity. She is that woman whom St. John beheld in his revelation, who does not receive the light of the Divine Sun as if from afar, but is altogether surrounded and inclosed by this Sun. Therefore the grace, which fills her soul has this excellent prerogative above the grace of all other creatures, that it is especially due to her, as the grace of

her Divine Son is due to Him, and so necessarily due, that she can never lose it or be without it, and so plentifully due, that we all may draw therefrom. As it is said of her Son, that He is full of grace and truth, so she is called by the angel, not only *blessed* with grace, but *full* of grace. As He is the own and only begotten Son of the Father, so is Mary His first-born daughter.

If we, therefore, consider the sublime dignity of Mary, as it unites in her grace with the Divine maternity, and this maternity with grace, then we may not venture to compare with it our heavenly dignity, which we have received by grace. But if we, for a moment, abstract from this union, and consider the maternal dignity of Mary in itself alone, then we may safely assert, without fear of prejudice to her, that grace is a greater gift and confers a higher dignity than the Divine maternity.

As Mother of God according to the flesh, Mary ranks high above all creatures; she deserves the love and respect of her Son, the reverence of the angels, the service of men, and beholds all things beneath her. But she would rather be without all this and without the sovereignty in Heaven and on earth; she would gladly give up the privileges and honors of the Mother of God, rather than lose grace. She would rather be a daughter of God by grace, than the Mother of God by nature; for she well knows that Jesus, although He embraces her with an incomparable love, would nevertheless love another soul more if this soul were richer in grace.

Christ Himself wished to intimate this, when He spoke the memorable words to those who would, during His sermon, introduce His Mother and His relatives: "*Who is My Mother, and who are My brethren? And stretching forth His hand towards His disciples, He said: Behold My mother and My brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of My Father, who is in Heaven, he is My brother, and sister, and mother.*"¹

On another occasion, when a certain woman from the

¹ Matth. xij. 48-50.

people called His Mother blessed in the words : “ Blessed is the womb that bore Thee and the breasts that gave Thee suck,” He answered with deep meaning : “ *Yea, rather, blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it.*”¹

He certainly did not wish, in these two places, to deny His Mother and do her injustice. He intended rather to say that His Mother is worthy of Him only for that reason, because she performs the will of His Father in the most perfect manner ; she hears His word and keeps it, and possesses in the fullest measure the grace of God, and that if another soul (which cannot for a moment be supposed) were more perfect in this respect than His Mother, He would honor such a soul more than His Mother.

Indeed, as Mother of our Saviour in the flesh, she had given birth to Him only according to the flesh ; she had received the Eternal Word into her bosom, to invest Him with a human nature, and she thus enjoyed a natural relationship with Him. But by receiving the Word of God into her soul, she conceived and brought forth her Son also spiritually, she was clothed with the splendor of His Divine nature, and thus entered also into a heavenly relationship with Him. Certainly this last relation cannot be separated from the first and is necessarily connected with it ; yet it remains true what St. Augustine says : “ The maternity would have profited the Virgin nothing, if she had not borne Christ still more happily in spirit than she bore Him in the flesh.” From this it by no means follows, that the maternity of Mary according to the flesh is of little or no value to her. Its highest privilege and its sublimest significance rather consist in its being inseparable from grace and having it attached to it as a necessary consequence.

2. But if the Divine maternity of Mary would have been profitless without grace, and if Mary had rather possessed this than the former alone, how may we dare to compare and prefer any other purely human dignity to grace !

¹ Luke xi. 27, 28.

How may we love fame among men more than the honor to stand in grace with God ! How may we cherish rather to appear great in the eyes of men, than to know our names written in the Book of Life ! How may we boast of possessing a temporal advantage over our fellow-men, when they may surpass us in the grace of God, and our Saviour almost makes us the equals of His own Mother by this grace !

By grace we in reality are in a wonderful manner rendered similar to the Mother of God. Not only was it impossible for the Son of God to adorn the soul of His Mother, as little as His own, with a perfection of a higher kind than grace confers ; He, indeed, had to grant her this^e grace in a much larger measure and much higher degree ; but we imitate in ourselves the maternity of Mary by the reception of grace. The same Holy Spirit that descended into the bosom of Mary, to invest her with a holy fertility, also descends into our soul, to generate, in a spiritual manner, the Son of God. As the Blessed Virgin, by lending a willing ear to the word of the angel, and by fulfilling the will of her heavenly Father, was made the Mother of the Son of God in the flesh and in spirit, so must our soul give birth spiritually to the Son of God by faithfully receiving the Word of God and corresponding to the command of God, who will give it His grace. Yea, even according to the flesh, the Son of God comes to us to dwell in us, as Mary bore Him in her bosom for nine months, and will be one with us in the flesh, as He is with His Mother. Can we be surprised, then, that our Saviour says : Whosoever shall do the will of My Father, who is in Heaven, is My mother, brother, and sister ? And must not we, in thanksgiving for the similar grace that God has given us, intone the same hymn with Mary and exclaim : “ My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour ; for He that is mighty, hath done great things to me.”

But if it was necessary that, on account of her mater-

nity, Mary should be so pure and holy as never to suffer the stain of the slightest shadow of sin ; if we shudder at the thought that she should have been able to offend, even by the least fault, the Son, whom she bore in her bosom, or perhaps even to lose His grace by a mortal sin ; must not we, also, in view of our intimate union with Christ, regard the least sin as a terrible and atrocious crime ?


3. Another sweet consideration we must not pass over on this occasion. Mary is greater and more exalted than we, because she is the Mother of God and at the same time our mother. But how can the Mother of God be our mother also ? She is not our mother according to our human nature, as we have received this from Eve, and not from her. She is rather our mother in so far as we are the brethren of her only Son and the living members of His body. She is our mother according to grace, by which we have received a new, heavenly nature and partake of the Divine nature of her Son, and indeed, as only God alone can be our Father by grace, so our mother by grace can be no other than the Mother of God.

Oh, what delight must fill our soul at this thought, and how must our heart thrill with joy in the sublime conviction that we are so closely related to the Mother of God, and may rightly call the Queen of Heaven and earth our mother ! But how highly should we esteem, too, the inheritance she bequeaths to us, the pledge of her maternal love, the image she impresses upon our soul, to make it like to her and her Divine Son ! How tenderly should we love and honor her, and in token of our gratitude, endeavor to guard and protect the great gift of grace which she grants us through her Son ! How carefully should we be on our guard, lest by the loss of grace we show ourselves unworthy of such a great mother and lose the dignity of her children !

FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

How much God Himself Esteems Grace.

1.

FTER all that has now been said, Christian soul, you will not only believe, but clearly see, that grace, which includes so many and such incomparable privileges and gifts, must be very, aye, infinitely precious. But if all this leaves no impression upon your heart, either because you do not see these glories with your corporal eyes, or because the visible and transitory riches of the world fascinate you too much with their charms, then learn the infinite value of grace from the infinite value of the price which God Himself has paid for it. If you cannot estimate it yourself, see how much God has valued it, and if you cannot understand it, submit your intellect to the obedience of faith, by making the infallible judgment of God your own; weigh the value of grace in the infallible balance of God.

And what do you behold? What could the great God, with all His infinite wisdom, power, and goodness do more than He has done, to procure us grace? What greater things could He sacrifice for it than He has really sacrificed? He has not spared His own Son, His own blood, His own life of infinite value.

Even the human life of the Son of God is a Divine life on account of the infinite dignity of His person, and can only be sacrificed for the sake of another Divine life. Neither Heaven nor earth, with all the splendor and the countless number of beings they contain, was worthy to be bought and saved by the life of the Son of God, or even by a tear or a drop of His blood. On the

other hand, theologians say that the Son of God, even if He should have to acquire grace for one soul only, would not have become man and died in vain. By sacrificing His life for us, then, the Son of God wished to indicate that He must purchase for us the life of the children of God, and that the grace that adorns our soul possesses an equally infinite value as the precious blood of His holy body. For if His human life is of infinite dignity, because it belongs to a Divine person, the life of grace is of infinite value, because it makes us partakers of the Divine nature.

2. A disgraceful treason had irrecoverably lost man the grace which God, in His infinite love, had originally bestowed upon him. Then God wished to acquire it again for him with equal or even greater love, and to that end made every effort that His infinite wisdom could invent and permit. He therefore conceived a plan, which by its unheard-of novelty amazed the whole heavenly host. He Himself would become man, to restore to mankind the dignity of His children and bring them back to His Divine paternal bosom. Behold the Son of God, as He leaves the throne of His Father, to seek one of His servants in the most remote corner of His kingdom, and to inclose Himself within the bosom of a human being, in a poor cottage at Nazareth! Behold, how low He descends, passing by the angels, and with what zeal He takes upon Himself all the trials and sufferings of human nature! Would it not seem as if He intended to purchase His own salvation, His life, His happiness, His glory and Divinity at such a great, such an unprecedented price? Oh, He desired and wished nothing else than to acquire grace, which the world estimates so lightly, and did not believe He purchased it too dearly with such great sacrifices and at such a high price! He purchased it, moreover, not for Himself, but for us; and if we must, with our own sacrifices, acquire a certain good for others, we certainly will not pay too dearly for it, and if we do give a great price for this good, it must be of indescribable value.

If, then, the Son of God, who in His infinite wisdom estimates all things according to their true value, would purchase grace so dearly for us, how must we, then, be ashamed that we bear its loss so easily, and having lost it, do not even miss it ! Every moment that we are without grace ought to be more terrible for us than hell ; and we are able to let days, weeks, and months elapse in the state of sin, and all the while quietly and calmly sleep, eat, play, and enjoy ourselves ! The great God humbles and annihilates Himself to give us lost grace again ; and we, who are the special subjects of this grace, who stand in so great need of it, we faithless mortals destroy it by our sins and crimes, when we are deceived by the shadow of vain-glory, or the gratification of a miserable indulgence ! How can we esteem that so lightly, which God considers of such great value !

3. It did not satisfy Christ merely to descend from Heaven upon earth ; for thirty-three years He would labor and suffer in His human nature. Because, even in His humanity, He was the true Son of God, all His actions had an infinite merit, and by *one* drop of His precious blood He might have obtained for us pardon of our sins, by *one* act of love to His Heavenly Father, by *one* act of glorifying God, He might have merited grace again for us. But no ; to make us fully aware of the infinite value of grace, He would show that not even a God-man can do and suffer too much for it. Therefore, He has suffered all that man can suffer, so that His sufferings may be called infinite, not only in value, but also in their measure ; therefore, He fasted forty days, in order to satiate us with the bread of grace ; therefore, He had His body torn with scourges, in order to clothe us with the robe of grace ; therefore, His sacred head was crowned with thorns, to adorn us with the crown of His grace ; therefore, He had His hands and feet pierced by sharp nails and shed His precious blood, to pour out into our soul the heavenly waters of grace ; finally, He sacrificed His Divine life on the ignominious instrument of

the cross, to raise us to the throne of grace and to fill us with Divine life.

Consider, Christian reader, and openly speak your opinion: can that be so very unimportant, which the Son of God will acquire in such a laborious manner? You so easily believe all men, who promise you liberty, blessing, and happiness, and proclaim themselves the true saviours of the world; but as soon as it would become necessary to purchase your promised happiness by their own sacrifices, they are not in the least prepared to do this. From this you may learn how insincere their good wishes are, how little they really love you, and how little they themselves esteem the goods which they promise you. Why will you not believe your Saviour, who makes so many and such great sacrifices in your behalf? If He should tell you to suffer all that He has suffered in order to merit grace, you would be obliged to believe Him, the Eternal Truth, that grace were worthy of such a price. How much more readily must you believe it now, when He has proven, by facts, that even the God-man of infinite dignity cannot suffer too much for grace. If you believe this, then you will understand, also, that all those little sufferings which poor man may undergo for the sake of grace, are nothing compared to its infinite value. If you had all to suffer what Christ has suffered, if you had to endure even all the torments of hell, you could not, with all this, merit the least degree of grace. Thank your Saviour, then, from your whole heart, for having suffered so much for your sake, and endeavor to be made conformable to Him in His sufferings, as far as possible, and to show thereby how much you have learned to esteem grace.

4. Certainly that is a great good, which has cost the Son of God His life. But even this Christ did not deem a sufficient recompense for grace. He went still farther, and to propagate grace amongst men, He instituted a sacrament and a sacrifice, which contain nothing less than His own body and blood. It was not enough for Him to be

born once, to die once, to be buried once, only. In a mysterious manner, in the hands of the priest, He would be born again a thousand or a million times, at every hour and over the whole world ; He would renew the sacrifice of the cross upon the altars of the holy Church, and be buried again in the hearts of the faithful. Oh, how much insult and dishonor must He always suffer in this holy sacrament, when the defiled hands of a wicked priest come in contact with Him, when poor and unadorned altars shelter Him, or when even a heart defiled with sin receives Him ! Why those countless steps and journeyings in which the Son of God untiringly descends every day from Heaven upon earth ? What impels Him is His infinite zeal to give us grace, whilst we, in dreadful blindness, scarcely move a step to obtain it, and on the contrary, pursue, with full sail, that which may despoil us of grace ? God has performed so many and such great works, and still acts and suffers for the sake of grace ; but what and how little do we labor and suffer, or even wish to do and suffer ?

But if the intrinsic value of grace were not so great in itself, that it ought to be purchased at an immense price, the price that was actually rendered for it ought to give it an infinite value in our eyes. For we hold anything in higher honor already, because we have obtained it with great labor and many sacrifices ; its great cost enhances and multiplies its value. When David, in a military expedition, suffered much from thirst, and some of his brave warriors had, with great labor and danger, brought a drink of water, he considered the water, though in itself of no value, yet, on account of the danger it had cost his soldiers, too precious to be drunk by him, and offered it to the Lord.¹ And yet his soldiers had not really sacrificed their life, but only exposed it to danger. Must not the sacrifice, which Christ has made for grace, render this doubly precious to us ?

¹ II. Kings xxiii. 14-17.

Yes, grace is as infinitely precious as its price, the blood and life of Christ, which was offered for it. Who despises it, despises not only the eternal and infinite treasures contained in its bosom, but also the price with which Christ has purchased it. St. Eusebius of Emisa¹ says very significantly: "I feel that I am something great, that I am a work of God; but I am conscious of being something far greater, aye, incomparably greater, because I am redeemed at such a rich, such a superabundant price, that I appear to equal God in value." And, in another place,² the same Saint remarks: "Not gold, nor an angel, but the Author of our salvation Himself was laid in the balance, that man might, at least from the great price, learn the greatness of his dignity."

As often, then, as you exchange grace for sin, so often do you, in the most insolent and shameful manner, trifle with the life, the blood and death of the great and terrible Lord and God! All the labor of many years of His ardent love, a love that spared not itself, is destroyed in a moment, and the inheritance that He acquired with so much trouble is cast into the abyss of sin!

God had created light, the joy of the whole world, with two words; with the same ease He had produced the stars, the plants, and animals. He gave life to the angels by a mere signification of His will and to man by a light breath of His nostrils. The greatest miracles He wrought, as it were, in passing, by one word, one touch, one sign, by His mere will. By those three words He spoke to Lazarus in the sepulchre He might have raised with him all the dead to life. But, to restore grace to you, who so audaciously despise it and cast it away, Almighty God was obliged to undertake a work that cost Him labor, an unspeakable labor of so many years; He was obliged to give up His own life, and He did so with joy, because He knew grace was worthy of such a struggle. You yourself, however, do not tire of the ways of sin; you often remain in sin for weeks

¹ Hom. 9. de Pasch.

² Hom. 2. de symb.

and months, and do not consider your conversion worth even a slight effort ! You think to redeem your sins by a hasty confession and soon after, the day following, or, perhaps, the same evening, you are as careless, gay, and merry as if nothing had happened, and perhaps even forget your good resolution ! Unhappy man ! Whither do your blindness and the intoxicating habit of sin lead you ! Had you only, as the true servants of God do, considered attentively the great price of your redemption, certainly you would, like them, approach the sacrament of reconciliation with bitter compunction and holy zeal ; you would shield yourself with a strong resolution of amendment and preserve, with the greatest care, the grace recovered. You would henceforth ever be mindful of the words of the Apostle : “ *Know you not that you are not your own ? For you are bought with a great price. Glorify and bear God in your body.* ”¹

5. Finally, grace is held in such high regard by God, that He would rather all other evils would descend upon man, and the whole world would be thrown into confusion and dissolution, than to permit the loss of grace, because this loss is the greatest of all evils. Do you see the immense wars and the terrible epidemics, that in a short time convert whole flourishing countries into deserts ? Do you perceive the many mishaps that deprive whole families of their wealth and honor ? Do you see the many evils that befall individuals, the countless persecutions that sinners wage against the just and in which the sinners often seem to triumph ? All these evils are permitted by God because men are thereby induced to seek their salvation and happiness, not upon earth, but in grace. All these evils, for which many men blame Divine Providence, are permitted by God because they are as nothing compared to grace, which they are intended to convey to man and to preserve for him. If God gave His only begotten Son for man,

¹ I. Cor. vi. 20.

why should He not rather destroy the whole creation than suffer mankind to be without His grace ?

Why should not we, also, learn from this Divine lesson to esteem grace and its price ? May we lose honor and a good name, if only grace does not fail us ; may we lose our riches, our parents, children, friends, our health and our life ; may we lose all, may Heaven and earth pass away, if we only retain grace ! Christ justly teaches us to sell, for its sake, all that we possess, and give it to the poor, to sever all, even the dearest human ties, to despise and sacrifice our own life, for which His bright and beautiful example has shown us the way ; for indeed, he who has found this pearl, possesses wherewith to purchase God, and Heaven, and all other things.

Second Book.

Of the Sublime and Incomprehensible
Union with God to which Grace
Introduces us.

FIRST CHAPTER.

By Grace we Receive the Person of the Holy Spirit
into our Soul.

1.

IN the first book we have considered the nature of sanctifying grace and found it to be a most sublime, supernatural quality of our nature infused by God in a most wonderful manner. We have seen that this quality makes us partakers of the Divine nature, and like unto this nature in its glorious prerogatives. But if our nature is so greatly elevated, and glorified, and made similar to the Divine nature, then we must also enter into an exceedingly intimate, mysterious, and living union with God, and this fact must evidently raise and increase the glory and preciousness of grace. This mysterious union with God, which is effected by grace, will form the subject of the second book.

In the language of Holy Writ and of the holy Fathers, the Holy Spirit is generally designated as that Person with whom we are specially united by grace. For the Holy Spirit, as the third Person of the Blessed Trinity, stands, as it were, on the boundaries of the Blessed Trinity, and

therefore the union of God with the creature, and of the creature with God, is primarily and principally attributed to Him. Besides, He is the personal representative of the Divine love, from which He proceeds. But since the union of God with the creature is effected by His love, and on the other hand, our union with God in this life consists principally in our love for Him, it is evident why it is the Holy Spirit who represents in this respect the whole Blessed Trinity.

2. Of the Holy Spirit now we say, that He Himself comes to us with grace, He gives us Himself in grace, and that He really and essentially, in an unspeakably intimate manner, dwells in us by grace.

The Holy Spirit it is who, according to the words of the Apostle,¹ transforms us by His power into the image of God. In this He does not act like the sun, which only from a distance transforms the crystal globe into its image by its rays; no, because as God He must be present everywhere He acts, He illumines our soul, as a light that is placed within a crystal globe, or as a fire that is most closely united to and penetrates the body, which it makes bright and glowing. He Himself is the seal by which God impresses upon our soul the image of His Divine nature and holiness. As the seal indeed only imprints its form in the wax, but in order to do this must be brought into most intimate connection with it; so the Holy Spirit, by impressing us with the seal of His image, enters into most intimate union with our soul. Thus the Holy Spirit cannot give us His grace without giving us Himself, as the Apostle says:² “*The charity of God (which together with His grace is His highest gift) is poured forth into our hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us.*”

But as the Holy Ghost must Himself come to us, to bring us grace, so conversely grace brings us to the Holy Spirit, unites us with Him, and effects that by it and with it we possess the Holy Spirit Himself. “By sanctifying

¹ II. Cor. iii. 18.

² Rom. v. 5.

grace," says St. Thomas,¹ "the rational creature is thus perfected, that it may not only use with liberty the created good, but that it may also enjoy the uncreated good : and therefore, the invisible sending of the Holy Ghost takes place in the gift of sanctifying grace, yet the Divine Person Himself is given us."

By those words, St. Thomas will not maintain that we are qualified by grace only to enjoy the Holy Spirit by knowledge and love, in a manner, as we may know and love objects that do not belong to us, and that we do not possess in substance. He will rather say, that we possess and enjoy the Holy Spirit Himself in the same manner as objects that we not only see, but may also use ; that we not only love, but may also hold in close embrace. Or rather, to express this mystery as far as possible in all its depth, by grace we are not only qualified to know, love, and enjoy God from afar, mediately by the beauty and goodness of His creatures, but to possess Him immediately in His substance. And this again not only means that the Divine substance is the object of our happy possession in any manner, but that it is truly and really present to us in a very special and intimate manner. For as theologians very generally teach with regard to the beatific vision of God in eternity, that it cannot be imagined without a true, real, and exceedingly intimate presence of God in our soul ; so we must likewise hold that we cannot love God in this life with a supernatural love, unless the Divine object of our love be present in the most intimate manner in our soul. As the object of beatific vision, God² is truly the food of our soul and is as intimately united to it, as the natural food is to the body ; and in like manner the supernatural love for God is at the same time a truly spiritual embrace of God, by which we receive Him, and hold Him in the innermost nature of our soul.

In a twofold manner, then, and from a twofold cause, we are truly and really united to the Holy Spirit by grace :

¹ 1. p. q. 33, art. 2.

² Vide inf. c. 6.

first, as the Author of grace He comes to us with grace, and unites Himself with us, and again grace conducts us to Him and unites us with Him. The Holy Spirit approaches us in an unspeakably intimate manner, to communicate to us grace and love as a participation in the Divine nature and sanctity, as an outflow from the innermost bosom of Divinity ; and again, we approach wonderfully near to Him by the same grace, which, as a participation in the Divine nature, qualifies us for the immediate possession and enjoyment of the Divine substance and the Divine Persons.

3. The Holy Spirit, and the Divinity itself, is present also to natural things, and that not only by His activity, but because God acts by His substance, also substantially. But by grace His presence becomes incomparably more intimate and of a quite different nature. In the creatures He is present only as their Creator, without whom they cannot exist ; but in those possessed of grace He is present as their sanctifier, who gives Himself to them and discloses to them the depths of His own being ; He is in them in a similar manner, as God the Father is in His only-begotten Son. The Father is in the Son by the substantial and essential communication of His nature, and so the Holy Spirit is in us by the gracious communication of the participation in the Divine nature. As much, then, as the presence of the Eternal Father in His Son is different from His presence in the creatures, so different, too, is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the soul filled with grace, from His presence in mere creatures.

Although the Holy Spirit is present to all creatures, though He dwells in the whole created nature as in an immense temple, and the Holy Scripture says of Him : · “ *The Spirit of the Lord hath filled the whole world ;* ” yet in the soul adorned with grace He dwells with a special and peculiar presence. This is so true, that a great theologian¹ does not hesitate to say : If God should cease to be present in the other creatures, He would not cease to be in the souls

¹ Suarez, de Trinitate, lib. 12, p. 5.

that are in grace any more than He would thereby separate Himself from the humanity of Christ which is united with Him in one person. Therefore all creation can no longer be called a temple of God in comparison with the soul in grace; or if that is His temple, the soul is His altar; if that is His house this is His innermost chamber. Yea, we may more appropriately, and in accordance with Holy Writ, call the whole natural creation the footstool of God, upon which only the hem of His garment descends; the soul in grace, however, we must call the throne of God, replete with all Divine glory. Shall I say even more? In the soul, which is in the state of grace, the Holy Spirit is as intimately present, as the soul itself is present in the heart, of which it is the principle of life and action.

4. And this holy presence of the Spirit of God lasts as long as we preserve grace. The Holy Spirit does not come to us as a *transient guest*, who will remain with us only for a short time and then leave us. Our Saviour has prayed for us to the Father, that He might send us the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, to abide with us *forever*.¹ Forever this great guest will dwell with us and not leave us unless we ourselves expel Him from our hearts.

O wonderful greatness of grace that introduces such a great, sweet, and holy guest and unites Him so closely and inseparably with our soul! If Zacheus called himself blessed because he could receive the Son of God in human form into his house for a short time, how much happier must we consider ourselves for being able to receive the Holy Spirit in His Divinity, not into our house, but into the innermost recesses of our heart! Let others consider it a great honor to receive a temporal prince into their house; we will gladly accept and account as nothing all shame and disgrace from our fellow-men, if we only keep the Holy Spirit in our heart. “*If you be reproached for the name of Christ,*” says the Prince of the Apostles,² “*you shall be blessed; for that which is of the honor, glory, and*

¹ John xiv. 16.

² I. Peter iv. 14.

power of God, and that which is His Spirit, resteth upon you." We should oppose a holy pride to all the abuse and insult the world may heap upon us, confident that no one can deprive our soul of the presence of this great guest.

5. But this distinguished guest comes not only to honor us with His presence ; He brings us also a very rich *treasure*, and He Himself is this treasure ; or rather He Himself is not only a treasure, but the pledge of a still greater treasure. For as we now are to experience and enjoy the Holy Spirit in the sweetness of His love, so we shall taste and enjoy hereafter the Father and the Son in their whole Divine essence and glory. "*He is the pledge of our inheritance,*" says the Apostle.¹ As this inheritance is none other than God Himself, the pledge for it can be no other than God. For only a Divine pledge can secure us a Divine inheritance and give us a foretaste of the enjoyment of God.

Oh, how little are we sensible of the preciousness of this treasure and of the living hope which this pledge gives us, because we make so little endeavor to experience it ! The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Divine charity, can only be perceived and enjoyed in the measure in which we receive His love. The more we love Him, the nearer He approaches us, the more deeply He is immersed in our soul, the more we experience His heavenly sweetness, the stronger grows our desire and confidence to possess and enjoy one day not only the pledge but the whole treasure of God. But if we do not nurse and cultivate this love in us, then we ourselves are in fault if we do not experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in our soul, and we even deserve soon to lose it altogether.

But no; far be this from you, Christian soul, for when you no longer esteem the presence of the Holy Ghost in your soul, you not only bring the greatest misfortune upon yourself, but also offer Him the most shameful insult. What outrageous wrong were it not, if a poor man, into whose home a temporal prince entered, would not receive

¹ Ephesians 1. 14.

him, or after receiving him, neglect him altogether or even expel him from his house! But what if you told the Spirit of God, not expressly, but plainly enough by your indifferent and contemptuous conduct: "*Depart from me!*" like those men, of whom Job says that they "*looked upon the Almighty as if He could do nothing, whereas He had filled their houses with good things*"?¹

6. The Holy Ghost comes to you, to give you Himself and thus to render you happy; but at the same time He comes as your Lord and God, *to take possession of you* as of His temple. "*Know you not,*" says the Apostle,² "*that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?*" By receiving the Holy Ghost into your hearts, you are dedicated as His temple and belong to Him; all your actions should tend to His honor and be worthy of Him. Before Him you shall serve no idol and thereby profane the temple of the true God. "*For,*" says the same Apostle in another place,³ "*what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? You are the temple of the living God, as God saith: I will dwell in them, and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*"

What an abominable crime is it not to profane and desecrate the temple of God! Learn this from the greatness of the punishment which the Apostle imposes upon it. "*If any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy, which you are.*"⁴ But by every mortal sin we not only violate this temple, but destroy and annihilate it; for we destroy in us grace, by which this temple is built up. O terrible and pernicious deed, by which we, like Samson, in a moment tear away the pillars of this grand structure to bury ourselves under its ruins, to rob God at one stroke of the object of His sweetest pleasure, and cast ourselves into a fathomless abyss! The wicked king Antiochus had not dared to destroy the temple of Jerusalem; he had only profaned it

¹ Job xxii. 17, 18.² I. Cor. vi. 19.³ II. Cor. vi. 16.⁴ I. Cor. iii. 17.

and robbed it of its treasures. Nevertheless, he soon experienced the hand of Divine vengeance ; worms grew out of his body, the rotted flesh fell in pieces from his limbs, and he died in unspeakable pain and the most terrible despair. And you, wicked blasphemer, who violate the sanctuary of the Holy Ghost, destroy His temple, extinguish the stars that shine in your soul, you dare to hope for indulgence ? Would that mortals could understand, says an eminent divine,¹ how great, how cruel and terrible an evil is one mortal sin, by which grace is destroyed in our soul ! It were better that the whole world were destroyed, than that one mortal sin were committed.

7. As the soul lives in the body as in a house, so the Holy Ghost dwells not only in our soul ; with it and by it He also dwells *in our body*. Our body also is then a temple of the Holy Ghost, blessed and sanctified by His presence, a holy vessel, holier than the ark of the covenant in the Old Law, because we hold not only the tables of the Law, but the Lawgiver Himself. Therefore the Apostle tells us :² “ *This is the will of God, your sanctification : that you should abstain from fornication, that every one of you should know how to possess His vessel in sanctification and honor ; not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles, who know not God. . . . Therefore he that despiseth these things, despiseth not man, but God, who also hath given His holy Spirit in us.*” The members of our body are members of Christ, by whom we have received the Holy Ghost, and they are therefore instruments of the Holy Ghost dedicated to His service and glory. “ *Know you not,*” says the same Apostle, “ *that your bodies are the members of Christ ? Shall I, then, take the members of Christ, and make them the members of a harlot ? God forbid.*”³ “ *Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body, so as to obey the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of iniquity unto sin, but present yourselves to God . . .*

¹ Philip Gamachæus in 1, 2, q. 113, c. 13.

² I. Thess. iv. 3-8.

³ I. Cor. vi. 15.

and your members as instruments of justice unto God.”⁴

8. Still more grateful should we be to God for the gift of the Holy Ghost, and more respectful to the temple of God within us, when we compare the communication and sending of the Holy Ghost with the communication and sending of the Son of God. It was infinite evidence of God's love for us, already to give us, in the Incarnation, His only-begotten Son. Who are we, that the Son of God should, on our account, descend from Heaven upon earth, adopt our nature, and walk and dwell among us? The whole heavenly court was seized with deep wonder at hearing of this condescension of its King. Yet the Son of God dwelt only a short time among us, only in *one* country and with *one* people. The Holy Spirit, however, equal to the Father and the Son in the Divinity, comes to each one of us, and not only comes to us, but enters our soul and makes it His throne and temple, and will always remain with us. And should we not know how to appreciate this great gift and this love?

In Holy Communion the God-man enters our heart with His holy body, it is true, only for a few moments, as long as the species remain entire. The Divinity of the Holy Ghost is certainly something greater and more sublime than even the body of Christ, and instead of soon departing from us, He is united to us the more intimately, the more we hold Him and approach Him; for the possession of any good, says St. Albertus Magnus, is so much more secure and lasting, as it is itself more noble and sublime. Why should we not extend to the Holy Ghost in our heart at least the same reverence and honor that we give the body of our Lord on the altar or in the tabernacle, or when receiving it in Holy Communion?

Your heart would shudder and tremble and be shocked at hearing that a fiendish hand had robbed the body of our Lord from the tabernacle and thrown it upon the street, or that a sacrilegious tongue had spit it out

⁴ Rom. vi. 12, 13.

again after holy Communion ; and no punishment would appear to you great enough for such a crime. Well, then, O sinner, out of your own mouth judge yourself ! Do not you commit a similar act, when you expel the Holy Ghost from the temple of your soul by a mortal sin and exclude Him from your heart ?

Every heart that is not altogether depraved and void of feeling approaches the table of the Lord with a holy awe ; and even those who otherwise show little concern for their sins do not dare to receive the purest body of Christ into a heart defiled with sin. But do you believe that the Holy Ghost, who Himself formed that purest flesh in the chaste bosom of the Virgin, will more easily be reconciled to the filth and uncleanness of your carnal heart and live together with sin under the same shelter ? Certainly not ; even the angels in themselves are not pure enough in His eyes, and must first be cleansed and purified by His own Divine fire, that they may become worthy to receive Him. Is it not, then, reasonable that you at least strive after an angelic purity and live, as the Apostle teaches, not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit ?

9. Finally, it is very significant, as St. Augustine explains,¹ that our Lord sent the Holy Ghost twice : the first time, when after His resurrection, whilst yet sojourning on earth, He breathed upon His Apostles and said : “ Receive ye the Holy Ghost ”—and again after His ascension into Heaven on the day of Pentecost at Jerusalem. For the Holy Ghost is the Divine love and, when given, is to pour out this love into our hearts. But since we must love two objects with this love, God and our neighbor, our Saviour wished, as St. Augustine says, to give His spirit twice, that He might grant us the love of God and the love of our neighbor. The Holy Ghost inspires us with the love of God, when He gives us the power and inclination for this love, and gives us Himself as the pledge, that God will eternally love us, and with all that He

¹ August., de Trinit., lib. 15, cap. 26.

possesses, will be ours. The love of our neighbor He works in us, by making Him also His temple, by giving Himself also to our neighbor and dwelling in him, that we may henceforth love in our neighbor, not a man, but God Himself, who lives in him. Oh, how few remember that they must honor and love their fellow-man as a sacred and venerable temple of the Holy Ghost! Would they otherwise treat Him so contemptuously, so easily despise Him, and so inconsiderately offend Him? Would they not rather consider themselves happy in being allowed to approach this sanctuary of the Holy Ghost and to serve it? Were we as enlightened as the Saints, we should kneel down before the sick and helpless, and with the greatest reverence render them the meanest services, knowing well that about the temple of God even the lowest service is infinitely great and holy. Holy Writ¹ says of God Himself, that He “*disposes of us with great favor,*” as of a precious vessel, certainly from no other reason but because He beholds His own spirit within us.

The great Abbot Alcuin adds to this passage of St. Augustine, that our Lord, while yet on earth, first sent the Holy Ghost, that we may love our neighbor and thus prepare ourselves to receive the Holy Ghost from our Lord in Heaven, that we may embrace God Himself with heavenly love. “*For,*” says St. John,² “*he that loveth not his brother, whom he seeth, how can he love God, whom he seeth not?*” Let us, then, in the Holy Ghost love the temple of God in our neighbor, that we may ourselves be made worthy to be true temples of God and forever to be filled with His Divine glory!

¹ Wis. xii. 18.

² I. John iv. 20.

SECOND CHAPTER.

The Whole Blessed Trinity is Introduced into our Soul by Grace.

1.

THE subject proposed here may be easily proven from what has already been stated; for “*in this,*” says the disciple and teacher of love, “*we know that we abide in God, and He in us; because He hath given us of His Spirit.*”¹ The Holy Ghost is Himself God, and is one God with the Father and the Son: all three Persons are inseparably united with each other, on account of the unity of their essence, and hence, where one is present the two others must also be present. Therefore our Lord Himself says very distinctly:² “*If any one love Me he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him.*” To this mystery, Origen applies that blessed “*fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ,*” of which St. John writes to the faithful,³ “*that they may rejoice, and their joy may be full.*” If, lastly, St. Augustine explains, in what sense we may, in the Lord’s prayer, address to God the Father the words, “*who art in Heaven,*” though He is present everywhere, He teaches that the word Heaven signifies the just on earth, and the angels above, in whom, as in a magnificent royal palace, God the Father, the inseparable companion of grace, dwells with the Son and the Holy Ghost. God always directly follows His grace, and whoever receives it, receives into his soul the Triune God, with incomparably greater happiness than Abraham once received Him, before his tent, under the guise of the three men.

¹ I. John iv. 13.

² John xiv. 23.

³ I. John i. 3-4.

O thrice wonderful power of grace, which draws down the whole Blessed Trinity from Heaven into our soul, or rather converts this into a Heaven! "How little appears to me," St. Chrysostom exclaims, "the power which Josue possessed over the greatest heavenly bodies, the sun and the moon, so that he could command them to stand still or to resume their motion! For this is an incomparably greater honor, that we may draw down the Lord of Heaven Himself upon earth." O holy grace, architectress of a new Heaven, a new temple, a new palace and throne for the King of Heaven and earth, who would not joyfully open to you the door of his heart, that you may prepare in it a worthy dwelling-place for the Triune God! And who should dare to drive Thee, O great God, from this Thy newly elected resting-place? He were certainly more impious than Herod, who drove the Infant Jesus from the stable at Bethlehem; for in this stable God had a dwelling unworthy of Him; but by grace our soul is so splendidly adorned, that God dwells in it with as much pleasure as He does in Heaven. Who then will dare to storm and seize upon this Heaven, this throne of God? And if any one is so audacious, ought the ministers and servants of God to remain silent? Ought not all creation to avenge the affront offered its Creator? Ought not Heaven to destroy this insolent wretch by its lightnings and the earth open to devour him?

2. This outrage is the more detestable, the more honorable and condescending is the coming of the Blessed Trinity into the heart of man. "*What is a man,*" we must exclaim with holy Job,¹ "*that Thou shouldst magnify him? or why dost Thou set Thy heart upon him, O God?*" since Thou dost not come to us as to servants, to accept the faithful services of a free and happy servitude from us, which were no small honor for us, but Thou comest to us, to live with us in the most intimate and familiar union.

¹ Job vii. 17.

Granted that it was a great honor for Joseph of Egypt, for Daniel and Mardochai to hold positions so near to temporal rulers, such an honor is not even a shadow of that honor accorded to us, when the great Almighty God approaches us so near by grace, and unites Himself so intimately to us, as no creature is able to do.

For this fellowship is so intimate, according to the language of the pious and learned Carthusian monk Dionysius, that we share, in common with God, intercourse, place of abode, mysteries, occupations, sentiments, desires, and interests. Who but the true Christian, united with His God, can speak those sublime words: "*It is good for me to stick close to my God, my soul hath stood close to Thee*"? ¹ He continually communes with God, and holds intercourse with Him in meditation; he lends an attentive ear to the sweet whisper of His voice; he receives with eager desire all His holy inspirations and impulses; to be separated from God appears to him harder than death; and if it occasionally happens that he does not notice the loving expressions of an habitual familiarity, he sighs in sad fear, lest he may have caused this withdrawal of God by his own fault. But who could describe how loving the intercourse is on the part of God, how God also reveals His innermost nature, and discloses His heart to him, how he makes known to such a soul His holy mysteries, lets it experience His holy presence, and infuses into it a peace that transcends all understanding? God's own word, "*My delight is to be with the children of men,*" ² tells us enough. Well, then, might this holy man Dionysius exclaim: "How great is the dignity of a rational creature, which participates in the Divine nature and obtains and holds fellowship with its Creator! But, '*Man, when he was in honor, did not understand: he hath been compared to senseless beasts, and made like to them.*'" ³ By spiritual and carnal sins, many associate themselves with the devils and the beasts and are made like to them."

¹ Ps. lxxii. 28.

² Prov. viii. 31.

³ Ps. xlviii. 21.

3. That you, my dear Christian, may not so easily cast aside the high position to which grace has raised you by similitude with God and fellowship with Him, consider the following :

The relics of holy bodies are deservedly the objects of our greatest veneration ; every one considers himself happy to be able to approach them, to see and touch them, and countless numbers often come from a great distance to pay their tribute of respect and love to these holy relics. But are not, in reality, we far more worthy of veneration, are not we a living shrine of the Divinity, in which is inclosed, not the dead ashes of saints, but all three Persons of the thrice-holy God ? Oh, if you could behold yourself, Christian soul, how would you esteem and honor yourself ! Oh, if you could behold yourself, holy soul, beloved and inhabited by God, honored and admired by the angels ! Oh, if you could behold yourself, lovely paradise of your Creator, glorious dwelling of the Blessed Trinity, beautiful bridal-chamber of the heavenly King ! Oh, if you could behold yourself, golden ark of the covenant, not of the Old but of the New Law, altar of the Divine Majesty, treasury of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, temple of the living God ! Oh, if you could behold yourself, sublime throne of the Divinity, wide Heaven, in which shine resplendently not corporeal stars, but the Divine Persons themselves ! Oh, if you could behold yourself, daughter of God the Father, sister of God the Son, spouse of the Holy Ghost, associate and companion of the whole Blessed Trinity ! Oh, if you could behold yourself, how would you esteem yourself, not on account of what you possess of your own self, but on account of the dignity you receive from grace ! How much would you honor yourself and grace, and guard against losing it !

We are rightly delighted at the companionship of St. Frances of Rome, who always beheld an angel companion at her side. But how surprised we should be to see the Archangels and Thrones, yea, all blessed spirits, surround-

ing man and standing at his side ! But what is this, or rather, how insignificant is all this, compared to the fellowship of God and all three Divine Persons, who are united to every soul that is in the state of grace ! If, now, it is scarcely imaginable that the soul, which knew itself surrounded by angels, would dare to drive them away or abandon them by an improper act in order to associate with the devils and reprobates ; how terrible and incredible must it appear, that a soul should do this towards Almighty God ! Who could believe that this occurs frequently, aye, that nothing occurs more frequently and universally ? Oh, let us entertain a greater esteem for that high dignity which we may confidently believe to have obtained by justification in the sacraments of baptism and penance, and that Divine Majesty which dwells in us ! Let our ways be worthy of God, pleasing to Him in all things ; let us despise the things that are of earth, occupy ourselves only with Him and with the things that are of Heaven. And as the Divine Persons descend so low in their goodness towards us, let us hasten to meet them and endeavor to unite ourselves as closely as possible with them. “ The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost come to us,” says St. Augustine,¹ “ if we go to them ; they come and assist us, we go by obedience to them ; they come and fill our heart, we go receiving, that our vision of them may not be external, but from within, and their residence in us be not transient, but eternal.”

¹ Tract. 76, in Joan.

THIRD CHAPTER.

By Grace the Holy Ghost Communicates to us His own Life.

1.

IF the whole Blessed Trinity is intimately united to our soul by grace, and if especially the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Father and the Son, is present within us, then this presence cannot be without fruit. God is a living God, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit or the breath of Divine life. He must then also dwell in our soul as the breath of Divine life, as it were, the soul of our soul, and inspire it with a new life, with His own Divine life.

Our soul certainly has its own natural life ; not only that life which it gives to the body, enabling it to move and perceive by the senses similarly to the animals, but it has besides a truly spiritual life in its reason and free will, by which it can know and love spiritual things, truth, beauty, and goodness ; otherwise the soul were not in its nature an image of the living God. But this life is scarcely a shadow of the Divine life ; it is so little, so weak, so limited, that the soul endowed with it alone is rather to be called dead than alive when compared to God.

✓ It is true that even the dead statue of a prince is precious and worthy of honor, but if this statue could be animated by the spirit of the prince himself, then we should respect and honor it as we do the prince himself. Well, then, God has breathed His own Spirit into our soul, His image, He has animated it with the breath of His own life, and this breath of Divine life is grace. By grace the Holy Spirit unites Himself with us: by it He fructifies the soil of our soul with the germ

of a higher, heavenly life, in a far higher manner than He once, at the time of creation, moving over the waters, fructified the void and dead earth with the life-germs of plants, animals, and men. By it He descends into our soul in a similar manner, as He once descended into the bosom of the Virgin, to let the rod of Jesse, the Son of God, sprout forth therein into a heavenly blossom.

One of the most beautiful and sublime miracles which we read of in Holy Scripture, is that of the prophet Eliseus raising to life again the dead son of the Sunamitic woman, who had so hospitably entertained him. "*The prophet,*" says Holy Writ,¹ "*lay upon the child : and he put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands ; and he bowed himself upon him ; and the child's flesh grew warm.*" Yet incomparably greater and more glorious is the miracle which is wrought in our soul at the infusion of grace, since here not one man is raised to a human life by another man, but our soul is raised to Divine life by God. With unspeakable love and tenderness God bows down on our soul; He places his own mouth upon its mouth, to breathe into it the breath of His life and the spirit of His love; He unites His eyes to the eyes of our soul, *i. e.*, with our intellect, His faculty of understanding with ours; He joins His hands to ours, His Divine power with the natural power of our soul; and so it is born to a new life by which *it lives in God and God in it.*

For after God has given our soul His life, He cannot depart from it, as Eliseus departed from the boy after he had revived him; our soul cannot live separated from God, as the seed lives separated from the tree that has fructified it. No, God remains in our soul as the soul remains in the body which it animates. He inspires His Spirit into the soul to remain there and produce the same effects that the soul produces in the body, to move and direct it, and always to kindle and sustain in it the light of Divine understanding, and the heat of Divine love. He inoculates,

¹ IV. Kings iv. 34.

as it were, the spirit of His life upon the weak sprout of our soul, to convert its natural life into a Divine life, to elevate and glorify it into a heavenly life, that henceforth the soul, nourished with Divine light, may shoot forth Divine and heavenly blossoms, and, filled with Divine ardor, may produce fruits of Divine love, that never pass away.

This new, ennobled tree is, then, always irrigated with that *living water*, which springs up, as our Lord told the Samaritan woman, into everlasting life that gushes forth from the bosom of the living God and is nothing else than this Holy Ghost Himself.¹ Therefore the Apostle says: *"The wages of sin is death; the grace of God, however,"* which is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us, *"is everlasting life."*

2. See, now, my dear Christian, whether you have hitherto at all comprehended the value of this Divine and heavenly life, or rather, whether you will ever be able adequately to comprehend it.

Life in itself is something so precious, that every living being, be it ever so humble, is worth far more than all, even the greatest and most beautiful things, which are without life. St. Augustine concluded from this that a worm or a small insect is preferable to the material heaven, the stars, and even to the sun, though it be the source of all light, and some learned philosophers have called life the culmination and the crown of visible nature. The reason is, perhaps, because lifeless beings cannot utilize their own being and their qualities for their own benefit, as the living beings may do. The plant, for instance, may command all that matter of which it consists and the matter that it assimilates, may utilize it for its own purpose (though it does this without perception and knowledge), and thus may ever more develop its beauty and produce its particular blossoms and fruit. Animals, besides, perceive what they are and have, and may therefore not only utilize their gifts, but to some extent enjoy them. But

¹ John iv. 14.

² Rom. vi. 23.

they cannot make use of and enjoy these gifts in the same manner as man, a rational being who knows himself and his destiny, who selects the means for the attainment of this end, strives after them, and who, moreover, may acquire and enjoy not only corporal, but also spiritual good.

The natural life of the soul is therefore exceedingly precious, incomparably more precious than the life of all other things on earth. But, as has already been said, the sphere of this activity is still very limited, as the soul by its natural powers can directly comprehend, acquire, and enjoy only natural things. Grace, however, infinitely amplifies and elevates this sphere; it qualifies the soul to know God immediately in His glory and to lovingly sink itself into the depths of His infinite goodness, to receive within itself the highest good and enjoy it as God Himself enjoys it. And so grace gives the soul a life infinitely more wealthy and sublime than all natural life, a Divine life full of unspeakable power and happiness, beyond comparison superior to all natural life.

The following illustration may, perhaps, still better show how sublime and precious this life is. The life of any being is manifested principally in the motion developed in it. Thus we may call the water swift, because it does not stand still, but flows and bubbles in a lively manner. The plants live, because they raise themselves from the root and steadily develop, and compared with them, even the flowing water is dead. But plants have no local motion, as the animal, that may leave its place and let its eye roam in immeasurable distance. Man moves infinitely farther, because with his reason he penetrates into the nature of things; besides the realm of the visible he may traverse the world of the possible, yea, pursue in his investigations not only corporal but also spiritual things, and from his lowliness he raises his eyes in wondrous anticipation to the heights of the Almighty's throne. But as long as the Spirit of God does not come to us with His

grace, our soul lies on the ground as a stone, which cannot, like the plant, move with living power and raise itself to Heaven to receive and enjoy the light of the sun. As a worm it clings to the earth, *i. e.*, to creatures, to the footsteps of God's glory; but it may not raise itself in daring flight, on the pinions of the eagle, to God, to behold Him and unite itself with Him. As, then, the stone is dead in comparison to the plant, as the worm may be said to be dead when compared to the eagle, so our soul must be considered dead, until it is pervaded by the mighty breath of the Spirit of God and is animated with His own life.

If, then, even the natural life of creatures is so valuable, how precious must not this Divine life be! And if the body loves so well the soul that animates it, how much more should our soul aspire after the Holy Ghost, who fills it with Divine life!

Oh, that we esteemed this heavenly life of the soul at least as much as the short, limited, and miserable life of the body, which is, in reality, nothing but a lingering death, which daily and hourly draws nearer its dissolution and in its beginning already contains the germ of death! What do we leave undone for the preservation of this life? What sacrifice is too great for us, if it will ward off death, the last and greatest of all evils? And yet we know that when its hour has come we cannot arrest it.

Our soul, however, by the grace of the Holy Ghost contains the germ of an eternal life, which, instead of daily decaying, is renovated from day to day. "*Though our outward man is corrupted,*" says the Apostle,¹ "*the inward man is renewed day by day.*" Besides, the grace of the Holy Ghost is everlasting life, not only for the soul, but also for the body; for, says the Apostle in another place,² "*if the Spirit of God, that raised up Jesus from the dead, dwell in you, He that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead shall quicken also your mortal bodies, because of His Spirit that dwelleth in you.*"

¹ II. Cor. iv. 16.

² Romans viii. 11.

Why should we not, then, love the life of grace, at least as much and more than the life of the flesh? Just then, if we love this carnal life, "*if we live according to the flesh,*" the Apostle tells us,¹ "*we shall die;*" die in the flesh and in the soul; but if we in the Holy Ghost chastise and mortify our flesh, we shall live forever, both in soul and body.

How true and evident is not the teaching of the Divine Saviour:² "*He that loveth his life, shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world, keepeth it unto life eternal.*" But how few there are who will understand these words, how few estimate by this teaching the true value of the life of soul and body! How few are mindful of those gravely important words: "*What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?*" O foolish and miserable mortal man, of what profit to you are all the pleasures and enjoyments of this earth, your indolent and comfortable and sumptuous life, spent only in the nursing and gratification of the flesh? All that is loss, is poison, is death and destruction! If you were half so much concerned about your soul, and made only a little expense in its favor, it would bring you eternal life and interminable happiness, and would be for you an incalculable gain.

3. But as this heavenly life of the soul is infinitely better and more precious than the temporal life of the body and even the natural life of the soul, so the loss of this heavenly life is the most fearful and horrible death. If in any case the proverb is verified here: "*The noblest thing, when corrupted, is the worst.*"³ Our senses find nothing more loathsome, repugnant, and detestable, than a human body that has quit this life. As this body, when still alive, was far more beautiful and excellent than all lifeless things, so it is now in death far more offensive and corrupt. It is nothing but a decomposing mass, whose repulsive sight and sickening smell keep you at a distance.

¹ Romans viii. 13.

² John xii. 25.

³ *Corruptio optimi pessima.*

Must not the death of the supernatural life of your soul, which you bring upon yourself by most cruel suicide, be far worse? What virulent, diabolical malice must have infected your soul, that you can dare to commit such a murder, and what most terrible reprobation do you incur, when you expel the Spirit of God from your soul! Indeed, if you could behold your soul in this terrible condition, as God and your guardian angel and many Saints, by permission of God, beheld it, you would be shocked and horrified at your own self, and would not rest until you had removed this abomination from your soul.

St. Anthony¹ relates of a monk, who, coming in his journey upon a corpse, immediately covered his nose with his cloak, whilst the angel, who accompanied him in human form, did not even appear to notice the great stench. But, when soon after both met a very elegantly dressed youth, the angel held his hand to his face, and explained to the surprised monk that the angels are not disturbed by the evil smell of a corpse, but that the whole heavenly court is driven away by the great and intolerably offensive odor of a soul in mortal sin.

A similar occurrence is recorded of St. Catherine of Siena. When she was at Siena, many miles away from Rome, she was yet annoyed by the evil odor of those who in Rome were defiled by mortal sin, and when upon one occasion a gaudily dressed woman came to converse with her, she could not be brought to answer a syllable and afterwards stated, in answer to the question of her confessor, that on account of the pestilential smell which the sinful soul of that woman emitted, she could scarcely keep herself erect, much less speak with her. "As smoke drives away the bees and a carcass the doves," says St. Basil,² "so sin drives away from us the angels," and with them all pure souls.

Only they, who bear the corpse within themselves, generally do not perceive its deformity and evil odor; but this is only another sign of their death, as loss of life is accom-

¹ 4. p. tit. 14. c. 6. §1.


² Or. 3. de pecc.

panied with loss of sensation. Oh, may Divine mercy give these dead beings at least a sense of their terrible condition; may they learn this condition at least from the nausea which it creates in the living! As the life of *one* soul is infinitely more precious than the lives of all bodies, so the corpse of a soul in mortal sin is far more loathsome than those of all bodies of mankind. But if the corpses of all the dead of all times, with all their wounds and sores, mutilated, half burnt, partly devoured by birds of prey, torn and decayed, were before you in one heap, could you bear this horrible sight and not immediately faint from the pestilential odor? With *one* such corpse before you, you would be unable, from disgust, to eat or drink. And yet you can suffer the corpse of your soul not only near you, but can carry it about with you in your innermost heart and withal eat, drink, and sleep in greatest peace and cheerfulness! Oh, this insensibility is more terrible than death itself! For it deprives you of the desire for life, it leaves you indisposed for receiving life again, and surrenders you, whilst otherwise you might yet be saved, to a more terrible eternal death!

FOURTH CHAPTER.

Grace makes us Children of God, First by Adoption.

1.

E now come to speak of an attribute of grace, which comprises, so to speak, all the previously described glories and still more clearly reveals its nature and importance.

By making us participants in the Divine nature, by inducing the Spirit of God to dwell in us, and by imparting to us a Divine life, grace makes us true children of God and makes God our true Father. “*Whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God,*” says St. Paul.¹ The same Apostle further teaches: “*Because you are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying: Abba, Father.*”² *For the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God. And if sons, heirs also; heirs indeed of God, and joint heirs with Christ.*”³ And again: “*God hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the purpose of His will. Unto the praise of the glory of His grace, in which He hath graced us in His beloved Son.*”⁴ Nothing, then, so clearly exhibits the glory of grace, as the fact that it makes us children of God, and on the other hand, nothing makes us more admire the love of God, than His adopting us as His children. “*Behold,*” says the Apostle of love,⁵ “*what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called and should be the sons of God.*”

In the Lord's prayer, taught us by the Son of God Him-

¹ Romans viii. 14.

² Gal. iv. 6.

³ Romans viii. 16, 17.

⁴ Ephes. i. 5-6.

⁵ I. John iii. 1.

self, we say every day: "*Our Father, who art in Heaven.*" By here calling God our Father, we designate ourselves as His children. But whether habit has made us indifferent to the meaning of those words, or whether we have never understood them with lively and enlightened faith, we remain cold and forget how high above all creatures we should soar up into the bosom of Almighty God. Let us imagine, therefore, that we are to learn to pray and understand this Lord's prayer for the first time to-day, and then let us hear the words in which one of the greatest Doctors of the Church, St. Peter Chrysologus, proposes and explains the "*Our Father*" to his catechumens:

"What I shall now speak with fear and trembling, what you are to hear with dread and fear, and are to speak with terror and awe, is the subject of wondering amazement for the angels, of reverence and fear for the Virtues, is incomprehensible to the highest Heaven, invisible to the sun, unbearable by the earth, unattainable by any creature. Of what avail is here the feeling of a mortal? Of what avail the imbecile mind of man, or the narrow limit of human sense? Of what avail the transient breath of the human voice, and the momentary sound of the human language? When St. Paul saw what is invisible to human eyes, and explained what is inexplicable in human language, he said: *'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him.'* Our mortal condition, our earthly structure, our material substance, our nature, uncertain of life or death, worn out by labor, wasted away by suffering, subject to decay and dust, is incapable of comprehending, insufficient to estimate, not audacious enough to repel, and yet hesitates to believe that which I am to-day obliged to confess. Human frailty knows not how it may be able to merit so large a bounty of Divine gifts, such greatness of promises, such a liberality of favors. This, I believe, was the object of prevision of the prophet Habacuc,

¹ I. Cor. ii. 9.

when, stricken with so great fear, he said: ¹ ‘*O Lord, I have heard Thy word and was afraid.*’ He was afraid on account of what he had heard, not because this great prophet then heard his Lord, but because he, the servant, found the Lord had become his Father. ‘*I have considered Thy works and have trembled.*’ Not because he contemplated the world, so harmonious with all its different elements, but because he beheld the work of Divine tenderness in Himself, therefore he was seized with wondering admiration and fear. He was astounded at being adopted as a son, when he had lost the confidence of the servant. Hear what the prophet further says: ‘*I was on my guard, and my interior shuddered at the voice of the prayer of my lips.*’ Having experienced the munificence of the Divine gift, he was on his guard, lest he again, like Adam in paradise, should become an enemy of God and an outcast. He guards himself with more vigilance and solicitude, who learnt after the loss of so great a gift that he held the heavenly treasure in frail vessels. ‘*And my interior shuddered at the voice of my lips.*’ If the sentiment of the heart had prompted the tongue to speak the word, why does it tremble at its own wish and desire, at the subject of its prayer? Because it had not spoken by its own impulse, but by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Hear the Apostle Paul say: ‘*God hath sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying: Abba, Father!*’ When the prophet heard this voice of the Holy Ghost in his heart, he was surprised to have merited so great a favor, and his whole interior shuddered. With good reason therefore he adds: ‘*And trembling seized my limbs and beneath me my power was shaken.*’ Why ‘*beneath me*’? Because one and the same man, who is elevated so high by grace, was prostrated so low by nature, and because the earthly force could not sustain the Divine power. Mount Sinai shook and smoked when God descended to give the law. What would weak human flesh do, when God de-

¹ The following texts of Holy Writ are taken from the Septuagint version.

scends into flesh, to confer grace upon this flesh? He comes as Father, because man could not sustain God, the servant could not sustain the lord. And because He is faithful in the words that He has spoken: *'Open thy mouth and I shall fill it,'*¹ then open your mouths that He Himself may fill it with this prayer, and cry: *'Our Father, who art in Heaven.'* He Himself teaches us to pray thus, He Himself encourages, commands us. Let us, then, dear brethren, attend to the grace that calls us, the love that draws us, the tenderness that invites us; let God be cherished by our hearts as our Father, let Him be thus confessed by our soul, proclaimed by our tongue; let all that is within us correspond to grace and not to fear; for He who was converted from our Judge to our Father would be loved and not feared."²

See, dear Christian, what the saints thought of the dignity of the children of God, and how much they admired it! It would almost appear to you that they had spoken too extravagantly; but if you will consider, with me, all that holy faith teaches upon this subject, you will readily concede that they could scarcely comprehend and teach the whole truth.

2. By nature we men are not, strictly speaking, children of God, but only His servants and bondsmen, the least and humblest of all. We stand far beneath the angels, and even these are by nature only servants of God. We, like they, are only creatures of God and the work of His hands; we, and all we possess, are subject to Him; we are obliged, as subjects of His great empire, to serve and glorify Him, our highest King and Lord. If we remained in this natural condition, God would not properly be our Father. But since, even in this case, He had still given us existence, since he would overwhelm us with natural blessings, would watch over us and preserve us with great care, and would not treat us as a tyrant, but as a good and

¹ Ps. lxxx. 11.

² Peter Chrysologus, Homil. 68.

mild Lord, He would even so be our Father more properly than our temporal father.

Yet we do not stand in *such near relation* to God as a child does to its father. With all our likeness to Him on the part of our rational soul, which is His image, we are not, in a strict sense, God's kindred, because we are only created by His will and not begotten by Him, and hence have not received His own Divine nature. Only the Eternal Word, which, uncreated Itself, in union with the Father has created us and all other beings, is in a strict sense by nature itself the Son of God. This Son alone is truly one with the Father and receives from Him the same Divine nature which He, the Father, Himself possesses. He alone is truly begotten by the Father in a spiritual manner, since He, the image of His essence, the impress of His substance, the pure reflex of His splendor, the expression and word of His intelligence, proceeds from Him as Light of Light, God of God, Himself God and one God with the Father.

What has this Son in common with the works of God, with those poor creatures that were created through Him? As near as He is to the Father, resting in His bosom, so far are they outside and distant from God. As much as He is like to the Father and bears His image in Himself, so much are they unlike God and exhibit in themselves only a dim and faint outline of His image. As completely as He is the Heir of the Father, and receives in inheritance His whole wealth, all the treasures of omnipotence, wisdom, and science, so completely must the creature be excluded from this inheritance, as the servant cannot claim the same rights with the son of the house. In the same measure as He, in the bosom of the Father, beholds Him face to face, is one with Him in most intimate, unspeakable love, and is united to Him by the Holy Ghost as by the bond of an unspeakably loving embrace, so must the creature remain at a respectful distance. The creature may and must love its Creator, as the good servant

loves his master ; but it may never hope or desire to receive the kiss from the mouth of the Father, or to assume the liberties of a child in embracing Him.

How can this creature, then, presume to call its Creator the King of Heaven and earth, to call Him Father with that confidence, with that fervor and tenderness, which the Apostle requires ? How can mortal man presume to say Father to the King of immortality, dwelling in inaccessible light ? How can he greet as Father Him who is the most pure and perfect Spirit ? How can the son of earth, with childlike confidence and courage, approach Him as his Father, before whom the Seraphim prostrate themselves in deepest reverence and veil their face ? Would it not, finally, sacrilegiously encroach upon the rights and privileges of the only-begotten Son of God, who alone is from all eternity in unspeakable manner begotten by the Father, to make His equal a creature, produced out of nothing by Him, preserved from being again annihilated only by the power of His will, and to make this creature participate by nature in the Divine bosom, in the love and inheritance of the Eternal Father, to make it one with the Father, as He is one with the Father ?

3. Do not fear, my dear Christian ; what is impossible with men is possible with God ; what we cannot claim as a right, is gratuitously granted by the infinite liberality of God. Though we are not the children of God by nature, we shall be made such by grace, and that so truly and really, that as adopted children we are associated with Him who is the Son of God by nature, and what He is by nature we are by grace.

This is similar to what often happens among men. A father may, beside his real son, or if without a son, adopt the son of another as his child, and extend to this adopted child the same love, the same dignity, and the same rights that would belong to his own son. God the Father, then, extends the same love, which He bears the only-begotten Son of His bosom, also to us poor creatures,

without any claim thereto on our part. He loves us, as Holy Writ says, in His only-begotten Son with the same love with which He embraces this Son. He associates us with Him as with a brother, confers upon us His dignity and the right to share in His inheritance. And the Son of God, far from desiring to be the sole occupant of the Divine bosom, and to treat us merely as His servants, has Himself undertaken the great work to acquire for us by His own blood this life of the children of God, and was made flesh, in order to "*give to as many as received Him, the power to be made the sons of God.*"¹ He was made our Brother in the flesh, to make us His brethren in His Divine glory. He considers it His honor, not to be the only-begotten, but "*the first-born amongst many brethren.*"² Therefore, too, He is the first who calls His Father our Father also: "*I ascend to my Father, and to your Father.*"³ He teaches us to pray: *Our Father who art in Heaven*; He declares that He has come into this world to give us the life His Father has given Him; He prays the Father for us, that we *may be one in Him as He is one in Him.*⁴ He wills, also, that we should be His co-heirs in that glory which He Himself asked at the Last Supper for His humanity, that Divine glory which He had with the Father before the beginning of the world, when He proceeded before the day-star from His mouth in the splendor of sanctity as His Word and as the image of His infinite glory and happiness.

4. Consider now, Christian soul, how unspeakably great is the love and grace of your Creator, by which He would not be Lord, but Father, and adopted you as His child, and as the brother of His only-begotten Son! If a very rich and powerful sovereign, says St. Anselm,⁵ would cause one of the least of His subjects, who lived poor, naked, and deserted, full of disease and ulcers, in the most abject misery, to be brought to him, attended to his nursing and cure, clothed

¹ John i. 12.² Rom. viii. 29.³ John xx. 17.⁴ Ibid. xvii. 21.⁵ Eadmer. in similit. S. Anselmi, c. 66.

him in royal purple, adopted him as his child, constituted him the co-heir of his son and the successor in his empire, finally, let the imperial command be heralded, that he should be obeyed by all as his own son ; would not this extraordinary grace and kindness elicit universal praise and surprise and admiration ? Now, we are by nature infinitely more distant from God than the subject is from his earthly king ; the misery, likewise, from which God rescues us, is incomparably greater than that of the subject, and the glory which God bestows upon us is as much exalted above the glory of a temporal sovereign, as Heaven is exalted above earth. Therefore, the blessing and grace which God grants by making us strangers His own children, are infinitely greater than this earthly grace and kindness. He cannot make us His successors in His empire, because He is immortal, and we ourselves would perish with Him. But, instead, He lets us participate in His own interminable reign, and what is more, He Himself is our inheritance and our royal possession. He gives us Himself, the highest and infinite good, which includes all other goods. As He alone is worthy of Himself, and all the world with all its riches could not make Him infinitely happy, so He alone is worthy of those whom He has adopted as His children. As His only-begotten Son can inherit nothing greater than to see Him face to face, and possess and enjoy Him, so the Father bestows upon His adopted children the highest gift within His power, He gives Himself to be beheld and enjoyed in undisturbed possession for all eternity. Our inheritance, and our relative dignity as children of God, are as infinite as God Himself.

But His paternal love was not satisfied with giving us Himself for our fruition and inheritance ; He also gave His only-begotten Son, to acquire this inheritance for us by His infinitely precious blood. Among men, he who would be adopted, must exhibit some merit and some worthiness. With God, however, we cannot possess the

least merit toward being made His children. “*What is a man,*” says Job,¹ “*that thou shouldst magnify him? or why dost thou set thy heart (thy paternal love) upon him?*” If we exerted all faculties of soul and body, and for many years performed all good works imaginable, if we besides suffered all possible trials and sufferings, and did not cease to labor and to suffer unto the end of the world, we would at no time be in the least worthy to be adopted by God as children and to possess Him. But in reality what have we done? We have nothing to exhibit but sins and faults, which even after our adoption as children render us unworthy of this inheritance and liable to eternal damnation. God’s own Son, then, was obliged to give us Himself and to sacrifice Himself for us, to make us worthy of the sonship of God by His merits and satisfaction. Where was there ever such love shown by a father and his own son, to adopt a stranger as child and brother? What return shall we make for this love of God? “Return to God,” says St. Peter Chrysologus, “by whom you are so well loved; devote yourself entirely to His honor, who has for your sake exposed Himself to the greatest dishonor, and acknowledge Him Father, whom you know and feel in His love to be your Parent.”

¹ Job vii. 17.

FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Divine Sonship.—Regeneration.

1.



WHEN we represent to ourselves our sonship of God as an adoptive sonship, we must be on our guard not to diminish thereby its perfection and intimacy.

If among men a father out of gratuitous love adopts any one as his son, he can only give him the name and rights of his real son ; but he has not the power to generate him anew, to impress upon him his own image and make him like to himself. By that love, however, which the heavenly Father gives us, we receive the privilege not only of *being called* sons of God, but of being such *in reality*. “*Behold, what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called and should be the sons of God.*”¹ As Divine grace in general does not only consist in God’s bestowing His favor upon us, but in imparting to us, at the same time, a supernatural goodness and beauty, by which we receive the fruit of this favor and remain worthy of it ; so we must likewise say that God not only loves us in and through His Son as His children, but besides, that He really impresses upon us the image of His Son and makes us like unto Him, that we may be truly His children. “*For whom He foreknew,*” says the Apostle,² “*He also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born amongst many brethren.*” He wills that we put on His only-begotten Son, that we receive the impress of His features upon us,

¹ I. John iii. 1.

² Rom. viii. 29.

that we be clothed with His Divine glory, and filled with His Divine life ; and this He accomplishes, when He receives us into His paternal bosom and *by the Holy Ghost generates us and gives birth to us as His children in the waters of regeneration.*

“ *That which is born of the flesh, is flesh,*” said our Saviour to Nicodemus,¹ and cannot be born again of the flesh ; but it can and must be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, that it may become spiritual and be raised to a new spiritual life. Thus says the Apostle St. James :² “ *The Father of lights, from whom comes every best and every perfect gift, hath of His own will begotten us by the word of truth.*” And St. Peter adds :³ “ *We are born again, not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible, by the word of God, who liveth and reigneth for ever.*” For in regeneration God has planted a seed in our nature, from which a new life springs up. “ *Whosoever is born of God, committeth not sin, for His seed abideth in him,*” says St. John.⁴

This regeneration is easily explained by what has been said in the first book on the nature of grace. Generation is the act by which a father communicates to the child his nature. Thus God generates His only-begotten Son, by communicating to Him His own Divine nature and essence. If Holy Scripture, then, says that we are generated and born of God, this signifies nothing else but that, by the grace of God, we participate of His own nature ; and conversely, if we by grace really participate of the Divine nature and Divine life, then it is true, in a strict sense, that we, similarly to the only-begotten Son of God, are generated and born again of the bosom of God. This difference certainly exists between the Son of God and ourselves. The Son of God receives the Divine nature entire and essential in its substance ; we, however, receive it in the impression of an image. We have a nature infinitely different from the Divine, and, as St. Athanasius says,⁵

¹ John iii. 6.² James i. 17, 18.³ 1. Peter i, 23.⁴ I. John iii, 9.⁵ Or. II. co. Arianos, n. 59.

are first created and afterward generated of God, whilst the Son of God receives His being solely by this generation and has the same substance as the Father.

Nevertheless, our relation as children of God to our heavenly Father is incomparably more intimate than that among men of adopted children to their adoptive parent. We are children of God, not only because we are adopted and considered by Him as such, but because we are, besides, similarly to His own Son, generated and born of His bosom, since we receive the communication of His Divine nature and life, and are filled and animated by His Spirit. We are not only His *heirs*, but our right of inheritance flows from this *regeneration*, as St. Peter teaches: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to His great mercy, hath regenerated us unto a lively hope, . . . unto an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that cannot fade, reserved in heaven for you.”* Those whom God adopts, He makes in truth new men, new creatures; He forms them after His own image and that of His Son, He seals them with His own Holy Spirit, as the seal of their dignity and the pledge of their inheritance.

2. Here, again, we must let the holy Fathers speak, in order that their sublime words may more vividly and effectually impress upon our minds the glory of our regeneration as children of God, and excite in us the feelings of gratitude and admiration and correspondingly sublime resolutions.

After St. Gregory of Nyssa² has described the lowliness and wretchedness of human nature on the one hand, and on the other the infinite sublimity and glory of the Divine nature, he continues: “Yet this man, who is accounted as nothing in the universe, who is but ashes and straw and vanity, is united to this so glorious and sublime Being, which may not be seen, nor heard, nor investigated by reason, and is received into the sonship of the God of all things!

¹ I. Peter i. 3, 4.

² De beatitud., cap. 7.

What expression of gratitude could be found equal to this blessing? What word, what expression, what idea is capable of celebrating worthily this unexampled grace? Man rises above his own nature and the mortal is made immortal, the frail and perishable is made perfect and imperishable, the man of one day and of brief existence is made eternal; in a word, man is made God. For having been considered worthy of being made a child of God, he must certainly have also the dignity of his Father and be the heir of all the paternal possessions."

"Great is the mystery of this grace," says St. Leo, "and this gift exceeds all other gifts, namely, that God should call man son, and man should call God Father. By these names we feel and learn what sentiment may correspond to such a sublimity. For if in the human lineage the blot of evil conduct is a stain upon the children of illustrious parents, and an unworthy posterity is brought to shame by the glory of its ancestors, to what end will they come who, from love of the world, do not fear to be cut off from the brotherhood of Christ? But if among men it redounds to their glory that the splendor of ancestry should be reflected by its posterity, is it not far more glorious that those born of God should exhibit the image of their Father and let their heavenly Progenitor be recognized in themselves, as the Lord says: *'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven'*? May the chosen and royal race correspond to the dignity of its regeneration and love what its Father loves, that the Lord may not be compelled to exclaim, as He once did through the prophet Isaias: *'I have brought up children, and exalted them; but they have despised Me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel hath not known Me, and My people hath not understood.'*"²

"When we pray, *Our Father who art in Heaven,*" says St. Peter Chrysologus,³ "we do not intend to say that God

¹ Serm. 6. de nativ. Dom.

² Is. i. 2-3.

³ In orat. Domini, hom. 67, 72, 71.

is not on earth, but rather that we, as His children, belong with Him to Heaven, that we are a heavenly race, whose Father thrones in the heavens, that a heavenly seed has been sown in us, which is to spring up into a heavenly life. Whither, O man, has the heavenly nature raised you, that whilst yet in the flesh and upon earth, you may forget flesh and earth and say: Our Father, who art in Heaven? Whoever, then, confesses and believes himself the son of so great a Father, let him conform his life to his noble dignity, his conduct to the will of his Father, and prove by his sentiments and actions what he has acquired by Divine grace.

“Since, then, we are of a Divine race, we also receive the name of God; the name of God and His Son is our name also, since we are called children of God and brethren of Christ. When we further say: ‘*Hallowed be thy name,*’ then we pray that the name of God, which is holy in and through itself, may be sanctified and glorified also in us His children by our actions; for by our good actions the name of our Father is praised, whilst by our bad actions His name is blasphemed. Hear the Apostle: ‘*The name of God through you is blasphemed among the Gentiles.*’ Let us, then, endeavor to exhibit a heavenly life and Divine morals; let our whole conduct bear the impress of the Divine image, because the heavenly Father rewards with Divine gifts those children worthy of his generation, but casts the degenerate into a painful servitude and slavery.”

3. Above all, however, the Son of God Himself reminds us of our sublime dignity and destiny in these words: “*Be you perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.*” Because we are children of God, we must not be satisfied with ordinary human perfection, but, conscious of our high dignity, we must seek to imitate the great God Himself.

St. Augustine quotes the following remarkable words of a philosopher: that it were of great benefit to the state, if

strong men, though erroneously, believed themselves descended from the gods ; that thus the human mind, inspired by the idea of its Divine descent, more boldly undertook great deeds, carried them out with more zeal, and more certainly achieved successful results. Assuredly the renowned king Alexander was not a little influenced by the statement of a certain Ammon (though impiously false in itself), that he was of Divine origin, to undertake and execute the greatest and most difficult deeds, that challenged the admiration of the whole world. How, then, must we, who by God's grace belong in truth to a heavenly and Divine race, and not only apparently or in a false and foolish fancy, direct all our pursuit to God, seek to be like unto Him, and to labor and suffer much for His sake !

“ *O do not degenerate from the high and noble sentiments of the children of God!* ” were the frequent words addressed to his novices by a most enlightened ascetic teacher, Balthasar Alvarez. These words inflamed their youthful hearts and made them heroes. A number of them shortly after resolved to leave their country and all, to preach the Gospel and proclaim the grace of the children of God to the abandoned Indians in Brazil. When on their journey thither they were attacked by a violent party of heretics, and condemned to die amid frightful torments for the sake of their faith, one of them repeated to his brethren the words of their teacher. “ *Do not degenerate from the sublime sentiments of the children of God,* ” and all of them suffered martyrdom courageously and joyfully. Let this beautiful sentiment henceforth be our watchword also. Let us repeat it one to another, let us repeat it to ourselves, when we stand in danger of disgracing our high dignity, or when it becomes necessary to show ourselves worthy of our great Father by an heroic act of virtue.

These sublime sentiments of the children of God require, especially, that we rise above all that is earthly, and despise the whole world. If we are really children of God,

then God is with us ; and “ *If God be for us, who is against us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation? or distress? or famine? or nakedness? or danger? or persecution? or the sword? But in all these things we overcome, because of Him that hath loved us.*”¹ For we are certain, with the Apostle, “ *that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, . . . nor might, . . . nor any creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.*”² We rest secure in the bosom of Almighty God, where no evil can approach us and all the powers of hell cannot harm us.

We must despise the world, then, because it cannot harm us ; and again despise it, because it profits us nothing. The whole world, with all its treasures and riches, is not worthy of the children of God.

“ *Nevermore will he admire human works,*” says St. Cyprian, “ *who has recognized himself as son of God, and he who is capable of admiring anything else beside God, precipitates himself from the summit of his high dignity.*”

The children of God, who have God for their inheritance, cannot and must not be satisfied with earthly riches, with sensual pleasures and human honors ; yea, they must consider all this dust a mere nothing, a burden, and must keep their desires and wishes immovably fixed upon the heavenly gifts. They must apply to themselves the word of the Apostle :³ “ *Seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God ; mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth.*” For as brethren of Christ we belong thither, where Christ is, and His home is our home.

We must consider ourselves only as pilgrims upon earth, journeying towards their heavenly country, and our life, therefore, must already, according to the admonition of St. Paul, be a life of Heaven. Far from attaching our hearts to the things of this world and seeking our happiness in it, we must rather sigh and weep that we are still

¹ Romans viii. 31, 35, 37.

² Ibid. 38, 39.

³ Col. III. 1, 2.

far away from our heavenly Father, and that we are not yet perfectly regenerated, so as to enjoy in His bosom His own glorious and happy life.

But even this should not make us despondent. For the same Holy Ghost, who has regenerated us from the servitude of sin, will also regenerate us from the servitude of the flesh, of suffering and death. Aye, even now we possess the Spirit of our Father, as the pledge of our inheritance and of our future glory, that Spirit by whom we remain in God and God in us. The same Spirit, who unites in ineffable love and unity the Father with the Son, is also sent into our hearts by sanctifying grace, to teach us to stammer the name of the Father, to inspire us with a child-like confidence towards Him, to give us proof of His love, to console us in our necessities and sufferings, and to unite us now in most intimate love with our heavenly Father. He seals our hearts, in token of our vocation; He anoints our soul with the oil of joy, to communicate to it the splendor of its Divine dignity.

Must we not say, then, that we enjoy a greater and more intimate union with our heavenly Father, than among men children enjoy, not only with their adoptive father, but even with their natural father? Our heavenly Father has not only once given us the life of His children, but continually maintains this life by His Holy Spirit in a manner so intimate, that we may say He lives in us and we in Him; He is near us not only from time to time, but without interruption; He is with us and in us by His Holy Spirit; in Him He impresses upon us His paternal kiss, and holds us in continuous paternal embrace.

We may and ought, therefore, to learn from the presence and efficacy of this Spirit of God, whether we are in truth children of God. For the Apostle says:¹ “*Whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God;*” and likewise St. John:² “*We know that God abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us.*” The Spirit of

¹ Romans viii. 14.

² I. John iii. 24.

God is love, pure and fervent love for God and man ; He is a light that shuns all darkness ; He is a mighty fire that consumes all stain and dross. We hold Him, therefore, only as long as we walk in the light and prove ourselves children of light ; as long as we do nothing to grieve Him and offend the eye of God, as long as we do not willfully surrender ourselves again to the powers of darkness, from which the grace of God had withdrawn us.

Much more might be quoted, from Holy Scripture and the teaching of the holy Fathers, in praise and glorification of the grace of sonship. Let us, in conclusion, yet hear the gravely important words of St. Leo,¹ by which he exhorts us to hold this gift in high honor, and to render sincere thanks to God for it. “ Let us, then, beloved brethren, give thanks to God the Father through His Son in the Holy Ghost, because *He has shown mercy towards us on account of the exceeding charity with which He loved us, and even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together in Christ,*² that in Him we may be a new structure and a new creature. Let us put off the old Adam with his works, and being made partakers of the generation of Christ, let us renounce the works of the flesh. Recognize your dignity, and as participant of the Divine nature, beware of returning again to your former lowliness by an unworthy conduct. Remember of which head and body you are a member. Remember how you were rescued from the powers of darkness and transferred into the light and kingdom of God. By the sacrament of baptism you have been made a temple of the Holy Ghost ; take care not to drive away so great a guest by evil works, thus subjecting yourself again to the slavery of the devil ; for the price of your purchase is the blood of Christ, and He will judge you in justice, who has redeemed you in mercy.”


¹ Serm. i, de nativ. Dom. in fine.

² Eph. ii. 4-5.

SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Wonderful Nourishment of the Children of God.

1.

OD," says St. Peter Chrysologus,¹ "who has given Himself to us as Father, who has adopted us as His children, who has made us the heirs of His possessions, distinguished us with His name, honored us with His glory and His kingdom, will also that we ask of Him our daily bread. But what bread is this? The heavenly Father can demand of His children to ask only a heavenly bread and this bread is the Son of God, who says of Himself: '*I am the living bread which came down from Heaven.*'"² Oh, He Himself is the bread, which sown in the virgin, leavened in the flesh, prepared in suffering, baked in the oven of the grave, seasoned in the churches, laid upon the altars, is daily offered to the faithful as a heavenly food!"

Indeed, the first duty of a parent is the nourishment of children, and the fulfilment of this duty gives us an estimate of the greatness of paternal love. What mortal mind, what sagacity of immortals can comprehend the liberality of Thy love towards Thy children, O God? Was no other nourishment at the disposal of Thy omnipotence than the most sacred body and the most precious blood of Thy Son? Oh, more than paternal heart of my God! Oh, love, that no mother could ever experience or imagine! Indeed, we happy beings have been made, in the words of the prophet,³ "*an everlasting excellence, a joy unto generation and generation.*" We have been "*nursed with the breast of kings.*" Of

¹ Hom. 67.

² John vi. 51.

³ Isaias lx. 15-16.

such possibilities nature knew nothing ; never had it experienced anything similar with the child of its bosom. But it was naturally becoming that, in the measure in which God is greater than man, and His children are nearer to Him than the children of men to their parents ; in the same measure the food prepared for the children of God should be greater, and should correspond equally to the majesty of the Father and the dignity of His children. Therefore, God would place no limits to His love, but would pour out all the treasures of His omnipotence, and give His children for their eternal banquet the most precious of these treasures, that is, Himself. “ *For what is the good thing of Him, and what is His beautiful thing, but the corn of the chosen ones and wine which maketh virgins to spring forth ?*”¹

Who would yet compare to this the love of mothers ? “ Many mothers,” says St. Chrysostom,² “ give their children to other women to be nursed, and even the best and most loving mothers, who themselves nurse their children, give only their milk, the superfluous portion of their blood, which flows spontaneously from their breasts. Christ, however, nurses us with all the blood of His body and heart, pressed from this heart as by a press, only by the violence of His infinite love and unspeakable sufferings ; He feeds us with His entire body, in order that, as the Psalmist says,³ *out of the mouth of infants and of sucklings He might receive praise.*

Some wealthy and luxurious Romans, in order to boast of their wealth and liberality, once had a lot of the most precious pearls dissolved and mixed with the food, so that every morsel taken by the guests might be worth more than an entire fortune. But if this precious banquet had outweighed even the riches of the whole world, what would it still be in comparison to that feast which God prepares for His children ? For here God gives us, as St. Thomas teaches, Himself and all created gifts. “ He has given in the highest measure His whole being and all His possessions,

¹ Zachar. ix. 17.

² Hom. 60, ad popul. Antioch.

³ Ps. viii. 3.

with the Holy Spirit. For there is nothing that does not belong either to the spiritual, or corporeal, or Divine nature. The corporeal nature comprises all that may be perceived by the five senses ; the spiritual comprises the angels, the souls, and all spiritual gifts and virtues ; the Divine nature contains of itself all that is the best. By giving us in the sacrament the body and blood of His Son, God the Father gave us the highest and greatest of all corporeal substance. By giving us the soul of the same Son, which was more perfect in grace and sanctity than those of all angels and just men, He gave us the highest and greatest of all spiritual substance. Besides this, He gave us the whole Divine nature.”¹ With this precious milk God nourishes His children ; with this sumptuous banquet, than which there is nothing sweeter and more precious on earth, He feasts them.

2. But if this nourishment is so precious, we may justly conclude from it the preciousness of the life of grace which is maintained by it and the greatness of that dignity which merits it. If our body receives the Divine blood of Christ, is not that a sign that our soul, too, in regeneration, must be filled through grace with the blood of Divine life and possess a Divine nobility? If our body is united to the substance of the body of Christ, is this not a surety that by grace we have been made partakers of the Divine nature? Oh, if we comprehended these truths with a lively faith and considered them often, how highly would we appreciate the life of grace, which is worthy of such a nourishment! And, on the other hand, with what desire, what love and fervor would we approach this heavenly banquet, which makes us partakers of the Divine nature, and fills us with a Divine life!

But our admiration and love for this nourishment of the children of God, and for grace, the object of this nourishment, will increase, if we further consider how this nourishment is prepared for us. God has chosen the material,

¹ Thom. opusc. 63, de beatitud. cap. 2, n. 3.

bread and wine, in order to prepare for us from both these substances a heavenly bread and a heavenly drink by means of a wonderful transubstantiation. The entire substance of bread is changed into the body, and the entire substance of the wine is changed into the blood of the Son of God. Is this not a sign that our nature also, in receiving this food and this drink, is by grace transformed in a wonderful and mysterious manner? Certainly; as the natural bread is by a miracle made a heavenly bread, so grace, coming to us in this sacrament, converts our earthly nature into a heavenly nature and without destroying its substance, makes it participate in the Divine nature. As we, therefore, after consecration no longer recognize bread under the forms of bread, but adore the body of the Son of God, so we should, after receiving grace, no longer consider ourselves men, but children of God, and esteem ourselves as sacred.

It is true we cannot behold this change with our eyes, nor perceive it with our senses. But the change of bread and wine also remains hidden from our eyes, as the exterior forms are not changed. Similarly, our conversion by grace is at present veiled from our sight, precisely because it is altogether interior and takes place in our innermost soul. Exteriorly, the children of God are as other men; they are subject to the same suffering and misery; with them also "*the outward man is corrupted,*" as the Apostle says,¹ "*yet the inward man is renewed day by day;*" they are transformed by the Spirit of God, until hereafter life consumes death and a Divine glory and happiness invest and fill the whole man.

Let us, then, neither in this case be deceived by our sense, and rather confess with a firm faith the miracle which God works in us by His grace. His omnipotence acts, by the mouth of the priest in baptism and absolution, upon our soul, as well as in Holy Mass upon the bread; it will assist us, too, to convert our sinful and carnal life into a holy and

¹ II. Cor. iv. 16.

spiritual one ; it will break the strongest fetters that hold us bound to the earth, that living in the flesh we may not live according to the flesh, and though the body burden the soul, we may soar up to Heaven, as on pinions of the eagle.

The change of bread and wine, however, is not the only miracle which God works in preparing a heavenly food for His children. This one miracle is attended with a countless number of others by which God suspends all laws of nature, and transgresses all its boundaries for the sake of His children. What is more wonderful than that the forms of bread and wine are preserved without their substance—that one and the same body is present at the same time on thousands and thousands of altars and in as many tabernacles,—that this body remains entire and undivided in every part of the species, even the smallest ! Must we not conclude from this that the grace of sonship, on account of which God works such great, countless, and unceasing wonders, must itself be one of the greatest miracles of His omnipotence ? And if God, for the sake of grace, overthrows all laws of nature, which He has Himself ordained, must we not feel ashamed that we for its sake do not even dare to break and conquer the law of sin, that reigns in our members and our flesh, to regulate with a strong hand our perverse inclinations, that draw us away from God, and to practise a holy violence against ourselves ? Are we permitted to do less for the reception and preservation of the life of grace, than God does to prepare its nourishment ? Alas for our ungrateful and miserable indolence ! God far exceeds the limits of His ordinary Providence to procure us the most rare and precious means of grace, and we will not deviate in the least from the customary path of our indolent and comfort-seeking nature ? Yea, as if we would mock the so zealous and inventive love of God, we even go so far as to throw ourselves carelessly and gladly into the arms of His enemy, who desires nothing else but our ruin.

Oh, I conjure you, children of God, by the body and blood

of Christ which you receive, do not show yourselves unworthy in sentiment and action of such a holy and heavenly food ; do not so wantonly dispose of that life which has been sustained by such a wonderful and precious nourishment ! Listen rather, as true children of God, to the admonition of St. Peter :¹ “*As new-born babes, desire the rational milk without guile,*” as children in unspotted purity of life, in holy simplicity of manner, in neglect of earthly things ; as children removed from the prudence of the world, from false cunning, from anger, from concupiscence ; zealous, docile, desirous of learning, as children that always grow until, arriving at perfect manhood, weaned of the breast of the mother, they dine at the table of the father.

3. The body and blood of His Son is not yet the greatest food which the heavenly Father gives His children. In the holy sacrament the Son of God gives Himself directly in His humanity, because we are yet too small to be able to comprehend Him in His Divinity. But when we shall be great and perfect children of God, then He will be our food and drink also in His Divinity. There He gives Himself, so to speak, as the milk, here as the bread of eternal life. “*For as the mother,*” says St. Augustine,² “*prepares in her maternal breast as milk, the bread which the infant cannot yet eat at the table of its father, so that the infant in its weakness may receive it and thus grow stronger and taller ; so the Word of God, which is with His Father in Heaven the bread of the elect, has descended to us upon earth, and made Himself small, that He may be taken as milk by the new-born infants of His Father. The holy sacrament of the altar, therefore, though great and Divine, is only a foretaste of and a preparation for that food with which God the Father will nourish us in Heaven. There we shall enjoy the Son of God in His glory ; there we shall be strengthened by the power of His Divine nature, there we shall be nourished by the light of His glory, and shall drink in the flood of His Divine love and delight.*”

¹ I. Peter ii. 2.

² In Ps. xxx. cf. in Ps. cxix.

But because He is not a food, which is converted into the substance of those by whom it is taken, but rather converts these into His substance, making them partakers of His nature, He will unite Himself entirely with us and us with Himself, that we may have a truly Divine life and, according to His own promise, live of Him and in Him, as He lives of the Father.

Thus the Son of God is the food of eternal life for the adoptive children of God, a food for the little ones here on earth, a food for the great ones in Heaven. For the little ones He is a food in the flesh in the bosom of His mother, for the great ones with His Divinity in the bosom of His Father; unless we will rather say, that in Heaven above He shares with His grown brethren the same bread, the same nourishment that He receives from His eternal Father, and lets them dine, as He Himself says, at the same banquet that His Father has prepared for Himself. But His food is the Deity itself, the infinite essence of the Father; for this is the highest and, most intimate that the Father possesses, it is His own marrow of life. By receiving this essence the Son is equal to the Father, by its immediate intuition He enjoys with the Father the highest happiness. As brethren now of the only-begotten Son of God, we too are admitted to the most immediate, intimate, and ineffable enjoyment of the Divine essence, and in this enjoyment it is for us likewise a food, as the hunger and thirst of the children of God can be satisfied by nothing less than God Himself.

4. This sublime mystery is very beautifully explained by St. Francis de Sales in the following words: "When we look at any object, though it is present to us, without which we could not see it, still it is not united to our eyes, but merely reflects on them a representation of itself, which, according to the philosophers, is the medium through which we see. This is also the case with whatever we hear or reflect on; these things are not united to our understanding except by another kind of representa-

tion, much more delicate than the other, because spiritual; this is termed an intelligible medium. But, O incomprehensible favor! in Heaven the Divinity will be united to our understanding without any intervening medium; intimate union will then supply the place of images and representations. Thou alone, O God, canst enable us to see and feel the happiness and delight of the human understanding, when receiving in itself, not the image, but the real presence and essence of the essential truth and Divine Majesty, it will see itself united for eternity to its sovereign end and object. We shall be nourished with the substance of God Himself, entering our souls through the channel of our understanding.

“The tender love of God towards us is almost incredible; for as an affectionate mother makes use of no foreign instrument to communicate her substance to the child whom she loves, feeding it not only with her substance, but in and by it, so our heavenly Parent, to represent to us His Divinity, does not confine Himself to conveying an abstract idea thereof to the understanding, but by an excess of love to which no words can do justice, He represents Himself to the mind without the assistance of any image—that it may be thereby seen and understood in itself and by itself—that thereby this Divinity and eternal essence should become at once the object contemplated by the understanding, and the medium through which it is contemplated. We shall then fully enjoy the accomplishment of these promises of God: *‘Behold, I will allure her, and will lead her into the wilderness; and I will speak to her heart.’*¹—*‘Rejoice with Jerusalem, . . . that you may suck and be filled with the breasts of her consolations; that you may milk out, and flow with delights from the abundance of her glory. For thus saith the Lord: Behold, I will bring upon her as it were a river of peace you shall be carried at the breasts, and upon the knees they shall caress you. As one whom the mother caresseth, so will I comfort you.’*²

¹ Osee ii. 14.

² Isaias, lxvi. 10-13.

This is the boundless, the eternal happiness to which we aspire and of which we have not only received the promise, but even the pledge in the Holy Eucharist, the perpetual banquet of Divine grace. We therein receive the blood of our Divine Redeemer, with His sacred flesh, and His body with His blood : His adorable blood is given to us by the immediate application of His adorable body to our lips, and of His substance to our substance to show us that He will as really and certainly unite His Divine essence to us in the banquet of His glory. There is, however, one difference ; for the first favor, though real, is concealed under the veil of the sacramental species ; whereas, in Heaven, God will communicate Himself to us in unclouded splendor, and we shall behold His Divine Majesty face to face, as He is in Himself."

According to this beautiful explanation of St. Francis de Sales the Divine essence is by the grace given to us as intimately united to our soul, as the bodily food and the sacred body of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament are united to our body. The Divine essence is for us a spiritual food, but even for that reason it is the most true and perfect food, since it contributes more to the eternal life of our soul, than the corporeal food to the life of our body. It is in the most perfect sense the "*super-substantial bread*," which the Saviour bids us ask. It is a food that contains the marrow of Divine life and at the same time a drink that fills us with the fulness of Divine happiness. It is a food, because it makes us strong and great, and a drink because it pours out upon us the stream of God's delight.

O wonderful heavenly bread, Divine bread which God has assigned and promised the children of grace ! Even the highest angels were not worthy by nature of this bread, far less we earthly and sensual men ! How great, then, O God, must that dignity be which Thou hast granted us by the grace of Thy sonship and by which we deserve to obtain such a bread ! Give us, therefore, besides this, the grace that, conscious of our high Divine dignity, we may

desire no other bread, and seek but this one bread, which is Thyself, and which nourishes our soul in Thy bosom unto eternal life. "Grant, O Lord," we pray with St. Bonaventure, "that we may always hunger after Thee, the food of the angels, the refreshment of holy souls, our daily supernatural bread, which possesses all sweetness, grace, and deliciousness. Let my heart always hunger after Thee, whom the angels desire to behold ; let my innermost soul enjoy it and be filled with the sweetness of this heavenly food ; let it continually thirst for Thee, O fountain of eternal life, fountain of eternal light, torrent of delight, and abundance of the house of God!"

SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Grace Establishes the Relation of a True Friendship between God and Ourselves.

1.

THE sonship of God enjoys an additional and special privilege from the fact that grace makes us at the same time true friends of God.

Among men, children do not always enjoy the friendship of their father; they may offend him and offend him grievously without ceasing to be his children. The grace of God, however, makes us children of God in such a manner, that as long as we remain His children, as long as we are born of Him, so long we also remain His friends. Among men, furthermore, the adoption unto sonship does not immediately effect a perfectly intimate, mutual affection; there still remains a certain respectful timidity, which does not permit a free and familiar intercourse with the parent. Grace, however, brings us so near God, that we hold intercourse with Him, not only with the reverence of a child, but with the liberty and familiarity of a friend.

Already the sonship of God raises us infinitely above the state of servitude; it removes the condition of estrangement, the relation of servitude, and the too great inequality in which we are placed by nature, and places us in the condition of *liberty* and a certain *equality with God*. But the friendship of God, which God brings us, does this more completely and decidedly, if, indeed, it may be called friendship in the strict sense of the term. ¹

¹ True, if we would estimate our relation to God in grace only by the standard of friendship, as friendship is possible among men, we should express its fulness as little and even less than by comparison with human sonship. But we do not

This is confirmed by the words of our Saviour Himself, when He so distinctly opposes the friendship He gives us to the relation of servitude : “ *I will not now call you servants, but I have called you friends.*” “ *What is greater,*” St. Cyril of Alexandria remarks upon this passage,¹ “ *what is more glorious, than to be called and to be in reality a friend of Christ ! This dignity surpasses human nature. For all things serve the Creator, as the Psalmist says, and there is nothing that is not subject to the yoke of His servitude. Therefore, the Lord elevates His servants who keep His commandments to a supernatural glory, because He does not call them servants, but friends, and in all things treats them as friends.*”

O most sweet and amiable Lord of Thy unprofitable servants ! Thou didst consider it too little for us to serve in Thy royal palace as laborers and servants, whilst it would have been honor enough for us to be permitted to serve one of Thy angels !

Admire, Christian soul, the condescension of God towards you. He has raised you to the dominion over irrational things, the earth and all upon it ; and whilst you are lord of the animals, ought you not to have been the servant at least of a seraph ? But not even this service did God require of you ; the exalted freedom of your nobility should rise still higher and acknowledge no created being its superior. For God alone is in truth your Lord, you are His subject, and belong to Him with all your faculties. But He will not consider you a servant, but receive you as His friend. He has sent you His own Spirit, of whom the Apostle says :² “ *Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*” Truly, it is a holy and ineffable liberty, not to be servants, but friends of the Lord of all things ; a holy liberty, when we behold the great God come to us with the tenderness of a friend, as if we were His equals, and when we may approach Him with the ease and familiarity of a

consider the friendship of God as a relation separate from that of sonship, but as including and perfecting it, or rather representing it in its perfection.

¹ Comment. in Jo. lib. 10, c. 23.

² II. Cor. iii. 17.

friend. Well might Gregory the Great exclaim in admiration : “ Oh, how great is the mercy of our Creator; we are not even His worthy servants, and now we are called His friends ! ”

We consider it a great honor even to be permitted to serve a powerful earthly king. To serve God, however, the King of kings, is incomparably more honorable than even to be a temporal sovereign and govern great empires. How highly must we then esteem the friendship of God, which unites us with Him in most intimate love and affection! And how highly ought we to esteem grace, which alone qualifies us for this friendship !

2. But grace gives us not only the *liberty* necessary for true friendship with God; it includes, likewise, the other condition of friendship, *equality*.

True friendship finds or makes equals. The peculiar intimacy and affection between friends either presupposes an equal condition, or, in case there be an inequality, friendship removes it. A friend is, so to speak, the *alter ego*, the second self of his friend; every one loves and honors his friend as himself and desires to see him loved and respected by others in the same manner.

Even according to our nature God loves us as His creatures and servants. But the distance between our nature and His is infinite and therefore greater, than that in this state we might be called His true friends. Even those heathen philosophers who supposed the soul to be an emanation and a part of the Divine substance did not dare to conclude from this that a true friendship might exist between God and man.

Grace alone raises man to that high degree of similarity with God and of a certain likeness to Him, that the distance between him and God is no longer so great as to leave him altogether unworthy of God's friendship. The splendor of grace was before the mind of the royal Psalmist when he sang : “ Thy friends, O God, are made exceedingly honorable; their principality is exceedingly

strengthened." Grace elevates us to the summit of a Divine dignity ; makes us participants of the Divine nature, impresses upon us the image of His being, and thus makes us in a certain sense God's equals and worthy of His most intimate intercourse. Yea, our nature is so transformed by grace and so intimately united to God, that God, as it were, recognizes Himself in us and can embrace us with the same love which He entertains for Himself. Thus man, born in misery and uncleanness, is by grace raised above the heavens and embraced by God as a true friend.

We should scarcely believe that God would unite us to Himself in such intimate friendship, or even that this were possible, if God Himself had not shown, by another wonderful act, how real and perfect He intends this friendship to be. In order to show us that He desires to make us equal to Him in His glory, He was first made equal to us ; He was made man, and as one of our kind He lived amongst us for many years, and delighted in being called the Son of man. He charged Himself with all the sufferings and miseries of our nature, that He might, as our brother and friend, share them with us, and sensibly experience them with us. If, then, He descended so low in His kindness, in order to become our equal, will He not much rather elevate us to Himself, receive us into His house, and share His entire glory and happiness with us ?

3. What folly and ingratitude, however, were it on our part to contemn or even to reject the intimate friendship of this great Lord ! All the world would consider him a fool, who should despise and neglect to consider the friendship offered him by a mighty king. So many men give themselves the greatest trouble to secure this friendship, even at the cost of all possible sacrifices and hardships. Yet their success is very often improbable ; and the friendship of kings, when gained, is so inconstant, that the least trifle often loses it again and death certainly puts an end to it. God, however, of His own accord, offers us His friendship,

which we need only accept, without much effort on our part, to possess it for all eternity.

St. Augustine in his Confessions¹ mentions an occurrence related to him by an eye-witness, which contributed not a little to his conversion: Two friends who were employed in the service of the Roman Emperor at Treves and courted his friendship and favor, one day retired into a lonely cottage. They found upon the table a life of St. Anthony. One of them took it and reading in it was moved and said to the other: "Tell me, I pray thee, with all these pains we take in the world, whither would our ambition aspire? What do we seek? What is it we purpose to ourselves in this employment? Can we have any greater hopes in the court than to be friends and favorites of the emperor? And then, what is there that is not brittle and full of dangers? And through how many dangers must we ascend to this greater danger? And how long will this last? But the friend and favorite of God, if I choose, I may become presently, and so forever." This speech from the innermost soul made such an impression on the other, that both instantly resolved to quit the court and in quiet retirement to seek and acquire the friendship of the highest King. Let us imitate them, and if we do not likewise quit the world entirely, let us endeavor to attach more importance to the friendship of God than to the friendship of the world and of men.

But let us also endeavor, in accordance with the fundamental law of friendship, to unite ourselves with God, as He unites Himself with us, and to become like and conform to Him, as He has made Himself like unto us. For that purpose only, He has united Himself so intimately with us, that, as His true friends, we may be of one sentiment, one will, one heart, and one spirit with Him. "To have one and the same object of inclination or disinclination," says a heathen writer, "that constitutes true friendship." We should endeavor to will

¹ B. viii. ch. 6.

only what God wills ; to love only what He loves ; for in no other way can we requite His love, since we are unable to elevate and endow Him as He has elevated and endowed us, by making us His friends.

4. Friendship is one of the deepest necessities, and one of the greatest goods of the human heart : to love and be loved is its desire and its happiness. Alone and in itself it feels so lonely, so miserable and forsaken, that it must seek another heart outside of itself, to which it may attach itself, with which it may communicate, and in which it may confide. It cannot rest until it has found another heart, and shares its sentiments and sufferings, and until it is so united to this heart that both seem to be moved by *one* pulsation.

Therefore we justly consider ourselves happy if we have found such a heart ; for Holy Writ even says : “ *Blessed is he that findeth a true friend.*”¹ Nevertheless, this never gives us perfect peace. The heart of other men, even if ever so noble, so good, and loving, is, in itself, always miserable and seeks its consolation and happiness again in our own heart. Though both approach each other very near, and support each other, yet both are too limited to penetrate each other, and too weak to resist all storms. What happiness were it, then, for us to find a heart, in itself infinitely noble, good, and loving, which could entirely fill our own heart, become one with it, and which could give us itself, and besides, all that we might wish and desire !

This heart, Christian reader, you find with your Lord and God, if you are united with Him by His grace. His Divine heart approaches yours so near as to penetrate it and to fill it with His holy presence, so that both hearts are united into one, and are animated by *one* soul, *one* spirit. And this heart is, at the same time, the highest infinite good, that includes everything good, everything beautiful, everything amiable. All love, all sweetness,

¹ Ecclus. xxv. 12.

that is found in all hearts in Heaven and on earth, is found united in this one heart and is but a small portion of its infinite love and sweetness. It alone verifies in the fullest sense the description which Holy Writ gives of a true friend: "*A faithful friend is a strong defence; and he that hath found him, hath found a treasure. Nothing can be compared to a faithful friend; and no weight of gold and silver is able to countervail the goodness of his fidelity. A faithful friend is the medicine of life and immortality.*"¹

God is a friend, who is present to you not only from time to time, but remains with you always without interruption, if you do not drive Him away. God is a friend whom you may not only occasionally press to your bosom, but who continually dwells in your heart and in the innermost part of your soul. God is a friend to whom you need not express your sentiments in words, but who recognizes and feels every pulsation of your heart, who knows your nature and sentiments better than you yourself, who understands and fathoms all your love, your feelings, and your desires. He is a friend without weaknesses and imperfections, whose presence will become sweeter and dearer to you the longer you enjoy it. "*His conversation hath no bitterness, nor His company any tediousness.*"²

But you so little esteem this Friend and this friendship to which grace introduces you, that you have recourse to all other friends in preference to Him. You will not approach this great and only Friend, whose delight is to be with the sons of men, and you will not give Him your heart, as He has given you His? You find His intercourse tedious, and prefer the friendship of the world? How ungrateful you are to Him, or rather, how cruel to yourself!

Take to heart those words of the Imitation of Christ: "What can the world profit thee without Jesus? To be without Jesus is a grievous hell, and to be with Jesus, a

¹ Eccclus. vi. 14-16.

² Wis. viii. 16.

sweet paradise. Whoever finds Jesus, finds a good treasure, yea, good above all goods ; and he that loseth Jesus, loseth exceeding much, and more than if he lost the whole world. He is wretchedly poor, who lives without Jesus, and he is exceedingly rich, who has Jesus. It is a great art to know how to converse with Jesus, and to know how to keep Jesus is great wisdom. Thou mayest quickly drive away Jesus and lose His grace, if thou decline after outward things. And if thou drive Him from thee, and lose Him, to whom wilt thou fly, and whom then wilt thou seek for thy friend ? Without a friend, thou canst not well live ; and if Jesus be not thy friend, above all, thou wilt be exceeding sad and desolate."

5. Woe to you, indeed, if you basely reject the friendship of God. This terrible ingratitude would change God from your dearest friend to your bitterest enemy. The greater His love was for you, the more terrible would be His hatred against you. "*He pours out indignation, according as His mercy is,*"¹ says Holy Scripture. The more desirable a true and sincere friend is, the more terrible is a decided and certain enemy, and as the friendship of God infinitely surpasses the friendship of all men taken together, so His wrath is more fearful than that which all men together might have against us.

Imagine a man, hated and persecuted to death by all others, shunned and avoided by all, rejected from their company as the outcast of mankind, wandering about an outlaw, like the fratricide Cain, fearing to come near any one, lest he be most cruelly tortured and put to death. Do you believe that this man could still eat or sleep quietly, could even live for sheer terror and anguish, and would not, in his despair, rather prefer instantaneous death to this death-like life ? But how much more unhappy is he who has God for an enemy and constantly sees the sword of so mighty, so wrathful, and so unavoidable a judge suspended over his head ! The former may hope to be relieved of his

¹ Ecclus. xvi. 12, 13.

miserable condition by death ; the latter, however, precisely by death falls entirely into the hands of his fearful enemy, with no possibility of escape. How, then, O sinner, can you be serene and cheerful in the enmity of God, how can you yet enjoy a pleasure, unembittered by this frightful thought of your terrible enemy ?

On the other hand, imagine a man who is loved and revered by all, who meets a friendly greeting from every one, who is borne in the hearts and on the hands of all, who is overwhelmed by them with presents and blessings, who receives all imaginable kind and loving services ; truly, we should praise him as the most blessed of men, and should envy his happy lot. What were this happiness, however, compared with the happiness of him who enjoys the friendship and love of God, a love that incomparably surpasses the love of all men and angels, a friendship that enriches him with all the treasures of God's omnipotence !

If there were question of choosing between the friendship and enmity of all men, certainly no one would hesitate in the least to obtain at any price the happy lot of the first and to avoid the terrible fate of the others. How, then, may we hesitate to prefer the friendship of God to His wrath and to surrender anything rather than lose it ? For if we lose this friendship we are delivered over to the servitude of the devil, in whose hands we must eternally suffer for the fearful sacrilege of despising the friendship of God.

6. The friendship of God, finally, is purer and nobler, and, therefore, more true and precious, the more *disinterested* it is in comparison with the friendship of men. The friendship of men is rarely or never entirely disinterested. Even if we do love a friend for his own sake and not because he may be of service to us, still we do not exclude the intention of deriving profit from him ; at least we expect consolation and compassion from his reciprocal love, and feel a necessity of being loved in turn by him. God, however, in

no wise stands in need of our friendship ; He can expect no profit, no increase of His beatitude from it, since He is in Himself infinitely happy. Even the reciprocal love which He demands of us is no necessity for Him and cannot make Him happier than He already is. This love, and all things besides, by which He makes us His friends and enriches and endows us as such, serve only to make *us* blessed and happy. We alone derive benefit from this friendship ; God has but the glory and the joy to have made us happy by making us His friends.

But you will perhaps say, Has not God made all things for His own sake, and does He not also love His friends for His own sake ? Certainly He loves you for His own sake, because it is only thus that He can truly and perfectly love you. Do you perhaps desire that He should love you *only* for your sake ? Then His love for you could not be so sublime, Divine, infinite, because in yourself alone you are not an infinite good and therefore cannot be the object of an infinite love. Now, however, He loves you on account of His own infinite goodness, which finds a wonderful reflex in you by grace ; He loves Himself in you, and therefore you in Himself ; He loves you on account of His own Divine nature, which He has communicated to you by grace, and therefore His love for you is so intimate, sublime, and infinite. The love of God is, then, more true and sincere for the reason that He loves you not only for your sake, but for His own sake ; you should rejoice on that account, and congratulate yourself, and if this were not actually the case, you should heartily wish and desire it.

Confide with your whole soul in this disinterested Divine friend. You need have no fear that He will withdraw Himself in any way from you, from selfish motives. He is your friend only to enrich and beatify you. But you, too, should be unselfish towards Him ; you should love Him as He has loved you, love yourself only in Him ; you should give Him yourself whole and entire, as He has given Himself to you ; and as He has granted you His grace and

favor, you should render Him the tribute of His honor and glory. Thus the sacred ties of friendship will be drawn ever closer, you will be made worthy to bear them through all eternity for your greater honor and beatitude, and will be inseparably united to your Divine friend by glory, as you were united to Him on earth by love.

EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Ineffable Love God Bears us, when we are in the State of Grace.

1.



THE mystery of love which God has for us, when we have been made His children and friends by grace, is so sweet, so deep and inexhaustible, that we must devote still further attention to it.

“*What is a man that Thou shouldst magnify him? or why dost Thou set Thy heart upon him?*”¹ We cannot repeat too often, in our present meditations, these words of admiration. “What is man?” asks St. Bernard, in explaining these words. “Doubtless he is as vanity and as nothing; he is nothing. But should he be entirely nothing, who is thus glorified by God? Let us take courage, my brethren! Though we be nothing in our own hearts, the heart of God may perhaps contain something of us. O Father of mercy! O God of the wretched! Why dost Thou set Thy heart upon us? Since Thou hast Thyself said: ‘*Where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also,*’ must we not, then, be Thy treasure, if Thy heart is with us? But how could we be mere nothing, if we are Thy treasure?” Thus speaks St. Bernard. And indeed, from nature we have nothing which could cause the love of God to be directed towards us, and rest upon us with such tenderness. We can be made the treasure of God only by receiving the treasure of grace from the heart of God, and bearing it in our frail vessels. How great is the beauty of grace, how glorious its splendor, which delights the heart of God, enrap-

¹ Job vii. 17.

tures it, and calls forth, not a general, but a very particular and extraordinary love !

There are very different kinds and degrees of love. One and the same person may with all sincerity love another person in a manifold way, with an ordinary and general, or with a very particular and eminent love, which tears, as it were, the heart of the loving person from his bosom and attaches it to the object of his love. Of this last, called the ecstatic love, the renowned spiritual writer, Richard of St. Victor, distinguishes four degrees: in the first degree, the heart can no longer control its love; in the second, it cannot forget this love; in the third, it can find pleasure in nothing else; in the fourth and last, it can no longer be satisfied even with the greatness of its love. The first degree he calls the *insuperable* love, because no other affection can displace it; the second is the *inseparable*, because it is so firmly impressed upon the memory, that it cannot be effaced; the third is the *exclusive* love, because it brooks no rival; the fourth, finally, is the *insatiable* love, which can rest content and satiated with no food.

That man in such enraptured love is irresistibly drawn towards his God, who is the highest and most amiable good, and his greatest happiness, can surprise no one. But that God is drawn by such love to man, whom He has created by one word of His mouth and with His hand formed, from the slime of the earth, that, I say, is impossible, unless God by grace implants in man something exceedingly precious and wonderful, the ineffable splendor of which transports Him and overwhelms Him with the most fervent love.

2. What, indeed, is more *invincible*, stronger, and more victorious than that love which has conquered the Son of God, the almighty and universal Sovereign, and has made Him the servant of us all? It led Him from the bosom of the Father, as it were, captive down to this earth; it disarmed the mighty wrath of the just Judge and by this splendid victory overcame all human misery. "That is

the nature of the Divinity," says St. Basil of Seleucia, "that He who subdues all is Himself vanquished by love for man." Therefore the Divine spouse in the Cantic of Canticles calls His beloved—the soul adorned with grace—terrible; He compares her to an army set in array; He begs her to turn away from Him her eyes, which He likens to chariots of war and triumph, lest she capture His heart and fasten it to the object of His love.

Yea, the Divine love effects that God is divested of Himself and is immersed in the beloved, wherefore it is called an ecstatic love. Though we may say of men, to a certain extent, that by love they go out of themselves, as it were, and place their heart in the heart of their friend, yet they can do this only in affection and sentiment. God, however, whose being is as unbounded as His love, and perfectly united with this love, enters substantially into the soul rendered amiable by His grace, and unites Himself as intimately with it, as if he were a part of its being. And if St. Augustine says of a loving person that the half of his soul dwells in the heart of his friend, the love of God is incomparably greater, since He imparts to the hearts of His beloved friends not only the half of His spirit, but imparts it whole and entire. So strong and invincible is the love of God, which we acquire by grace.

That this love unites God also *inseparably* to His friends by a continuous and unceasing remembrance, He Himself attests, through the prophet Isaias, since what He says of the earthly Sion may be very well applied in a higher and more perfect sense to the spiritual Sion; that is, to the soul in grace: "*Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? and if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee in my hands.*"¹ As the goodness of God in its infiniteness surpasses, beyond comparison, all others, so the solicitude of His paternal heart for His children infinitely distances the love and solicitude of all fathers and mothers, and just there, where

¹ Is. xlix, 15.

we are forsaken by these, God assumes the care of us. “*My father and my mother have left me; but the Lord hath taken me up,*” says the Psalmist.

But as God, conquered by His love, descends into our heart, not only in affection, but in reality with His Being, so this same love not only keeps His remembrance attached to us, but keeps Him continually present with us and in us with His essence. As little as God can withdraw His affection from us, so long as we are in a state of grace, so little can He withdraw His mysterious presence from us. The delight which His presence in the soul in grace affords Him is too great; too great the pleasure He takes in its beauty. It seems as if He could only there find His resting place, His happiness; wherefore He Himself says: “*My delight is to be with the children of men.*”

The *exclusiveness* of Divine love for those who are in a state of grace, is evident from the fact that no being can be admitted to this love without grace. God embraces all creatures with the arms of love, but He does not receive all into His innermost heart. His love for Himself, which is very different from that for His creatures, is the love in which creatures participate by His grace. In comparison with Himself He forgets His creatures and loves them only for His own sake, as means of His glorification. In the same way He loves His children in a very particular manner, as if He could love nothing in the whole world besides them: His eye rests upon them alone with infinite complacency, and notices the other creatures only in so far as they may serve and glorify His children. For the same reason God, in the *Canticle of Canticles*, calls all His friends *one* dove, *one* perfect one, *one* spouse; for though there be many, yet they all shine with the same light of grace, all partake of the same Divine nature, and all enjoy the Divine love, whole and entire, since this love is capable of embracing one as well as many, and many as well as one.

Finally, the love of God for the souls in a state of grace

is so *insatiable* that, not content, we might say, with its infiniteness, after being saturated for thirty-three years with sufferings and sorrows, it still thirsts, and like a devouring fire, not quenched by the waters of many tribulations, it rages ever more strongly, consumes everything, and ever seeks new food. So entirely hast Thou, ever good and bounteous God, forgotten Thy former blessings! Thou no longer rememberest the expense of Thy Omnipotence at the time of creation to our benefit, nor Thy Incarnation, this most incomprehensible of all miracles, nor the long and tiresome years of Thy earthly life! Thou still criest out to us: I thirst; and hast Thou not satisfied Thy love? No, sweet Jesus; this was not enough for Thy love! After all the uninterrupted, laborious travels through Judea, Galilee and Samaria, Thy love was not tired, though Thy bodily strength was exhausted. Thou still didst burn with the glowing desire, as sweet as it is bitter, to drink the cup of suffering to the dregs. Thou didst desire, not single drops, but an entire ocean of suffering, as Thou didst not desire to shed but a few drops of Thy blood, which would have been more precious than a thousand worlds and would have sufficed for our redemption, but Thou wouldst pour it all out in streams for us. But even this immense ocean could not comprehend the fulness of Thy love. Thou wouldst gladly have suffered unspeakably more, if it had been necessary for our salvation. Then Thou didst send Thy Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, from Heaven, didst give us Thyself in the most Holy Sacrament, didst give us Thy Father and make Him our Father. What yet remains that Thou couldst give us to satisfy Thy not yet satisfied love? Nothing else, but to unite us ever more closely with Thyself, Thy Father, and the Holy Spirit, and to fill us ever more with Thy grace and Thyself, the more our capacity and desire grow.

3. O happy soul, adorned with the grace of God, which enjoys the sweet embrace of the invincible, inseparable, exclusive, and what is most, inexhaustible love of the

mighty Lord of all ! If grace brought us only this one good, could it then be outweighed by all treasures and enjoyments ? It is always sweet and pleasant to be loved ; but to be loved with such a love, by so great a Lord, is so full of delightful sweetness, that it would seem incredible that a man should despise it. What a monster must that soul be, which, by forfeiting grace, rejects this love and tramples it under foot ! The most stubborn and corrupt must shudder at such wickedness.

Nothing can turn God away from a man who maintains grace ; He would be obliged to abandon and give up Himself by such separation ; and you, O man, desert Him with the slightest pretext, every momentary pleasure suffices for you to give Him up !

God bestows His whole and entire love upon you ; and you profane the love which you owe Him alone, by vain and disgraceful attachment to transitory things ! God never tires of loving and embracing you and overwhelming you with His benefits ; and you weary of the slightest exertion for so lavish and devoted a Friend !

Oh, come, you friends, you lovers and beloved of God, and if you can do nothing, at least blot out with your tears the shameful insults offered to this eternal love ! Let us be the more grateful, the more others and we ourselves formerly despised this love. Let us give to God, our most constant Lover, a love that can be conquered by no assault. Let us make returns for His incessant solicitude in our behalf by a lively and joyful remembrance that keeps Him constantly before our eyes. For His very particular love let us give our entire heart to Him alone, and exclude from it all foreign attachments. To His insatiable desire of blessing and benefiting us, let us correspond by unwearied endeavor to love Him ever more, and as much as our weakness permits to perform ever greater things for His honor. "Love never ceases," says St. Anselm, "to will that which it is able to accomplish, and always desires to accomplish more than it can accomplish."

NINTH CHAPTER.

The Heavenly Beauty which Grace Confers upon the Soul.

1.

BEAUTY is the principal object of pure love. If God, then, embraces our souls with such an ineffable love, we may conclude from this that our soul must have received from grace a wonderful, heavenly beauty. This is the more true, since the Divine love not only estimates things by their true value, but is also powerful enough to make the object worthy of being so loved. Human love presupposes love in its object; Divine love, however, works and produces it; for as all things of themselves possess nothing and receive what they possess from God, God can love anything only inasmuch as He makes it partake of His infinite goodness and beauty. This is true in general of all love of God and of the beauty and goodness of all created things, but particularly of the supernatural love of God and the supernatural beauty of spiritual creatures. If God addresses Himself to our soul with a supernatural love, then He adorns it also with a supernatural beauty, and on account of this beauty, which He Himself has given us, His loving eye rests upon us with ineffable complacency. But since the love of God works in us by grace and rests upon us on account of grace, it must be grace that contains this beauty and confers it upon us.

Thus says St. Augustine, when he speaks of the elevation of man to the state of grace: ¹ "When human nature,

¹ De Trinit. lib. 15. cap. 8.

distinguished above all others, is cleansed from injustice, it is converted from deformity into beauty." Still more appropriate is the teaching of St. Cyril of Alexandria,¹ that by grace we are *transfigured into a Divine form* and thus receive a more than earthly beauty.

Indeed, a most perfect image of the Divine nature and glory is impressed in our soul by grace; the soul is made a true mirror of God's beauty and majesty which it reflects in its entire purity and completeness. It is made a child of God, an adoptive child, which is clothed with the precious robe and royal ornaments of God's own Son and, like Him, is invested with light as with a mantle, —and a regenerate child, into whom the heavenly Father breathes His own life and imprints His own features, as He does to His only-begotten Son. The soul is made *dei-form*, as the holy Fathers so often say, *i. e.*, of a godlike form, and thus participant of the beauty peculiar to God. Whoever, then, would represent to himself the beauty of a soul in grace, ought first to have beheld the infinite beauty of God Himself, that beauty which the angels desire to see, which unites in most perfect harmony all created beauty, and which is the prototype, the measure, and unattainable end and ideal of all that man, or rather, that God Himself, can imagine beautiful and glorious.

Moreover, our soul is made by grace a temple of the Holy Ghost and of the Blessed Trinity, the real throne of God, a Heaven upon earth, a spiritual city of God, of which the Jerusalem of the Jews was only a figure. But will not God make every effort to adorn this holy temple suitably to His majesty! If He surrounds the sun in the skies with so much splendor, if He covers the earth, which is but His footstool, with the richest and most diversified tapestry of beautiful verdure, crowns it with wreathes of loveliest flowers, and encircles it with silvery threads of streams and rivers, what heavenly treasures, what precious pearls, what magnificent splendor will He

¹ *Contra Anthropom.* c. 8.

bestow upon the temple of our soul, in which He dwells with all the love of His Divine heart, and will dwell for all eternity! And if men strive with all the resources of wealth and art to erect grand and magnificent material temples to the Divinity; how much rather will God adorn and glorify the sanctuary of our soul, where He is adored in spirit and in truth! "To the soul in a state of grace," says St. Ambrose,¹ "God speaks as once to Jerusalem: '*Behold, Jerusalem, I have painted thy walls in the splendor of light.*' That soul is painted by God which beholds in itself the loveliness of virtues and the splendor of piety. That soul is beautifully painted which reflects the image of Divine activity. That soul is beautifully painted, which is resplendent with the glory and the image of the substance of the Father."

2. Solomon, therefore, in his Cantic of Canticles, praises nothing so much as this Divine beauty and glory of a soul in grace. No mortal man, however, can express or comprehend the nature and greatness of this beauty. If the mere natural beauty of the soul surpasses beyond comparison the beauty of all bodies, even that of the sun, how much more the supernatural beauty which it receives from grace? For there exists a much greater distance between grace and the nature of the soul, than between the latter and all the beauty of the visible world. Nor does the heavenly splendor of grace suffer from the fact that our bodily, or even our mental eye, is incapable of beholding it; this is rather a proof of its excellence, for whatever we are able to see can only be a limited and earthly beauty. This, however, is certain, says the blessed Blossius, that if we could behold the beauty of a soul in the state of grace, we should be enraptured and transported with wonder and delight.

When God had once revealed this beauty to St. Catherine of Siena, she covered with kisses the footsteps of those who were engaged in bringing sinners back to the grace of

¹ Hexaem. lib. 6. cap. 7.

God, and transported with joy, she said to her confessor : “ Had you, my father, beheld the beauty of one soul adorned with grace, you would certainly, for the sake of one such soul, gladly suffer death a thousand times.” Christ Himself, who was drawn down to this earth by the splendor of holy souls, said to St. Bridget that if she beheld this splendor she would be dissolved as a decayed vessel, and sink down without life.

As our eyes are dazzled, not only by the sun itself, but by its reflex from a bright crystal, so the human soul cannot bear, not only the inapproachable light of Divine glory, but not even its image in the spirit, that is filled with grace.

Like God Himself, this, His image, too, is incomparably more splendid than the material sun. St. Frances of Rome experienced this when she beheld beside her an angel, whose dazzling brightness darkened the light of the sun.

Yet it is still more wonderful that even the angels, naturally accustomed to heavenly spectacles, are enraptured at the beauty of grace. For the angels cry out in the Cantic of Canticles, on beholding a soul united with God by grace : “ *Who is this, that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her Beloved?* ”¹ And, indeed, the height of glory to which God raises the soul, favored with grace, bearing it, as it were, in His arms, and the perfect loveliness which He pours out upon it in streams, by the breath of His mouth, is so great that even the natural beauty of the angels vanishes before it like a shadow. Their wonder, therefore, is so much greater when they behold a soul, before buried in deep misery in the dreary desert of this earth, clothed with such splendid beauty. This is as wonderful, says St. Chrysostom, as if a miserable and crippled man, deformed by age and disease, were restored by an unexpected cure to the bloom of youth and received the royal purple and sceptre.

¹ Cant. of Cant. viii. 5.

The greatest surprise, however, we experience when we see and hear that God Himself beholds this beauty of grace with admiration and delight. For what else does He mean to indicate by those words in the Cantic of Canticles : “ *How beautiful art thou, my love, how beautiful art thou!*”¹ and by the following vivid description of her beauty. Certainly God would not make so much of the beauty of material bodies, which form but His footstool, nor of the beauty of any other pure creature, which He has produced out of nothing by His almighty word. God can admire nothing but what is Divine, as He considers throughout all eternity His infinite beauty and loveliness with the same infinite delight ; so His eye rests with unspeakable satisfaction upon the image of His Divine nature which the Holy Ghost impresses as a seal upon our soul. He is astonished, as it were, at the wonderful power of His love, which is able to adorn with such beauty a poor miserable creature, and to make this creature so like to Himself. He is astonished at the magnificence of His royal palace, which He has clothed with the gold of His grace. He is astonished at the beautiful and lovely garden, with never-fading bloom, which His love has planted, refreshed by the breath of His Holy Spirit, as by a mild, vernal breeze, and in which He dwells with unspeakable delight. And thus He repeatedly cries out : “ *How beautiful art thou, my love, how beautiful art thou!* ”

Does not this twofold exclamation indicate also a twofold beauty of the soul ? The soul is beautiful, first, by a created beauty, by the splendor of grace, that invests and surrounds it, that covers it with the precious golden robe of all supernatural and Divine virtues. The soul is again and doubly beautiful by an uncreated beauty, that, namely, of the Holy Spirit, who has erected His throne within it. For as the palace of a king must first be beautifully furnished, to receive the king worthily and surround him with becoming glory, but receives its greatest ornament in the

¹ Cant. of Cant. iv. 1.

king himself; so the Holy Spirit first forms our soul into a magnificent and glorious temple, and then confers upon it its highest ornament and brightest beauty by His own presence. The soul, adorned with grace, is but a golden setting for the most precious jewel, the Holy Spirit and God Himself. As in a ring the gold is not identical with the jewel, yet both are so closely united as to form but one whole and one beauty; so the Divinity is, indeed, distinct from the soul, but by love so intimately united to it, that both seem to have one and the same beauty. This same sweet mystery was revealed by our Lord to St. Theresa by another beautiful image. He showed her the soul as a crystal globe, that was not only illuminated from without by the rays of the Divine sun of grace, but bore this sun in its centre. From this centre the sun filled with Divine splendor the different parts of the globe, which were said to signify the different faculties of the soul. Therefore the Psalmist sings of the daughter and spouse of God: "*All the glory of the king's daughter is within.*"

If God Himself, then, considers the beauty and loveliness of your soul with such delight, ought not you, Christian soul, gladly to conform your judgment to the judgment of this highest and infallible judge and critic of art, even though that beauty be invisible to you? Will you still dare to esteem any other beauty, compare it, or even prefer it to this beauty?

3. But if you wish to compare the beauty of grace with all other beauties that delight you, well, then the comparison will teach you still better the superiority of grace. For everything found in other beauties is found in infinitely higher measure and without any imperfection in grace.

Lifeless bodies delight you by the harmonious composition of their parts, by their pleasing colors and their brilliancy; yet their beauty is but external and transitory. Grace, however, effects a heavenly harmony among the

faculties of your soul, sheds over it a Divine lustre, and glorifies it not only externally, but from within with eternal and imperishable beauty.

Incomparably greater than the beauty of lifeless things is that of living creatures in the bloom of their youth, in their manifold activity, in the fulness of their vital power. But where is there a higher, purer, and more perfect life, than in your soul by grace ; a life that never grows old and is always rejuvenated, that brings forth heavenly blossoms and sheds about it the fragrance of Divine bliss ?

More than all material beauty, it is the beauty of virtue, the purity of heart, the realized living order of the moral law in the soul, which delight every heart not yet entirely corrupt. But all these receive an infinitely greater lustre by grace, by which the Holy Ghost Himself impresses upon our soul the law of God, unites it most intimately with the archetype of all justice, adorns it with the supernatural and Divine virtues and invests it with justice and the true sanctity of the Son of God.

If, finally, all harmony, all splendor, all joy of life, and all virtue in creatures is only a shadow of the highest beauty of God and vanishes before its splendor, then grace, as the image of the Divine nature, must give to the soul a beauty and loveliness that include and infinitely surpass all natural and created harmony, splendor, life, and virtue, and all their effects, as the sun includes and surpasses the colors of the rainbow.

4. But if this exquisite beauty of grace is not powerful enough to delight and captivate your heart, then you ought to shudder at least at the terrible hideousness which sin produces in you by depriving you of grace. Sin places itself like a dark cloud between the Divine sun and your soul, and in a single moment the splendor of its heavenly beauty is extinct, the supernatural life is killed, the virtues are destroyed, the garb of the children of God is tattered. From a fragrant and lovely garden of God your soul is converted into an abominable and pestilential abyss, the haunt

of detestable reptiles and serpents and of the hellish dragon himself. From an image of your most lovable God you are made an image of hell and the devil.

The devil, however, is so hideous, that our Lord told St. Bridget that if she saw him in his deformity, she would either sink lifeless in a heap or would continue to live only with unspeakable pain. And St. Catherine of Siena, who had seen him but a moment, was seized with such terror, that she would rather walk until doomsday barefooted, over glowing coals, than to look upon him again. He who, when in grace, was an angel of light and the reflex of Divine glory, was by sin converted into so deformed and hideous a monster.

In the same manner is your soul, my dear Christian, disfigured, when sin expels the Divine sun from it. This, too, was demonstrated to St. Theresa by the above-mentioned image of a crystal globe, which, after the retreat of Christ from its interior, contained nothing but black night, and a foul and pestilential mass full of ugly and detestable vermin.

What must be the feeling of your guardian angel at this terrible change? How great must be his sorrow and that of the whole heavenly court, which before so delighted in beholding you? Must not you yourself be shocked at your own deformity and flee from your own sight? Yes, flee indeed, but to that bath that cleanses you from this filth and so easily restores your previous beauty. God has prepared such a bath for you, and calls you thither, as Eliseus sent the leprous Naaman to the Jordan, to wash himself seven times therein. Not seven times, but once only need you wash yourself to recover your former beauty and purity. Once only need you repent of your sins out of pure love of God, or to enter the tribunal of penance with sincere conversion of heart; once only need you earnestly detest your sins, and you are pure and immaculate as before. Oh, how powerful are these tears of penance! How great is the goodness and mercy of God towards you, to so easily restore

to you the lost beauty! Show yourself, O sinner, worthy of this mercy and do not hesitate a moment to raise yourself from this mire of sin.

5. You, however, good and faithful preserver of the robe of beauty, given to you by God, who have not yet lost it, continue to guard it in future, not only against being lost, but against all stain and soil which might disfigure it; otherwise you would appear uglier in the royal purple of grace than in the common garb of nature.

What pains and time and what expense is spared, to preserve, to increase and adorn the exterior and transient beauty of the body! Not only some hours, but whole days are spent to carefully and diligently arrange the hair or an article of dress, and to add grace and dignity to the deportment of the body. And should one hour be too long a time to cleanse and beautify the soul? Should we be unwilling to bestow that care upon the beauty of soul that secures us the friendship of God and Heaven, which we bestow upon the hair or a dress? Whilst the world hopes by such trifles to gain the admiration of men, we are assured by God Himself that even the least solicitude that we bestow upon preserving the purity or enhancing the beauty of the heavenly figure of our soul, secures for us a greater measure of His love. In the Canticle of Canticles He Himself says: "*Thou hast wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse, . . . with one of thy eyes, and with one hair of thy neck.*"¹ Every aspiration to God, every virtuous beauty, even the least, is made by grace a powerful missile, that wounds, not the inconstant heart of man, but the eternal and constant heart of God. Every step in the pathway of grace is so beautiful and lovely, that God, in beholding you, exclaims: "*How beautiful are thy steps in shoes, O prince's daughter!*"² Each of your words that you address to God is so sweet and lovely, that it draws down upon you His richest blessing, as the Psalmist says: "*Grace is poured abroad in thy lips; therefore God hath*

¹ Cant. of Cant. iv. 9.

² Ibid. vii. 1.

blessed thee for ever."¹ Nothing is small in grace ; each and every thing is great there, because everything gains us the love of God.


From this, moreover, it follows that we are not allowed to despise or neglect or even love any man less on account of an ugly appearance, or a deformed body, or inelegant dress, or the like. A frail and decayed frame may inclose a picture that is worthy of the highest love of God and His empire, and will in a short time be unveiled with great glory. It becomes the Christian to judge, not according to his senses, as the brutes, nor even according to his reason alone, as the heathens, but according to the Divine faith.

¹ Ps. xlii. 3.

TENTH CHAPTER.

Grace makes the Soul a True Spouse of God.

1.

E have seen how by grace God has become our Father, Brother, and Friend, and thus approached us as near as one man may approach another. But God will so entirely be all in all for us ; and the fountain of His grace is so copious and inexhaustible, that as long as we can find a more intimate union among men, we must not rest satisfied without comparing this also to the relation of our soul to God.

The union between bride and groom, between man and wife, is by nature as well as by Divine ordinance the most intimate possible among men : “ *Man shall leave his father and mother, and shall adhere to his wife ; and they shall be two in one flesh.*”¹

The ineffable love which God bears a soul in the state of grace, and the supernatural beauty and loveliness which He bestows upon it, already intimate to us that this relation also is established between God and the soul, and that in the highest and most perfect manner. Matrimony, according to the teaching of the Apostle, is a great sacrament, that is, a sacred sign of sublime significance, only because it represents the union of Christ with the Church, and therefore also of God with the soul. But as the reality and the ideal are infinitely more perfect than the sign and the copy, so the union of God with the soul is incomparably more true and intimate than that of man and wife. These are one in one flesh only ; God, however, is one with the soul in the same spirit. *He who adheres*

¹ Eph. v. 31.—Genesis ii. 24.

to a wife, says the Apostle,¹ *is made one body ; but he who adheres to the Lord, is one spirit.*

But as the spirit is above the flesh, yea, as God is exalted above the flesh, so the union of God with the soul is exalted above that of man and wife. Yea, this union of the soul with God in one spirit is so true and intimate, that its equal cannot be found in all created nature, and that no created reason can suspect or comprehend it. God immerses the soul in the ocean of His Divine light, inundates it with the stream of His Divine happiness, fills it with the whole plenitude of His Divine being, embraces it with the arms of His love, and presses it so closely to His bosom, that no power in Heaven or on earth can separate it from Him.

It is certainly a great thing to have God for Father, Brother, and Friend ; but all these sweet names and infinitely more are contained in the one by which He calls the soul His spouse. It is His spouse whom God in the Canticle of Canticles now calls His sister, now His friend, now again His daughter, and considers her even as His mother. "As among us men," so says St. Bernard, "the name of a mother, a sister, and a friend does not signify as much as the name of a spouse, so the mutual sweet affections of God and the soul could find no sweeter expression than in the name of a betrothed and spouse, who have all in common, nothing separate or divided. Both have but one inheritance, one house, one table, one bridal chamber, and finally one flesh."²

This, then, reveals most clearly the ineffable greatness of grace. Grace makes us children of the Father, confers upon us a Divine nobility, makes our soul of equal birth with the Son of God, and worthy of His espousal. Grace gives our soul that heavenly beauty and loveliness which so fascinate the Son of God that He descends from His Divine throne to embrace and lead the soul home to His heavenly Father. Grace introduces the Holy Ghost into

¹ I. Cor. vi. 16.

² St. Bernard, in cant. serm. 7, n. 2.

our soul, who, as the bond of Divine love, is at the same time the brides-man, the pledge, and the wedding-ring of its espousals with the Son of God. Grace gives the soul that bold confidence to ask, with the spouse in the Canticle of Canticles, the kiss of His mouth, which, according to the explanation of St. Bernard, is nothing else than the same Holy Spirit whom the Son of God breathes into His spouse, that she may feel His love and intimate presence. Grace finally unites the soul to God in one spirit, introduces it into His glory, and places it upon His throne, in order that it may sit as “*a queen, on His right hand, in gilded clothing, surrounded with variety.*”¹

This union removes all barriers that might in any way separate the soul from God. As His child the soul was yet restrained by childlike reverence; as friend it could not yet claim Him; but as spouse it approaches unembarrassed, possesses Him with entire right, and may, therefore, exclaim: “*My Beloved to me, and I to Him, who feedeth among the lilies.*”² “*I to my Beloved, and His turning is towards me.*”³

2. But if the other relations to God, in which we are placed by grace, are so sweet and sublime, how agreeable and dear to us ought this last kind of union to be! Among all earthly feelings none are stronger and more powerful than those that institute and maintain matrimony. Ought not our soul, then, to be drawn with far greater force and might to embrace its heavenly Spouse, who has become all for its sake, who will adhere to it whole and entire, who does not violate the bloom of its purity, but renders it youthful and fair by His connection, who has loved it with eternal love and has delivered Himself unto death for its sake, from whose holy side it was born, by whose precious blood it was cleansed from its sins and adorned with Divine glory? How great should be its endeavor to please Him alone and exhibit itself, as He desires, “*not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and*

¹ Ps. xlv. 10.

² Cant. of Cant. ii. 16.

³ Ibid. vii. 10.

without blemish!"¹ How much ought the soul to strive to be entirely His, as He has given Himself entire to it, to love Him, as He loved it, and to adhere to Him with unswerving fidelity! How much ought it to desire, in this mortal life, where it celebrates only the espousal, to be worthy of Him, in order to be admitted hereafter to the marriage of the Lamb, to rest for all eternity at His side in the bosom of the Father, and enjoy the vision of His Divine countenance!

In comparison with this can it be esteemed anything great, if a virgin of humble birth, as, for instance, Esther, is elected to be the spouse of a mighty earthly king? The king is a man, like herself, who lives but a short time and cannot satisfy all the desire of her heart. He may give her an empty name, settle earthly riches and external ornaments upon her; but an internal, higher beauty he cannot grant her. And yet such espousals would be considered and celebrated among men as the best imaginable fortune. Learn from this, Christian soul, how highly you should esteem your heavenly Spouse, the King of Heaven and earth. The betrothed of an earthly king would be accused by all the world of the greatest folly and the meanest ingratitude, if she either declined the proffered hand of the king, or, after accepting it, conducted herself in a manner unworthy of him, became faithless and sought the company and the embrace of his servants, or perhaps even of his bitterest enemy. But would not you act far more meanly and foolishly, if you declined the hand of your Divine Spouse, defiled His heavenly bridal-chamber, which is your own heart, admitted into it His bitterest enemy, the devil, and surrendered yourself to this unclean and abominable seducer? Must not the whole heavenly court weep at this, and all the elements rise up to avenge this shameful insult offered the king? Alas, that we must only too often behold this detestable outrage, and perhaps have committed it too often ourselves!

3. St. Thomas, following St. Augustine in this, enumer-

¹ Eph. v. 27.

ates especially *three gifts of matrimony*, which constitute its honor and its happiness,—*fidelity*, the *sacrament* or the *sanctification*, and the *offspring*. Fidelity indicates the indivisible unity of matrimony by which husband and wife belong exclusively to each other. The sacrament or the blessing indicates the hallowed indissolubility of the tie formed by God, as the Saviour says: “*What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.*” The child, finally, represents the fruit of matrimony, its crown and seal, since it lets the married couple enjoy the ineffable pleasures of the father and mother, and unites them still more closely.

All these three endowments of matrimony are found in a far greater measure in the union which grace effects between God and the soul. It must only acquire, preserve, and enjoy them ; for God, on His part, leaves nothing undone to promote their obtainment and preservation and increase.

Of *fidelity* God Himself says, by the prophet Osee :¹ “*I will betroth thee to Me in faith, and thou shalt know that I am the Lord ;*” and the Apostle holds up to men the fidelity of God to His spouse as a model fidelity to their wives, when He says :² “*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church and delivered Himself up for it.*” God gives Himself to His spouse whole and undivided, and if He has elected countless spouses beside yourself, He does not cease to belong entirely to you, and His love for you is not lessened on that account. He is as the sun, which, though united by its rays with a thousand eyes, is yet seen and enjoyed in its entirety by each single eye. You ought rather to rejoice at the greatness and power of your Beloved, who is able to render so many souls happy at the same time ; you ought to consider the others your brethren, love them in your heavenly Spouse, and thus their happiness will increase and multiply your own.

The heart of your Spouse is infinitely great and can, therefore, embrace so many ; yours is infinitely small and narrow, and yet you will divide this small heart and attach it to a

¹ Osee ii. 20.

² Eph. v. 25.

thousand different things! If you give it entirely, you do nothing that can repay His love in a worthy manner, and you are not able to embrace it entirely. Therefore He is so jealous of your fidelity, as the prophet says: "*The Lord thy God is a jealous God.*" He demands for Himself every pulsation of your heart, every act, every sentiment, and is justly angry if beside Him you suffer anything else in your heart, which you do not love for His sake or in accordance with His holy will.

But even after you have offended His holy jealousy, He does not cease to be faithful to you. This jealousy impels Him to seek with greater solicitude to gain your affection again, and in proof of His unspeakable love, He plants all outlets and by-paths with sharp thorns, to leave you no other way than that which leads you to Himself. Where among men do you find such fidelity and undivided love? And if you do not find them there, why will you deprive yourself by your culpable levity of their enjoyment in God?

4. The bond of union between God and the soul is, on the part of God at least, eternal and inseparable, as the eternity and unchangeableness of God require it. The same Spouse who has said: "*I will betroth thee in faith,*" has also said: "*I have loved thee with an everlasting love.*" Your Spouse, Christian soul, who has loved you with an everlasting love, likewise gives Himself to you forever; He can neither die, nor withdraw from you out of disgust, as long as you do not yourself, by your own great fault, suffer the death of sin or feel loathsome and disgusted at your ever sweet and amiable Spouse, and thus with your own hands sever the ties that unite you with Him. Sometimes, indeed, He seems for a short while to withdraw from you and leave you to yourself. But this He does only in wholesome chastisement of your neglect of Him, or soon to return to you with greater kindness and love. Oh, do but despise all other pleasures and enjoyments, avoid all idle distractions, devote all your time to His intercourse and service, and your union with Him will be more intimate from day to

day, until He Himself will come to receive you into the eternal mansions of His Father ! There no power in Heaven or on earth, not even you yourself, will be able to separate yourself from Him, and in His embrace, in the light of His countenance, you will rejoice for all eternity in blissful exultation.

5. The third blessing of matrimony, *fecundity*, is found here, no less than the two others, in the highest degree. It is a heavenly and wonderful fecundity, to which the matrimonial fecundity can scarce remotely be compared. It is a fecundity so much greater and more glorious, as it does not violate the purity and virginity of the spouse, but elevates and glorifies her and produces a fruit that does not separate from the bosom in which it has been generated, but remains therein, as the bloom of a tree is the splendor of its purity and its most beautiful adornment. As the dew, falling from Heaven, fructifies the plant, so the Son of God fructifies the soul in the state of grace ; and as the sun by its light enters the clear eye and is reflected by it, so He produces in the soul the image of His Divine being, and is, as it were, born again in the soul.

In the natural birth the child leaves the bosom of the mother and is a person, separate and distinct from her. The soul, however, by grace receives within itself the image of its heavenly Spouse, by which it is made His child, is made similar and conformable to Him, is united to Him by all the ties of the most intimate relationship and possesses all the joy and happiness that such a relation can bestow. What a wonderful fecundity, which does not cause the blossoms of virginity to wither, and yet produces the most perfect fruit, yea, where the blossom is the fruit itself ! What a wonderful fecundity, where the Son of God, begotten from the luminous bosom of the Eternal Father, is by the light of grace born again in the soul ! What a wonderful fecundity, in which the Mother does not sacrifice her life for the sake of her child, but is herself born again to a new life !

The more the soul is regenerated and made to bloom in

the gracious light of its Spouse, the more will it receive within itself His image, and experience His strength ; the more will it endeavor, too, to produce for Him abundant fruits of good works, to manifest its gratitude and be united ever more closely to Him. This offspring of virtue, says a heathen philosopher, is certainly to be preferred to all carnal posterity. They are children of the Spirit, conceived of the Holy Ghost and born in our heart ; their birth is so easy and quick, that a moment is sufficient thereto, and so full of joy and consolation, that its recollection delights us a long time. The natural progeny is limited to a very small number of children ; the spiritual knows no number or measure ; this offspring may be multiplied manifold every day, and as they do not perish in all eternity, they do not trouble the parent by the fear of an untimely death, but rather give the soul a certain prospect for eternal life in Heaven. The natural fecundity produces a posterity that inherits and takes unto itself the wealth of the father and mother ; the spiritual children, however, give the parent rather the right to an eternal, heavenly inheritance, and instead of dividing and consuming the existing riches, increase them to an infinite measure.

Oh, how much happier than a mother according to the flesh is the soul espoused to the Son of God, if she only do not sever the heavenly tie that binds her to Him ; if she only desire to produce a rich harvest of virtues and good works ; if she only return to Him the fruit of a faithful and immaculate connection, and fear nothing more than to dishonor and enrage Him by the wicked brood of sin, which springs up from the seed sown by the devil ! As long as it produces good and holy fruit, it is the honor and pride of the Divine Spouse and the joy of His whole empire. But the more shameful and detestable would be the conduct of this soul, if from its royal bosom it brought forth a poisonous brood of vipers and, by deeds of darkness and by dishonorable union with the prince of darkness, defiled the pure bridal-chamber of its heavenly Spouse.

What a salutary awe must this comparison between virtue and sin, between the works of light and those of darkness, inspire in a Christian soul! Filled with dread to disgrace yourself and your heavenly Spouse, and to be visited by His terrible anger, you will avoid all sin, and with holy zeal desire nothing more ardently than to present Him with new and beautiful fruits of heavenly virtue and thus evermore to honor and strengthen the holy union with Him.

Queens recognize in their children the supports of their marriage-tie, the pride of their maternity, the ornament of their glory, and the best and most secure pledge of royal love and favor. Yet this is far more true of the espousal of the soul to God, as in it the soul is not exhausted by frequent birth, nor loses in strength and beauty, but rather grows ever stronger by the birth of holy works, ever more fruitful by the number of its children, ever stronger, more beautiful and pleasing to God by nursing them. For thus the prophet Isaias¹ speaks of it: “*Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy health shall speedily arise, and thy justice shall go before thy face, and the glory of the Lord shall gather thee up. . . . then shall thy light rise up in darkness and thy darkness shall be as the noonday; and the Lord will give thee rest continually, and will fill thy soul with brightness, and deliver thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a fountain of water, whose waters shall not fail.*”

6. If the soul is not only espoused by grace to its heavenly Beloved, but by its fecundity makes itself worthy of Him and enters into ever closer connection with Him, then He already in this life unites Himself so intimately with it, fills the mind with a light so sublime and entirely unknown to the senses, and grants the will such a delightful perception of His Divine presence, that all the faculties of the soul enjoy the goodness, beauty, and sweetness of God, and the soul, overwhelmed with the radiance of an

¹ Is. lviii. 8-11.

ever-increasing beauty, and a stream of heavenly delight, exclaims with the spouse in the Canticle of Canticles: ¹ “*Show me Thy face; let Thy voice sound in my ears; for Thy voice is sweet, and Thy face comely.*” It is converted into a new paradise, full of delight and happiness, of which, as St. Ephrem beautifully explains, the ancient, material paradise was but a weak image. For if God has made the bodily aliment and fruitfulness so beautiful and delicious, because it is necessary for the maintenance of life and of the human race, how much sweeter and lovelier will He render the life of virtue, the heavenly love and fruitfulness of His spouse, that she may adhere to Him joyfully and with her whole heart and soul!

Well, then, Christian soul, do not hesitate a moment to surrender yourself entirely to your Divine Beloved and to enter into His delights. “*Hearken, O daughter,*” so the Psalmist tells you, ² “*hearken and see, and incline thy ear; and forget thy people and thy father’s house, and the King shall greatly desire thy beauty: for He is the Lord thy God.*” Yes, it is the Lord your God who descends to you, to introduce you into His Heaven, who knocks at the door of your heart with ardent desire, and is so condescending as to beg of you to open your heart to Him. Do not withdraw from Him, that you may not at the same time withdraw from yourself His great honor and happiness. Endeavor to be His pride and His joy, and He will make you the pride of Heaven for all eternity; at His heart He will suffer you to drink in the ineffable, mysterious fountain of His Divine love and to reign and govern with Him upon His Divine throne.

And to maintain this holy fidelity to your heavenly Betrothed, consider frequently the beautiful words which St. Agnes, the spouse of Jesus, faithful unto death, spoke to her intended seducers: “*Already another lover has taken possession of me; I am espoused to Him whom the angels serve, whose beauty the sun and moon admire,*

¹ Cant. of Cant. ii. 14.

² Ps. xlv. 11, 12.

whose Mother is a virgin, whose Father knows no wife. My right hand and my neck He has surrounded with precious stones, my ears He has adorned with inestimable pearls. With the ring of His fidelity He has united Himself to me and has adorned me with innumerable jewels. His body is already united to my body, milk and honey have I received from His mouth, and His blood has reddened my cheeks. If I love Him, I am chaste, if I touch Him I am pure, if I accept Him, I am a virgin. To Him shall I remain faithful, I devote and intrust myself entirely to Him."

ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

By Grace we Participate in the Empire of God and His Dominion over All Things.

1.



AS grace makes our soul a spouse of God, the King of Heaven and earth, so it elevates the same to be queen over all things, because, as God says to His Son, so He says to the spouse of His Son: “*All I have is thine.*” If God, says the Apostle, ¹ “*spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us, hath He not also, with Him, given us all things?*” We may likewise say, in general, at least: If God by grace makes us partakers of His Divine nature, and gives us His own Divine being for our possession and enjoyment, will He not also present and subject all other things to us? Certainly, for this precisely follows from all the properties of grace that we have hitherto considered.

In the first place the dignity of a true *spouse* of God gives our soul likewise most clearly and evidently the right to the sovereignty over all things; for the spouse of the king is queen, she possesses the same throne, the same crown as the king, and is honored by all subjects as well as he.

But aside from this, grace makes us true *friends* of God and it is the first law of friendship that friends divide their possessions and hold everything in common. If this is rarely or never carried out among men, it only shows that human friendship is imperfect and inclosed within narrow limits; the friendship of God, however, knows no limit, and rests and is satisfied only when there is nothing more to divide and communicate.

¹ Rom. viii. 32.

Moreover, by grace we are true *children* of God, and consequently His heirs and the co-heirs of Christ. "What is there in Heaven or on earth, or beneath the earth," says St. Anselm, "that must not obey and be subject to those whom the Lord of all things has elected as His friends and adopted as His children?"

All material creatures have, therefore, been created for the use of man, because he, by nature, bears in his soul the image of God. How much more will not only they, but even all rational creatures, that are without grace, be subject to him, who, as partaker of the Divine nature, has been elevated infinitely above them? As man is the crown and glory of the earth, so the soul in the state of grace is the crown and the glory of Heaven and earth, of the entire creation. The Holy Scriptures say of the only-begotten Son of God, that all things were created for His sake, and all things in Heaven and on earth are destined for His honor and glory. But the adoptive children of God are, in a certain sense, one with Him; they reign with Him in the bosom of His heavenly Father and enjoy His undivided love and tenderness. They are, then, likewise, with the Son of God, the highest end and destiny of creation.

They are those, finally, who, by the supernatural strength of grace, despise all created things and rise above them, who battle with the world and conquer it. But if the world is conquered by them, then it must also serve and be subject to their dominion; and Christ Himself says: "*To him that shall overcome (the world) I will give to sit with Me in my throne: as I also have overcome, and am set down with my Father in His throne,¹ and I will give him a hidden manna . . . and a new name.*"²

2. True, in this life men in a state of grace have not the full enjoyment of their dominion and often seem to be the poorest and most desolate. But who would have recognized the King of the universe in the suffering Jesus, seeking in vain a shelter at Bethlehem? Who would have re-

¹ Apoc. iii. 21.

² Ibid. ii. 17.

cognized in the poor and indigent Virgin of Nazareth, when considering her humble cottage, the queen of all creation? Who would have considered the poor beggar Lazarus greater and richer than King Herod or the Emperor Tiberius? Truth is often veiled from our eyes; we must estimate it by faith, and by the Divine light. “*As long as the heir is a child,*” says the Apostle,¹ that is, as long as he lives in this valley of exile, “*he differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all.*” He himself is not conscious of his rights or riches, nor is he acknowledged as lord by men. But when he shall have entered the kingdom of his father, then his glory will be revealed, and the world will be confounded to behold, how the one who was the object of their greatest contempt secures the possession of all its riches, to enjoy them for all eternity.

It by no means follows from this that the Christian may already claim all the things of this world for himself, or may seize the property of any one, especially of the sinner. This is not the will of God. God, on the contrary, has so ordained it that every man on earth may acquire and possess property, and therefore His children, above all others, should religiously respect and maintain this right. Yea, they should despise the goods of this world, set them aside, and seek first the kingdom of God in the firm hope that, according to the words of our Saviour, all things will be added unto them. Besides, the things of this earth are too poor and miserable to be worthy of the love and desire of the children of God. Then only, when all creation, in the words of the Apostle, shall be delivered from the servitude of corruption and glorified by a heavenly light, when the new Heaven shall have descended upon earth and transformed it into a new Heaven and a glorious city of God—then only will creation be a worthy dwelling-place of the children of God, then they shall possess it and in it enjoy the glory of God.

¹ Gal. iv. 1.

But even now no barrier of proprietary rights can prohibit the children of God from the highest and truest enjoyment of creation. Though the rich accumulate lifeless gold and shining silks in their palaces and wardrobes ; though they alone be able to purchase works of art for large sums of money ; though they call fields and meadows their own and reap the fruits therefrom to convert them into money or to feed and delight their bodies, they can never withhold grand and glorious nature from even the poorest child. Even the poorest may step forth from his poor cottage, and everything great and beautiful that his eye beholds about him he may call his own, because it is a work of his heavenly Father. In every flower of the field, in every tree, he recognizes the image of his God's beauty, who has presented it to him as a token of His love. All living beings that inhabit the earth in such manifold diversity proclaim to him the power and love of his heavenly Father. He appreciates the true loveliness of all beauty, the true sweetness of all melodies of the birds in the air ; and thus he may call all things his own, because he can truly enjoy them.

The wealth of the child of God is not confined to earth ; he may raise his eyes to Heaven, consider the glorious splendor of the sun and of the stars, be absorbed in the contemplation of their immense space and distances, and exclaim with St. Ignatius : " How inferior does this earth appear, when I glance at the heavens ! " What delight must fill his heart to think that the countless luminous bodies, before which the whole earth, to say nothing of the wealth of a prince, appear as nothing, that they all are his own, are destined for his joy and glory, and that hereafter he shall throne with them, whilst all the wealth of this world is limited to a small earthly space !

Moreover, earthly wealth gives no man the power to control nature in the proper and full sense, and to make it subject to his desires. But in the case of many of His particularly beloved children, God has shown that grace can

give us a complete and unconditional power over living and lifeless things. The poor St. Francis, as often as he wished, called the birds of the air, and commanded them to sing the praises of God and delight him with their melodies, as long as he pleased. In the same manner St. Anthony of Padua one day, when the people would not listen to his sermons, standing on the seashore called a countless number of fish, who, obedient to his command, gathered together from all sides.

And we all should possess this dominion, as Adam possessed it in Paradise, if we had not in him lost original grace. Now we are to receive it again only in the future life, where all consequences of original sin will be removed. But since it is grace which merits for us heavenly glory and the gifts connected with it, it is always true that the grace of God makes us the lords over all things in the fullest sense of the word.

Even the privations that we must suffer in this life are by grace converted into heavenly riches. "*To them that love God,*" says the Apostle, ¹ "*all things work unto good.*" All that we want or give up for the sake of God and as His children, will be returned to us a hundred-fold, according to the promise of the Redeemer. As often again as we, either of our own free will, or by the ordinance of God, are deprived of anything, we resign, as it were, the right by which everything belongs to us, as children of God, and God Himself accepts it, as if we, out of filial love, had given Him something that belonged to us. Thus the earthly riches belong to us most when we renounce them, or according to God's wise Providence, do not possess or enjoy them; for then we dispose of them, as God Himself does; we return them to God when we acknowledge the property of other men according to His law.

Oh, how rich would we feel in all our poverty, how happy in all our misery, if in lively faith and according to the laws of eternal truth, we considered ourselves the kings of

¹ Rom. viii. 28.

this world ! Far from coveting our neighbor's goods, we should gladly content ourselves with our small possessions and even with the greatest poverty, since we know that in time all will be delivered unto us, and that now no one can possess and enjoy to his heart's satisfaction. Yea, we should gladly renounce temporal enjoyment and possession, lest this attracted our heart too much and thus rendered us unworthy of eternal possession.

TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Exceedingly Intimate Union with God, which Grace Effects in Us.

1.



WE have hitherto sought to explain the wonderful and mysterious union with God, the effect of grace, by comparison with the diverse bonds of union and attachment among men, and have always found that they all are incomparably less perfect and intimate than it. But we would conceal the sweetest and most sublime mystery, if we did not add that grace unites us to God by a higher and very peculiar kind of unity, since it causes us, in a very true and deep sense, to grow together into one being, one body, one spirit with Him.

All relations between father and son, husband and wife, are relations of kinship and mutual alliance only, not a real, permanent, and perfect union of the body; the relation of one friend to another is only a relation of mutual love and sentiment, not a real union of spirits. And indeed, the unity of two created human persons cannot be more intimate, since both, being finite and limited, cannot interpenetrate each other. God, however, in His infinite unity and perfection, can so unite Himself to angels and men, as the fire is united to the body, heated and illuminated by it, as the soul is united to the body, which is vivified by it. The creature, without ceasing to be distinct from God, is made one with Him in a singular manner, as in man, soul and body, the head and members are one. This is the full and entire meaning of the Apostle, when he says:¹ “*He who is joined to the Lord, is one spirit,*” one

¹ I. Cor. vi. 17.

spirit not only in the unity of sentiment and affection, but in the unity of life and being. This is that sublime unity to which the Son of God referred when He prayed to His Father after the Last Supper : “ *The glory which Thou hast given Me, I have given to them ; that they may be one, as we also are one ; I in them, and Thou in Me ; that they may be made perfect in one ;* ”¹ and just before He had prayed to the Father for the same unity in the words : “ *Not for them only do I pray, but for those also, who through their word shall believe in Me : that they may be all one, as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee ; that they also may be one in us ; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me.* ”² The ineffable unity of nature and being, which God the Son has with the Father, is, according to His express and oft-repeated teaching, the true type and the foundation of our unity with God. But the Son is not only kindred or similar to the Father, but is one with Him, as the branch is one with the tree, the ray of light with the light itself, the brook with the fountain. So we too shall be one with God, if not in the same perfect, at least in a similar manner, not only by relationship or similarity, but by so intimate a union, that we form, as it were, one being with God.

For a better explanation of this, St. Cyril of Alexandria teaches, that after the image of the unity which exists in the Blessed Trinity, we are to enjoy a twofold, true, and real unity with God, of which the one represents and brings with it the other ; viz., the unity of the Spirit with the Son of God in His Divine nature, and the unity of body with Him in His human nature. In His human nature the Son of God unites us in truth, and not only in imagination or affection, but in reality unites us in one mystical body, of which He is the head, and in the same manner He will make our soul one spirit with His Divinity.

2. Let us, then, first consider our union with the sacred humanity of Christ, and let us hear upon this subject St. Chrysostom : “ *We being many, are one bread, one*

¹ John xvii. 22, 23.

² Ibid. 20-21.

body,'¹ says the Apostle. Why do I still speak of a participation of union? We are ourselves the body of Christ. For what is the bread upon the altar? The body of Christ. And what do they become, that receive it? The body of Christ; not many bodies, but one body. As the bread is a whole composed of many grains, and the separate grains nowhere appear, and in their union do not show the distinction, though they continue to exist, so we are united amongst ourselves and with Christ. For you are not nourished by one body, and another one by another body, but all by the same body. And therefore the Apostle adds: *We all are partakers of the same bread; but of this we all are made one body.*"

St. Cyril himself, however, explains his idea in the following manner: "Let some one tell us the virtue and significance of the mystical sacrament. For what reason is it inserted in us? Is it not for the purpose that it may cause Christ to live in reality in us by the reception and the communion of His sacred body? For St. Paul writes:² *'The Gentiles should be fellow-heirs and of the same body and co-partners in Christ Jesus.'* But how are they of the same body? By being honored with the reception of the Holy Sacrament, they are made one body with Him, as each one of the holy Apostles. For with what other reason has the Apostle called his own members, or rather those of all Christians, members of Christ? *'Know you not, that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I, then, take the members of Christ, and make them the members of a harlot?'*³ And our Saviour Himself says: *'He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, abideth in Me and I in Him.'* Here it is of importance to notice that Christ will be in us, according to His own words, not merely by a certain relation of love, or a certain feeling, but by a real union. For as two pieces of wax, placed and molten together, are made *one* whole, so we are united to Christ by the reception of His body and blood and He at the same time with us."

¹ I. Cor. x. 17.² Eph. iii. 6.³ I. Cor. vi. 15.

The natural bread is also united with the body of him that partakes of it. But since it is a dead and perishable bread, it cannot convert the bodies of the partakers into its own substance and unite them with itself into one body. The body of Christ, however, is one living, undivided, imperishable bread, and, therefore, it unites with itself the bodies of those who receive it, makes them its members, and fills them with the plenitude of Divine life. It nourishes us, as the vine feeds with its sap the branches united with it, penetrates and vivifies them with its own vitality. And so the same union exists between us and Christ, mystically and supernaturally, that exists between the head and members, between the trunk and the branches.

3. Now, the union of our body with the body of Christ is only the means and the figure of that union which grace establishes between our soul and the Divinity. We are made one spirit with God, as truly and really as the body of which Christ is the Head must be vivified by the same Spirit in whom the Son of God lives.

Let this also be explained by St. Cyril: "Of the spiritual unity, however, we will, following the same course, say, that we all are in a certain manner mixed with each other and united to one whole by receiving the same Holy Spirit. For although, taken singly, we are many, and Christ inserts His and His Father's Spirit into the heart of each, yet this Spirit is one and indivisible, and, therefore, so unites the spirits of men which are separate in themselves, that in Him they all appear as one spirit. For as the power of the body of Christ renders all those who receive it one body, so the Spirit of God, in the same manner, by His indwelling, leads all to this spiritual unity. Therefore, St. Paul tells us: '*Support one another in charity, careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; one body, and one spirit, as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all.*' For, if the one Spirit dwells in us, the

Father of all will be in us, and as God will, through His Son, unite those that partake of the same Holy Spirit.”

We are, then, truly made *one* spirit with God, not as if the substance of our soul ceased to exist, but because it is so intimately united with God, as if in a certain manner it formed one whole. In the human body, too, the members are substantially distinct from the head, and the soul from the body. Yet they are really one, because they form a whole, and cannot exist separate. We are made one with God, because, in the words of the Saviour, *we abide in Him and He in us*. As the iron is in the fire, and the fire in it, as the fire entirely absorbs the iron and consumes it, as it were, so that they no longer appear to be distinct, so the fire of the Divinity penetrates our soul, and receives it so entirely, that it seems to be God Himself.

4. This explains more fully, and throws still more light upon what we have said in the first book of the *deification of the soul*. There it was remarked that our soul was deified by a supernatural similarity with God; here we add to this similarity the mystical union with God, which is inseparable from it.

The deification of the creature in its entirety consists not only in the greatest possible similarity with God, but also in an exceedingly intimate union with Him. For as the creature, by rising above itself to God, receives a deiform condition and loses its imperfections, so in the supernatural union with God, it casts off its natural solitariness and self-dependence, to exist no longer in itself and for itself, but in God and for God. Thus we distinguish in the sacred humanity of Christ a twofold deification: the one consists in its personal union with the Eternal Word, the other in its glorification by the communication of Divine grace and splendor. True, we are not united to one person with God so perfectly as the humanity of Christ, but nevertheless this union is so intimate, that supernaturally we really exist in God and for God, and that this union can find its model only in the union that exists between the Divinity and humanity in Christ.

Moreover, the deification of the soul by similarity with God pre-supposes the deification by union, and is attendant upon it. For as the branch is similar to the vine and partakes of its life only because it is of the vine, and forms one whole with it, so we are made perfectly similar to God and partakers of His life, only by being received supernaturally into His bosom, and forming one whole with it. But as the branch is completely taken up by the tree, and exists no longer in itself and for itself, but belongs to the tree, so we, in a manner, are absorbed in God, existing no longer for ourselves, but for Him and in Him ; it is no longer we who live, but it is God, who exists and lives in us. Thus that great mystery is prepared and begun in us, which, according to the words of the Apostle, will form the highest perfection of created nature, that *God will be all in all*. God is all in us, not only because He has created us, not only because our whole nature and being is dependent on Him, not only because we are His, as the work of His hands, and reveal His glory, but because He has drawn us entirely into Himself, and poured Himself out in us, because He absorbs us, and unites us to Himself as a drop of water is dissolved by a stream of wine, because He has, as it were, inserted us in Himself, and bears us in His bosom as His only-begotten Son, with whom He is perfectly one.

Let us not fear to lose ourselves in this ineffable union with God. We are lost in an unfathomable abyss, but an abyss not of annihilation and darkness, but of the greatest glory and happiness. We lose ourselves to find ourselves again in God, or rather to find God Himself, with His whole glory and beatitude. For the more we are God's the more He is ours ; the more we live in Him and for Him, the more He lives in us, and for us. Is the branch lost when it is ingrafted upon a superior tree and imbibes the same life from the same root, whilst, separated from it and left to itself, it would either wither, or as a wild tree wear out a stunted life ? It can now not only

boast of the life which it draws from the tree, but of the life and perfection which the root and trunk possess for themselves. So may we, united to God by grace, not only derive for our portion a ray of Divine glory, a small stream of Divine life, and direct it into our soul, but may consider the Divine Sun itself, the fountain of Divine life, as our own, and rejoice at the perfections of God, as if they were ours. Hence, by the very fact that we are deified in a twofold manner, we also partake in a twofold manner of the Divine beatitude ; first by beholding the beauty and bliss of God, as He Himself beholds and enjoys it, and again, by possessing this glory and bliss in a similar manner by grace and calling it our own, as God possesses it and calls it His own in virtue of His nature.

5. Is not that, Christian reader, the highest degree of sublime dignity to which the almighty grace of God can elevate man ? Can human reason comprehend the honor conferred upon us, when we are made one body with Christ, one spirit with God ? Can the human heart bear the transporting delight, when it learns that its members are members of Christ, that its spirit is melted together with the Divine Spirit ?

And with what love towards God should we be inflamed, when we behold ourselves so intimately united to Him ! Though the love be great which unites persons by likeness or kindred, that love is undoubtedly greater and more intimate which unites, with indissoluble ties, the different parts that form a whole, as the head and members, the soul and body. For in such a case there exists, as the Apostle explains so beautifully,¹ the most intimate and indivisible unity and communion : “ *All members are mutually careful one for another. And if one member suffer any thing, all the members suffer with it : or if one member glory, all the members rejoice with it,*” since each loves itself in the others, and the others in itself. How, then, should we not love Christ, whose body and members we

¹ I. Cor. xii. 25, 26.

are, who is the Head infinitely more dignified and beatifying than that of our body! How ought we not to love the Holy Ghost, who vivifies our soul more than it does our body!

The soul is rendered so dear to the body by the intimate and living union with Him, that both separate in death only with the greatest pains, though the soul does not raise the body above the defects of its nature. But as the union with God deifies the soul, and immerses it entirely in the ocean of Divine glory and happiness, and as a union of spirit to spirit is far more intimate than that of the soul with the body, must it not bind us to God with even stronger ties? Must we not endeavor to preserve it with greater care and trouble and be unspeakably grieved if not external violence, but our own will divides and destroys this union with the sword of sin?

If a spirit, created outside of the body, and perfect in every respect, would of its own accord, and out of pure compassion, unite itself to a body that lay lifeless and exposed to decay, in order to be made one with it, to give it life and motion and preserve it from impending dissolution, with how much love and gratitude ought this body, if it were capable of acknowledging the benefit, to embrace the spirit! But what were the condescension of this spirit, compared to the mercy that God shows us, when He Himself enters our naked, helpless, and miserable soul, and speaks in its hearing the blessed word, "live," which in a moment produces in it a blissful beauty and immortality? Yet, where is our gratitude that we exhibit in turn—where our love, by which we reward Him? Where may we find a thousand tongues and hearts to praise and love so merciful a Father?

Since we are one body with Christ, and one spirit with God, and we abide in God and He in us, we should also live in God and let Him live and act in us, that we may say with the Apostle: "*I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me.*"¹ For all members of the body live from the

¹ Gal. ii. 20.

life of the head, and the heart lives from the life of the soul, that is one with it. The Divine heart of Jesus Christ, from which courses the vivifying sap of the precious blood through His sacred body, and which contains in itself the plenitude of the Holy Spirit and of Divine life, is the hearth and the fountain likewise for His whole mystical body, that we may all be one heart and one soul with Him. As the single members have not each a heart of their own, but all draw the vital fluid from one heart, so we should give up our own heart, immerse it in the Divine heart of Jesus, and weld it to Him, that it may beat and act only in Him, seek its nourishment in Him, live from Him and in Him.

Oh, what a heavenly life will then be developed in our heart, if it dies to itself, is absorbed by the Divine heart of Jesus, and feels no longer its own pulsation and impulses, but those of God; when that happens to us in a mystical, yet on that account, very real manner, what our Saviour has miraculously revealed to several of His saints, namely, that He took their heart out of their breast, and placed His own in its stead!

We esteem ourselves happy when we possess and may preserve the heart of a dear friend, of a great man, or of a saint, after his death; overjoyed we should be, if we might carry it with us, not dead, but alive, and might receive it into our breast, into our own heart. And should we not ardently desire to introduce into our breast the Divine heart of Jesus, which will communicate its own life to us, and to let it take the place of our poor and miserable heart, which only exhausts itself by its beating and must soon fall to dust? How can our heart object to this union and transformation, and prefer its own miserable life to the Divine life? Oh, Jesus, tear my heart away from itself with holy force, though it suffer and bleed ever so much, that it may not hate Thee by perverse love of itself and that it may love itself so truly and recover itself in Thee! Soften its hardness by the fire of Thy

heart, that it may be melted into it, and as molten wax receives the seal, may receive the impress of Thine image !

6. The union with God and Christ by grace, moreover, has that sublime advantage, that we are made *one body and one spirit*, not only with Christ and God Himself, but *with the saints and just persons*. These all are likewise one body with Christ, and one spirit with God ; with them we form one great body, of which Christ is the Head, and which is vivified by the Spirit of God. “ *One body, one Spirit,*”¹ says the Apostle. “ *We being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.*”² “ *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female ; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*”³ Here all distinctions of persons that exist among men disappear, for all are melted together into one great whole, as the grains of wheat in the bread. Even the great distinction of nature, which separates us from the angels, is lost sight of, for we, as well as they, are made one spirit with God, and in our body, by which we are inferior to them, we are made one body with Christ.

With this union in God we should also represent among ourselves the exceedingly intimate union which unites God the Father with the Son in the Holy Ghost. The same Holy Spirit, which, according to St. Augustine, is the bond of union between the Father and the Son, likewise embraces us all and unites us very intimately with each other, as the soul unites the different members of the body. As a golden chain, He links us to God and Christ, but likewise with all the choirs of the blessed spirits, with the band of apostles, and the legions of all holy martyrs, confessors, and virgins. In Him we all cohere, penetrate each other, and belong one to another.

What a happiness to belong to this immense, intimate communion of saints and in it to possess, conjointly with the countless number of saints, their glory and happiness !

¹ Eph. iv. 4.

² Rom. xii. 5.

³ Gal. iii. 28.

For though each member of a body have its peculiar qualities, yet these, in virtue of its union with the body, belong likewise to the whole body, and to all other members. Thus we may rejoice at the wisdom of the Cherubs, the burning love of the Seraphs, the dignity of the apostles, the fortitude of the martyrs, the gift of foreknowledge possessed by the prophets, the miracles of the confessors, the purity of the virgins—we may boast of all this as if it were our own, because all proceeds from the same Spirit, who also dwells in us, and belongs to us also as members of the same body. If, therefore, the possession of the body of one saint is so dear to us, how dear and cherished ought we to hold this living, intimate union and association in the Spirit of God.

But how much are they also to be pitied, who by a blind and perverse passion suffer themselves to be separated from this so honorable, dignified, amiable, and sweet society, to unite with the enemies of God, the outcasts of mankind, and the inhabitants of hell! O deep and unhappy fall! They were precious rings on the hand of God, from which they received their dignity and splendor, and now they have cast themselves into the deepest filth and mire. They were artistically and Divinely-wrought links in the golden chain of saints, and by their union with the other parts enhanced their own beauty and value; and now they are fettered to one chain with the fratricide Cain and the traitor Judas; they were precious jewels in the crown that adorns the head of God, and now they are the prey of the devil, who has defiled and polluted them and inserted them in his terrible crown of victory.

Let us not be so cruel to ourselves as to sever our soul from grace and from the communion of saints by a mortal sin, but rather endeavor to maintain this union at any price. Let us use every endeavor "*to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,*" as the Apostle exhorts us.¹ Let us thus represent among ourselves that

¹ Eph. iv. 3.

sublime unity which the Son possesses with His Father. Let us unite ourselves ever more closely with God and His saints, that we may always become more and more worthy of their society, and that the tie which binds them to us may be drawn closer each day. Let us love our neighbor as ourselves, in God and Christ, as a member of the same body, and strive to unite him also more closely to Christ, our Head, to the Holy Spirit, and thus also to ourselves. In this manner we shall co-operate in the great work which is the end of all creation, namely, that, as the Apostle says, God may be all in all, and that we may enjoy that unspeakable happiness which the perfect unity with God and the saints alone can give us.

For by this unity the joy which we shall experience in the beatific vision in Heaven is multiplied manifold and infinitely increased. Hear St. Anselm, how in holy ecstasy he describes this: "Human heart," says he, "poor heart that suffers so many tribulations, aye, is inundated with sufferings, how would you rejoice, if you possessed all things that are prepared for you in Heaven! Ask your innermost self whether it could comprehend its joy at such great happiness. Yet, certainly, if another, whom you loved as yourself, possessed the same happiness as you, your joy would be doubled, as you rejoice no less at his fortune than at your own. But if two or three or many more enjoyed the same good fortune, you would rejoice for each individually, as much as for yourself, if you loved each of them as yourself. In that perfect love, then, of numberless angels and saints, where one loves another no less than himself, every one will rejoice for all others individually as much as for himself. If the heart of man cannot comprehend the joy of so great a good, how will it be wide enough for so many and so great joys? And indeed, since each rejoices as much at the fortune of another as he loves him, they all, loving God in that perfect happiness, incomparably more than themselves and all others, will also rejoice more at the happiness of God than at their own and that of all others

with them. But if they so love God with their whole heart, their whole soul, and their whole mind, that nevertheless the whole heart, the whole mind, and the whole soul will not satisfy the worthiness and dignity of the love, they will certainly so rejoice with their whole heart, their whole mind, their whole soul, that the whole heart, mind, and soul will not suffice for the fulness of joy. My Lord and my God, my Hope and the Joy of my heart, tell my soul whether this is the joy of which Thou didst say, through Thy Son: '*Ask and you shall receive; that your joy may be filled.*' For I have found a joy that is full, and more than full. For if the heart, the mind, the soul, and the whole man is filled, a superabundance of joy will still remain. That joy, then, will not fully enter in the rejoicing, but the rejoicing will fully enter into the joy."¹

Christian soul, if you read and consider these enchanting words, must not your heart kindle with a burning desire to enter into the communion of God and His saints? Must it not be filled with an ardent gratitude to God, who, by His glorious grace, has destined you to such intimate and sublime union with Himself and His saints? Oh, consider this sweet truth very frequently, meditate upon it unceasingly, and you will certainly not so frivolously lose the treasure of grace by a mortal sin.

¹ Prosl. cap. 25, 26.

Third Book.

On the Effects and Fruits of Grace.

FIRST CHAPTER.

Light, a Symbol of Grace.

1.

IN the foregoing book we have considered the supernatural and mysterious union with God which grace produces in us. We have seen that it makes us the living temple of the Holy Ghost and of the Blessed Trinity and produces a Divine life in our soul, confers upon our soul, moreover, the unspeakably high dignity of a child, a friend, a spouse of God, appoints it with all corresponding privileges and qualities, and finally even makes us one body and one spirit with Christ and God. We must now proceed to examine more particularly the effects and fruits which grace produces in the soul. If until now every view taken of it has revealed to us new wonders and glories, we may rest assured that its wealth is inexhaustible and will hereafter still more attract and fascinate our attention and admiration.

Yet we shall first endeavor to render all the foregoing and the following yet clearer, by representing, in imitation of Holy Scripture and the holy Fathers, material light as an image of grace, as we have already represented it in some respects.

2. As the material light is sometimes called the grace of

the sun, so the holy Fathers call grace the light of God. The material sun, too, is the most sublime image of God Himself, who is for the spiritual world what the sun is for the material world. God is the Sun of justice and eternal truth, of the highest beauty and of infinite love, of the purest sanctity and most perfect beatitude: "*God is light, and in Him there is no darkness,*" says St. John.¹

The Divine nature itself is purest light. But if by grace this nature is communicated to us, then grace must also be a light, a light streaming forth from the innermost being of God, that illumines our soul, glorifies it, and transforms it from glory to glory into the image of God. And if God, because He is light Himself, is likewise, according to the words of St. James, "*the Father of lights,*" from whom cometh "*every best gift and every perfect gift,*"² grace, as the best and perfect gift, is also the purest and sublimest of lights, whose Father is God. It is that light by which we are introduced into the inaccessible light of God, which reveals to us the glory of God in all its depth, and lets us behold it unveiled face to face.

By grace we are born of the light of God and the fire of the Holy Ghost; we are made "*children of light*" and children of God, and are therefore also called light as God is called: "*You were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord.*"³ Therefore St. Peter says to the souls in grace: "*You are a chosen generation; . . . that you may declare His virtues, who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.*"⁴

So strikingly true and so beautiful is the image of light, that we can scarcely speak of grace without calling it the light of grace, and the language of the Church therefore regularly uses this term. The Roman Catechism cannot explain grace better for us than by saying: "*It is, as it were, a brilliant light, that effaces all those stains which obscure the lustre of the soul, and invests it with increased brightness and beauty,*"⁵ and the holy Fathers call baptism,

¹ I. John i. 5. ² James i. 17. ³ Eph. v. 8. ⁴ I. Peter ii. 9. ⁵ De Capt. n. 59.

in which we are for the first time regenerated by grace, the Sacrament of Illumination, or simply the Illumination.

Light is indeed, among all things that we perceive by the senses, the purest, most beautiful, lovely, and sublime ; and though by it we perceive all other things, it is itself so mysterious in nature and being, that no one has ever yet comprehended it, and we are able to say rather what it is not than what it is. Though it is in material bodies, it is in a manner spiritual, as it is limited to no place, pervades all space, penetrates and brings together the most remote bodies, and, as it were, vivifies all nature. In the same manner grace is something Divinely spiritual, an emanation of the Divine nature and glory ; and as this nature, though present to all things and revealing itself in all, cannot be fathomed in itself, so grace likewise is an unfathomable abyss of beauty and glory.

3. If, then, material light is so rich in superior and glorious qualities, that we cannot find sufficient words to describe it, how much more praiseworthy and incomprehensible, then, must grace be in all its richness ! Light always was and is still studied with admiration by scientists, and praised in the enraptured songs of poets : they call it the bloom of colors, the beauty of the world, the smile of Heaven, the joy of nature, the image of God, the life of all things, the delight of eye and soul, the encircling bond of the universe. Its first and principal praise, however, consists in its having been the first ornament of the world in creation, which dispelled chaotic darkness and disorder on earth and was therefore praised by the Creator Himself as a great good. All the qualities, however, that render the natural light beautiful and grateful, are found in a far superior and more admirable degree in grace.

Light gives life to the various colors, and without light they would be dead and nothing ; pearls could not be distinguished from ordinary pebbles, nor purple from common dye : so without grace all created spirits, the souls of

men and the angels of Heaven, are shrouded in death-like darkness ; they are, according to the expression of St. Augustine, still without figure and form, “ *they find no consideration with God,*” and are as if they were not, until, enlivened by grace, they appear before the eye of God in beauteous form and splendid adornment.

Light is an emanation from the most perfect body, the sun ; grace, however, is an emanation from the most perfect Spirit, the Divine spiritual Sun, which has created the material sun out of nothing and placed it in the heavens as a faint image of its glory. The material sun makes the planets, that are dark in themselves, bright stars ; but grace makes the souls in the spiritual heavens, spiritual stars, that shine far more brilliantly than the material stars, as the prophet Daniel says : “ *They shall shine as stars for all eternity.*”¹ Material light converts a pure mirror or a clear crystal into an image of the material sun, so that it appears as the sun itself ; grace, however, not only communicates to us the splendor of the Divine sun, but encircles us with it, as with a crown, and introduces us into its innermost being.

What is more beautiful, radiant, and bright than a mirror, though by nature so fragile and worthless, when it suddenly receives and reflects the whole splendor of the sun ? Although we now little esteem the beauty of this phenomenon, being so accustomed to it, it would certainly delight our sense and mind if we could see it but once or twice. But the brilliancy of the mirror is scarcely a shadow of the majesty of the soul, which receives with grace not only the image of God, but God Himself, and is filled and surrounded by all that is beautiful and glorious in Him.

4. The following effects of light have at all times been mentioned as the most conspicuous : it penetrates, illumines, heats, inflames, enlivens, expands, elevates, and pictures ; all these are likewise the effects of grace, but in an infinitely higher degree and larger measure.

¹ Dan. xii. 3.

Light *penetrates* and transforms the transparent bodies to which it is communicated. Every other ornament, as agreeable colors, gold, and jewelry, can adorn bodies only exteriorly, but cannot communicate brightness and beauty to the interior. So in the case of man : riches, honors, corporal beauty, even the natural spiritual gifts, that distinguish one from another, as learning, and what is generally called education, all these are but exterior adornments, that touch but the surface, and not the innermost nature of the soul. Grace, however, as a Divine light, penetrates the soul in every direction, in all its parts and faculties, unto the deepest and innermost bottom of its being, and transforms it with heavenly beauty and Divine splendor.

Light *illuminates* the eye and fills it with images of external things, regardless of their degree of proximity. It alone shows us the form and nature of those things whose impressions we receive through the other senses. It carries our perception so far as no other sense can, far beyond the limits of the earth, into the most distant stars of the firmament. Grace does likewise. It illuminates the eye of our soul, or rather grants it a new organ of vision by which it may behold a new world. By reason we only perceive the exterior side of truth ; we perceive by it only a reflex of eternal truth in the created world, only its effects and rays, but not this eternal truth itself in its innermost nature. The light of grace, however, causes us to see now by faith, but hereafter by vision, the invisible world in the bosom of God, from which this visible world was produced. He sees the least reason of this visible world, and perceives truth itself in its substance. It introduces us even into the bosom of God, into its inaccessible light, to let us look into the deepest mysteries of His heart, which only the Eternal Father and His only-begotten Son, who dwells in His bosom, and the Holy Spirit, who searches the profound things of God, can, in virtue of their nature, behold. For by it God Himself shines, according to the words of the Apostle: "*God, who*

*commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath Himself shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Christ Jesus.”*¹

Light *heats* and *inflames* bodies, for in its essence it is one with heat, and when it is apparently without heat, it is only because of its imperfect communication. As with the material sun so with the Divine sun, light and heat are inseparably united and perfectly one; from the light of the Father and the Son proceeds the fire of the Holy Ghost, the Divine flame of love. And so God kindles in our hearts not only the light of faith, but by it also the grateful and blessed fire of His Divine love.

The light of the sun *calls forth* and preserves life in all nature. When the sun during the night disappears for a short time, all life is dormant upon earth: the flower-cups close, the song of birds is hushed, all strength grows tired, and all life anxiously awaits the coming morn. If the sun retires in winter and but sparingly sheds its blessings, then the life of plants decays altogether, field and meadow are converted into a bleak and barren desert, until returning spring brings new life with the full blessing of the sun. Far more powerful is the action of grace in the soul. Without grace the soul possesses not even the germs of that heavenly life to which God has called us. But by grace it is converted into a magnificent paradise, that blooms in eternal spring, knows no night nor winter, always buds forth new blossoms, without withering the first, and by the brilliancy of its colors, and the fragrance of its flowers, enchants the eye and heart of God. We alone are in fault, if on account of our lukewarmness night sometimes reigns in us, or if perhaps even a cold winter withdraws from us the heat of Divine love.

Light *expands* metals by its heat. Light expands the air and makes it elastic, until it extends ever more into the indefinite realms of space. But grace still more expands the narrow vessel of our soul, and renders it ever more ca-

¹ II. Cor. iv. 6.

pable of receiving new and greater treasures of grace, and an ocean of Divine happiness, yea capable of containing, as a temple, the greatness and infiniteness of God, and embracing Him with the arms of its love. Grace infinitely expands and increases the elasticity of our soul, so that it extends its activity far beyond the limits of its natural abilities, desires and undertakes ever greater things, until the whole world is too narrow a field for its activity, and God alone in His infiniteness can fully satisfy it.

The action of light *elevates* the warmed air from earth towards the heavens ; the action of light causes the plant to rise from the bosom of the earth, and turn itself towards the source of light, to bask in it, drink in its blissful rays, and unite with it. Grace likewise raises our soul to the Divine sun, and causes it to turn with ardent desire towards this source of light. It even really unites the soul with God, transports it from earth to Heaven, and transplants it into the bosom of the Divine Sun.

Light, finally, *pictures* the truest forms. Under the influence of the sun plants express in themselves the true picture of the Creator's idea and plan of their nature and being. There is no truer and more lifelike picture of man than that which light exhibits of him in the mirror ; and even human art, with all the means at its disposal, cannot produce a more perfect picture than that which it causes to be reflected by light upon an artificially prepared plate. In a similar manner God cannot produce in us a more perfect picture of Himself, than by the light of grace. In nature He has fashioned His numerous and various images according to a certain measure, and therefore they are not perfect representations of Himself. By grace, however, the light of His nature streams into our soul as into a mirror, acts with its whole force, and thus produces not merely an outline or a sketch, but a complete, true, and living image of His being.

5. We might thus go on illustrating the glories of grace by the properties of material light ; for it is the symbol of

everything good and beautiful, of everything that is amiable, mild, kind, meek, refreshing, blissful, pure, holy, and perfect, comforting, radiant, and glorious. And the more we delight in its countless beauties and admire them, the more will we be delighted by its ideal, invisible to the corporeal eye, but visible to the eye of faith, especially when we see that the symbol and figure is infinitely inferior to its ideal.

If, then, material light is so dear and precious to us, that we should consider its loss more dreadful almost than death, ought we not to entertain an infinitely greater esteem and love for the light of grace? Tobias certainly found it a severe trial, when, as Holy Scripture relates, after the warm dung had fallen from the swallow's nest into his eye, he sat in darkness, and could no longer behold the light of Heaven. But is not he infinitely more miserable, who by a mortal sin is separated from the immortal light of God, cast into deepest spiritual darkness, gropes about without light, everywhere stumbles and falls, is precipitated into the most frightful abysses, and, repulsed from the sight of God, nowhere finds peace and joy? Tobias in his bodily blindness preserved the light of grace, and could, therefore, endure the material darkness not only patiently but joyfully, confident that his eyesight also would be restored by God, either on earth or at least in Heaven. The sinner, however, unless he is converted, has no hope ever again to receive the light of grace, and must fear that he will lose in the darkness of hell even his natural sight, or if he retains it, that he will be permitted to see nothing but what redounds to his terror and sufferings.

When St. Francis of Borgia once celebrated the holy mysteries in a city of Portugal, the sun was suddenly covered with such darkness that the stars could be seen in midday. All the inhabitants were so terrified that, supposing the day of judgment to have come, they filled the whole city with cries and lamentations, left their houses, and as to a last place of refuge, fled to the church,

where they expected security from the protection of the saint. But when even there they ceased not to weep and lament, St. Francis, after the Gospel, turned towards them and addressed them an eloquent discourse. He reminded them, that if this brief and not unusual eclipse of the created sun caused them such alarm and terror, how carefully and zealously they ought to endeavor to prevent the splendor of the Divine Sun from forever disappearing from them; that they were, however, deprived of this true heavenly light by every mortal sin, and that the consequent evils were indeed inestimable and indescribable.

We ourselves notice, during an eclipse, how all nature is terrified, the birds fly about uneasily, animals seek a safe retreat, and we should likewise be seized with nameless terror, if we did not know that the sun is not extinct, but only hidden, and will soon again shine in full splendor. Oh, that we too were terrified at the mere idea of closing our heart by a mortal sin against the sun of grace, and perhaps of extinguishing its light in us forever and without the possibility of ever beholding it again!

6. That we may, however, always preserve in us the heavenly light of grace, and render ourselves ever more accessible to it, we must cleanse our soul from all filth and uncleanness. As little as light can be reflected by a mirror that is not smooth and pure, or a body may be rendered translucent when it is dark and opaque, so little can grace penetrate and fill a soul that is not cleansed from the filth of sin, and open to its rays as a clear crystal. The less we cover our soul with venial sins as with dust, the less we stain it by too great attachment to earthly or sensual or even sinful things, the more will grace pour its heavenly light into the soul and reveal its Divine splendor. Therefore our Lord says: "*Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.*"

About the manner in which we should preserve the light of grace in our soul, St. Chrysostom¹ instructs us, when

¹ In I. Thess. hom. xi,

he explains the words of the Apostle : “ ‘ *Extinguish not the spirit.*’ A thick darkness and a heavy cloud covers the whole earth, what St. Paul expresses in the words : ‘ *You were heretofore darkness.*’ Since, then, it is night, and a night not illuminated by the light of the moon, and since we must walk in this night, God has given us a bright lamp, by kindling in our hearts the grace of the Holy Spirit. But this light some, after receiving it, have rendered more shining, bright, and cheerful, as Peter, Paul, and all the other saints ; others, however, have extinguished it, as the foolish virgins, as those that have suffered shipwreck in their faith, the incestuous adulterer, and the apostate Galatians. Therefore, now, St. Paul says : ‘ Extinguish not the spirit,’ for thus he habitually calls the grace of the Holy Spirit. This grace, however, is extinguished by an unclean life. For as he extinguishes a lamp, who pours into it water or earth, or only takes out the oil, so it is with grace. If you throw upon it the love for idle and transitory things, you extinguish the spirit. Or if from other quarters there blows the wind of a severe temptation, if the flame is not strong, or has but little oil, or the opening of the lantern is not secured, or the door of the house not closed, all will be in vain. But which is this opening ? This opening in us is our eyes and ears ; do not permit a high wind to enter through them, which will blow out the light, but close these openings with the fear of the Lord. The mouth is the door ; lock and bolt it, so that it may protect the light and ward off every irruption from without. For instance, another has insulted or cursed you : Close the door of the mouth ; for if you open it you will cause a draft of wind. Do you not see that when two opposite doors in a house stand open and a strong wind is blowing, that the wind loses its greatest force and can effect nothing, as soon as you close one door and cut off the draft ? In the same manner there are two doors here, your mouth and the mouth of him who assaults you with affront and contumely. If you close your door and do not

let the wind pass through, the whole storm is at an end ; but if you open it, the storm cannot be checked. Let us then not extinguish the Spirit.

“ It often happens, however, that the flame is extinguished, even though there be no blast from without. When the oil fails, that is, when we give no alms, the Spirit is extinguished ; for He comes to you as an alms of God, and if He does not see in you the fruit of almsgiving, He flies away again, since He cannot remain in an uncharitable soul.

“ But when the Spirit is once extinct, the consequence is known to all who have ever wandered about in a moonless night. Yet if it is difficult to find the way from one part of the earth to the other in the night-time, is it, then, safe to ascend by night the way that leads from earth to Heaven ? Do you not know how many devils, how many wild beasts, how many wicked spirits infest this way ? If we have the light of grace, they will not be able to harm us ; but if we have extinguished it, they will soon destroy us and take away all our possessions. The robbers, likewise, are wont first to extinguish the lantern ; and they are able to see in this darkness, because they practise the deeds of darkness, whilst we are not accustomed to the light of darkness.”

SECOND CHAPTER.

The Wonderful Power which Grace has to Destroy Mortal Sin in us.

1.

THE first effect of the light of grace, when it is infused in regeneration, is to destroy the terrible darkness of mortal sin. Grace is not only inexhaustibly fruitful in heavenly gifts and blessings; it is equally powerful and strong in dispelling the evils, and, therefore, the soul possessing grace is compared in the Canticle of Canticles to an army set in array and to the horsemen of Pharaoh.

The remedies for bodily evils owe their special value, not to their precious substance, nor to their agreeable odor, taste, or aspect, since they are often cheap, of ugly appearance, of bitter taste, and disagreeable smell; but they are appreciated on account of their intrinsic remedial power, for which they are sought in the bowels of the earth and the sea, and are brought from the most distant countries. Grace, however, as a remedy is doubly precious; first, because it contains infinite and heavenly qualities, and then because its wonderful curative power conquers all disease and death, and victoriously and infallibly destroys the greatest of all evils, which alone appropriately deserves this name and can be remedied by no other power in Heaven or on earth.

*“Understand, ye senseless among the people; and you fools, be wise at last.”*¹ Your sensuality, your anger, your concupiscence deceive you, when, contrary to the words of the Holy Ghost, they tell you that poverty, voluntary or in-

¹ Ps. xciii. 8.

voluntary privation, sufferings, insults, and even death, separate and apart from an offense of God, are true evils. Sin alone cannot be good, whilst every other thing may be beneficial to us and honorable to God. Sin alone cannot be given or produced by God, whilst everything else may be loved and esteemed by Him and may be conferred by His hand as a precious blessing. When the Son of God, who certainly is able to appreciate the truly good and the truly evil, came into this world to destroy evil and to obtain and grant us the good, He assumed unto Himself all else, endured all suffering and ignominy, was made like unto us in all things, except sin. This alone He detested with His whole heart, offered for its destruction His whole life, His precious blood, and would bear all other evils, only to liberate us from this one evil.

Yet even if we conceded that those things are evils, which deprive us of life or other temporal benefits, sin is yet beyond comparison the greatest evil, since it deprives us entirely and forever of the highest and infinite good, God Himself; it is a monster so hideously terrible that all other evils disappear before it as a mere nothing.

Moreover, sin is the source and fountain of all other evils that have ever visited and shall ever visit this earth, such as diseases, great plagues, famine, and death. All the bloodshed of millions of men in so many terrible wars, all the pestilential diseases that have laid waste whole countries, in a word, all the evils that the earth has borne since the fall of Adam, all that we now fear, and see, and hear, and experience, is a terrible fruit of that sin. That one cruel drop of poison of that one sin has infected and poisoned the whole human race with all evils.

2. And for this horrible poison there is no other remedy than the blood of the God-man and its fruit and power, the Divine grace; for an infinite evil requires a remedy of infinite power and efficacy. We must drink the blood of Christ as a medicine, must cleanse ourselves from filth in this precious blood. This is possible only when we im-

bibe the stream of grace that flows from the side of Christ, and in it wash away our sins, and by it are nourished and vivified anew. As soon as we receive grace, we are changed from enemies into children of God, we may appear confidently in His presence to pacify His anger, for we have put on Christ and in His justice and true sanctity we are exceedingly pleasing to the heavenly Father. As little as God can hate His only-begotten Son, so little can He hate those who by grace are made His living members and bear His image in them. A man may hate even his child, by continuing to charge it with a fault committed; and it does not cease to be his child. God, however, cannot hate His children, because they are at the same time His friends and spouses, because He beholds Himself in them, and has received them in unspeakably intimate union into His bosom.

As the great evil of sin consists in two things that include each other, in this, namely, that man averts his love from God and God from man, which establishes an enormous and frightful chasm between them; so the wonderful power of grace in destroying this evil consists in removing this chasm and reuniting man with God and God with man. Neither man himself, nor any other created power, can so change the perverse will of man that he elevates himself again to God and embraces Him with supernatural, childlike love; and much less can man, or any other creature, so draw down God again into the soul, that He again encloses it as His child in His arms. Grace alone works both effects in a wonderful manner; it infuses into our hearts the supernatural love of the Holy Ghost, by which we again adhere to God, and at the same time draws down upon us the entire love of the heavenly Father, so that He forgets our sins and considers our soul again His friend and spouse.

Oh, how great and wonderful, then, is the power of that remedy of grace, which destroys an evil that no created power in Heaven or on earth, only the God-man and God Himself can conquer! This power, however, will appear

still more wonderful if we consider the manner in which grace performs its work.

3. Grace is capable not only of eradicating *one* disease, but ~~is~~ altogether regardless of the number and greatness of the diseases. Let us suppose that *one* man alone had committed all the sins and crimes from the fratricide of Cain to the diabolical uprising of Antichrist at the end of the world: if but the faintest ray of sanctifying grace entered the soul of this man, it would at once destroy all this sin, as the least degree of this Divine sanctity overcomes all, even the greatest wickedness.

Moreover, in healing our soul grace does not leave the smallest *trace* of mortal sin in our soul. It indeed does not always destroy the inclinations to sin, which flow from natural perverseness or previous evil habits; but it always removes from the soul everything that is really wicked and damnable. Thus the Apostle says: "*There is no condemnation to them that (by grace) are in Christ Jesus,*"¹ and the Council of Trent accordingly teaches that in the regenerate there is no longer anything that is the object of God's hatred. If our sins were as scarlet, God has assured us, by His prophet, they shall be made as white as snow; and if they were red as crimson, they shall be white as wool. The same is still more clearly expressed by another prophet, who promises that God will drown all our sins in the depth of the sea, that He will bury them so deeply, that if we should sin again and again, our previous sins can never return, after they have once been healed by the remedy of grace.

It is still more wonderful that grace should heal our sins *in one moment*, without trouble or delay, be they ever so great and numerous. It needs not to wrestle with them a long time; the beginning of the struggle is, at the same time, already the victorious end; it needs only to come and command, as God once spoke in creation: "*Be light made,*" and immediately there is light, and the darkness of sin dis-

¹ Rom. viii. 1.

appears. Scarcely had David confessed to the Lord that he had sinned, when he heard that his sin was taken away; scarcely had he said he would confess against himself his injustice, and his wickedness was immediately forgiven; he was reconciled to God, and from a slave of Satan converted into a pure angel.

Who is not filled with admiration at such decisive and perfect victories, such sudden and easy triumphs of grace over that powerful and terrible fiend whom no other power can conquer? Who would voluntarily again submit to the dire yoke, which he of his own power can never throw off? And should we not, at any price, purchase, preserve, and anxiously guard this precious remedy of grace, that brings with it every blessing and dispels every evil, and for its sake sacrifice honor and riches, our bodily life and health?

4. Ought we not to feel ashamed, however, when we remember how much we do and suffer for the cure of bodily ailments? We labor and suffer so much that the severest mortifications of the most austere penitents can scarcely be greater. If a sick person calls for something to drink, it is denied him; if he wishes to eat, he is bidden to wait. If the physician wishes to open his veins, burn or cut his wounds, he patiently lends his limbs and his body. He does not rise nor go about, nor do anything without the permission of his physician; he buries himself in solitude, abstains from his choicest pleasures, sacrifices his money and his possessions, and all this in the uncertain and often delusive hope of regaining a brief and inconstant state of health.

On the other hand, what is sought with more negligence and treated with less esteem than grace, though it is so easy to obtain, though it is the only remedy for the deadly disease of the body, though it rescues soul and body from eternal death and with infallible certainty instantly regenerates us unto an immortal life?


O thoughts of men, how blind you are in things that

are of the greatest value, and how foolishly sagacious in indifferent and worthless things ! May God, however, be praised, who has rendered the remedy of eternal life easier than bodily remedies, in the same measure in which the heavenly surpasses the bodily remedy in value and preciousness.

THIRD CHAPTER.

Grace Infuses into our Hearts the Supernatural Divine Virtues.

1.

ITH the forgiveness and eradication of sin grace, according to the teaching of the holy Council of Trent, works the sanctification and renovation of the interior man, and at the same time infuses into him the three Divine virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

We have already seen that grace implants in us a supernatural, heavenly, and Divine life, the life of the children of God, born again of the Holy Ghost. We shall now see in what this life consists, which faculties are the subjects of this life, and by which acts it is manifested.

The natural life of the soul, which distinguishes it from animals, consists in the natural acts of the reason and the will. The supernatural life, however, is that activity which proceeds from the same faculties of intellect and will, but after these faculties are glorified by grace and converted into new heavenly faculties. For as grace transforms the nature of the soul and makes it partaker of the Divine nature, it glorifies the faculties of the soul, so that they become capable of performing acts of such exalted dignity as are peculiar only to the Divine nature. Grace invests these faculties with an ability and a fitness for accomplishing what naturally can be accomplished by God alone, and this supernatural ability, which can be infused and implanted by grace only, is called by theologians *supernatural infused virtue*.

Infused virtue, then, is very different from the so-called *acquired* virtues, which we may acquire by our own activ-

ity. These consist in a certain *readiness*, acquired by our practice and effort, by which we are enabled to perform acts naturally possible with greater facility, decision, quickness, and ease. These virtues may be compared to that fruitfulness which we may impart to a tree by careful culture, frequent irrigation, and watchful protection from all evil influences. All this labor does not cause the tree to bring forth fruit of another kind, but only to produce its own peculiar fruit more certainly and in greater quantity and better quality.

The infused virtues, however, are similar to the fruitfulness which we may impart to a tree by engrafting upon it a scion from another tree of superior quality. The principal effect of these virtues consists in this, that the soul produces fruit of an infinitely higher and superior quality, of which not even the smallest germ is found in its natural faculties. At the same time they communicate to the soul a certain facility and readiness in the exercise of these higher supernatural acts; but as they do not at once eradicate all evil propensities and weaknesses of our nature, we must, with the help of God, remove the impediments of Divine life in us, and in addition to the supernatural power infused by God, we must acquire facility in its exercise.

Still another comparison may illustrate the difference of the natural from the supernatural virtues. Iron is tempered by the fire and the hammer is magnetized by friction upon a magnet. The iron that is tempered is far better and harder than ordinary iron, but it does not change its nature. Magnetized iron, however, seems to be a body of an altogether different nature. As if by magic it loses its inertia and immovability, acquires a new power of attraction, and is itself attracted in a mysterious manner by the poles of the earth. The natural virtues now have no other effect than to strengthen and temper the faculties of our soul by frequent practice, as by strokes of a hammer, so that, with the help of God, they may perform what is naturally good. Grace, however, magnetizes them by a myste-

rious touch of the Divinity, which imparts to them a Divine power. Thus they are converted into new Divine faculties, suddenly feel themselves attracted in a manner and by objects hitherto unknown to them, and elevated into mysterious regions by an invisible hand. God Himself is the pole, the centre and source of our life, the pole to which it tends, the centre around which it revolves, and the source from which it draws its force and nourishment; *we partake of the inner life of God.*

2. The participation in the Divine life, which is produced in us by the infused supernatural virtues, now principally consists in this, that we copy in us the Divine activity of life, unite our own with it, and thus in cognition, love, and confidence, unite ourselves with God in a similar manner, as He is one with Himself.

In Christian faith we receive a supernatural and Divine knowledge, by uniting our knowledge with the Divine knowledge, and supported by it, we know God in a similar manner as He knows Himself. In Christian charity the same love for God as He bears Himself is infused into us, so that we are enabled to unite ourselves as intimately with Him and to be absorbed in Him, as if we possessed His own nature. In Christian hope, finally, we rest immediately upon the infinite power of God, as if it were our own, and thus acquire that sublime confidence to possess and enjoy God in all His greatness for all eternity.

Christian faith, then, is a supernatural and Divine knowledge, Christian charity a supernatural and Divine love, Christian hope a supernatural and Divine confidence, whence these three virtues are also called and in reality are *Divine* virtues. They are called thus, not because they are in general related to God, but because they *unite us in a Divine manner with God*, have Him for their immediate motive, and can be produced in us only by a communication of the Divine nature.

With these three Divine virtues, then, God endows His children, so that they may lead a life worthy of their exalt-

ed regeneration and may even on earth, in the land of exile, unite with Him as their Father and the object of their beatitude. By these alone, therefore, are we enabled to prepare ourselves for the eternal life, which we shall one day enjoy in the bosom of our heavenly Father.

For the life that the children of God lead already upon earth must be of the same kind as the life that awaits them in Heaven. In Heaven they shall know God as He knows Himself, and possess and enjoy Him as He possesses and enjoys Himself. But as, according to the express teaching of Holy Church, it is indispensably necessary for such a knowledge, such a possession and enjoyment of God, that the light of glory transforms the faculties of our soul and deifies them or makes them deiform: so must in this life already the faculties of our soul be transformed and deformed, to be able to know and love God and confide in Him in such a manner as is necessary to obtain His Divine happiness.

As certain, then, as it is that by grace God has made us His children and the heirs of His Heaven; as certain as it is, again, that God gives to every creature all that is necessary for the attainment of its end; so certain is it, too, that God, by grace, endows His children with those Divine virtues, without which they cannot be united with Him in a supernatural manner.

3. See the plant: it has its roots that dig in the earth, to seek there the sap necessary for the nutrition and sustenance of the whole; it has its stem that unceasingly tends towards the light, by which it is warmed and enlivened; it possesses a certain power of attraction and production, to draw up and assimilate the matter suitable to its maintenance and development of life. But what is the soul in the state of grace? Is it not likewise a plant, a wild olive tree, engrafted in Jesus Christ as in a cultured olive? It has its roots in faith, and these roots penetrate into the depths of the Divinity, to draw thence the nourishment of Divine life. Hope is its stem, by which it raises itself to

the Sun of justice to find there light and warmth. Love is the power of attraction, by which it apprehends God, to receive His own life, or rather to immerse itself in Him.

The bird, destined not to creep upon the earth, but to roam in ethereal regions, has received feathers and wings from God. The eagle builds his nest upon high, inaccessible cliffs; fearlessly and without flinching he looks into the sun, he rises on mighty pinions above the clouds, and from on high darts upon the booty which he descries in the plains beneath. This is the image of the child of God, that rises on the pinions of faith, hope, and charity from the depth of its nature, by which it adheres to this earth, unto the bosom of God Himself, there takes up its residence, beholds God in His inaccessible light, and descends to the earth only to snatch the booty from the devil, to edify and convert fellow-men, and to perform acts of penance and charity.

If a ship has been built and launched into the sea, it lies immovable, because of itself it is incapable of moving. But scarcely have strong arms taken hold of its rudder, scarcely have the sails been unfurled, scarcely has the fire which develops a mighty steam power been kindled, than the ship moves, plunges into the high sea, divides the waters with swiftest rapidity, and in a few days reaches the farthest ends of the earth, whence it soon returns laden with treasures. So the Christian is cast upon the stormy sea of the world, to seek the port of Heaven. His natural faculties might perhaps suffice to bring his boat, in a small river or lake, safely from one shore to another. But on the high ocean, that separates the finite from the infinite, he requires very different means and other faculties to reach the distant shore, and these are given him by God in the Divine virtues. Faith is our compass, which points out to us with infallible certainty the heavenly country, that we ourselves cannot see. Hope takes the place of rudder and sail, since it inspires us with a supernatural confidence in our attainment of the distant goal, heightens our


courage and assures us of the omnipotent help of God. Love, finally, is the moving power, a holy and mighty propelling-power, that carries us more speedily and swiftly to God than a ship is borne across the ocean by steam. By the power of these virtues we sail along with courage, combat the storms, overcome the billows, escape the rocks and shoals, and arrive safe in the port of eternity.

Oh, how great is the goodness of God, how great the glory of His grace, which so elevates and transforms all the faculties of our spiritual nature, introduces these three Divine virtues together into our soul, and infuses into it a heavenly and Divine life ! Oh, that all Christians very often considered the dignity and preciousness of these Divine virtues and experienced its sweetness and pleasure by diligent practice ; they would certainly not make so light of them and of their source, grace, but would rather consider it a great privilege to be permitted to possess and cultivate a Divine life in their soul.

FOURTH CHAPTER.

Supernatural Divine Faith.

1.

HE first of these three Divine virtues is that of faith. Its subject is our reason. Faith supernaturally enlightens and strengthens reason and enables it to unite its own knowledge with that of God, and, with the aid and medium of such knowledge, to perceive and know with infallible certainty the mysteries that naturally are cognizable only by God and are concealed from every created eye. Faith gives the soul a new eye, or rather, it lets the soul see through the eye of God, and makes it partake of the Divine knowledge.

Indeed, if by grace we partake of the Divine nature, then we must likewise partake of that knowledge which is peculiar to the Divine nature. We must, as the Apostle says, know God in the same manner in which we are known. That will take place in a perfect measure, only when grace has been perfected in us by the light of glory, and when in the bosom of the Father, at the side of His only-begotten Son, we behold Him in His own light, as He is face to face. But even now, in the land of exile, God does not forsake His children. Even now they shall know Him, and their own dignity and inheritance; and as no one knows the Father, but Himself and His Son with the Holy Ghost, He must reveal Himself to us by His own word. And since we by nature cannot grasp and understand this Divine word in a worthy manner, He must, by a supernatural *strength* and supernatural *light*, qualify us to understand and believe this word.

2. This faith is something inestimably great and won-

derful, and if the world does not consider it so, it is, as St. Ambrose teaches, because "*the narrow heart of the wicked cannot comprehend the greatness of faith.*" The world imagines that faith is something suitable only for the weak and uneducated; that it is an indication of narrowness and weakness of mind, whilst St. Leo says: "*Faith is the vital force of great souls.*" Only credulous human faith is a sign of weakness and narrow-mindedness, because by it we believe men, capable of deception and error, without rational cause and wise discrimination. Divine faith, however, is the noblest and most dignified act of human reason and wisdom, which thus unites and subjects itself to the highest and infallible reason that reveals itself by plain and unmistakable signs.

If faith does manifest human weakness and inferiority, this happens only because all human power and wisdom, even that of angels, is not sufficient to elicit such an act of faith as God requires of us. All that a created spirit, in its highest natural perfection, is able to do, is to subject itself in deepest reverence to the word of God revealed to it, to acknowledge it as a humble servant in unconditional obedience, and to conform its own judgment to this word. But it is incapable of raising itself in daring flight up to God Himself, and to so unite by faith its judgment with the Divine, that its cognition assumes the qualities of Divine cognition, and partakes of its sublimity and infallible certainty. This is possible only by the power of supernatural grace. It alone gives a creature the power to soar high above its natural limited sphere up to God, to hear His word in His own bosom, to drink in the light of truth immediately from the Divine Sun, to be supported in God as upon a firm rock and to find in Him unchangeable, infallible security and certainty.

Therefore, our Divine Saviour says,¹ that no one can come to Him, except the Father draw him by that supernatural attraction that draws us beyond the limits of nature

¹ John vi. 44.

into the bosom of the Father to the side of His only-begotten Son.

Thus the act of faith infinitely surpasses all natural power, it is an absolutely supernatural act ; but on that account the grace of faith, that makes it possible, is something great and wonderful. Who possesses it is not weak, but strong beyond conception, not narrow-minded, but endowed with an almost infinite power of understanding. The souls of the faithful alone are the really true and great spirits, infinitely greater and stronger than all the wise men of this world. For these are supported only by the vacillating reed of their natural reason, which is tossed about by the winds of their humors and passions ; they are as little children, who are carried away by every storm and are deceived by the wickedness of men and the aims of the devil. The souls of the faithful, however, are, according to the Apostle, really strong and manly, since by faith they sink their anchor into Divine truth, in supernatural security, bid defiance to all storms, and with unshaken conviction hold the principles of the highest truth.

3. Yet grace not only bestows upon us a supernatural *strength*, necessary for Divine faith ; it is besides a supernatural *light*, that enlightens us for faith and in faith.

In order to believe, it is necessary to know that God Himself speaks to us. Now, this we may know by our natural reason alone, if we attentively consider the extrinsic criterions that accompany revelation. But unless God, besides this, illuminated our heart in a mysterious manner, unless He approached us supernaturally, and, as it were, inserted a new ear into our heart, we should be incapable of understanding and appreciating His word in a manner necessary for the peculiar supernatural enlightenment of faith. The supernatural attraction of grace is not a blind and obscure, but a clear and enlightened attraction, that represents to us our supernatural destiny in all its Divine splendor and draws near to it. Grace is like a new heavenly ether, whose vibrations communicate to us the

voice of God far better than the earthly atmosphere of our senses and our reason. By grace we perceive the Divine word immediately as it proceeds from His mouth, we feel its whole Divine power and force, and are thus incited to accept it in all its plenitude and greatness. Hence, the Apostle teaches that God by grace enlightens the eyes of our heart, and opens its ear, that we may know, and know supernaturally, whom we believe.

After we have thus, by the light and strength of grace, grasped and received in us the word of God, we must by the same supernatural light learn to comprehend the truths which God reveals to us. For these truths are of so sublime a nature that the light of reason is as insufficient to understand them, as it is to reveal them to us. A man born blind may hear a very accurate and elaborate description of the objects of our vision; these objects will always remain strange and incomprehensible to him. The same would be our condition with regard to supernatural truths, if God, who reveals them to us by His word, did not at the same time infuse into us the supernatural light of grace, and by means of this light bring home to us these truths. By the light of grace, drawn from His own light, He represents to us the things that He has Himself beheld in this light. Grace elevates us to a supernatural condition and thus brings us into mysterious connection and relation, as it were, in contact with the supernatural mysteries, so that they no longer appear entirely strange and incomprehensible to us. True, we cannot on earth arrive at an immediate intuition of these truths, which would suspend faith; nevertheless, they become as clearly and easily intelligible as is possible in this time of faith.

4. Oh, how foolish are they who denounce faith as darkness and oppression of reason! On the contrary, all natural knowledge, compared to faith, is but as the light of a lamp compared to the full glow of the midday sun. Our reason is but a created and an earthly light that faint-

ly illumines the objects of this earth and the creatures, and shows us the Creator Himself, only from a remote distance. It is a light which enables us to see but few things and these imperfectly, just as a lamp illumines only the nearest surroundings, and does not exhibit these in their full and natural color. Faith, on the other hand, raises us above all created things up to God Himself; with it our soul soars as an eagle up to the sun, and boldly and freely fixes its eye upon God and penetrates into His deepest mysteries. Proceeding then from God, the last reason and source of all things, faith unrolls before our eye the whole visible and invisible world, and shows us everything in its real light. It discloses to us the depths of the Divinity, and reveals to us how, from all eternity, the Son proceeds from the Father and the Holy Ghost from both, as the bond of their mutual love; how, in time, the Son goes forth from the bosom of His Father, to pour out over His creatures the plenitude of His Divine glory and happiness, and to unite in the Holy Spirit all creatures with Him and the Father in most intimate communion. It shows us the final supernatural end of all things, where the finite passes over into the infinite, the transitory into the immutable, and is so united to God, that God is made all in all—and should this light appear to us mere darkness and obscurity? And should we fear to submit our reason obediently to faith and not rather glory in it, and with St. Peter thank God that *He has called us into His admirable light?*

There is, indeed, a certain degree of darkness connected with this light,—but it is a darkness similar to the twilight, which indicates the dawn of day, and the approaching splendor of the sun, and ought, therefore, to be dearer to us than all the lamps burning in the night; it is a darkness like that of a starry night, which reveals greater mysteries to us and gives an infinitely greater scope to our vision than even the brightest day. The day permits us to see but a small part of the earth's surface, a mere

speck in the great world ; night, however, carries our vision into immeasurable distances up to the greatest and most distant constellations, which the sun had hidden from our view. There is a darkness in faith ; but it is of such a nature as to render palpable for us that which is invisible. “ *Faith,*” says the Apostle,¹ “ *is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not.*” St. Bernard, commenting upon this against a heretic, who maintained that faith was a mere opinion, exclaims : “ Hearest thou, ‘ substance ’ ? Not then a fickle opinion, not an idle fancy. Everything here is solid, everything secure, and admits of no doubt, no hesitation.” Faith grounds us in Divine truth and this truth in us so firmly and immovably, that we perceive, with the same absolute and infallible certainty as Divine truth itself, that our conviction, our judgment, can be wrong and erroneous as little as the conviction and judgment of God, upon which ours is based. Faith is darkness, because in it we do not see with our own eyes ; but instead, we see with the luminous eye of God, before which there is no darkness.

Faith, then, is a night, but a night illumined with heavenly light. It is night in reference to the day of eternal glory, but is brightest day with respect to the light of reason and sense, which in comparison with it is but darkest night. The grace of faith as far surpasses all natural knowledge, as the seeing eye is superior to the blind, and the rational soul of man to the irrational brute.

5. Far from considering faith as darkness in comparison with reason we should esteem it the more, the more we appreciate and love the latter. We justly esteem and appreciate reason as a great gift of God, because it also, like a signet, impresses upon our soul the light of the Divine countenance, and raises us far above the irrational animal. Justly do we deem it the greatest misfortune if any one, from disease, or perhaps even through his own fault, loses the use of reason, and we consider it a far sadder loss

¹ Heb. xi. 1.

than the loss of his bodily eye-sight. But far more sacred and dear should we hold the light of faith, which raises us, not only above the brute, but above all rational creatures, which reveals to us the unveiled countenance of God Himself, and which can be lost to us and excluded from our soul only through our own fault.

What an act of terrible cruelty would he commit, who in mad frenzy, tore out both his eyes, or who deprived himself, knowingly and willingly, of the use of his reason ! And yet it were far more cruel and at the same time a heinous crime, if you, imitating so many others, declined to receive the heavenly and Divinely offered light of faith, or if, after being blessed with it, by frivolous doubt or stubborn pride, you instantly extinguished it in your soul, and thus cast yourself into darkest gloom.

How few are there who not only guard against the loss of faith, but honor this grace highly as a source of heavenly light, and endeavor day by day to increase it and to derive new light from it ! So many spend their whole life in ceaseless labor, in countless sacrifices of health and money for no other purpose but to acquire human science and to learn the most trivial and insignificant things. Yet it never enters their mind that one spark, one ray of this heavenly light of faith contains incomparably more light and truth than all science of men and angels together. All human science, says St. Augustine, is as the light of the setting sun, that wanes more and more, and in its progress grows constantly paler. In the same manner human reason, the deeper it penetrates into the essence of things, the higher it would rise, must acknowledge evermore its weakness, and finally, at the approach of the highest truths, sees nothing ahead but dark night. But in this night rises the light of faith, as an ever increasing morning dawn, and reveals to us a new, supernatural and more beautiful world, and implants in our soul the germs of a heavenly and imperishable knowledge, germs of inestimable fruitfulness, that are never lost except through our own fault,

and that will one day unfold their undying bloom in the light of glory.

Oh, that we devoted half the trouble and sacrifices which the learned men undergo for the attainment of human science, to increase in us the grace of faith, to receive its light ever more fully, and follow the word of God ever more closely! With how much pleasure would we bask in this heavenly light, with what delight would we absorb its glorious rays! How soon would all earthly things appear to us vain and colorless, and Heaven alone smile at us with enchanting charm! We should glory in our holy faith, and like the Apostle, boast of knowing naught but Jesus, and Him crucified. How would all the wisdom of this world appear but as folly, and our heart be filled with gratitude toward God, who has liberated us from the powers of darkness, and called us unto His admirable light!

FIFTH CHAPTER.

Supernatural Divine Hope.

1.

THE second of the supernatural theological virtues, which is infused by grace into our heart and which is no less great and glorious than the first, is Christian *hope*.

Hope, like charity, has its seat, not in the intellect, but in the will. The will, namely, has two different acts: the first is, to take pleasure in anything good and to love it, and the second to pursue it with earnest activity and firm confidence. In the same manner, now, as faith communicates to our reason a supernatural power of understanding, the infused virtue of hope endows our will with a Divine power and a supernatural confidence, that it may actively pursue and securely attain the highest and infinite good, which no created force can ever attain. Hope likewise carries us above all creatures up to God, to let us rest in His bosom, to strengthen us in His omnipotence, and ground us upon it as upon an immovable rock.

Its greatness, then, has two reasons: first, because it gives us the confidence to possess God, the highest supernatural good, perfect and entire for all eternity, and second, because it bases this confidence upon nothing less than upon the infinite power and might of God Himself. God alone possesses Himself by His nature, and He alone, therefore, can grant the possession of Himself to His creatures.

Hope or confidence, says St. Thomas,¹ is the raising of the soul, by which it confidently pursues a sublime and

¹ 1, 2, qu. 25, a. 1.

arduous good, and despises and overcomes all the obstacles that are in the way of its attainment of this good. It is an elevating sentiment, which fills the soul with a joyous pride in the consciousness of its power, and more than any other thing transports it with a peculiar great delight. The more sublime the good is which our hope has for its object, the greater is the power upon which it is founded, and the greater is that joy and delight which we derive from such hope.

2. How powerful and lovely, then, must this Christian hope be which God infuses into our soul by grace! It grants us the consoling and comforting assurance that by grace God has called us to the ineffable dignity of His sonship; that we are His heirs and the co-heirs of His Son and shall sit upon His throne and reign with Him; that the whole world shall be subject to us, and God Himself, with all His glory, with all His treasures and riches, with all His Divine happiness, will be our possession and our joy. This hope does not rest upon the frail support of a created power, but upon the transcendent greatness of God's own power, who, according to the words of the Apostle, "*Fills us unto all the fullness of God and does all things in us more abundantly than we desire or understand.*"¹ It makes the omnipotence of God our own and lets us rest secure in the possession of this power. For God belongs to us, since He has made us His children; He embraces us with infinite paternal love, receives us into His bosom, covers us with the cloak of His omnipotence, and strengthens us with the entire fulness of His Divine power, so that we may exclaim with the Apostle: "*If God be for us, who is against us? He that spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how hath He not also, with Him, given us all things?*"²

This consciousness gives the children of God that triumphant confidence which fears no danger, no obstacle, which is terrified by no created power, because it is superior to them

¹ Eph. iii. 19, 20.

² Rom. viii. 31, 32.

all, which knows no hesitation, no trembling, no fear, no disappointment, and renders us as secure of attaining to our end, as if we were already in possession of it. Therefore the Apostle says :¹ “ *Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation? or distress? or famine? or nakedness? or danger? or persecution? or the sword? But in all these things we overcome, because of Him that hath loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

Yes, we are certain, and infallibly certain, that neither a hostile power in Heaven nor on earth, nor our own very great weakness can prevent us from attaining to our high aim, if only we ourselves, not from weakness, but from our own free will and our malice, do not withdraw from this infinite power of God. This power never deserts us so long as we do not desert it; it remains with us and in us, so long as we remain with it; it fortifies and completes upon the weak foundation of our soul that heavenly edifice, which we alone are able again to destroy by taking away this foundation.

3. Great God! How can our weak and miserable heart comprehend or even sustain this strong confidence, which rises above Heaven and earth and triumphs over everything and over ourselves! Indeed, we cannot of our own ability conceive it; Thy powerful grace alone can infuse it into us. Our heart could not so much as bear it, it would be crushed thereby, unless Thy grace, as with a mighty hand, supported and strengthened it. On that sublime course, which leads to Thy Heaven, our heart would collapse at the first step, unless Thy grace gave it wings, to fly clear of all abysses, to raise itself from earth over the highest mountains, and to continue ascending until it rests in Thy bosom.

¹ Rom. viii. 35-39.

What thanks must we then render Thee for this other fruit of Thy grace, and what better thanks can we give, than to preserve faithfully and increase constantly this Divine confidence, this heavenly courage, this holy pride, which is founded upon Thee and rejoices in Thee? Thus we may often exclaim with the Psalmist: "*Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we call upon the name of the Lord.*"

May God, as the Apostle prays for us, "*enlighten the eyes of our heart, that we may know what is the hope of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.*"¹ By the power of that Holy Spirit, whom we receive as the pledge of our glory, as our solace in all grief, as our helper in our weakness, may we all confidently "*wait for the adoption of the sons of God, the redemption of our body.*"² May we all, with the Apostle, firmly hold "*this grace wherein we stand, and glory in the hope of the glory of the sons of God.*"³ Yea, we should, as the same Apostle says,⁴ "*glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience trial, and trial hope, and hope confoundeth not.*"

4. Yet how much do we dishonor this great and ineffable grace of Divine Hope by our pusillanimous timidity! We tremble at the slightest danger, we succumb to the least trial, we cleave to this earth and dare not take one step on the steep pathway of Heaven. If we only consider our natural powers, we have reason enough to despair. But what excuse have we, when God, by His powerful grace, gives us such strength and makes us superior to all the powers of hell? Why do we not seize this grace and support ourselves by it, and thus drive fear and anxiety from our heart? At other times we are so much inclined to rely upon our strength, to boast of it, even when in reality it is very weak or when the object is very insignificant. Why should we, then, do ourselves this incalculable harm and God this great injustice, not to confide

¹ Eph. i. 18.² Rom. viii. 23.³ Ibid. v. 2.⁴ Ibid. 3-5.

in Him through His grace, and supported by Him, why should we not despise all our enemies and dangers? The youth rejoices in the fulness of His youthful vigor; the warrior is boastful of his strength and valor; the prince is proud of the great number of his subjects and the extent of his riches; should the children of God alone remain in abject lowliness and forget their sublime dignity and power? Theirs is a perennial youth that never decays, but is renewed and increased from day to day. They are an army in battle array, whose strength is the power of the Almighty and before whom hell itself trembles. All creatures must serve and co-operate for the welfare of those who love God, and all the treasures and riches of God are at their disposal.

Let us then in future hold this grace of heavenly hope in high esteem; let us appreciate the hope of this heavenly glory more than all earthly riches and power, and let us expect with unshaken confidence the possession of the highest good, which will crown our hope with the unspeakably happy assurance that we can never again be deprived of it, even by our own fault.

SIXTH CHAPTER.

Supernatural Divine Charity.

1.

THE third and greatest of divine virtues is that of supernatural love for God and our neighbor. “*Now there remain,*” says the Apostle, ¹ “*faith, hope, charity, these three ; but the greatest of these is charity.*”

It is the greatest, because it is the complement and perfection of faith and hope. For by charity we embrace that highest good which we know by faith ; by charity we are united on earth already with that which is the object of our hope in Heaven. Faith and hope may be dead, *i. e.*, they may exist in us, without uniting us in a living and perfect manner with God, whilst charity cannot be dead, but is life itself and therefore gives life also to faith and hope. We may possess the faith and hope of the children of God, without possessing sanctifying grace. Charity, however, is inseparably connected with sanctifying grace, because we cannot be children of God, without loving Him as our Father, and again we cannot embrace Him with filial love, without experiencing His paternal affection. When charity is infused into our soul, then the Holy Ghost is given us likewise ; He then comes, not only to enrich us with His grace, but to dwell in us and consecrate us as His temple.

This supernatural charity, therefore, is as great a gift as sanctifying grace itself ; yea, in the opinion of St. Augustine, as great as the Holy Spirit Himself, who is given us in and by it. As God unites Himself in a supernatural and

¹ I. Cor. xiii. 13.

indescribable manner with our soul by grace, so we unite ourselves by supernatural love in a mysterious manner with God and thus complete that wonderful circle, that golden ring, which embraces God and the creature and makes both one spirit. This wonderful ring is the most perfect image of the divine union, which unites God the Father with His only-begotten Son and the Son with the Father in the Holy Spirit. The Eternal Father produces the Son of His love and the image of His glory with ineffable love ; the Son, however, is united to the Father and returns to Him with the same infinite love, and both breathe in this love the Holy Spirit as their mutual bond of union ; in like manner God bestows upon us that same love which He bears His own Son by making us participants of the Divine nature ; and we again approach and return to our heavenly Father by filial love, as we have proceeded from Him ; and the same Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, becomes the bond and seal of our union with God.

2. You will understand this better, dear Christian reader, when you consider the essence and nature of this love, which proceeds from grace. This love is a *Divine* love, not only because it has God for its object and unites us with God, but because by it we so love God as He alone, in virtue of His Divine nature, can love Himself. As grace is a participation of the Divine nature, so is the charity which proceeds from grace a participation of the Divine charity in its peculiar nature. Hence some theologians have supposed this charity as a virtue to be identical with God, with the person of the Holy Spirit Himself. This indeed is not correct ; it is rather, according to the words of the Apostle, something infused into our hearts *by* the Holy Ghost ; it is a holy flame, which His sacred fire kindles in our soul, an image of that Divine charity from which He Himself proceeds, as the immediate, beatific vision in Heaven is an image and a participation of that Divine intelligence of which the Eternal Word is born.

Nevertheless, it is something glorious and Divine, so that St. Augustine says it is called by the name of God, and no other name would fully express its value.

And, indeed, only such a Divine love becomes the state of the children of God. By grace we are received as true children of God into His bosom ; we are, as it were, of equal birth with God, and approach Him infinitely nearer than we do by nature. But if we are so intimately related to God, then our love for Him must be of equal kind with the love He bears Himself, it must be Divine. In grace He loves us with paternal love in His only-begotten Son, and so we must by grace embrace Him with *filial* love. By grace He comes to us with the whole goodness and sweetness of His Divine nature, and so grace must pervade our soul as with a Divine magnetism, that draws us supernaturally to God, and immerses us in Him. By grace we participate in the Divine nature, and as we are, therefore, called to know God as He knows Himself, so we must be qualified by this participation to love Him in a similar manner as He loves Himself.

As that love which God bears Himself is a *holy* love, because it is referred to the purest and highest good, and loves it as it deserves to be loved, in a word, because it is a Divine love, our love to God, which flows from grace, must be a holy love, because it is of the nature of Divine love.

It is self-evident, that this Divine love is altogether *supernatural*. Even in the order of nature we can and must love God as our Creator and Lord, whose natural image we are. But this natural love is as different from the Divine love, as the nature of the creature is from that of the Creator, as the natural cognition of God in the image of His creatures differs from the immediate vision of His nature, as an earthly fire differs from the light of the sun. Though both are related to God yet these relations are of a very different nature ; as the love of a servant and of a child may have the same person for its object, yet the one

loves him as a master, the other as a father. The former remains at a distance from God, and cannot rise up to Him, embrace Him, and be united to Him. The latter, however, approaches God, transcends all limits of nature, and so immerses itself in God, as if it were of the same nature, and one person with Him.

3. See, then, Christian soul, how great and wonderful, how full of glory and blessing must grace be, on this further account, that it qualifies you for so sublime, supernatural, holy, and Divine a love !

Love in general is the sweetest and happiest thing that exists in God or in creatures ; yea, it is sweetness and happiness itself, as its very name indicates. Our heart has been created for love ; it finds its delight and happiness therein ; its innermost self is enfolded therein ; it surrenders itself entirely to love, and lives and flourishes in it ; it desires nothing more than to find a worthy object of its love, with which it may intimately unite itself and into which it may infuse itself. We are happy already if we may love a creature whose beauty wins our admiration, or who is united to us by the most intimate ties of friendship or affinity. Incomparably sweeter and happier, however, must it be for us, that we may entertain any love for God Himself, and rejoice in Him, the highest and infinite good, our gracious Creator and most benevolent Lord.

Yet what is all natural love to creatures, and to God Himself, when compared with that supernatural holy love which is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit in grace ? This love comes directly from God Himself ; it is the blossom and fruit of Divine life and Divine happiness ; it is that spark or fire of Divine charity with which He Himself is inflamed. Compared with it natural love is, as it were, no love, is as a fire without warmth, as a plant without life.

Of this supernatural love Thomas à Kempis writes in holy rapture :¹ “ Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing

¹ Book 3, Ch. 5.

stronger, nothing higher, nothing wider, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller or better in Heaven or earth ; for love proceeds from God, and cannot rest but in God, above all things created. Whosoever loves, knows the cry of this voice ; a loud cry in the ears of God is the ardent affection of the soul, which saith : ‘ Oh, my God, my love, Thou art all mine, and I am all Thine!’ ”

It is this love alone which is accorded such eminent praise by the Apostle, when he exhorts us to be “ *rooted and founded in charity, that we may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and height and depth ; that we may know the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge, that we may be filled unto all the fulness of God.* ” ¹

Of this love St. Bernard says : ² “ It forgets the reverence and submission proper to a creature, and with the facility of a child, and the familiarity of a spouse, boldly raises itself up to God Himself, to clasp Him as its Father, Brother, Friend, and Spouse in most intimate and sweet embrace ; to penetrate into the innermost depths of His goodness and sweetness, and to be dissolved in the abyss of His Divine heart.”

4. Since it is this infused charity alone which makes us love God as He loves Himself, it alone likewise makes us possess God in truth ; by it we possess Him not only in affection, but also in reality in our heart, by it we enjoy His Divine sweetness at its very fountain. By it we embrace God as our Father, as He by grace embraces us as His children. By it we approach Him ever nearer, we become ever more like unto Him, until we are entirely transformed into His image, and behold Him face to face. By it we are united to God into one spirit, and, as it were, melted together as two flames which meeting are united into one, and as two liquid metals flowing together are inseparably united into one body. For as the Divine nature is pure fire, and a burning stream of love, its union with our love, when this

¹ Eph. iii. 17-20.

² In Cant. hom. 83.

is of a similar kind, is so intimate, that among creatures no union can compare with it. Where two desires, which are equally ardent, meet, their union is perfect.

What earthly love ever unites so intimately the lover and the beloved? What love can so immerse the one in the other, and so blend the two? What love can so absorb its object and so securely possess it?

Oh, human heart! poor and miserable heart, that always will love and yet is never satisfied with love; that so divides and wastes away its love, and whilst it seeks its life in such love, finds its death therein; that is always aglow with the fire of love, and yet is not warmed and softened by this heat, but becomes hardened and brittle! How canst thou remain closed against this grace of Divine love, which will satiate thee with the stream of Divine happiness, which will call forth in thee an ever-blooming life, which will set thee aglow with a heavenly fire! When God, in such great love, approaches thee, how canst thou refuse to complete that golden circuit which will fasten Himself to thee and thyself to Him! How canst thou yet seek another love, surrender thyself to another love, when here is offered to thee the purest, the highest, the sweetest, and most powerful love! Oh, if thou didst know the gift of God, like the Samaritan woman thou wouldst ask the Saviour for the living water of His love, which not only quenches thy thirst for love, but gives thee infinitely more than thy desire craves! For grace not only directs thy natural power of love to the true good; it is the source of a new, heavenly love, unknown to thee in thy natural state.

Hasten, then, to be made drunken with the wine of Divine love and to submerge in it every other love. Disengage thyself from all love to creatures, from self-love, from every natural and earthly love, and live henceforth only in this holy love of God. Then wilt thou soon taste its heavenly sweetness and preciousness, as so many saints have tasted it, and thy experience on earth already will confirm the teaching of thy holy faith.

5. But since we must live among men and according to the will of God love them also, the grace of God works another miracle no less great than the first. It ennobles and elevates also our *love for our neighbor* and dips this love also into a heavenly balsam, thereby conferring upon it the same heavenly, precious sweetness which the love of God possesses. St. John therefore applies all his beautiful and sublime sayings equally to the love of God and the Christian love of our neighbor. Grace leads us to embrace our neighbor with the same love that we have for God, to love him in God as a child, a friend, a spouse of God, and thus it unites us with our fellow-men with such intimate, firm, sweet, and holy bonds of friendship, as are unknown and impossible to nature.

What, indeed, are the natural human ties of a common nature of relationship of matrimony, compared with those that unite us in God as members and brethren of Christ, who participate in one and the same undivided Divine nature? The latter are certainly incomparably more intimate, because they represent our neighbor as one and perfectly one with us in God; they are more firm, because God Himself is their seal, and death cannot destroy, but only strengthen and glorify them; they are more holy and sublime, because they are of a heavenly and Divine nature and are finally infinitely sweeter and more pleasant, because the sweetness of God Himself seasons and penetrates them.

Great and wonderful, then, is the grace of Divine charity likewise in this second effect; here, again, it is a golden chain, which, hanging down from Heaven, not only links together most intimately individual men, but all who possess, or are destined to possess the sonship of God. It acts as a heavenly cement, which forms us all into one great body and unites us so sweetly and firmly, that an inexpressible, heavenly harmony and the peace of Christ reign over us all.

Let us then again give thanks to God for His powerful

grace, which produces in us such a sweet and holy charity. But our thanks will then be most acceptable, if we consider this charity as a most beautiful crown, with which His infinite goodness adorns us, and not as a heavy burden, which His law imposes upon us. Let us not only esteem it more, infinitely more, than all natural gifts, but more than all other supernatural gifts and virtues, as the Apostle teaches us in the words: ¹ “*If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. If I should have prophecy, and should know all mysteries and all knowledge: If I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. If I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*”

With this charity we possess all, and in losing it we lose all. When we possess charity, we also possess the other supernatural virtues; but if we lack it, all others lose their vitality and power and cannot bring us to life eternal. Though every mortal sin do not destroy in us faith and hope, yet it always destroys charity and with it sanctifying grace. Without these, however, faith and hope are lifeless and can scarcely be called virtues, since they cannot render us capable of living as children of God and meriting Heaven. It is charity alone, says St. Augustine, which distinguishes the children of God from the children of Satan. We must, then, acquire it at every cost, we must give our life in defence of it, so that we may become worthy of enjoying its sweetness for all eternity in the bosom of our heavenly Father.

¹ I. Cor. xiii. 1-4.

SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Supernatural Moral Virtues.

1.



LONG with Divine charity, sanctifying grace produces in our soul a whole series of supernatural virtues, adorning it as a crown of heavenly flowers. Since the Eternal Wisdom is united with our soul by grace, the words of Holy Scripture in praise of wisdom may be applied to it also: “*All good things came to me together with her, and innumerable riches (of virtue), through her hands.*”

By grace we are made new men, new creatures; we enter a new and exceedingly sublime state and pursue the highest and most exalted end, the vision of God; we are true children and friends of God. Since God now gives all His creatures, according to their state and destiny, the power and means to live according to this state and attain to their end, He must grant His children the sublime, heavenly virtues that correspond to their state and that help them to arrive at their supernatural destiny. The children of God must be perfect, as their heavenly Father is perfect; they must have Divine habits and must reflect the image of God in all their features, manners, and actions. Therefore grace must not only bestow upon us the Divine virtues, by which we are united with God in faith, hope, and charity, but besides these all those virtues which enable us to live conformably to our rank as children of God, and to our sublime relations towards God, our neighbor, and ourselves. In distinction from the Divine virtues these are called the *moral* virtues. These moral supernatural virtues are as far superior to the natural or acquired

moral virtues, which are known to human reason, to infidels and philosophers, as grace is superior to nature. The latter qualify us to honor and adore God as our highest Creator and Lord, and to do His bidding as humble servants ; the supernatural virtues, however, make us a *royal priesthood*, as St. Peter aptly remarks, loving and adoring God in union with His only-begotten Son, with a heavenly adoration and honor, and bringing Him spiritual offerings that are sanctified by the Holy Ghost Himself. The natural virtues lead us to treat our fellow-man as co-citizen of an earthly empire, and to respect him as a rational being and natural image of God ; the supernatural virtues, however, teach us to live together as brethren in God and Christ, as “ *fellow-citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God,*”¹ to quote the Apostle, as members of a heavenly kingdom. With natural moral virtue we live, with regard to ourselves, as rational men, greatly superior to the animal from the dignity of our reason, naturally moral, modest, temperate, and chaste ; the supernatural virtues, however, so raise our spiritual life above the natural, as that of men is above the life of animals ; we walk not in our spirit, but in the Holy Ghost, who produces in us the fruits of a heavenly morality, meekness, temperance, chastity, and purity, and makes us like not only to the angels, but to God Himself. In a word, grace elevates and transforms not only our nature, but with it all our faculties, relations, and acts, and imparts to us virtue so noble, that its least and most insignificant act is infinitely more beautiful and precious than the sublimest acts of the most perfect natural virtue of man or angel. Yea, an act of supernatural virtue is almost as different from naturally virtuous acts, as the rational acts of man are different from those of merely sensual and animal life.

2. These glorious virtues are the radiant nimbus which surrounds grace, the strong and fruitful branches which spring from it and overshadow our soul on all sides. They are the rich and infinitely varied ornaments on the royal

¹ Eph. ii. 19.

robe, with which God clothes His spouse, as the Psalmist sings: "*The queen stood on Thy right hand . . . surrounded with variety.*"¹ They are a precious crown, which God places upon the head of the children, and which the prophet in holy rapture contemplated adorning the angel of light, before he had yet lost grace by his pride. "*Thou wast,*" said he to the angel, "*the seal of resemblance, (of God), full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou wast in the pleasures of the paradise of God; every precious stone was thy covering; the sardius, the topaz, and the jasper, the chrysolite, and the onyx, and the beryl, the sapphire, and the carbuncle, and the emerald.*"²

If these precious stones in their manifold brilliance of color are a fit adornment for the brow of a queen, grace, connected with the varied heavenly brilliance of the supernatural virtues, is a far more precious ornament for our soul and makes it the object of delight for the choirs of angels and the heart of God. Every virtue, even the natural, truly ennobles man and so adorns him, that we can behold nothing more beautiful and lovely on earth than an innocent countenance which is the mirror of a virtuous soul. How beautifully, then, must the lines of these heavenly virtues adorn our soul, which God draws and forms in our hearts with the finger of His right hand, as the Holy Scripture calls the Holy Ghost! What nobility, what splendor, what grace and beauty must they add to the soul! If philosophers in the light of reason already consider and represent virtue as the highest good of man, for which every other good ought to be sacrificed, how much must we, in the light of faith, appreciate and love these supernatural virtues and be intent on nothing more than on acquiring them with grace, on increasing and preserving them!

Moreover, the supernatural virtues have besides their sublime nature and in virtue of it, *this other* advantage over the natural virtues, that they may be acquired in a moment

¹ Ps. xlv. 11.

² Ezech. xxviii. 12, 13

without much labor and trouble, an advantage which ought to endear them still more to us. The natural virtues are the fruit of our own labor and we must devote much labor and effort and often a very long time to their acquisition. The supernatural virtues, however, are so sublime, that with all possible labor, with the application of all our energies, and in an endless period of time, we cannot acquire the least degree of such virtues. They are the fruit of the Holy Ghost, who infuses them into us, and whose grace, as St. Ambrose says, knows no tardiness in action. They all enter our heart in the same moment, when we receive grace and charity in justification. Their exercise, it is true, does not so suddenly become easy and pleasant for us, as long as our evil inclinations and habits are opposed to them. But they give us light and strength to overcome and remove these obstacles, and render even the severest self-mortification that may be required in their practice so indescribably pleasant, that we can soon exercise them likewise with facility and delight.

3. We ought, then, to thank God for rendering these sublime virtues so easily accessible to us and for infusing them so copiously and generously with His grace and charity. However, as they are inseparably united to sanctifying grace and charity, and form, as it were, the retinue of these, so they are lost along with these by every mortal sin, and one moment suffices to destroy at one blow all of them in our heart. Faith and hope may remain in the sinner, without charity; but all other virtues stand and fall with charity, which is their root and motive power, or at least they scarcely leave a shadow of their former glory to remain in the soul. For by giving up the sublime state of grace we likewise lose the faculty of living conformably to this state and of exercising those exalted functions, which correspond to its sublime dignity.

O fearful power of sin, which like a terrible flash of lightning in one moment withers all these beautiful blossoms of heavenly virtue in our soul, and mercilessly de-

stroys even their roots ! O sadly perverted soul, which is suddenly stripped of all its ornament, cast from the summit of its exalted station, and covered with the filth of vice and sensual, beastly desire ! O sad desolation, sadder than even the destruction of the glory of Jerusalem, which the prophet Jeremias so deeply laments !

The lamentations of this prophet are yet far more appropriate to the soul that has lost sanctifying grace : “ *How is it the gold becomes dim, the finest color is changed, the stones of the sanctuary are scattered in the top of every street ? The noble sons of Sion, and they that were clothed with the best gold ; how are they esteemed as earthen vessels, the work of the potter’s hands ? They that were fed delicately have died in the streets : they that were brought up in scarlet, have embraced the dung. Her Nazarites were whiter than snow, purer than milk, more ruddy than the old ivory, fairer than the sapphire. Their face is now made blacker than coals, and they are not known in the streets : their skin hath stuck to their bones : it is withered and is become like wood.*”¹

This sad picture of the destruction of Jerusalem is but a faint image of the graceless soul, which before in grace was the spiritual city of God. Whilst before the soul was a holy temple of God, built up of heavenly virtues, a reflex of His own glory, now by sin, as by a terrible storm, all its precious stones have been torn asunder and dispersed. Whilst before it was fed by the precious, heavenly fruit of virtue, and was royally adorned by the pearls of holy sentiments, it now seeks the food of animals and wallows in the mire of beastly lust. Whilst before it stood erect in the full vigor of youth, now its marrow is dried up, its strength is gone ; it lies weak and powerless, to the joy and derision of its enemies. And yet, how few deplore this desolation, even when they are, not like Jeremias, seated upon its ruins, but lie buried beneath them, and have wrought this destruction with their own hands !

¹ Lament. iv. 1-8.


What is the strength of Samson, the terror of the Philistines, compared with that Divine strength, which confers the supernatural virtues and makes vice and hell tremble? And yet we are incensed and angry at the foolish man, who betrays the secret of his great strength, known only to himself, to the curiosity and fickleness of a woman! But we are not angered at ourselves, who betray the sublime power of our soul to our bitterest enemy, holding our arms out to him, that he may cut them off, our sinews to be bound, so that we can neither fight him nor flee from him! Is this not the case, when by sin we open the door of our soul to the tempter, since he comes only to destroy its supernatural power and then to lay it in fetters?

But if we do not act so much as traitors towards ourselves, yet we often keep this heavenly treasure, this source of all blessings and fruits in peace, and of all auxiliaries in war, this nerve of our supernatural life and our merits, concealed in great part and as it were hidden in a chest and forgot, that we must give the strictest account of its investment. Let us then be more prudent in the future; let us by careful cultivation reap the greatest profit from this Divine plantation in our soul, let us incessantly exercise all these virtues, that they may bring their author ever greater glory and more abundant profit.

EIGHTH CHAPTER.

By Grace we receive the Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost which are accompanied by the Eight Beatitudes of Christ and the Fruits of the Holy Ghost.

1.

HOUGH the supernatural virtues, which grace infuses into our soul, be great and glorious, yet they are not all and are not the greatest thing that we receive by grace from the Holy Ghost. Though these infused virtues are also gifts of the Holy Ghost, which are bestowed by Him and make us possessors of and like unto Him, yet there are other gifts, which are yet more particularly attributed to Him and are distinguished above the others by being called, in a special sense, gifts of the Holy Ghost.

The supernatural virtues, indeed, give us the power and faculty to perform supernaturally good and Divine works and to lead a supernatural life. Yet this life is so sublime, the path to Heaven so arduous, that the same Holy Spirit, who has given us these virtues as means for our ascent, must Himself raise us up and, as it were, carry us onward. The virtues are the roots from which our heavenly life must spring up. But besides these roots, there are required the leaves and the cups to imbibe light and warmth from above. The virtues are the rudder, by which we steer the ship of our soul over the stormy ocean of time into the port of eternity, the pinions upon which we are to rise above all created nature to Heaven and to God. But we are too weak alone to move this powerful rudder and these strong wings, and even if we were able to do this, yet

Heaven is too distant from earth and too far above us, for us of our own selves to bring the ship to the heavenly port. Therefore, the same Holy Spirit, who has given us the rudder and the wings, must also give us sails, which He Himself must swell, who appeared as a mighty wind to the Apostles on Pentecost day; He must Himself, as a strong wind that comes from Heaven and returns thither, support our flight and with His own hand bear us upward.

2. Now, these sails, these faculties, bestowed upon our soul by grace, by means of which our soul can easily be moved by the Holy Ghost to the most sublime activity, these, according to St. Thomas, constitute what we call the Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost.

They are *seven* in number, because there are seven principal supernatural virtues, which the Holy Ghost cultivates, develops, and stimulates into activity in us.

The gift of *Wisdom* corresponds to supernatural love; for wisdom is, according to the explanation of theologians, that knowledge of the highest good which makes us relish its Divine sweetness, and thereby kindles and inflames our love.

The gift of *Understanding* enlightens faith and fills it with so bright a light, that we experience in this life already a foretaste of future vision; it teaches us to understand the mysteries that we believe, and to so penetrate into their depth, as if we beheld them with our bodily eyes; it represents Divine truth to us in an ever brighter light and induces us to adhere to it ever more closely.

The gift of *Counsel* is related to the virtue of hope. By it the Holy Ghost comes to us as the best and truest Counsellor and Comforter, as He was promised us by our Saviour; He counsels us to desire and to sigh after the eternal and heavenly good only, and "*Himself asketh for us in unspeakable groanings,*" as the Apostle says. He further counsels us to place a very firm and unshaken confidence in God alone, and to embrace and hold Him as a pledge and surety of our hope.

The gift of *Fortitude* assists and quickens the virtue of fortitude and patience, that it may not succumb even in the greatest dangers. It animates our courage, so that we, out of love for God, undertake ever greater and more difficult works, and never relax or despair in our high endeavors.

The gift of *Science* unites with the virtue of prudence, and endows it with a greater clearness and security in discerning right from wrong. It is a luminous and holy instinct of the Holy Ghost, which securely and distinctly informs us what God requires of us, even when all resources of natural prudence fail.

The gift of *Piety* fosters and perfects in us the virtue of justice towards God and man. It makes our will pliant, devout, and yielding to all the demands of justice, so that we satisfy them, not only as the severity of the law commands, but with deep devotion and sincere affection.

The gift of *Holy Fear*, finally, confirms and calls into action the virtue of temperance. It inspires us with a holy reverence for the infinite majesty of God and a deep conviction of our own lowliness, and thus guards us against the inflations of pride. The fear of the Lord pierces our flesh, as the Psalmist says, and thus bridles and restrains the motions of concupiscence and prevents it from transgressing the bounds of modesty and holy propriety which virtue imposes upon us.

Thus the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost are, so to speak, the *motive power* in the supernatural faculties of virtue, which invests them with a wonderful energy and elasticity. They form our soul into a pliable tool in the hands of the Holy Ghost, by means of which He produces the grandest and most glorious works; into an instrument, strung with golden chords, from which He elicits the sweetest tones, that ascend even unto Heaven and by their wonderful harmony delight the angels and God Himself. They are the seven lamps upon the candlestick of seven branches, that

were alternately kept burning day and night before the ark of the covenant. They burn in the daytime during the performance of good works, and in the night of temptation to preserve us from the snares of sin, and to expose the delusions of the devil. And as the cups of these lamps in the temple are explained by some learned interpreters to have been wrought in the form of an ear, so the gifts of the Holy Ghost furnish our soul with spiritual ears, that it may hear the grateful inspirations of the Holy Ghost, and interiorly receive them.

These seven gifts of the Holy Ghost are given us in and by sanctifying grace, just like the supernatural virtues. For, since grace is a participation of the Divine nature, it must bring with it all those dispositions, be they ever so sublime, which are necessary for the development of supernatural life. Since it unites us so intimately with the Holy Ghost, it must also grant us all that which we require to be moved by Him. It must grant us these gifts, furthermore, because the supernatural virtues can scarcely be imagined without an inherent motive power.

Oh, how rich and beautiful does sanctifying grace appear again under this aspect, making us so similar to the Incarnate Son of God, that the words of the Prophet Isaias' may also be applied to us: "*And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and of godliness, and he shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord.*" The same Holy Spirit, who rested upon the humanity of the Son of God, comes to us also, when we are in the state of grace, and not only transiently, but to remain with us with His seven gifts. He constantly hovers over our soul, fructifies us with His heavenly dew, illumines us with His Divine light, and impels us onward as a strong roaring wind.

But how great, how infinitely great, then, must the loss of grace be! The ship of our soul, which before

¹ Is. xi. 2.

under purple sail sped onward over the stormy ocean of time towards the port of eternity, is suddenly bereft of all sail, and in dead calm lies motionless in mid-ocean at the mercy of the whirling waves that draw it down into the deep. Whilst before it was a precious implement employed in the hands of the Holy Ghost for the greatest works, a beautiful instrument producing the most pleasing melodies, it is now cast away ; its strength is gone, its chords are broken, it is a frail, dried piece of wood, that can serve no other purpose but to be thrown into the fire and burned. From an instrument of the Holy Ghost, it becomes the tool and plaything of the devil, who now, when it has lost these gifts, uses it and moves it about at his pleasure.

4. For as these seven gifts of the Holy Ghost animate and strengthen the seven principal virtues, so they, with invincible power, ward off from the soul and conquer the *seven-headed monster of capital sin* and of temptation to sin.

Filial fear of the greatness of God conquers and humbles the capital sin of *pride*. Piety, by which we guilelessly render and wish every one his due, dispels *envy* and malice. The gift of knowledge saves us from that dangerous madness which *anger* produces in us. Fortitude destroys *sloth* and that lassitude of the soul which makes it incapable of withstanding the assaults of sin. The gift of counsel liberates us from *covetousness*, by teaching us that our temporal goods are best invested in the purchasing of eternal goods, and that so invested, they will not be lost, but will bring fruit a hundred-fold. The gift of understanding protects us against *gluttony*, since by it we relish the sweetness of the heavenly food, the knowledge of heavenly things, and learn to despise sensual enjoyments. Wisdom, finally, keeps us from *luxury*, by filling our heart with the purest heavenly love, thus smothering impure and animal affections.

When, therefore, by losing sanctifying grace, we lose

these seven gifts also, sin raises its sevenfold head in our soul, subjects it to its power, and lacerates it in the most cruel manner with the violent stings of passion, as the serpent attacks and wounds the bird that has its wings broken and falls to the ground. Yet we alone are to be blamed for this inestimable misfortune; for by committing the first sin we have torn ourselves loose from the hand of the Holy Spirit, which carried us to Heaven, and we have precipitated ourselves into a bottomless abyss. Oh, that we, instead of so frivolously casting grace away, surrendered ourselves entirely to an infinite love, so that by its sweet gifts, its powerful impulse, its mighty hand, it might raise us ever higher, enrich us ever more, and grant us in this life already a foretaste of that sweetness which it has prepared for us in Heaven !

5. For by the acts of the seven virtues which we perform under the impulse and with the help of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, we acquire likewise the eight beatitudes which our Saviour has promised us in the Sermon on the Mount. These beatitudes also are really seven in number, for the eighth, the kingdom of Heaven, is none other than the first. The conditions, likewise, for acquiring these beatitudes, are seven, according to St. Augustine, because the eighth, "to suffer persecution for justice' sake," contains in itself and crowns all the different degrees and parts of justice. Thus, according to this holy teacher, they correspond in number and order to the gifts of the Holy Ghost and to the supernatural virtues, of which they are the fruit.

The gift of fear and the virtue of temperance make us, truly, *poor in spirit*, by mortifying our self-conceit and our desire of earthly goods, and thus secure for us the kingdom of God, with its sublime sovereignty and abundant riches. By the gift of piety and the virtue of justice, we practise true *meekness*, live in peace and harmony with our fellow-men, and thus deserve undisturbed possession of the land of promise. By the gift of knowledge and the virtue of

prudence we acquire holy *sorrow*, and perceiving the vanity of earthly things, and of human means, we may seek and find our consolation and tranquillity in God. The gift of fortitude and the virtue of fortitude create in us a growing *hunger and thirst after justice*, which will hereafter be satisfied by God with all heavenly blessings. The gift of counsel induces us above all to practise *mercy* towards our neighbor, that we may obtain mercy with God, and this increases and confirms the virtue of hope. The gift of understanding and the virtue of faith plunge our heart in the Divine light, purify it ever more from sensual attachment, and thus procure us that *purity* of heart which makes us worthy to see God in Heaven face to face. The gift of wisdom, finally, and the virtue of charity, tend to unite us ever more intimately with God and with our neighbor in the enjoyment of the highest good, which implies that *peace* which makes us true and perfect children of God.

And these beatitudes, which we are to expect in a future life and to merit by a zealous application of the gifts of the Holy Ghost and of the supernatural virtues, these we may, according to St. Thomas, enjoy already in this life to a certain extent. Even now we may esteem ourselves heirs of Heaven, sovereigns over the earth, and children of God. Even now we are consoled by the Holy Ghost in our sorrow, our hunger and thirst are satisfied; even now we experience the sweet consciousness of God's mercy towards us, behold God with the eyes of a pure heart, though it be in the dim light of faith only, and we may thus possess Heaven already on earth.

6. Therefore, says St. Thomas, does the Apostle speak of *Fruits of the Holy Ghost*, whose sweetness and loveliness we may enjoy in this life already; not only of blossoms that will ripen only in time of harvest and whose fruit can be gathered only after some time. The fruits, however, that he designates, are nothing else than the exercise and application of supernatural virtues and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. “*The fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, peace,*

patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continency, chastity."¹ The very name of these glorious fruits proclaims not only their heavenly beauty, but also their precious flavor and sweet fragrance, which delight and refresh our heart. This is especially true of the first three, which are, so to speak, the life of the others; for charity is the mother and root of all other acts of virtue, and communicates to them that heavenly joy and ineffable peace which it receives itself from the aspiration of the Holy Ghost, who is eternal charity.

Well may we apply, therefore, to the Holy Ghost and His gifts those beautiful words which in Holy Scripture Eternal Wisdom applies to itself; for the spirit of truth and of eternal wisdom is none other than the Holy Spirit, and wisdom is His highest and most precious gift: "*I took root in an honorable people, and in the portion of my God, and my abode is in the full assembly of saints. I was exalted like a cedar in Libanus, like a palm-tree in Cades, as the olive tree in the plains. I gave a sweet smell like cinnamon, and aromatical balm: I yielded a sweet odor like the best myrrh: . . . I have stretched out my branches as the turpentine tree, and my branches are of honor and grace. As the vine I have brought forth a pleasant odor: and my flowers are the fruit of honor and riches. I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope. In me is all grace of the way and of the truth, in me is all hope of life and of virtue. Come over to me, all ye that desire me, and be filled with my fruits. For my spirit is sweet above honey, and my inheritance above honey and the honeycomb. . . . They that eat me, shall yet hunger: and they that drink me, shall yet thirst. He that hearkeneth to me, shall not be confounded: and they that work by me, shall not sin. They that explain me, shall have life everlasting.*"²

7. How may you, then, dear Christian, hesitate even a moment to follow this pleasant invitation of the Holy Ghost and His grace, which promises you such sweet fruit

¹ Gal. v. 22, 23.

² Eccli. xxiv. 16-31.

and heavenly enjoyment? But should the testimony of infallible Divine truth not suffice for you, then come and learn from experience how great is the sweetness of the Holy Ghost. "*O taste, and see, that the Lord is sweet,*" cries the Psalmist. You would certainly not throw away untasted an unknown fruit which you had heard praised and commended very highly. Come, then, likewise, to the grace of the Holy Ghost and taste its fruit; receive grace within you, cultivate and cherish it in you, and let it operate in you. Very soon, and even in the first moment in which you turn from your sins to God in sincere contrition, you will experience a peace and a joy which the world cannot give; you will learn from your own self how sweet the Lord and His grace are, and will not so easily be deceived again by the vain joys of this world.

It would, then, be unpardonable if we lost the grace, together with the gifts of the Holy Ghost, or did not zealously endeavor to recover them as soon as possible. Equally unpardonable would it be if, whilst in the state of grace, we placed obstacles to the work of the Holy Ghost, and did not faithfully and zealously co-operate with His grace. The Holy Ghost desires, as the Apostle teaches, by His seven gifts to transform us more and more into the image of God from glory to glory. He will raise the structure of the temple of God higher and higher, until it reaches to Heaven. How ungrateful, how wicked and foolish would it be to restrain the master-hand of this Divine artist in His glorious work!

In the famous city of Athens a law was passed that any one who should cut off the hand of the sculptor Phidias, who had adorned the city with the most beautiful statues and works of art, would be considered a traitor to his country. Yet what is this artist who from lifeless stones sculptured images of false gods and of mortal men, when compared to the Holy Ghost, who, with infinite power, out of men forms living images of the highest and true God? And yet we restrain His hand, which we cannot cut off,


when we resist His grace, and wrest from it its wonderful instrument when we trifle with His grace, and permit His inspiration to be carried off by the winds of our concupiscence ! Yet we prove ourselves hard and brittle stones, who will not yield to the delicate strokes of this Divine instrument, and will not be transformed into the image of God ! Must He not thus finally grow tired of our resistance, and though He had selected us to be ornaments of Heaven, in the end cast us away, and deliver us over to perdition ?

Certainly we have deserved this, and our lot would then be the sadder, the higher the honor was for which we were destined. Let us, then, beware in future of placing obstacles in the way of the Holy Ghost in this unremitting labor, and no longer grieve Him by our stubbornness. Let us rather endeavor to offer Him a soft and pliable heart, which He can impress as He pleases. Let us entreat Him to melt our heart by His holy fire, that it may become impressible as wax, and not require the chisel, but only the seal to receive pure and perfect the image of God. Though even if He should use the chisel to crush the hardness of our heart, and we should tremble under His powerful strokes, let us not take fright and withdraw from Him ! The pain that we feel will soon be converted into the sweetest joy, and this trembling is a trembling of delight and exultation, caused by the flood of light and hitherto unknown happiness which overwhelms the heart and which it cannot comprehend.

NINTH CHAPTER.

Sanctifying Grace brings with it the Supernatural Actual Grace of the Holy Ghost.

1.

HILST we dwell so largely upon the glories and the power of sanctifying grace, we must not forget, or consider unworthy of notice, the so-called actual graces of God.¹

Without these actual graces, sanctifying grace, as we shall see directly, is not sufficient to lead a supernatural life. Yet withal it is the principal and most important element in this life. Sanctifying grace brings actual graces along with it, and is necessarily followed by them; it is, moreover, the specific principle of life for supernatural acts, whilst the others are only incitements to them. On the other hand, the actual graces serve, with our co-operation, to introduce the sanctifying grace into our soul, or to increase it. Since, therefore, sanctifying grace is the end, and in large part, also, the principle of the other graces, it

¹ Strictly speaking, sanctifying grace is also actual in the sense that it is an *actual reality*, a really existing quality of the soul, not only a relation or an idea of the mind. It is besides active, or operative, because it qualifies and inclines the soul to supernatural acts. Yea, as a permanent transformation of the soul, of its faculties as well as its substance, it has a far more solid reality than so-called actual graces, and as a *principle* of life, as a special radical capacity for action, it has a greater efficiency than actual graces, which are only transient sparks of life and incitements to action. Nevertheless, these are particularly called actual, because they consist in perceptible interior illuminations and affections, and actuate and give evidence of sanctifying grace, which in itself is not so perceptible. Besides, these actual graces must occasion supernatural action, and determine the soul thereto. That, however, which proximately occasions supernatural action and determines the soul to act, appears as the principal cause and characteristic of such action, and is, therefore, denominated active and operative. We cannot probably find an expression that is entirely unequivocal; but the usual acceptation of the term sufficiently specifies the meaning.

follows that all glories and privileges of the actual graces redound to the greater glory of sanctifying grace.

In this place we will only speak of the necessity of actual grace and its intimate connection with sanctifying grace ; later on, in the fifth book, we will explain how it prepares the way and leads to sanctifying grace.

Even when in the state of grace, we constantly require for every supernatural good work a special incitation of the Holy Ghost. Though in the supernatural virtues, and in the gifts of the Holy Ghost, we have the power and disposition to perform such acts, yet this power must be moved, by a special impulse of the Holy Ghost, to place the individual act.

Even the natural faculties of the soul cannot pass into active operation without a stimulus from without, which rouses them from their inaction, and impels them to act. Since a supernatural power, now, cannot be aroused into action by natural things ; since such a power is less properly our own, and, therefore, less under our control than the natural powers, the Holy Ghost, who has given us the power, must also influence and move it to develop itself, and this influence we call actual grace.

The plant, even in the fulness of its vitality, requires the nourishing elements, light and heat, and a congenial atmosphere and climate. The nobler the plant is the purer must be the atmosphere, the milder the climate to furnish it the requisite nourishment and the suitable degree of light and heat. In like manner the germ of supernatural life cannot develop in our soul, excepting under the influence of a supernatural atmosphere and a supernatural sun—a supernatural atmosphere that feeds it with heavenly dew and rain, and a supernatural sun that irradiates it with heavenly light, and fosters it with heavenly warmth. It can only develop under the constant influence of God, in whom we live, move, and are, as we exist and move in air. True, natural life also can develop only under the influence of God, just as the polar plants must

be enveloped by the same atmosphere, and receive light and warmth from the same sun as the tropical plants. But as the tropical plants exist in a far warmer region of the atmosphere, and must be nearer the sun, and receive its influence in a very different manner from the polar plants ; so must the soul, in supernatural life and thought, approach God incomparably nearer, and receive an incomparably higher influence from Him, than in its natural life. The Holy Spirit Himself must animate the germ of supernatural virtues with His own breath, imbue them with His own light, diffuse His own warmth in them, and only thus can they develop a Divine life.

Moreover, we must, by the acts that we perform in the state of grace, rise continually higher, always ascending a higher degree of grace. But we are unable to do this alone, even with the grace that we already possess, because no one can be elevated above His condition without the help of a higher agency. Therefore, the Holy Ghost must again extend to us His hand to draw us upward, He must induce us to aspire to a higher degree of grace, and assist us to reach it.

For this the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost are not sufficient ; for though they excite us more to supernatural action than do the infused virtues, nevertheless they indicate a *condition*, and are, therefore, dormant qualities of our soul, which, likewise, require an additional influence of the Holy Ghost. They are only the sail, by means of which the ship of our soul will arrive at the port of Heaven ; but this sail must be swelled and driven by the powerful aspiration of the Holy Ghost. The gifts of the Holy Ghost make our soul a pliant and obedient instrument of the Holy Ghost, but an instrument must actually be used and put in motion by the master to produce any effect, and this is done by actual grace.

Finally, every man in the state of justice requires actual grace, not only for every supernatural good work, but besides this, especially to avoid mortal sin in case of a grave temptation, and likewise to avoid the many venial

sins to which human frailty exposes him at every moment.

In a word, actual grace has almost the same influence upon supernatural life, and the principle of supernatural life—sanctifying grace—as light and nourishment have upon the development of natural life, and as medicine has for the weakness and disease of such life.

The sinner, in the state of sin, enjoys not even the habit or condition required for all necessary, supernatural acts. Therefore the actual assistance of the Holy Ghost is far more necessary for him. Besides, in the state of mortal sin, man is constantly averted from God; he is bowed down by the whole frailty of our corrupt nature, since there is no corresponding counter-balance to hold him up; his passions are in full activity and hurry him on from sin to sin, from one abyss to another. He is that carnal, God-forsaken man, whom the Apostle pictures in such dreadful colors, that man who sighs under the yoke of sin, from which his own unaided effort cannot liberate him.

2. After this preliminary explanation, we say: sanctifying grace alone makes us worthy of the actual assistance of the Holy Ghost, as long as it resides in our heart.

Sanctifying grace makes us children of God; as such, however, we deserve that our heavenly Father, by the influence of His Holy Spirit, should develop, foster, and preserve our heavenly life, that He should strengthen and enlighten us, guide us in all our ways and not desert us unless we have deserted Him. As God must give light to the eye, to which He has given the faculty of sight, for without light it cannot employ this faculty, as He must give to plants and animals their specific nourishment, without which they cannot develop their life, cannot arrive at their natural perfection and preserve themselves from a premature death, so must He, in our case, when we have by grace received the power of a supernatural life, grant us the influence of that light, and the strength of that nourishment, without which this life could not develop or be saved from speedy destruction.

By grace we are furthermore made living members of Christ. "Christ, however," says the holy Council of Trent,¹ "incessantly imparts His strength to the justified, as the head imparts strength to the members and the vine to its branches; and their good works are preceded and accompanied and followed by this strength, and without it they could in no wise be acceptable to God and meritorious."

The supernatural assistance of the Holy Ghost, then, by sanctifying grace, becomes in a manner natural, because by this grace we have ourselves been invested with a new, heavenly nature. This assistance is a staff placed in our hand and left to us, until we ourselves cast it away; it always surrounds us, as the light of the sun surrounds us and never withdraws itself from us, excepting when we close our eyes or put them out. When in grace the Holy Ghost dwells in so mysterious a manner in our innermost soul, He constantly influences our heart, and impels us to the good; He constantly addresses us, teaches us every truth, exhorts us to good works, and warns us against sin; He strengthens us in the hour of danger, and supports us when we are about to stumble and fall. The words of Moses in reference to Israel are then verified again in us: "*The Lord led him about and taught him: and he kept him as the apple of His eye. As the eagle enticing her young to fly, and hovering over them, He spread His wings and hath taken him and carried him on His shoulders.*"²

3. Oh, how happy are we, then, in the state of grace! How easy is for us the practice of virtue, how secure are we against the dangers of sin, and against the craftiest and mightiest temptations of hell. Well might we exclaim with the Apostle:³ "*If God be for us, who is against us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*" How secure may we, then, not only walk in the ways of God, without striking our foot against a stone, but even run and fly and attain to the highest point of perfection!

¹ Sess. vi. c. 76, de Justif.

² Deut. xxxii. 10, 11.

³ Rom. viii. 31, 35.

Yet equally unhappy are we, when by sin we have fallen from this high and secure state of the grace of God. Then the assistance of the Holy Ghost is incomparably more necessary for us, and at the same time our claim to it is infinitely less, or rather we have no claim at all. Even in this state God will never forsake us, as long as we live on earth, since in His infinite mercy He wills not the death of the sinner, but that he should be converted and live. God eternally condemns and casts away no one upon earth. But we are not worthy of this assistance, we have nothing to deserve it, but much to render us unworthy of it.

Without sanctifying grace we possess the claims and rights of our purely human nature only. Yet how could these merit for us the supernatural assistance of the Holy Ghost? This is a free gift of God, who thereby descends from on high and bears us up to Heaven. Our nature can lay as little claim to this assistance as it can to the grace of the sonship of God. For by nature we are only servants of God, and the gifts of the Holy Ghost properly belong to those only who by Him are made children of God, and participants of the Divine nature.

To this absence of worthiness in our nature sin adds a positive unworthiness, so great, that even if naturally we had a right to the assistance of the Holy Ghost, it would deprive us of this right. Sin not only obtains us no new gifts from God, but deserves the severest punishment and the loss of those gifts which we already possess. Much more, then, are we unworthy of the heavenly gifts of the Holy Ghost, if we return the deepest ingratitude and insulting contempt for the great abundance of these gifts, if we cruelly expel the Holy Ghost Himself from our soul, when He so kindly and graciously deigns to dwell therein!

Indeed, fearful must be the condition of our soul, when by sin we have deserted the fountain of the living water of grace, and receive but a few drops of this grace only by a special mercy of God; when we have closed the dwelling of our heart to the Divine Sun, and a few rays only of this

Sun, almost by a miracle, find their way into it, then the heavenly dew no longer fructifies a soil planted with living germs; then the sparks of grace no longer strike on easily ignitable tinder; then the Holy Ghost no longer finds a pliant, living instrument, which He may direct and use at pleasure. The consequence can be no other than that we deviate ever more from the path of virtue, sink ever deeper into the mire of sin, until finally we become incapable of heavenly assistance.

For if the Holy Ghost withdraws His assistance from you and leaves you to your own resources, how will you then check your headlong course down the steep precipice of sin, how will you withstand the whirling torrent that has seized you, how will you break the chains by which hell is dragging you into its abyss, or prevent yourself from being daily fettered with new chains? Though the Holy Ghost grants you some assistance, yet, unless you employ it to return speedily into the state of grace, you render yourself unworthy of even this assistance, and run the risk of being soon left to your own fate. But what can you expect of your own self, when you are naught but weakness and misery? How will you be able to cope alone, not only with your own passion and concupiscence, but with all the powers of hell, as the Apostle says: "*Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood: but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness*"¹? This terrible supernatural enemy can be conquered only by a mighty supernatural power, and you will not be certain of this power for any length of time, unless you recover grace.

4. Return, then, speedily into the bosom of your God, seek refuge under His wings and conceal yourself in the recesses of His tent, where you will be secure against all enemies. And lest in future you might again become a prey to sin, perhaps for all eternity, make a good use, in the state of grace, of all the many gifts and resources which the

¹ Eph. vi. 12.

Holy Ghost offers you. Remember that all those who lose grace by mortal sin have brought themselves to this only by neglect or contempt of the assistance so abundantly proffered them before. For God permits no one to fall into mortal sin who has not before rejected His powerful assistance, and forsakes no one who has not first forsaken Him.

But that precisely is our misfortune, that, when in the state of grace, with base ingratitude we stifle the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, will not heed His counsel, rebel against His wholesome restraint, withstand His holy impulses, instead of zealously and faithfully corresponding to them and improving every single grace. This ingratitude towards God makes us unworthy of further graces, and especially those great graces which we require in the hour of danger. For how can God suffer us to treat so slightly and contemptuously that which He grants us so generously and lovingly? How can He suffer us to cast away the graces that have cost Him the blood of His only-begotten Son, that are each of an infinite value? How can He suffer us to trifle with them, and thus to trample under foot the precious blood of Christ? He will do with us as with the foolish virgins. They would not provide the necessary oil for their lamps, and when they wanted it most, they could obtain none and were excluded from the marriage of the bridegroom. This will also be our lot, if we permit the oil of graces, which we are not asked to buy, but which is given us gratuitously in greatest abundance, to flow by and run to waste. We will then, perhaps, in the moment of grave temptation, or in the hour of death, not receive as much as is necessary to keep our bridal lamps from going out. Thus will we be excluded from the perpetual marriage which our soul should celebrate as the spouse of the Son of God in the state of grace, and perhaps from the eternal marriage in Heaven.


That we may escape this great misfortune, let us never again remain deaf to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost,

nor close our eyes to His light, nor counteract His powerful assistance. Then we shall experience that grace not only elevates our nature, but likewise heals all its infirmities and weaknesses, that it not only qualifies us for all good works and for heavenly merit, but that it also destroys sin, which had enslaved us, and guards us against relapse into sin.

TENTH CHAPTER.

The Infinite Value which Grace communicates to our Works for meriting Eternal Glory.

1.

E have already indicated that grace leads us, by means of the supernatural virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, to heavenly glory and happiness. It introduces us into Heaven, because it makes us true children of God and hence heirs of His Divine glory and happiness. Besides this, grace gives such a value to the works which proceed from it, that through these works we may merit and purchase Heaven ; so that God does not grant us Heaven gratuitously, from pure liberality, nor simply in fidelity to His promises, but out of strict justice, as a reward due to our works.

True, God needed not to reward each of our good works. For as our Creator and Father He may justly demand all service and devotion from us, and on account of His infinite dignity and goodness fully deserves it. Hence, Heaven always is a grace ; the more so since sanctifying grace, which makes us heirs of Heaven, and all faculties, by which we perform supernatural works, are gratuitous gifts of God.

Nevertheless Heaven, in the words of St. John, is a grace *for* grace, *i. e.*, a second grace which the first grace merits for us, and for which it qualifies us.

By sanctifying grace we are made partakers of the Divine nature, and true children of God, and the works which we perform in this grace are Divine, heavenly works. We thus stand in a relation of equality to heavenly glory, and when God promises us this glory, He promises it as an

inheritance and a reward, which is not above the dignity of our person and the value of our works.

A prince need not, absolutely speaking, reward either the services of his subjects or those of his children. If he would grant a great part of his kingdom to a subject in reward for faithful services, this would rather be a supreme favor than a just and equitable reward. The fidelity and love of his children, however, would be insufficiently rewarded, if their reward were no greater than that of his subjects; they might properly expect a share in his kingdom and his power.

We may apply the same to the heavenly King and His reward. The good works which we perform by nature only, as mere servants of God, have not been promised a heavenly reward by God, but they could not even expect such a reward; they are in no proportion whatever to the dignity of heavenly happiness, and God would have too much depreciated the infinite value of His Heaven, by offering it for such a low and limited price. Even the supernatural works which we perform without the state of grace, by means of actual graces and the virtues of faith and hope, are not worthy of Heaven. Not even considering that by sin we are still enemies of God, we are not yet His children and do not adhere to Him in filial love. We do not yet perform those works as heirs of Heaven and they can only serve to prepare our heart for this filial love and for the speedy reception of the grace of sonship through the merits of Christ.

But when we have actually been made children of God by grace, and embrace Him with filial love, then all the good works that we perform with the help of grace are so many filial services, which God can reward worthily only with His kingdom and all the riches of His Heaven.

It always remains true that, in the first place, Christ, the Son of God, and not we, merited Heaven, and that we can only merit it through Christ. The reason of this, however, is that we of ourselves, as sinners and servants of God, can-

not merit the grace of sonship, which is given only through the infinite merits of Christ. But if this grace is so precious that it could be purchased only with the infinitely precious blood of the Son of God, then it is evident that it has an infinite value itself, and consequently may communicate to the works performed in and by it a value sufficiently great to purchase the infinitely precious Heaven.

The grace which the Son of God has merited for us makes us conformable to Christ, and makes us sharers in His Divine dignity. Christ, however, as the true Son of God, acquired an infinite merit by every action, even the slightest, that He performed in the service of His Father, by every drop of His precious blood and sweat. We now are adoptive children of God by the grace received from Him, and our dignity in this state gives all our good works a very high value in the eyes of our heavenly Father. The principal distinction between Christ and ourselves is this only, that the merit of Christ was due to His natural dignity and was so abundant that it could suffice for all angels and men, whilst we have received our dignity through Him and can merit Heaven only for ourselves.

Grace makes us, furthermore, living members of Christ, and temples of the Holy Ghost. As the members are united to the head in life and action, so are we connected with Christ. He lives and acts in His mystic members, and our actions become, as it were, the actions of Christ Himself. The children of God, says the Apostle, are led by the Spirit of God; He is the soul and root of their life, and they are only as instruments that work and act in His power. "The Divine Spirit," says St. Francis of Sales, "acts in, by, and for us, so admirably, that though our actions are our own, they still belong more to Him than to ourselves. We perform them in Him, and by His direction, while He performs them in us; we act for Him while He acts for us, and co-operate with Him while He co-operates with us."¹ The value and merit of our actions,

¹ Love of God, B. II., C. 6.

then, says St. Thomas Aquinas,¹ is to be measured, not by our natural power and dignity, which is but finite, but by the infinite power and dignity of the Holy Ghost, who resides in us. This is another reason why the Apostle so often calls the Holy Spirit the Spirit of promise, the pledge of our inheritance, and the surety of our reward.

2. O incomprehensible dignity! O inexhaustible wealth of Divine grace, which is not only in itself such a great boon, but which is a source of innumerable other supernatural and heavenly gifts, which has such a weight on the scales of God that it causes the insignificant works of poor miserable men to balance the entire Heaven!

“*For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory.*”² What can give such a great weight to our troubles and sufferings, which in themselves are but trifles? How can the one scale of a balance, which contains only a straw or a feather, have equal weight with the other, which is freighted with a talent, unless there be another weight added, equal to the talent? All our power and labor is as chaff, compared to the excess of glory, which is the object of Christian ambition, and “*the sufferings of this present time,*” according to the words of the Apostle, “*are not worthy to be compared with it.*” Infinite, then, must be that weight, which so strengthens our insignificant powers and sufferings that we not only counterbalance the weight of glory, but even outweigh it. Such, now, is the weight of grace, such is its greatness and majesty, that the light chaff of our actions is made equal to the eternal and infinite glory of Heaven, equal to the highest and most perfect good, to eternal and heavenly happiness.

Without grace we may perform the greatest and most sublime works; we may convert entire nations, succor all the poor, devote our whole life to the honor and service of God; we shall never merit even the slightest degree of heavenly glory. We may suffer all the tortures of the martyrs,

¹ 1, 2. qu. 114, a. 3.

² II. Cor. iv, 17.

practise all the fasts and mortifications of the holy monks and hermits ; all that, without grace, is too little, or rather is nothing, to be rewarded even with the smallest drop of heavenly sweetness. With grace, however, we need not perform great things, or endure great suffering ; we need only pronounce the blessed name of Jesus with devotion, give our neighbor a cup of water to drink, say a short prayer, or offer up to God a momentary, insignificant suffering, and we have already merited Heaven. What distance between a pious word and eternal happiness, a drink of cold water and the heavenly banquet, a short, humble prayer and the kingdom of God, a momentary suffering and eternal bliss ! But in grace nothing is small and insignificant. Dipped into grace, the chaff becomes purest gold ; filled with its rays, the drop of water becomes the brightest pearl, and thus every little good work by grace becomes of precious value, so that it may purchase for us the greatest treasure, Heaven and God Himself.

3. If, then, it is grace which makes our works meritorious before God, this merit increases with the degree of grace which we possess, and that for three reasons.

Firstly, the higher we stand in grace before God, the greater is our dignity in His eyes, and this greater dignity of our person is communicated to our works. Even among men are the labors of a person in higher dignity accounted more than those of an inferior person. A commander receives a better salary than a private soldier, though the latter must generally work and exert himself far more than the former. The same holds good in all departments of social life ; superiors receive more wages for less-labor than inferiors. A similar distinction of rank is held before God by the souls according to the different degrees of grace, and the works of superiors here also merit more than those of others. It may thus happen that two just men give the same alms, practise the same mortification, and nevertheless the merit of the one is greater than that of the other.

Secondly, we must not forget, on the other hand, that in his meritorious works the Christian offers up to God not only these works, but himself also. If he now appears greater and more worthy before God, and is more loved by Him on account of a greater abundance of grace, then he brings God a more valuable and acceptable offering than he who is poorer in grace. In reality he gives more than the latter, even if the work of both, considered in itself, were entirely equal.

Thirdly, the intrinsic value of the action itself is enhanced by the higher degree, which the person that performs it holds in grace, because he exercises not only an exterior, but an interior influence upon it and gives it a greater intrinsic merit. The heart of man is but a barren soil, which is fructified by the grace of God. Therefore, the supernatural virtues must bring better and sweeter fruit in a heart, which is more abundantly saturated with the dew of grace, than in another, which is not blessed with such abundance.

The works, then, which are performed in both conditions, are unequal in their intrinsic value on account of the difference of their sources, even though they had the same object, the same good motive, and were performed with the same effort and exertion. When two persons make an act of love for God with equal exertion, the act of one may be incomparably more perfect and worthy than that of the other, because with grace his love is incomparably greater than that of the other. And so two persons may give the same alms to the poor, with the same good intentions, and under the same external circumstances, and yet these acts, in appearance so similar, may, in their intrinsic value, be as different as two coins of the same size and the same impression, one of which is of gold, the other of silver.

Far greater, then, must now be your admiration for grace, Christian soul, when you see that it not only communicates to your works a simple merit, but may infinitely increase this merit. Who, then, would not esteem and love

grace, when it so easily grants us that which otherwise we cannot obtain by the greatest labor and exertion? Who ought not to burn with a holy desire to acquire and preserve this grace? Who, finally, would be satisfied with an inferior degree of grace, and not rather hasten to increase it as soon and as much as possible by co-operating faithfully and zealously with the grace he already possesses?

This is the more necessary, as God gives us grace precisely for that end, that we may merit as much as possible with Him, since He Himself admonishes, encourages, and urges us thereto, and since nothing is more agreeable to Him than when we make Him ever more our debtor. "*Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come;*"¹ so God addresses, in the Canticle of Canticles, the soul that is in the state of grace. Yes, we should hasten, and not only run, but fly as the dove, to receive the crown prepared for us. "*He that is just, let him be justified still,*" says our Lord in the Apocalypse:² "*and he that is holy, let him be sanctified still.*" "*Blessed is the man,*" sings the Psalmist,³ "*whose help is from Thee: in his heart he hath disposed to ascend by steps.*" St. Paul constantly admonishes us to grow and increase in charity. In like manner Holy Writ exhorts us in a thousand other places to be prudent and zealous merchants, and not to neglect the precious opportunities for such an advantageous bargain. Yea, God makes it our strict duty to put at interest and multiply the talent of grace He has given us, and He threatens us with the severest punishments if we let it lie idle and unimproved.

4. How foolish, then, are we, if we neglect so many opportunities that offer themselves every day and hour! Though we did not commit sin by neglect of prayer, an easy, un-mortified life by performing but few good works, nevertheless, we suffer an irreparable loss.

If we made an act of love of God thrice a day, we should acquire a hundred degrees more of grace in one month; a thousand in one year; and in a few years we should be en-

¹ Cant. of Cant. ii. 13.

² Apoc. xxii. 11.

³ Ps. lxxxiii. 6.

riched with infinite degrees of grace, for which in Heaven we might expect equal degrees of glory. If you omit those three acts of love, how can you imagine it a trifling loss ?

But how much do they gain, who, with the Apostle, mortify themselves the whole day, who constantly sing the praises of God, bear His love in their heart, and in their acts accomplish His will ! With how great and wonderful glory will they be introduced into the possession of the kingdom of their Father ! Who, then, would be contented with a few prayers only, a few mortifications and good works, when his every day, aye, every hour and minute, may be replete with good works ?

The loss, however, which you suffer on account of your negligence, appears double and threefold when you consider that your present negligence in acquiring merit deprives also your future works of a part of their value, and even leads you into danger of losing again that which you have already acquired.

For since the merit of our works depends principally upon the degree of grace that we occupy, our future works will evidently be less meritorious the more inferior the degree of grace is that we have before acquired. Since, then, we can acquire by every good work a higher degree of grace which the omission of the act withholds from us, it follows that our negligence and sloth in the practice of virtue must deprive all our future works of a part of their value, and must cause an incalculable and irreparable loss.

Moreover, the negligent merchant endangers that which he already possesses ; for the kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and with violence must we bear it away. We are placed with our treasures, as it were, upon a rapid stream ; if we do not tend upwards against the stream, and struggle against the waves, we cannot remain in the same place, but will be carried away by the torrent, together with our treasures. We have to deal with God, who prizes very highly the gifts of grace and glory which He offers us, and cannot permit us to despise and contemn them. Yet we are guilty of

such contempt when we seek them only negligently, and thereby diminish our desire to receive them, as well as the readiness of God to concede them. Oh, that we all took to heart the consoling, but equally terrible words of our Lord: “*To every one that hath shall be given, and he shall abound; and from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken from him.*”¹

5. It is, again, not necessary for the acquisition of heavenly merit, that we perform works to which we are not bound by any law. Even if we only fulfil the law and do that which we cannot omit without sin, we already acquire merit with God, and our merit is the greater the more zealous and solicitous is the performance of our duty. Thus, by suppressing an inordinate motion, by combating a temptation, we may enrich ourselves, and acquire the greatest merit, where the devil intended us the greatest damage.

Admire here again, Christian reader, the power of grace and the liberality of your God. But at the same time wonder at your own incomprehensible folly, when by succumbing to a temptation, you at once lose the great good of a heavenly merit, and bring upon yourself the great evil of sin with all its consequences.

But what shall we think of him who by a mortal sin loses not only the merits he might have acquired by overcoming the temptation, but besides loses all he had hitherto acquired, and renders himself incapable, as long as he remains in sin, of acquiring any further merit?

Oh, how sad it is to hear the sinner say, “Why should it be a great thing to commit a mortal sin? Can I not make it good again in the next confession?”—I will say nothing even of the hideousness of sin itself, which offends the highest good, and dishonors your soul, say nothing of all that which must make even a momentary loss of grace appear more bitter to a truly enlightened man than the suffering and pain of many years’ duration, I will say nothing of your uncertainty, whether you may again be converted and

¹ Luke xix. 26.

thus escape eternal damnation. But is it really a trifle if you lose at once, in a single moment, all those precious treasures of merits, which you have perhaps gathered through many years with much labor and exertion? Is it a mere trifle that during all the time that you remain in sin, you are unable, with all possible labor and pain, to acquire even the slightest merit for Heaven? Without grace all the works that you perform are dead with regard to Heaven. Your fasts, your prayers, your works of mercy may be useful and in part obligatory, so that you could not omit them without falling into other sins. But they can profit you nothing for eternity. Had you remained, however, in the state of grace, they would have brought you a great profit.

If a rich banker cast a large sum of money, which brought him daily a hundred dollars, into the sea, in hopes that in a month or so he might draw it up again, would you not consider him the greatest fool, especially if he pretended to have lost only a trifle? You would certainly consider him so, not only because the loss were great, but also irrecoverable.

But is the loss of merit, which you might have acquired in the state of grace, less great and irreparable? Even though the merits acquired before and lost by mortal sin revive again at the recovery of grace—which depends, according to some theologians, upon conditions that you perhaps cannot so easily fulfil,—even though in future you compensate for the lost time by redoubled fervor; that time, which you have spent in sin, is certainly lost beyond recovery, and your redoubled zeal would bring far greater fruit if you had always preserved and made use of grace.

When, with the grace of God, you have once entered Heaven, and could even there experience sorrow, you would have no more just cause for such sorrow than your neglect of grace upon earth, and your loss of a higher degree of glory consequent upon your temporary loss of grace. Well, then, indulge now in this holy grief, and en-

deavor, at least in future, not to be guilty of this neglect, of this disastrous folly.

6. We must here emphatically remark, that the necessity of sanctifying grace for heavenly merit must not prevent us from performing all possible good and supernatural works, even in the state of sin. Though these works are not elevated by grace, nor animated by a filial love of God, and are, therefore, of no account for eternity, yet they restrain us from many new sins; they dispose our heart for revival by charity, and also influence the mercy of God to grant us soon the grace of perfect conversion. If we omitted them also, we would withdraw ever more from grace, and finally almost entirely lose the hope of recovering it, and with it the faculty for merit. It is foolish, then, to omit these works; but it were equally foolish to shun the little trouble by which we might communicate to them an eternal and imperishable value.

This also must be especially remarked, that the merit of the good work depends principally upon the grace that we possess, but that the act itself must likewise be taken into consideration. We must not imagine that any and all acts that we perform in the state of grace, even those we perform with natural motives, are meritorious before God, provided only they be not sinful. Only those acts which we perform from supernatural motives under the impulse of the Holy Ghost and the influence of Jesus Christ; only those which are rooted in grace and correspond to its high dignity, are borne aloft by grace to the throne of God, and are pleasing and meritorious in His eyes. Their merit increases according to the strength of grace we apply to them, and the purity and nobleness of the motive that directs and determines them, according to their being performed in the full strength and the spirit of grace. As a man, therefore, who stands higher in grace may, with the same effort and in the same work, gain more merit than one who is inferior in grace; so may the latter gain a greater merit than the former, if he acts with his entire

strength and the noblest motives, whilst the other only employs a part of his strength and from less noble motives. If, then, we would gain great, very great merits before God, we must seek by all possible means to acquire grace, and the highest possible degree of grace, and likewise endeavor to perform our works entirely in the spirit of grace, and with its full strength, with the greatest effort and the highest motives. The manner in which we must do this will be shown in the fifth book, which treats of the practice and exercise of supernatural virtues.

ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Inestimable Privilege of Grace, that by the Works performed in it, we may render Satisfaction for the Punishments of Sin Deserved.

1.



THE merit of a higher eternal glory in Heaven is not the only fruit of the supernatural works that we perform in the state of grace. They have this other incalculable advantage, that they remove the obstacle which may after death delay our entrance into Heaven for a long time, that they liberate us from the terrible sufferings of purgatory.

This would follow already from the fact that grace entirely destroys and annihilates in us the guilt of mortal sin. If it is able to destroy the guilt, which is an infinitely greater evil than its punishment, and which is the cause of such punishment, then it cannot be lacking in the power of paying and remitting the punishment also. Although, therefore, in justification, it generally leaves a part of temporal punishment to be paid for the guilt, it places us in a condition to make worthy satisfaction for the penalty.

As it makes the good works of the children and friends of God very pleasing to Him and worthy of a heavenly reward, so it makes all the sufferings of the children and friends infinitely valuable and offers them up to God as a worthy satisfaction. We need only joyfully accept the difficulty and labor connected with the performance of good works, or bear the inevitable sufferings patiently and resignedly, and God will, in consideration of the high dignity grace has given us, and the supernatural charity for

which it qualifies us, appreciate these little sufferings more than if, without grace, we had endured for many years the greatest and direst torments. As the satisfaction of Christ receives its infinite value not so much from the greatness of His sufferings, as from the infinite dignity of His person, so the sufferings of His living members receive from grace an ineffably high value, which of themselves they could not possess.

We could fully appreciate this further blessing of grace, then, only if we had a clear notion of the terrible sufferings of purgatory. St. Gregory the Great teaches that they are more fearful than the most exquisite sufferings of the holy martyrs; according to St. Thomas, they are more painful than the sufferings of Christ; according to St. Anselm, they are greater than all the sufferings which a man can endure in this life. Yea, according to the common opinion of theologians, the fire in purgatory is of the same kind as that of hell, and the principal distinction between the sufferings in purgatory and those in hell is this only, that the former are not eternal, and do not destroy, therefore, the hope of liberation.

2. What a boon, then, do we enjoy in grace, when by it we may redeem so many and such great torments by every insignificant and trifling suffering! If the king of a vast empire decreed, by an especial privilege, that the pence of a subject, who, with his family, was burdened with a heavy debt, should be accepted and valued at a thousand gold-pieces, how speedily and diligently would he take up all his pence to rid himself from all debt! Would he not hasten to assist also his friends and relatives, and to leave his children a great treasure! In the same manner you may, whilst you are in the state of grace, redeem, by an insignificant suffering and slight effort, other sufferings a hundred and thousand times longer and more dreadful. That which would otherwise scarce be of any profit to you is now estimated as of infinite value by God on account of grace. The hundred-fold fruit, which Christ has promised

our works in the life to come, has reference, according to different theologians, not only to the heavenly reward, but also to the expiation of merited punishment. Grace is, so to speak, the patent upon the presentation of which God accepts our pence at a thousand times their value. How, then, can you hesitate to gather as many pence as possible by mortifications and sufferings for the love of God, to cast these pence into the treasury of God and thus redeem your own debt and even that of your relatives and friends? For grace so enriches you, that with comparatively little labor you may render satisfaction, not only for your own sins, but also for the sins of others. If you would, therefore, do a great service to your relatives and friends, then thank God that you can, by this means, assist them in their greatest necessity, and do not fail to do so with all zeal and Christian prudence, as soon and as much as possible.

How poor and miserable are we, on the other hand, if we have lost grace! Whilst in grace the endurance of all, even of involuntary pain and suffering, brought us the greatest profit, without grace all voluntary suffering can profit us nothing for the remission of the punishment of sin. We may suffer grave diseases, hunger, poverty, insult, offences, and the loss of earthly goods, the most cruel pains in soul and body, anything that a man can suffer in this life; all is for nothing. If we suffered all this taken together until doomsday, we should not have redeemed the punishment for the slightest offence of God, since Divine justice can accept no satisfaction from its enemy whilst he remains an enemy. This is so true¹ that the justice of God is forced to punish those who are eternally damned on account of mortal sin, to punish them likewise for small and venial sins for all eternity. Whether, then, you would be eternally damned or temporarily suffer in purgatory, you see how much it is to your interest to preserve grace, in order to be saved from such terrible punishments.

¹ Suarez, de pecc. disp. vii., sect. 4.

TWELFTH CHAPTER.

By Grace we enter into a Wonderful Communion of Goods with Christ and the Saints.

1.

THE wonderful power of grace is not exhausted by enabling us personally to gain merits for Heaven and to render satisfaction for our sins to the Divine justice ; it makes us, besides, participate in the merits and satisfactions of all saints and of Christ Himself, as the enraptured Psalmist sings : ' *"I am a partaker with all them that fear Thee and that keep Thy commandments."*

By grace we enter into the most intimate and loving union with Christ and all the saints, being joined with them into a mystical body, whose soul is the Holy Spirit. But if there exists the most perfect communion of goods in this union, as has been explained already, then the treasure of merits and satisfactions which Christ and the saints have solicited by their holy works and sufferings must profit all those who are connected with them by grace.

As regards first the merits of Christ, it is certain that Christ has died for the sinners, and will apply His merits to the sinners. The sinner, too, receives manifold graces ; but all these graces remain fruitless, if they do not lead to sanctifying grace, and reconcile him again with God. Thus the sinner, then, only obtains in reality the fruit of the merits of Christ and access to eternal life, which Christ has acquired for us, when sanctifying grace converts him from an enemy into a child of God. Therefore we must say that no one derives any benefit for eternal life from the merits of Christ, excepting by sanctifying grace.

¹ Ps. cxviii, 63.

Grace, again, makes us living members of Christ. Now it is evident that a living member may draw much good and advantage from the resources of the head, which a dead member or one only half alive cannot receive. Thus the justified, in virtue of their living union with Christ, receive a great wealth of actual graces to practise virtue and avoid sin, from which sinners are excluded. The just alone have access to the sacraments of the living, which apply the merit of Christ to us and which increase grace in us far more than we could increase it by our own merit. For the sacraments and especially the Holy Sacrament of the altar are the channel by which streams of grace flow to us from the infinite treasure of the merits of Christ without any action on our part. We need only to approach with devotion and to draw therefrom, in order to increase and perfect ever more the wealth of Divine grace in our soul.

The merit of the saints, then, is in itself a personal merit and can work an increase of sanctifying grace directly for themselves only and not for others. Nevertheless, our fellowship with them in grace is so intimate, that their merit also profits us and effects in us, at least indirectly, an increase of sanctifying grace.

Besides this their merit lends a far greater efficacy to their prayers. And thus the saints, by their merits and their more efficacious prayers, can obtain many and great actual graces for us, by which we are preserved from the loss of sanctifying grace, and urged to acquire ever greater merits ourselves. In a thousand cases, where our prayers would be insufficient with God, the saints come to our assistance with their prayers, and enable us to make such progress as of ourselves we could never accomplish.

2. All these treasures and riches are lost for you, my dear Christian, if you are not in the state of grace. Though others be favored with a golden stream of grace from Heaven; though others be filled and blessed by the abundant sufferings of the martyrs, by the charitable works of the patriarchs, by the ardent desire of the prophets, by the

zealous labors of the apostles, by the austere life of confessors and virgins, and by the whole infinite treasure of the merits of the ever Blessed Virgin and the King of saints, Christ Jesus Himself, you alone are left empty-handed. Oh, what unspeakable misfortune ! Whilst others swim in a stream of Divine graces, are drunk with heavenly drink, and in the Most Blessed Sacrament feed upon the bread of eternal life, you must perish miserably from hunger and thirst ! Aye, you are forbidden, under grave and just penalty, to approach the table of life and the treasure of the Sacraments of the living, whilst the others have constant free access. Or if you should nevertheless approach sacrilegiously, you would only receive a deadly poison and live coals, that would forever burn you, whilst others derive therefrom imperishable riches. By the judgment of God and the judgment of your own conscience, you are spiritually excommunicated, *i. e.*, cut off from the living union with Christ and His members, though exteriorly you still belong to the body of Christ. But if the public judicial excommunication of the Church is so terrible and is justly dreaded by the faithful, how much more terrible, then, is sin, which deprives you of the fellowship of the saints, eliminates your name from the number of the children of God, and associates you with the slaves of the devil !

Nevertheless, as long as you preserve the faith and remain in the bosom of the Church, you still enjoy to some extent participation in the merits of Christ and His saints ; you still receive through them, though far less abundantly than in the state of grace, many graces, which ought to lead you to return to sanctifying grace. But the fruits of the *satisfaction* of Christ and His saints is to the last and smallest part entirely lost to you. As little as you yourself can render satisfaction for your sins and can redeem its punishment when you are in a state of sin, so little can you partake in this state of the satisfaction of others. Thus you are incapable likewise of deriving any benefit from the indulgences which the Church so lavishly

dispenses from the treasury of her head and holy members.

In the state of grace, however, you may appropriate the superfluous satisfaction of others at pleasure. Every friend, every saint can transfer his satisfaction to you, and they are your own as well as his. The Church herself may with a full hand pour out upon you the inexhaustible treasure deposited with her, and may enrich you so much that you are as free from punishment as from guilt, and can enter Heaven without touching the fire of purgatory. So great is the dignity which grace confers upon you, so intimate the union in which it associates you with Christ and the saints!

How easy, then, does grace render the paying of the terrible penalties of sin, since it even does away with the necessity of taking upon ourselves those little labors and troubles by which we may redeem in this life the punishments of purgatory! Yet, we, who otherwise are bent upon acquiring the greatest amount of good in the easiest and most commodious way possible, are in this case so foolish and senseless, that we often, for a considerable time, remain without sanctifying grace, this easy means of giving satisfaction for our sins! When will we finally know our own advantage and acknowledge the wonderful goodness of God towards us, who has given us in grace a source of all good and a remedy against all evil? Oh, that it may not be necessary in the hour of death, or in purgatory (supposing, that we have not the terrible misfortune to lose grace forever), to repent too late, that we have not extinguished or moderated the fire of purgatory and hastened the time of the beatific vision by careful preservation and exercise of grace!

3. When in the state of grace we are united with Christ and His saints into a living body, we are finally enabled to perform all our good works in union with the works of Christ and the saints. Since their works are incomparably more perfect than ours, they can supply the defects of our works and thus make them more pleasing to God.

There is nothing more acceptable to God than if all His children are united with each other and with His Divine Son in serving and praising Him. Christ Himself says : “ *Where there are two or three gathered together in My name, I am in the midst of them.*”¹ How grateful to Him must our service and praise then be, when we are united not only with the one or the other, but with all saints, not, it is true, in one place, but are united in one spirit as members of the same body ! And how agreeable and consoling must be for us the assurance that we serve God and practise virtue, not alone and separate, but conjointly with so many holy souls, who are inflamed with the most ardent love for God, who offer themselves as pure and holy sacrifices, and chant with us the same hymn of praise !

Equally worthless, however, are our works, equally desolate our condition, if we are without the state of grace, separated from Christ and all the just. How must we fear to approach God, when we can no longer join that society of holy souls which formerly surrounded us ! How weak must our prayers now appear before God, how miserable our works ! How little will our actions now please Him, when we are no longer associated with the angels, but with hell !

Certainly the sinner also must pray to God and perform good works ; God also appreciates them, but only in so far as they are accompanied with the sincere desire of conversion, or at least, are in some manner directed to such conversion. But if the sinner, without the desire of conversion, without the intention of severing his connection with hell and returning again into the communion of saints, aye, if he perhaps have the intention even of again offending God, and in this disposition dare to make his offering to God, then those terrible words apply to him which God once spoke to wicked Israel : “ *To what purpose do you offer me the multitude of your victims, saith the Lord ? I am full ; I desire not holocausts of rams, and fat of fatlings, and blood*

¹ Matth. xviii. 20.

*of calves, and lambs, and buck-goats. When you came to appear before me, who required these things at your hands, that you should walk in my courts? Offer sacrifice no more in vain: incense is an abomination to me. The new moons, and the sabbath, and other festivals I will not abide; your assemblies are wicked. My soul hateth your new moons, and your solemnities: they are become troublesome to me, I am weary of bearing them. And when you stretch forth your hands, I will turn away my eyes from you.”*¹

Hasten, then, O sinner, hasten to return to God and the communion of saints. God and His saints will gladly assist you in the recovery of grace; but you do not know how long God will yet bear with you, and permit His saints to assist you, if you do not in this moment already begin your conversion.

¹ Is. i. 11-15.

THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Wonderful Power which Grace manifests in the Weakness of our Nature.

1.

BEFORE we conclude this book on the effects of grace in the soul, we must call particular attention to the *wonderful* power which grace possesses, compared with the weakness and infirmity of our nature.

The supernatural, precious value which grace confers upon our actions is certainly in itself a most sublime effect of grace. But as long as we live upon earth, it is visible to God and the saints of Heaven only. We perceive it only by faith and therefore we do not accord it a very great admiration.

But when sanctifying grace, in union with its accompanying actual graces, breaks the chains of our passions and bad habits, when it conquers the weakness and misery of our nature, or rather confers upon our nature the power to deny and conquer itself, then we behold and experience the effects of grace as plainly as we feel and experience the severe yoke of the passions and the misery of our nature, and we have occasion to realize and admire its evident wonderful power in us.

“*Come and behold ye the works of the Lord: what wonders He hath done upon earth,*” sings the royal Psalmist.¹ The old spiritual writer, Cassian, applies these words to the effects of grace: Come and see, he says, how a hardened usurer is converted to liberality, a spendthrift and debauchee to continency, a proud man to humility, an indulged

¹ Ps. xlv. 9.

and delicate person to severe and zealous penance, to voluntary poverty and mortifications. These are truly works of God, these are miracles, which in a moment convert, as in the case of Matthew, publicans into apostles, and as with St. Paul, raving persecutors into most zealous preachers of the Gospel. These are the works of God, of which the Son of God says that He performs them every day, together with His Father. Who would not admire the power of grace, when he beholds the attraction to gluttony and the love for sensual pleasure so mortified in himself, that he is contented with vile and insipid food, and takes even this sparingly and unwillingly; when he perceives the fire of concupiscence and of carnal lust, which he considered inextinguishable, so cooled within him, that he scarcely notices the slightest motion of it; when he beholds angry and mad men, who were incited to anger even by marks of great tenderness, made so meek and mild, that they are no longer moved even by gross insults, but on the contrary, enjoy them?

Thus teaches Cassian, and St. Bernard adds: that the omnipotence of the Eternal Word is made evident in nothing more than in this, that it makes those who trust in Him omnipotent by the strength of grace. Of this strength the Apostle remarks, that he can do all things with it. Grace is that power of the Holy Ghost which our Saviour has promised to the Apostles, and in them to us, by the words: "*You will be endued with power from on high.*"¹ Hence St. Chrysostom calls grace an impregnable wall and he teaches that it smooths all difficulties for us and makes every burden bearable. The same sentiment is expressed by the royal Psalmist, when with strong confidence in God he says of himself: "*Who hath made my feet like the feet of harts, and who setteth me upon high places. Who teacheth my hands to war: and hast made my arms like a brazen bow.*"²

The recollection of these words dispelled in the heart of

¹ Luke xxiv. 49.

² Ps. xvii. 34.

blessed Andrew Spinola the fear of the sufferings and mortifications of monastic life, which depressed him and detained him from the entrance into the Society of Jesus, as he had been accustomed to the pleasures and comforts of the court. He was so impressed by the words, that he experienced a great sweetness in all those things he had before dreaded, and finally, as a missionary in Japan, joyfully suffered a slow and terrible martyrdom by fire.

Indeed, there is no doubt that, in the words of the Prophet Isaias, all "*they that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength ; they shall take wings as eagles.*"¹ They shall fly without trouble and weariness in the way of perfection, since the grace of God wonderfully supports and bears the clumsiness of our body and the weakness of our soul, and seasons with heavenly balsam the bitterness of every labor.

2. Great and sublime, but very true, is that saying of St. Augustine, that the soul, provided only it do not voluntarily surrender to sin and cast away its weapons, has more power, from the assistance of Divine grace, to subdue the flesh, than the flesh has in kindling the fire of concupiscence, for we all know that it is written : "*The lust (of sin) shall be under thee, and thou shalt have dominion over it.*" St. Augustine spoke not without experience ; he only repeated for the instruction of others a truth which he had proven in himself. He had long and laboriously battled with the vanities of this world, with his evil habits and passions ; but they had held him so long and strongly enslaved and would not leave him escape at once and for always, and he could not break their chains. But when grace had suddenly burst these chains asunder with mighty power, he exclaimed : "How sweet on a sudden was it become to me to be without the sweets of those toys ! And what I was before so much afraid to lose, I now cast from me with joy. For Thou, O my God, didst expel them from me and didst come Thyself instead of them, sweeter than any pleasure whatever."³

¹ Is. xl. 31.

² Gen. iy. 7.

³ Confess. Bk. IX. Ch. 1.

St. Cyprian had made a similar experience in himself ; he speaks of it as follows : As I was held enslaved by the innumerable errors of my former life and did not believe that I could free myself from them, so was I attached to the vices that adhered to me, and, despairing of a better life, I loved my evils as if they were already my bondsmen and my property. But after the power of the waters of regeneration had washed away the stains of my former life, and had infused a light from above into my cleansed and purified heart, after I had been imbued with the Spirit from Heaven, and had by a second birth been transformed into a new man, then I felt, suddenly and wonderfully, all doubts dispelled, all hidden things clear, all obscure things plain, and what before seemed difficult to me appeared now very easy. ¹

St. Gregory the Great applies to the grace of the Christian the promise made to Saul : “ *The Spirit of the Lord shall come upon thee : . . . and thou shalt be changed into another man.* ” ² As the Spirit of God converted Saul from a poor shepherd boy into a mighty and terrible king, before whom the enemies of Israel were to tremble, so the same Spirit, by His grace, makes you a strong master over concupiscence, a victorious king over the flesh ; He converts you into another man, who finds that sweet and pleasant, which before he avoided and detested. “ *This is the change of the right hand of the Most High,* ” ³ which the Psalmist so admired ; this is a supernatural wonder, which only grace can work in you and of which Holy Writ says : ⁴ “ *God is wonderful in His saints.* ”

This effect might indeed appear less wonderful and sublime, since it is appropriate to the spiritual nature of our soul to govern the flesh, to subdue its lusts, and to love the beauty of virtue and justice more than sensual goods and pleasures. Though this be true, and though, according to the words of the Apostle, the spirit is contrary to the flesh and tends to govern it, yet it feels but too well that it is

¹ Ep. ad Donat.

² I. Kings x. 6.

³ Ps. lxxvi. 11.

⁴ Ibid. lxvii. 36

against its will a slave to the flesh, that it cannot liberate itself from the dominion of the latter, and therefore groans under the heavy yoke imposed upon it. Hence the Apostle cries out: ¹ “*Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God, by Jesus Christ our Lord.*” It is grace, then, which liberates the soul in a wonderful manner from this sad servitude in which it is placed by nature; it is grace, again, which establishes the spirit in its becoming rank and superiority.

3. It is, however, still more wonderful that grace not only orders the flesh back into the position of natural and necessary subjection to the spirit, but it gives the spirit, moreover, such a power, that it may even hate the flesh and desire to annihilate it, that it may deny to the body the gratification even of its lawful desires and grant it naught but what is bitter and unpleasant, that it may be prepared to suffer the flesh to be consumed and destroyed as a holocaust in honor of God. For is it not wonderful that delicate virgins and children, as St. Agnes, St. Eulalia, St. Pancratius, and innumerable others, should joyfully triumph over the rage of the tyrants and of hell, who, with most exquisite cruelty, applied all their wit to invent torture and suffering for them, aye, should even in holy joy mock at these pains and torments? What shall we say of the holy hermits, the fathers of the desert and so many other saints, who voluntarily lived for many years in greatest retirement and poverty, denied themselves all gratifications of the flesh, labored by fasts and chastisements not only to keep within bounds, but to kill the concupiscence of the flesh, and who lived in the flesh, as angels in Heaven without flesh? Whence did Barsanuphius, to mention one out of a thousand, receive that superhuman strength to live for fifty years in a small cave, hidden from the view of all mortals, without food, and without all human resources? From the inexhaustible source of grace alone.

Grace is mightier than nature; it arms nature against it-

¹ Rom. vii. 24, 25.

self, so that it is able to renounce itself, to deny and give up its own self, and to do a holy violence to itself. Grace makes us capable of that superhuman mortification and perfection which the Saviour demands of us, when He instructs us to renounce all, even that which nature holds dearest, and to hate and sacrifice our own soul. For that is the greatest wonder of grace, that it induces our spirit not only to mortify and renounce the flesh, but to deny and mortify itself, by renouncing its own will and its own judgment, and to offer itself in unlimited obedience to God as a precious and perfect holocaust.

The violence of grace to nature at first glance appears unnatural, not as a blessing, but as an evil for nature, wherefore nature, too, is so much opposed to it. But grace will mortify nature only to raise it to a new life, and by taking away all that nature possesses, loves, and desires, even its own self, and thus dividing and wounding it in its innermost depth, it at the same time infuses such a grateful balsam into this wound, that nature finds nothing sweeter than to be stripped and wounded in this manner. Inquire of the saints whether they ever experienced any greater delight than in those moments when they denied themselves and offered themselves, soul and body, up to God. St. Francis Xavier will answer, in the name of all, that he knows nothing sweeter than to conquer and mortify oneself. Let us ask ourselves whether we have ever experienced a deeper and livelier joy, than when we suppressed a violent desire of nature, or performed any other act of heroic mortification with the help of grace.

If grace, then, could give the saints such a wonderful, superhuman, and heroic courage, as to elevate them above themselves and make them lead an angelic life already in the flesh, can it not enable you to live at least like a man, in harmony with your natural dignity, and not as an animal, as a slave to the flesh? Believe me, everything is possible to grace, everything; and when you have experienced its power, you will exclaim with the Apostle: "I

can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me.”¹ I can curb the insolent flesh, bridle the passions, restrain the desires, eradicate the evil habits, and prune the sinful inclinations and affections, even if the operation should draw blood ; I can humble myself and subject myself to all for God’s sake ; I can finally die with Christ, and for Christ, and die a protracted death, and do all this perseveringly and joyfully !

O heavenly power, O blessing, O wonder of grace, which converts this frail reed, this light down, this soap-bubble of our nature into a brazen column, an impregnable wall, and makes it strong and invincible, not only against its external enemies, but even against itself !

4. Indeed, grace loves to manifest its strength most gloriously, not in making the strong stronger, but in uniting itself with the greatest weakness. Thus says the Apostle : “ *The power (of grace) is made perfect in infirmity.*” And he adds : “ *Gladly, therefore, will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. For which cause I please myself in my infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ ; for when I am weak, then am I powerful.*”²

Precisely *when* we are weak and *because* we are weak, the wonderful power of grace is made manifest in us. God might have given us a perfect and strong nature, which grace needed only to elevate and to glorify. He might also, by the grace that makes us His children, take away all our natural weakness and infirmities. But this would be less glorious for His grace and for ourselves, and would not make the wonderful power it gives us so manifest as now, when we by grace may triumph over weakness and misery.

Let us, then, give heartfelt thanks to God for the wonders which His grace works in us. Let us, in evidence of this gratitude, always remain hopeful, and in the midst of our poverty and misery faithfully hold fast to the word of God

¹ Phil. iv. 13.

² II. Cor. xii. 9, 10.

which He spoke to His Apostle :¹ “ *My grace is sufficient for thee : for power is made perfect in infirmity.*” Let us not complain that the devil and the flesh afflict us with such severe temptations, that it would seem we must succumb. And though it is not forbidden to desire and ask God to avert them from us, let us suffer them with patience and even joy, if He will not deliver us from them ; for then we are certain that He will gloriously manifest His grace in us and give us the opportunity for a splendid superhuman victory. Therefore, we must not consider it a severe yoke, but an honor and great happiness, that grace places us in a condition to deny and mortify our nature.

¹ II. Cor. xii. 9.

Fourth Book.

On some other Effects and Prerogatives of Divine Grace.

FIRST CHAPTER.

Grace makes us Worthy, in Every Respect, of a Special Divine Providence.

1

THE supernatural effects which grace produces in our soul are no less glorious and sublime than the sublime union with God into which it introduces us. Grace is a Divine light, which diffuses in our soul in a higher manner and more perfect measure all those gifts and blessings which the sun diffuses over the earth. At one blow it annihilates the most fearful and invincible of all evils, mortal sin. It impregnates our soul with the germs of heavenly and Divine virtues, by which we participate in the life of God Himself and merit His heavenly happiness. It brings us the seven precious gifts of the Holy Ghost, and a whole series of other graces, which we require on the way to Heaven. It makes us partakers of the merits and satisfactions of Christ and of all the saints. It finally triumphs in a wonderful manner over our weakness and infirmity.

These are so many and so great gifts, that it might seem as if with them the treasures of grace were exhausted. Still there are some others, which deserve a particular

attention, and which, therefore, will form the subject of the present book. Afterward we shall demonstrate how much the example of the good angels and of all the saints ought to animate us to love and appreciate the glories of grace.

2. Since grace makes us dearly beloved children of God, whom He embraces in ineffable tenderness in His only-begotten Son, we are certain that God will in every way provide for us with truly paternal solicitude. We may confidently commend to Him all our desires and cares, and expect, with full certainty, that He will give us not only His heavenly kingdom, but all other things besides, if they are useful and salutary for us.

“*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His justice; and all these things shall be added unto you,*” says our Saviour.¹ This kingdom of God is grace, by which God reigns in us, and by which we are called to reign with Him; the justice of the kingdom of God is none other than the justice of grace, which is given us as children of God. How easy and precious and desirable in themselves even are the conditions of the contract between God and ourselves! If we seek Heaven only, earth will likewise be ours; aye, everything is ours, if we belong to Christ and God. “*All things are yours,*” writes St. Paul to the Corinthians,² “*whether it be Paul, or Apollo, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come: for all are yours, and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.*” The saints are ours to assist us, life is ours to make us happy in God, death to bring us to Him, the present to serve our necessities, the future, which we may already claim, the world, because it is subject to us and was created for us.

O blessed and happy condition! If you belong to God, you are lord over all things. “For,” says St. Bonaventure, “the Lord, the Friend, the Father will not permit His servant, His friend, His child to suffer want in anything.”

God not only compares this His paternal solicitude with

¹ Matth. vi. 33.

² I. Cor. iii. 22, 23.

the care of a mother for her infant, but He extols it infinitely more, saying: "*If a woman should forget her infant, yet will not I forget thee.*"¹ "*Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob,*" He exclaims, "*and all the remnant of the house of Israel, who are carried in my bowels; even to your old age and to your gray hairs I will carry you. I have made you and I will bear. I will carry and will save.*"² "*He that touches you,*" says God to us through the prophet Zacharias,³ "*toucheth the apple of my eye.*" "*He hath hid me in His tabernacle; in the day of evils He hath protected me in the secret place of His tabernacle.*"⁴

But if God so loves us, so diligently provides for us, so guards and protects us, because we have been made His children by grace, what could be wanting to us in soul or body, that is truly useful to us, and can make us truly happy? If God feeds the beasts, and sustains the flowers of the field, how much greater care will He show us men, and particularly His children?

Let us hear our Lord Himself: "*Be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body, what you shall put on. The life is more than the meat, and the body is more than the raiment. Consider the ravens, for they sow not, neither do they reap, neither have they store-house, nor barn, and God feedeth them. How much are you more valuable than they? . . . Consider the lilies how they grow; they labor not, neither do they spin. But I say to you, not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these. Now if God clothe in this manner the grass, that is to-day in the field and to-morrow is cast into the oven, how much more you, O ye of little faith?*"⁵

What then should cause us any anxiety, if we are in the state of grace? Eternity belongs to us as heirs of Heaven, and here on earth God provides for all our necessities. We may, as St. Peter admonishes,⁶ "*cast all our care upon Him; for He hath care of us.*" We need fear no

¹ Is. xlix. 15.² Ibid. xlv. 3, 4.³ Zach. ii. 8.⁴ Ps. xxvi. 5.⁵ Luke. xii. 22-39.⁶ I. Pet. v. 7.

enemy, since God is with us, nor dread any misfortune, since His wings shield us, nor be anxious about food and clothing, since our heavenly Father provides better than an earthly father or we ourselves could provide.

3. But you may say, Why, then, do the children of God suffer, and sometimes suffer great want, more than the children of the world and the sinners? Why do they also frequently pine away in bitter poverty, and so often experience rude shocks of misfortune? Why are they, too, visited by much sickness and tribulation, so that it appears God had abandoned them more than others?

The answer is very easy. None of these evils can befall you without a special permission of God, and as long as you remain a true child of God, He who loves you so much cannot permit it, unless it redound to your benefit. All these evils, therefore, are special gifts of the paternal love of God, thereby to make you like unto His only-begotten Son, who likewise had to enter into His glory by suffering "*We know that to them that love God, all things work together unto good, to such as according to His purpose are called to be saints.*"¹ These sufferings are supernaturally hallowed by grace, and they consume our nature in honor of the heavenly Father as a holocaust seasoned by the heavenly incense of grace. These evils, furthermore, are to excite in the children of God a most ardent desire for their heavenly home, lest they might become too much attached to the place of their exile, and suffer their heart to be drawn away from heavenly things by the abundance of earthly goods.

As children of God we are called for eternity, and have even now a claim upon eternity; all temporal things must only be a means for arriving at the eternal. The more certainly anything leads to this end, the dearer it ought to be to us, the more it ought to excite our admiration for the temporal Providence of our heavenly Father, be the thing sweet or bitter, agreeable or disagreeable.

¹ Rom. viii. 28.

Let the heathens run after the perishable things of earth, weep over years of scarcity, and anxiously watch the winds and the weather ; they have nothing higher to hope for ; we have received the temporal things only as auxiliary means for brief and transient use, to obtain thereby the highest eternal good.

Oh, that we knew how to appreciate our sublime dignity, and the wonderful Providence of God for us ! We should consider it beneath our dignity to occupy ourselves so zealously with temporal cares, and to attach our heart to this earthly vanity. Let us deeply impress on our mind the following words of St. Peter Chrysologus : “ After the Lord has been so liberal towards us and given us His grace in such abundance, He commands us to cast away the miserable and worthless possessions of our servitude, since we are destined to royal greatness. ‘ Sell what you possess and give alms ! ’ The royal dignity does not suffer a common ornament ; this supreme honor is bestowed only with the purple and diadem. He, then, who believes himself anointed king by God, must doff the garment of his servitude. If, then, that highest of Kings beholds one who dares come to the marriage feast with a garment unsuited to His majesty, He will have him bound and cast into exterior darkness, because the disfigurement of the guest dishonors the host. And he who still preserves the poor possessions of his former state of servitude, after he has been loaded with royal treasures and riches, is blinded by his misery and knows not how happy he is.”¹

Therefore, we should not seek the temporal, we should rather be without it, and gladly give it up for the price of Heaven. We should seek only the eternal goods of grace ; then all other things that are really useful for us, and not merely of a glittering appearance, will be added unto us ; without grace, however, they can only be dangerous and harmful for us.

“ *Why,* ” says the prophet, “ *do you spend money for that*

¹ Pet. Chrysol., hom. xxiii.

*which is not bread, and your labor for that which doth not satisfy you?"*¹ Let us purchase Christ without silver and without labor, and He will comfort us; His grace will be a fountain of living water in us, springing up unto everlasting life, and creating in our soul a hunger and thirst after heavenly goods, which is more agreeable and salutary than every earthly food and drink.

¹ Is. lv. 2.

SECOND CHAPTER.

Grace Enjoys the Company of Numerous Hosts of Angels.

1.



OD not only extends His own loving and powerful Providence to man in the state of grace, but He sends out hosts of heavenly spirits for their protection, guard, and service.

The woman represented in the Apocalypse as clothed with the sun, who is a figure of the soul adorned by grace, has at her side the archangel Michael, and a close array of other angels for her protection. Jacob, who was in such high favor with God, was astonished to see the angels meet him on his return into his country, and he recognized in them the camp of God. Eliseus beheld them as they stood ready armed to serve him and his disciples as powerful auxiliaries. And abbot Isidore led his friend, the abbot Moses, who was troubled with grave temptations, to an elevated plain and pointed out to him the arrayed hosts of heavenly spirits, saying: "The Lord of hosts sends all these to the assistance of His servants, and you see there is a greater number on our side than on the side of the enemy." Thus was fulfilled what the Psalmist predicted: ¹ "*The angel of the Lord will spread his tents around those that fear the Lord.*"

But what can move God to send from Heaven His own court, the hosts of heavenly spirits that surround His throne praising and serving Him, to the assistance of poor, miserable men? What can induce the angels themselves, who constantly, in ecstatic vision, behold

¹ Ps. xxxiii. 7, according to the Hebrew.

God, to offer their services to us poor earth-worms, and to become our faithful companions? What is our dignity that we should merit such society and assistance, and what is the important business of the angels with us that requires so much care and solicitude from them?

2. Certainly, according to our nature, we should rather serve the angels than that they should serve us. But grace ranks us so high that even the highest angels do not consider it beneath their dignity, but on the contrary, esteem themselves happy, in being able to offer us their services. They know too well and better than we, that grace has raised our souls to the dignity of true children and spouses of their King; that it confers upon us a nobility which we do not possess by nature. They recognize in us the supernatural image of God and therefore hold that they must serve and honor God in us. What wonder that *they* should come to us, and that they should be sent to us by God, when the Holy Spirit and the whole Blessed Trinity by grace descend into our soul, to reside in it as in a holy temple? If the King of angels so lovingly takes up His abode in our soul, so gladly remains with it and cannot suffer to be separated from it, why should His retinue remain behind, and not hasten to surround in closed ranks the resting-place of their King and to guard it?

Oh, who may comprehend the honor that is accorded our soul, when, as a spouse of God, it is surrounded by His own court and receives their homage and service? Human ambition knows nothing greater than the glory of a powerful king, to whom a whole country does homage, whose bidding numerous richly ornamented servants obey, and whose retinue is made up of the princes and nobility of the land. Who, then, should not envy the glory of the justified soul, which is surrounded, not by men, but by angels, not by the princes of this earth, but by the princes of Heaven, and which is served, not with exterior and compulsory devotion, but with the deepest and sincerest respect and love?

3. But, besides this, the duty and service which the angels perform for us is so eminent and Divine, that they must feel happy to be admitted thereto. The communication of grace and its increase is so great a work, that even God can perform no greater work in a pure creature. The angels, however, are all, as the Apostle teaches, '“ *Ministering spirits, sent to minister to them who shall receive the inheritance of salvation.*”' They are sent to the children of God to introduce them into their heavenly inheritance. It would be unworthy of the angels to be obliged to assist us in the acquisition of earthly goods, as riches, amusements, human science, or to avert only temporal and bodily evils. Grace alone, and the corresponding heavenly inheritance, is precious enough to cause them to descend from Heaven to assist us in the acquisition and increase of this grace and glory, and to guard us against its loss. Their whole attention and labor, then, is devoted to grace, to preserve and increase this precious treasure in our frail vessels.

True, in imitating our heavenly Father, they extend their care also to the procuring of earthly goods for us and protecting us from temporal evils ; but this they likewise do only because we are by grace children of God, and only in so far as our temporal welfare can be conducive to our heavenly destiny. They intend nothing but our true happiness ; but for this they labor with so ardent a zeal as is unknown to the world, as can spring only from a heavenly love and can be surpassed only by the zeal and love of God.

4. What can be more agreeable and welcome to us than so devoted an attendance and so powerful a body-guard, whom God has sent from His presence to the protection of His children, as the Psalmist assures us, and to whom He hath given charge over us, to keep us in all our ways, and who will bear us up in their hands, lest we should dash our foot against a stone ?² Thus we shall be able, as the same

¹ Heb. i. 14.

² Ps. xc. 11.

Psalmist says, to “*walk upon the asp and the basilisk and trample under foot the lion and the dragon.*” And why should we still fear and tremble, unless we perhaps imagined that the heavenly spirit might be afraid of the powers of hell? We need lament no longer over our solitude and desolation, since we have so many, such powerful and faithful allies. If only we do not voluntarily surrender ourselves to the enemy, and foolishly hold out our hands to him, to be fettered with chains, we shall not only come forth from the battle without a wound, but shall also put our foes to ignominious flight.

Moses broke the power of the enemies of Israel by his prayer, Josue by brave battle; and should we despair of victory, when the angels fight for us on earth and the Seraphim pray for us in Heaven? Let us only take care not to omit in our own affairs that which they do for others, viz., to battle and pray, and let us not despise the companionship which they so willingly and joyfully offer us. You may better understand the honor and happiness of this angelic fellowship by a familiar illustration. Compare yourself to a poor stray lamb, that is in danger of being devoured by a hundred ravenous wolves and is then suddenly surrounded by as many shepherds and saved from their jaws. How unhappy were this lamb, if it remained exposed, solitary and alone, to such a number of enemies? How happy and secure, however, is it, if not only the dogs, not only a single shepherd, but as many shepherds as wolves surround it! We too are such weak lambs, surrounded by a hundred wolves, to whose fury we should undoubtedly succumb in our weakness, unless protectors, that are still stronger, come to our aid. Not only the pastors of the Church whom God has placed over us on earth, but even the princes of Heaven, come in great numbers to our succor. How grateful, then, should we be to them, how readily and gladly should we accept and make use of their assistance! How much should we endeavor to render ourselves worthy of their society and help, and to remain worthy of it!

Let us, then, lead a life that is pleasing to them and that they can present without shame to the eye of God. Let us cultivate such heavenly manners, as are becoming to the society of this heavenly court. Let our mind be averted from earthly things and be elevated to the angels in Heaven, where they stand before God. Let our heart be attentive to their counsel and obedient to their inspirations. But, above all, let us, with high and noble courage, hold fast to grace, which makes us on earth already fellows and brethren of the angels, and which alone makes us worthy of their society and service.


As soon as we give up grace, our soul ceases to be a child and spouse of God, and the whole heavenly court, which before surrounded us in such numbers and with such reverence, must at once disperse. As much as the angels honored and loved our soul on account of grace, so much must they loathe and flee from the soul which is so terribly mutilated and is lifeless by sin. In their stead, then, a whole band of evil spirits rushes upon us, to take possession of our soul, to torment and lacerate it, as the angels before remained inseparably with us, so they now will not leave us a moment, as long as we are in a state of sin, and they so hem us in on all sides, that our guardian angel can scarcely find access to us. True, the angels, even then, do not cease to protect us and pray for us, but only as from a distance, and only for that end that they may with grace return to us.

Behold St. Magdalen, who had experienced more, perhaps, than any other soul, the different effects of sin and grace. When she was still a sinner, a whole multitude of hellish spirits had taken possession of her ; but with grace a whole host of holy angels became her associates. Consider this example, I say, and then see and decide which of the two conditions you will prefer for yourself.

THIRD CHAPTER.

Outside of Grace there is no True Happiness in this World.

1.

 grace contains all the blessings which we have hitherto described, if it places us under a very special protection of Divine Providence and of the angels, then we may easily conclude what bliss and happiness it must prepare in this life already for all those who possess and preserve it. Let us add that there is no true happiness to be found in this world outside of grace ; then certainly our own profit will leave us no other way open, and we are compelled, if we will be happy, to seek our happiness exclusively in grace.

We need only invoke the witness of our own heart and of our daily experience to prove that the three principal things in which the world seeks its happiness, instead of making us happy and contented, make us more unhappy and miserable, the more we possess and enjoy them. These three things are sensual enjoyment, riches, and human honors.

If happiness consists in the full possession and enjoyment of all, and especially of the highest good, how could it then be found in sensual lust ? Sensual lust disgraces the nobility of our rational soul, obscures its spiritual vision, and drags it down to the lowest pleasure of the brutes, deprives the soul of its natural liberty, plunges us into the most ignominious slavery of the flesh, impels it to countless crimes and vices which cannot flow from true happiness, because true happiness is always good and pure. Aye, sensual lust even enervates and destroys the body and that es-

pecially, when it is considered the highest happiness and is indulged in to the fullest extent without restraint. For as a field is spoiled and loses its fertility by the boggy water that remains standing on its soil, so, says St. Chrysostom, is the body corrupted and destroyed by lust, is afflicted with innumerable, disgusting, and incurable diseases; it decays already in life, and its life is more miserable than a manifold death.

Since riches are only means to secure sensual pleasures or human honors, it is evident that they cannot give us true happiness. For such happiness is not sought as a means, but as an end and for its own sake, and must of itself satisfy all our desires in quiet possession and enjoyment. Moreover, riches are, as Holy Writ says, prickling thorns, which wound and lacerate us, whether they are pressed into our heart, or whether they are torn out again. They always create a desire for still greater riches, and since we do not always possess all that we desire, they make us truly poor and unfortunate. Only when we despise and contemn them, do they leave our heart in peace; wherefore our Saviour pronounces those happy only who are poor in spirit.

But what shall we say of human honor, which is not within us, but without? If it is a real and merited honor, it is always but a shadow of the virtues and gifts which we possess interiorly, and it were foolish to believe that the shell could give more happiness than the kernel. I will not mention how vain, how ambiguous, how wavering and uncertain this kind of goods is. St. Anselm aptly portrays ambitious men, when he compares them to children who chase butterflies, but are every moment deceived by their ever changing flight. In dumb haste these children run on, clap their empty hands together as if they were filled, rejoice as if they had caught the desired prey, whilst it has escaped them, and meanwhile they stumble, fall to the ground, cry, and sometimes even break a limb of their body. If they happen ever really to have

caught the butterfly, they rejoice at their glorious prey and boast as if they had really made a precious gain. In the same manner, the ambitious trouble and torment themselves in pursuit of fame which ever flees before them, and if they succeed in snatching a drop, they entirely forget how vain their joy is and how the next moment may again deprive them of it.

As little as these three things can individually satisfy your soul, so little can they all taken together do so. They are too miserable to fill our heart; so difficult to obtain, that we cannot possess them at all times and in equal measure; so transitory, that we must ever fear their speedy loss; so small, that we must always desire more; so dangerous, that we cannot give ourselves up to them without reserve and fear, and enjoy in them a true peace.

2. Our heart is created for Thee, O God, and it is unquiet until it rests in Thee, says St. Augustine. Our soul is by nature already too noble to be contented with sensual and external goods. It is immortal and desires an eternal and immortal happiness. When it has no hope of such an eternal happiness, it cannot even in its earthly time be truly quiet and happy.

How much less, then, can our soul find peace on earth, when it knows to what an exalted destiny it is called by grace! A man of humble condition can be happy in his state of life and be contented with the gifts and enjoyments which it offers. But if he were received as an adopted child by a great king, or if he had fallen into this low condition by misfortune, but knew himself descended from royal ancestry, then he would find his lot unbearable, which to others seems good and enjoyable, and he would not rest until he had recovered royal glory. The same may be said of us. Even if we should suppose that the goods of this world can make a man happy, they cannot satisfy the heart of him who feels himself called to the dignity of the children of God and destined for Heaven. The human heart is so exalted that the whole world is far be-

neath it, and so large and spacious, that all created things cannot fill it, and that God Himself cannot satisfy it unless He infuse Himself and His whole glory and happiness into it.

Or do you imagine, perhaps, that you may be able to forget your high vocation and basely attach your heart to the world and find pleasure in it? But would not this cruel insensibility to your highest happiness be itself the greatest misfortune and the most degrading shame?

But no, you will never succeed and be happy in your lowliness and degradation. You may resist grace as much as you will, you may close your heart to its blessing, it will always enter into it, if not to fill it, at least to make it feel its infinite emptiness. Grace makes Heaven and infinite happiness a necessity for the human heart, and leaves it no moment to enjoy fully and peaceably the earthly and finite. The more your heart will crave earthly goods, the more will grace excite its hunger and thirst after the heavenly. And woe to you if you do not satisfy this hunger and thirst by imbibing grace in full draught! Grace and your own nature will take terrible revenge; grace will be converted by God into a curse for the heart, which will not be made happy by it, and nature will rise up against him who cruelly and criminally will deprive it of its highest good and eternal happiness.

“*O ye sons of men, how long will you be dull of heart? Why do you love vanity and seek after lying? Know ye that the Lord hath made His holy one wonderful.*”¹ Thus the Psalmist speaks to all who would seek their happiness on earth outside of grace. For everywhere we find, as Solomon did, nothing but “*vanity and vanity of vanities,*” and in the end we must confess with him, that “*all is vanity and vexation of spirit.*”

3. Grace, however, which makes us saints, gives us the highest and only happiness that we can possess on earth. I will not even mention that happiness which is imparted

¹ Ps. iv. 3, 4.

to us in Heaven through grace; but only that which it prepares for us in this life.

There is, first, the hope of heavenly happiness, which alone, if we had nothing else, would render our heart more happy than the full enjoyment of all earthly goods. The mere consciousness that the heavenly joys infinitely transcend all idea and conception of the human soul, and that, on the part of God, they are infallibly certain—this consciousness alone is powerful enough to perfectly comfort and quiet our heart.

But in grace we possess the highest and infinite good, not only by hope, but in truth and reality in our very heart, and we may already embrace it and taste its sweetness. By grace we bear God truly and substantially in us, call Him our own with perfect right, and hold Him so firmly, that no power in Heaven or on earth can rob Him from us. By it we embrace Him with the arms of holy charity, press Him to our bosom, enclose Him in our heart, and are so penetrated by Him, that we are one heart and one soul with Him. By the union with God in grace, we already enjoy the highest delight and the sweetest pleasures, which so far surpass all sensual pleasures, as Heaven surpasses the earth; we possess the greatest wealth in possessing Him who has created all and whose greatness knows no limit; we enjoy the highest honor, since we appear truly great in the eyes of the infinite God and of His holy angels, and are unspeakably honored and respected by them.

Above all, however, grace gives us that sweet, heavenly peace which the Son of God has brought upon earth, the peace of Christ, of which the Apostle says: ¹ “*Let the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*”

As this peace is the principal fruit of grace, so it is the first condition of a true and perfect happiness. Indeed, peace is something so heavenly, that the world does not even pretend to be capable of giving it to us. It promises

¹ Phil. iv. 7.

its children glory, pleasure, and enjoyment, but not peace ; yea, it seeks to persuade them that true happiness does not consist in the quiet of peace, but in uninterrupted change and eternal variety. Oh, the imposter ! What is happiness but the quiescence of desire, and where do we find this quiescence, if not in peace ?

If grace, however, promises us happiness, we should believe this promise already, because it places true happiness in peace. But it also really gives us this peace, by uniting our heart in unchangeable love with the eternal and immutable goodness of God and in Him with all men, by grounding us upon God as upon an immovable rock, and by letting us rest in Him as in the fountain of all life and happiness. And nothing in the world can rob or impair this heavenly and Divine peace and happiness, as long as we remain in grace. Though we lose all else, though all that which the world calls misfortune and misery break in upon us, as long as we possess God, we possess all ; He alone suffices, He alone fills our heart, so that it requires nothing else.

Yes, all suffering and mishap is rendered not only bearable, but sweet and pleasant for the children of grace by its heavenly balsam. They esteem themselves happy to suffer anything for God and for Heaven ; for God, to give Him proof of their gratitude and devotion ; for Heaven, to merit it at least to that extent that it may not seem to have been granted to them altogether gratuitously. Grace not only hallows and glorifies all the good it finds in nature, but, excepting sin, also the imperfections and evils of nature, and renders them so highly valuable, that the saints ask nothing more of God than to be overwhelmed with pain and suffering.

But if grace converts all bitterness into sweetness, all suffering into riches, all sorrow into joy, by giving us that peace which the world cannot give ; if it leads us to enjoy God in this life, and adds, besides, the sweet hope of eternal salvation ; is it not true, then, that it makes us truly happy already on earth ? Why do we still hesitate to

cast ourselves into its arms, and to seek in it the only true peace and perfect happiness for our heart? Let us not be deceived by the vain appearances by which the world endeavors to stifle and lull into quiet the deep desire of our heart after true happiness. Let us listen to the loud call of the ardent, intimate, and infinite longing which grace itself elicits in our heart; let us hearken to the unspeakable groanings which the Holy Ghost produces in it, and let us follow them to the source whence they proceed; then we shall not be misled, and shall enjoy here in advance the happiness of Heaven.

4. It will scarcely be necessary, Christian reader, to describe to you how unhappy and miserable you are rendered by the loss of grace and by sin.

The misery of sin corresponds exactly to the happiness prepared for you by grace. The sinner loses the certain prospect of the eternal happiness of Heaven, and in its place inspires the fear of His dreadful punishment, by which God will, in a fearful manner, avenge the contempt of His grace and His Heaven. He loses the sweet peace with God and with himself, and instead falls into the most wretched discord with God and with himself, which must embitter all his joys and pleasures. As the supernatural, heavenly peace of grace composed him into happiest quiescence, so the discord of sin casts him into the most painful inquietude. Every blessing is for him converted into a curse. He is a reprobate in the eyes of God, and may not dare to look up with confidence to his angry Judge. His heart is agitated and distracted, his nature rebels against him, and if all creatures do not rise up against him to destroy him, the despiser of his loving Creator, it is an additional evidence of the forbearance and patience of God, who awaits his penance.

If you have ever been in this terrible condition yourself, Christian reader, you will have experienced how empty and desolate was your heart; how much it was oppressed by the curse of God and tortured by the sting of con-


science. And if you have not felt it, it was only a sign that you had lost every knowledge, every idea of true happiness, and that, in blindest self-deceit, you esteemed death life, and misery happiness. But that, certainly, is the greatest misfortune, not even to know true happiness, and that is the fulness of misery, to love misery itself and not even desire to escape from it.

Render thanks, therefore, to God, if His grace brought you to the knowledge of your misery, and inflamed in you the desire of deliverance. But who knows whether in future He will again save you, if you relapse into sin ?

FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Grace of God makes us far Happier than does the Grace of Man.

1.

INCE most men seek their happiness in the favor of princes and the great men of the world, rather than in the grace of God, we must condescend, though the comparison appear very unworthy, to place the grace of God by the side of human grace, in order to see which of the two makes us happier, even in this life.

If we possess the grace of God, we have no need of the grace of man, or if this be useful to us, we shall, with the help of God, certainly obtain it. God, by His grace, can, besides, protect us from the ill-will of men and of princes, and render it harmless for us. The favor of the great ones of this earth can profit us nothing without the grace of God ; it cannot obtain for us this grace, nor much less protect us from the terrible consequences of the disfavor of God. On the contrary, when this favor of men is courted and appreciated beyond due, it is only too often the cause of our falling into disgrace with God. For only too often men require, as a condition for their favor, things which we cannot reconcile with our conscience and the obedience due to God.

Woe to us, then, if we fear men more than God ! “ *God hath scattered the bones of them that please men.*” They will perish together with them and will recognize, too late, that they have founded their hope upon a weak and fragile reed, and not upon an immovable rock.

After all, what can the favor of men grant us that is good and great, and that can render us truly happy ?

It can only grant us external goods, riches, and honors, but it cannot enrich our interior : it cannot give us greater mental faculties, greater knowledge, a better and more perfect will, in a word, it cannot interiorly render us any better than we really are. The desire for such favor, on the contrary, excites in our soul every passion and vicious inclination ; there is nothing that alienates our heart more from virtue and induces it to every wickedness, than the inordinate desire to please men. It leads to the practice of every possible cunning and deceit, flattery and hypocrisy ; it impels one to belittle, slight, and calumniate the other ; it engenders the bitterest envy and the most burning jealousy, implacable hatred, and eternal enmity amongst rivals ; and the best will of a king is unable to prevent these sins.

The grace of God, however, beautifies, transforms, and perfects our soul ; it confers upon it an internal glory and improves all its faculties. It will never give occasion to sin or any other evil ; on the contrary, it infuses all virtues into our heart and constantly stimulates and nourishes them. We need practise no artifice, no intrigue to acquire it, since it is offered gratuitously by God ; aye, every sin, every injustice is an impediment to its acquisition, and we enjoy it the more, the more we wish others to share it with us and all to receive it.

Furthermore, men have not the power to let us truly and lastingly enjoy the benefits which they offer us. A king may offer his favorites riches and pleasures in abundance ; he is unable, however, to grant them also enduring health and vigor of life, without which they must perish in the midst of abundance. He may surround them with influence and high honors, and command his subjects to serve them, but he cannot compel a sincere respect and an interior love, and an affected and mere outward reverence is more bitter in the end than retirement. But if a king were capable even of all this, how could he give his courtiers that interior peace and the sweet quiescence of the heart which is the vital part of all true happiness ?

In the hand of God, however, is health and life ; in His hand are the hearts of men and He inclines them to whomsoever He will ; in His hand is that heavenly, Divine peace which fills our heart to its innermost depth. Is not this sufficient reason to esteem the grace of God infinitely higher than the grace of men and of kings ?

2. Yet we have still another reason. The grace of the great ones of this earth is uncertain and changeable as the wind ; the grace of God, however, is certain and unchangeable. Who would not admire the high favor which David enjoyed with Saul, being made his armor-bearer and having to remain constantly in his presence, to soothe and calm him in his trouble ? And yet in the short time that David was absent from court he was so forgotten by Saul, that Saul neither remembered his name, nor his family, nor his rank, and upon being roused by the heroic victory over Goliath, inquired who this David was. That is the result of the services and the devotion which we waste upon men ; thus ends their favor : it vanishes like a dream, and as a light feather is carried away by the wind.

Assuerus was indebted to Mardocheus for his life, since, by his fidelity and solicitude, the latter had averted from him the swords of the conspirators. But how long did he wait until he accidentally remembered his deliverer, and how long was Mardocheus without the favor of the king, which he had merited in such high degree !

But Thou, O my God, never avertest Thine eye from those who seek and preserve Thy grace ; with care and infallible accuracy dost Thou examine all their deeds and works which may render them more worthy of Thy favor. Thou dost never forget either them or any of their merits. Thy grace, Thy favor extend even beyond the limits of time : they last forever.

Oh, what an injustice we do Thee when besides Thy grace, or in place of it, we esteem and seek the grace of men ! Do not permit us in future to prefer men to


Thee, or even hold them as Thy equal, lest we meet the terrible curse: “*Cursed be the man that trusteth in man,*”¹ but that we may rather hear the consoling blessing: “*Blessed are they that hope in the Lord: their hope will not be confounded.*”

¹ Jerem. xvii. 5.

FIFTH CHAPTER.

In Grace we find the Highest Enlightenment, the Truest Liberty, and the Greatest Progress.

1.

NLIGHTENMENT, liberty, progress—these are the great catch-words which the spirit of the present uses to designate the highest blessings of mankind. They are beautiful words, of great and sublime meaning, and therefore they kindle, like an electric spark, every heart that is not yet entirely insensible to human dignity and human happiness. But the world is guilty of an impudent falsehood, when it claims for itself the discovery and possession of these three things, and pretends that it is the first to proclaim them. The joyful message of Divine grace, which Christ brought down upon earth, proclaimed nothing else than enlightenment, liberty, and progress.

“*I am the light of the world,*” says our Divine Saviour.¹ “*The night is passed and the day is at hand.*”² “*You were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord,*” exclaims the Apostle.³ “*If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed,*” says Christ,⁴ and His apostles teach us⁵ that this liberty is “*the liberty of the glory of the children of God.*” “*Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect,*” we are told by the Son of God, and the prince of the apostles admonishes us: “*Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,*”⁶ “*that you may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and*

¹ John viii. 12.

² Rom. xiii. 12.

³ Eph. v. 8.

⁴ John viii. 36.

⁵ Rom. viii. 21.

⁶ II. Peter ii. 18.

*length and height and depth . . . and that you may be filled unto all the fulness of God.”*¹

The highest enlightenment, the truest liberty, and the greatest progress are given mankind by nothing else than by the grace of God, which Christ has brought upon earth. The world, however, intends an enlightenment, a liberty, and a progress without God and in defiance of God, through and for itself alone. But this enlightenment is only darkness, this liberty is the lowest servitude and slavery, this progress is naught but complete retrogression and decay. “*Every best gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights,*” says St. James.² The enlightenment, liberty, and progress which humanity can of itself work out, at best do not transcend the narrow limits of human nature and its natural faculties; grace, however, brings us a supernatural and Divine enlightenment and liberty; it elevates us above our nature to the infinite nature of God, and thus renders possible for us a progress which knows neither end nor limit.

2. What do we understand by *enlightenment* and culture? Certainly a high illumination of our soul in respect to the highest and sublimest truths concerning our condition, our last end, and the means for attaining it. But what high illumination can we obtain without Christian grace? Nothing, then, is left us but our own natural reason and that of our fellow-men, or perhaps, too, the wisdom of that hellish serpent which enlightened our first parents in paradise and cast them into deepest misery. Our reason can, at the highest, enlighten us about sensual things, about our natural dignity and destiny, though it can do even this only with great difficulty and liability to error.

But, unfortunately, those who call themselves the apostles of enlightenment, do not even attempt to really cultivate the mind. They deem it great wisdom to lower man to the level of a brute, to contradict the immortality of his

¹ Eph. iii. 18.

² James i. 17.

soul, to deny his eternal destiny. They give sensuality the place of reason, they decrie the consciousness of spiritual and Divine things as darkness and superstition, and demand that we be entirely absorbed in the study and enjoyment of sensual things. By their enlightenment they will deliver us from the guardianship of the Church and of God Himself, and instead we shall be placed under the tutelage of a flippant, ever changing public opinion, of the blustering boastfulness of other men, who would make their foolish notions and vagaries the measure of all truth and wisdom.

Grace, however, does indeed place us under the guardianship of God, because it makes us children of God. Yet, as it is no ignominious disgrace to be the child of God, but rather our highest honor and greatest happiness, so we must esteem ourselves happy to be under the tutelage of God and to attend His instruction. For here truth will reveal itself in all its fulness and glory. Here we are enlightened by a supernatural light, which by its infallibility dispels all doubt, by its mighty splendor disperses the clouds that conceal the deepest mysteries from our view, enlarges our horizon infinitely, and elevates us far above the earth and all earthly things. Grace makes manifest our entire dignity, by which we are not only men, but true children of God; it reveals to us our supernatural destiny, which we are to attain in the beatific vision of God; with unerring security it points out the way that leads to heavenly happiness. It not only develops the light of our reason, but adds another infinitely higher light. It emancipates us from all prejudices by which we are blinded; yea, it alone emancipates us from the slavery of human respect and so-called public opinion, and gives us an infallible security in judging all important things, the world itself and all its ways and actions: "*The spiritual man,*" says the Apostle,¹ "*judgeth all things: and he himself is judged of no man.*"

¹ I Cor. ii. 15.

Who now would dare assert that the grace of Christ is opposed to enlightenment, and not rather that it alone gives us true enlightenment? How can we be intimidated by the world, when it mocks and insults us by calling us obscurantists? With holy pride we should, in imitation of the first Christians, call ourselves the enlightened and illuminated, since we enjoy the great happiness of having been delivered from the darkness of the world and been called by God into His admirable light.

As the Christian alone is truly enlightened by grace, so he alone is truly *cultured* and refined. The world understands by culture an exterior, polished, and accomplished manner and bearing, or at the highest, a greater or lesser education of the natural mental faculties, which appears great and splendid in the eyes of man, but in the eyes of God it appears as nothing. The highest and truest culture is that which impresses upon our soul the image of God, which transforms us into a Divine form and glory, and qualifies us to lead a heavenly life on earth as domestics of God and associates of the angels. This is the culture which alone corresponds to our exalted dignity, a culture to which, in their heart at least, even the children of the world cannot deny admiration; and which they denounce and revile, only because in its presence they feel their utter baseness and lowliness, and because they hate to see that others attain that which, to their mean comprehension and miserable weakness, seems unattainable.

3. The second gift, which the world boastfully promises but which can be obtained really and perfectly only by grace, is *liberty*. There is no word more abused and misinterpreted than this; and at first glance it would seem that grace were the last thing that could give us true liberty. But a closer consideration will entirely enlighten us.

Liberty can be good only inasmuch as it is a liberty *from* evil and from the impediments to good, or as it is a liberty *for* good. The liberty, then, to be able to choose the good *and* the evil is only in so far a good and perfect

gift, as we may thereby determine ourselves for the good. We must desire to lose this liberty in Heaven, so that we may, like God, have only the faculty to will the good. Grace gives us freedom from all evil, and freedom for all, even the highest, good. It is grace alone which delivers us from the greatest of all evils, from sin and the eternal punishment due to sin. It is grace which gives us the power to free our spirit from the preponderance of sensual desires that draws it down from its height to the level of the brute. It is grace which will one day deliver us from all pain and suffering, from all disease, and from death itself, to which we are subject as long as we are imprisoned in our frail and mortal body. It is grace which breaks through the barrier that separates our nature from the sublimity of God, and from servants makes us children of God. It is grace which enables us, not only to practise the natural virtues, but to perform supernaturally good acts and works, by which we can merit the heavenly happiness. In a word, grace frees and delivers us from all that can impede or disturb our highest happiness, and qualifies us for everything that is conducive to this happiness, and hence makes us free in the same manner as God is free.

Only of the dependence upon God it cannot and must not deprive us ; for as we can triumph over all impediments and enemies of our happiness only through God and His grace, we must remain subject to and dependent upon Him. But this dependence, too, is our highest and sweetest liberty, since it is nothing else than the most intimate and sublime union and unity with God. As the child is subject to the father, and the spouse to her betrothed, but very differently from the servant, in such a way, namely, that both, as it were, form but one person ; so we are by grace perfectly one with God : His liberty is our liberty, His dominion our dominion, His affair is our affair. And if we serve Him, it is not out of slavish fear, not even with the love of a servant, but with the freest and

noblest love of a child towards its father, of the beloved towards her spouse.

This high and heavenly liberty of the children of God, this liberty of grace, is promised by Christianity to all men who will accept the power to be made the sons of God, and who will profit by this power. All men, without exception, from the mightiest king to the most wretched slave, from the richest to the poorest, from the master to the servant, may obtain this liberty; all have a right to this liberty. No earthly power can rob us of it; we carry it with us, even if we are confined in chains and fetters, and obliged to assume the service of a slave. This liberty makes the servant equal to the master, the subject equal to the ruler; and if the former serves the latter, he does so out of free love for God, who ordained the different conditions of life, and he knows that, if he surpasses his master in grace, he is, in the eyes of God, superior to, and more free than the other.

Where are now the apostles of liberty, who promise us liberty without the grace of God? Oh, how shamefully do they abuse this high and noble word, to cloak the most degraded and miserable servitude and slavery! For as there is no other good without God, so there is no true liberty; this is rather a special prerogative of the Divinity and, therefore, forms in us its sublimest image. Desiring to be free without God is the same as desiring to exist without God. Just when man of himself will be equal to God, and make himself another God, he relapses into his entire nothingness and into the most abject servitude.

Freedom without God is not freedom from evil and freedom for virtue, but is freedom or separation from good and hence slavery of sin and evil. He who seeks his freedom in casting off the sweet yoke of grace and justice, takes upon himself the severe yoke of sin and its punishment, and becomes a slave to sin. He loses the sublime dignity of the children of God, and descends to the level of the brute and the devil. As long as he does not turn

again to God and subject himself again to Him, he has lost the power of rising again from sin and raising himself up to Heaven. He loses the control over his passions and is with superior violence carried along by them to every abomination. Instead of being liberated after death from the burden of his flesh, and seeing this itself redeemed from its frailty, he is eternally fettered to his body as to a prison and to an instrument of torture. Instead of being eternally a friend of God and reigning with Him, he is made a slave of the devil, who punishes and torments him with tyrannical power and violence.

May the grace of God save us from such liberty ! May it enlighten us, so that we may recognize our true salvation and seek that liberty alone which He Himself has brought from Heaven ! Then we will know how to appreciate every other liberty in political and civil affairs which the spirit of our times makes so much of. We will not over-estimate it and always seek first to acquire and preserve the liberty of the spirit and of conscience.

4. As the world clamors for enlightenment and culture, so, likewise, it clamors for *progress*. Restless, unimpeded progress is the pass-word, especially in our days. But whither shall we progress ? This is certainly a legitimate question. The friends of progress cannot tell us ; they answer that the whole existing order of things must be torn down, and something built up in its place. They feel that nothing on earth is sufficient for them, that nothing satisfies them. But can they elevate themselves above the earth, and soar up to Heaven ? Indeed, not. This is precisely the progress of grace. It is a progress by the hand of God, which leads and bears us on ; a progress which raises us above the earth, above our own self, and brings us to God ; a progress which, with one courageous bound, crosses the infinite distance between the finite and the infinite, and introduces us into the bosom of God ; a progress which never stands still, which always proceeds, as grace may increase and expand infinitely without meas-

ure and end ; a progress which does not improve the health of the body or our natural education, but which transforms soul and body from glory to glory into the image of God. It is a progress like that of the eagle, which with powerful flight rises from the earth to the sun. The progress, however, which the world attempts with its native faculties alone, is as the slow creeping of a worm upon the earth, which drags itself along with great labor, and cannot rise from the ground to which it adheres. We should certainly smile to hear this worm boast to the eagle of its great progress, after it had crept over a small space of earth. But must not God and His holy angels in Heaven also smile, if we dare to speak thus, or rather must He not be justly angered at the foolish boast of men, when they have made a new invention for greater facility and comfort of travel and intercourse ?

Let us place the same estimation on the progress of the world, as God and the angels do, and let us be little concerned, if the world scornfully call us men of retrogression. The world knows not what it wants and what it says ; we, however, know what we want. We know that we are borne aloft on the pinions of God, and may thus ascend from earth to Heaven. We know that God will perfect the work which He has begun in us.¹ We know that the whole doctrine of Christianity is nothing else than an invitation to ceaseless growth and progress. Only for that purpose did the Son of God descend from Heaven, to build us a bridge thither, to take us upon His shoulders, as the eagle takes its young, and thus to carry us Heavenward.

Well, then, let us show the world that we are as earnest about our progress as it is about its progress. Let us at least command the respect and reverence of the world, by zeal and energy in pursuing our progress ; for it is the indolence of the Christian which exposes him mostly and justly to the derision of the world.

¹ Phil. i. 6.

SIXTH CHAPTER.

How much the Angels esteem Grace.

1.

THOUGH we have not by far enumerated and described all the glories and privileges of grace, those already mentioned are certainly great and numerous enough to induce us to esteem, love, and appreciate grace above all other things, as the highest good God has granted us. In order, however, to encourage and confirm us still more in this love and esteem, we will now consider the examples which we ought to set before us herein. We have already considered God's estimation of grace ; next to God, however, none know its value better than the blessed angels and the saints ; the former, because they are already in full possession and enjoyment of grace, the latter, because by grace they have been made so great and glorious even on earth.

The angels manifest their love and esteem for grace, first, by descending from Heaven for its sake, to assist us in its acquisition and preservation. The great and unremitting zeal they manifest, their anxious solicitude to guard and protect this treasure, not for themselves but for others, ought to be a stimulus for us to employ at least the same zeal and diligence in our own affairs.

We learn this great esteem, however, particularly from the ineffable *joy* which the angels experience when we obtain grace or make progress in it. This great joy of the angels is described to us by their King Himself, the Son of God, in the words : “ *There shall be joy in Heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just*

who need not penance.”¹ The angels then rejoice over all the just on earth; but still more they naturally rejoice over the sinner who, contrary to expectation, recovers the lost gift of grace.

How great and glorious, then, must this good be, which fills the angels, who are always drunk with the stream of highest happiness, with such great delight, and excites in them so much sympathy! Many men acquire immense wealth, attain to high posts of honor, ascend the sublimest thrones and govern the most flourishing empires, acquire fame by brilliant victories, by works of science and art; yet this does not affect the blessed citizens of Heaven; they seem not even to notice these glories, much less do they compliment those who obtain them, or their friends and relatives. But if a poor beggar, or a person forgotten and deserted by all, is led back again to grace, then there is a feast of joy, and the angels hasten to offer their congratulations to that despised soul.

A rich merchant, who always deals in high values and is accustomed to great profits only, esteems small profits as nothing; he scarcely takes notice of them, and what others would consider a very happy possession appears to him as loss and detriment. Those glittering trifles which give little children the greatest joy are scarcely honored with a compassionate smile by grown persons. Let us, then, imitate the angels, who are certainly richer and more sensible than we men; let us leave the joy at the gain of earthly things and brilliant vanities to the poor, foolish children of the world, and let us be persuaded of having made a great and true profit, when we have obtained or increased grace.

That joy alone which springs from grace is pure and perfect enough to expel all sadness from our heart. Therefore we say with the Prophet: ² “*I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, and my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, and with*

¹ Luke xv. 7.

² Is. lxi. 10.

the robe of justice He hath covered me, as a bride-groom decked with a crown, and as a bride adorned with her jewels;" that is, with the grace, the virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Let us rejoice, as our Saviour directs, because our "*names are written in Heaven,*"¹ in the book of the children of God, and of the heirs of the kingdom of Heaven.

2. The joy which the angels experience, when by grace we are introduced to the friendship of God, appears to have principally three motives : the first is God, the second is the angels themselves, and the third is our own self.

In the first place, the angels rejoice on account of God, because they know how much He desires to reconcile us with Himself, to find us again and to receive us into His bosom. The Son of God compares Himself to a shepherd, who seeks us stray sheep in the desert with longing desire, takes us upon His shoulders, carries us home and then calls together His friends and neighbors, saying : "*Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost.*"² How ready must the angels be to follow this invitation of their King ! How enraptured must they be by His indescribable love for us, and hasten to share His joy and to congratulate Him !

In the second place, the angels rejoice on account of themselves, because by grace we are made their brethren and fellows and are called to occupy those thrones in Heaven which the sin of the fallen angels has left vacant. Far from being filled with jealousy and malice towards us, for being made equal to them by grace, though by nature we are so far inferior—they, on the contrary, have no greater desire than to share with us their honor and happiness. They desire to see the pride of their fallen brethren avenged and humbled by this, that we, notwithstanding the lowliness of our nature, occupy their places by the condescension of God. This reason, however, must incite us also to a great esteem for grace,

¹ Luke x. 20.

² Ibid. xv. 6.

because by its possession we attain to the glory of the Seraphim, but by its loss we are made similar to the devil and involved in his deep ruin.

Finally, the angels rejoice on our account, because grace imparts to us the greatest happiness and regenerates us into children and heirs of their King. What joy is not created at the court of an earthly king by the birth of a crown-prince ! What rejoicings fill every heart, what splendid feasts are instituted ! But of all this jubilation the new-born heir can experience nothing, when he first sees the light of the world. We, however, know what joy exists in the heavenly court, when in the sacrament of penance we are received again as children of God, or when by good works we increase grace in us. And should we who are the object of it all, alone remain cold and indifferent to all this joy that surrounds us, to all the felicitations that overwhelm us ?

“ We made the angels rejoice,” says St. Bernard, “ when we were converted to penance ; let us hasten, then, to make their joy over us complete.” Yet, what do I say ? the joy of the angels—no, that of the whole heavenly court, with its most holy queen and the adorable Trinity itself, which bids us receive the congratulations of the whole Heaven, because it is so desirous of our salvation, though it receives no benefit whatever from our possessing its grace. O inestimable gift of grace ! O first and principal object of the care of God and the congratulations of saints and angels ! Indeed, let us hasten to complete the joy of God and His angels, by growing daily in grace through good works and by preserving it pure and entire unto death, that we may then really be received into the society of the angels, and in union with them praise God forever.

But how shocking and abominable it would be if we were to destroy again, by a disgraceful relapse into sin, this joy of the angels, after it had scarcely begun to exist ; if we were, so to speak, to mock these honorable congratulations and render them in vain, if we were to convert this

great joy into deep sorrow, by which the angels of peace must again be dissolved in tears! Oh, that the angels of peace may save us from such a barbarous cruelty! May the Divine goodness maintain and confirm what it has worked in us, and make us firm pillars in the temple of grace.

SEVENTH CHAPTER.

We must have a Greater Esteem for Grace in us,
than the Angels and the Saints of the
Old Law.

1.

IF the *angels* so esteem the grace in us and so rejoice at it, we may infer how much they love and honor grace in themselves. They have so firmly defended grace in themselves, that they never stained or lost it by the least sin, and for its protection have waged the fiercest contest with their rebellious brethren. Now, I say, we must love and esteem our grace far more than the angels did their grace, because ours is far more precious and valuable.

First, the grace of the angels has cost neither them nor God anything ; God had infused it into them without labor, without sacrifice, by His mere liberality and an act of His omnipotence. But for us this pearl has been purchased by the sweat, the suffering, the blood and death of the Son of God. Therefore, because our grace has cost so much, we must be more grateful for the smallest degree of grace than the angels for all that abundance of grace which was heaped upon them.

The heart of God also cherishes and holds dear every degree of grace in us, as a mother loves that one of her sons whom she has educated with greater labor and danger, as the patriarch Jacob loved Benjamin, the son of the pain of his dear Rachel ; as King David loved the castle of Sion more than his native city, because he had taken it with great difficulty and in bloody battle. Far more, then, should we hold the smallest share of grace dear and sacred, since we enjoy its profit and benefit.

But if the fall of Lucifer, who lost grace as speedily and easily as he had obtained it, was suddenly followed by so great a confusion of Heaven, that he and his associates were at once precipitated into the deepest abyss, how much should he lament his fall who is made a traitor not only to his Creator, but also to his loving Redeemer, by so frivolously risking the grace bought so dearly and laboriously ? He insults the precious blood, the adorable suffering and death of the Son of God, which no angel did, and therefore has more reason to lament his fall than the reprobate angels have to mourn theirs. Woe to us, if we nevertheless are blind to the greatness of this loss and can behold it with indifference !

Moreover, the angels received grace once only, and having once lost it, did not receive it again. We all, however, had lost it in Adam, lost it so frequently by our personal sins, and receive it a second time and so frequently again after we have lost it. Every good is prized more highly by its possessor, when he recovers it after having lost it, than if he had never lost it, or receives it for the first time. Thus the shepherd has a special joy over the sheep that is found again, the father over the return of the lost son, the widow over the recovered coin, greater than over every other thing that was never lost. Therefore the Saviour Himself says, that He and His angels have greater joy upon the penance of a sinner, than upon ninety-nine just that do not need penance. Should we alone not esteem the treasure of grace more dear and precious after having found it again ? Should we in future be equally careless about preserving it, or perhaps even risk it oftener and with greater recklessness, because we may hope to obtain it again ? Be this far from us. Rather will we, after having once had the misfortune of losing it, preserve it henceforth with greater care, if possible, than the angels, who never lost it, lest otherwise we perhaps lose it forever.

Our grace appears still more precious compared with the grace of the angels, if we consider that the angels are in-

deed children of God, but not, as we are, members of Christ. We, however, by grace are made living members of the body of Christ, who has accepted our nature. As the dignity of our Head is reflected upon us, a new lustre is added to our grace, our nature has a certain claim to grace, and our merits receive a very particular strength. God must love us more than He loves the angels, since He beholds His Son in our midst and considers us as one with Himself. In Christ our nature was elevated above all the choirs of angels, and we all share the honor of our Head.

Truly, if the angels were capable of envy, they would be tempted to it, notwithstanding the lowliness of our nature, because God has so extraordinarily favored us. How, then, could we be so mean as to esteem this enviable gift, the grace of Christ, so little, and to postpone it to anything else? Let us emulate the holy angels in their high estimate of grace; and if they possess more light and strength to use it well, we have more reasons thereto; if they could preserve it easily and without labor, we ought to account it a particular honor to be able to suffer something and make some sacrifices for its sake. The Lord in Heaven will behold this emulation with great pleasure, and the angels themselves will gladly assist us therein.

2. Although the *saints of the Old Law* have also received grace through the merits of Christ and under the same circumstances that exalt it above the grace of the angels, yet their grace did not enjoy all those prerogatives with which the coming of Christ has endowed it.

First, the grace of the Old Law did not give the just that full liberty of the children of God, did not deliver them from the bondage of the law, and did not permit them that sublime familiarity with God, which Christ has granted us, saying: "*All things whatsoever I have heard of My Father I have made known to you.*"¹ Furthermore, their grace had not the power to introduce the children of

¹ JOHN xv. 15.

God immediately after death into the inheritance of their Father, into the kingdom of Heaven, but left them in expectancy in hell, until the death of Christ. Neither did it give them that plenitude of the Holy Ghost, that sweet and strong charity, that spiritual and heavenly mind, which Christ gave His disciples after His resurrection. In consequence thereof, the observance of the Divine law was not so easy, sweet, and pleasant a yoke to them as the merits and the example of Christ have made it for us. Lastly, the saints of the Old Law had not the happiness to be united so intimately to Christ, the fountain of grace, in the holy sacrament of the altar, to feed truly, really, and substantially upon the heavenly bread of the children of God, and to imbibe in the other sacraments the stream of grace of the blood of Christ.

And yet they had a great hunger and thirst for justice ; yet they walked in the fear of the Lord with such care, not to lose His grace ; yet they would rather suffer all than fall into disfavor with God by a single sin. How must they confound us on the day of judgment, since we have received far greater gifts and graces from God and yet remain so cold and indifferent, aye, even return the deepest ingratitude for His goodness ! How shall we tremble, when before the judgment-seat of God we face them and the angels, who have been less honored than we ! How shall we be able to answer, or what excuse shall we bring ? Let us remember in time, that we are more indebted to God than the angels, and let us endeavor to preserve grace as faithfully, at least, as they, and to reap abundant fruit from the talent committed to us.

EIGHTH CHAPTER.

How the Saints of the New Law valued Grace, and how much they did for its sake.

1.

LET us finally consider how much the saints of the New Law appreciated grace. For the defence and preservation of grace the saints have spared neither honor, nor riches, neither their members nor their life ; and when they had given and sacrificed all, they were convinced of having made a great profit by the loss of all earthly and natural goods, and that even at such an enormous price they had received grace gratuitously. They thought of the words of Christ, who directs us to pluck out the eye, to cut off hand and foot, to bear our cross and give up even our life, if necessary, to preserve us from the loss of grace and of the kingdom of Heaven.

Following this direction of our Saviour, the holy martyr Quirinus suffered his hands and feet to be cut off, St. Serapion permitted his whole body to be cut to pieces, St. Nicephorus allowed himself to be burned upon a roasting-iron, and afterwards his entire body to be lacerated and torn. But why do I dwell on these individual examples, when countless martyrs have endured these and more terrible tortures, and for the sake of grace would have been ready to endure even more cruelty and pain than the rage of hell and of wicked men could possibly devise ?

Other saints did not wait for a hostile hand to inflict these sufferings. In order to escape or lessen the danger of losing grace, they voluntarily became their own tyrants and tormentors, and considered themselves happy to purchase the preservation of grace by means of the greatest

pains and sufferings. The blessed John of Bono stuck sharp splinters under the nails of his fingers. The blessed Martinian built a slow fire of brushwood, and not only once but often burnt his limbs at it, asking himself how insignificant was this pain in comparison to the eternal fire of hell, which he would deserve by the loss of grace. St. Francis rolled his bare body upon live coals, sometimes in the cold snow, sometimes upon a heap of thorns. And all these tortures appeared easy and trifling to the saints, if they could thereby avoid only one sin. They were not stones, so as to be insensible to pleasure or pain ; but the sense of the heavenly sweetness of grace and the desire for its beauty outweighed the pain of the body and gave them the wonderful courage which we can only behold with mute admiration. They would rather destroy the frail vessel of their body than lose the precious treasure of grace.

Others again, who had at their disposal all the joys, honors, and riches of the world, preferred to desert all these and live until death in suffering, poverty, and contempt, than to expose themselves to the many dangers that surround the preservation of grace in the world. Thousands and millions have done this, and a countless number do it every day before our eyes. The world wonders and mocks at so extraordinary a step ; but they who take the step, well know their benefit. By a lively faith they have recognized the infinite preciousness of grace and the vanity of the world ; they have weighed both and found the latter wanting. They sought and found the heavenly peace, which their heart desired, in the grace of God, and therefore they are so jealous of it that they will let no other good, no other pleasure rob them of its possession or disturb them in its enjoyment.

Oh, how must these sublime examples confuse us, who do so little to preserve grace, who shun the least sacrifice to ward off a danger of sin, or to remain faithful to the commandments of our heavenly Father ; who find every little suffering too great to take upon us for the sake of

grace ! Let us sacrifice our body, our honor, our life, let us sacrifice everything, without exception, before we expose ourselves to the danger of losing grace !

2. But the example of the saints must shame us still more, if we see the many and great labors and sufferings which they endured, not only to preserve grace in themselves and to escape the anger of God with its terrible consequences, but even to increase the grace acquired and secured, and to impart it to others.

St. Bridget asked of God, as a great favor, the disfigurement of her countenance, that she might more easily remain a virgin and in this state lead a holier life than in the state of matrimony. The same saint had obtained the restoration of sight for a pious nun ; afterwards, when the nun had progressed in virtue, St. Bridget obtained her relapse into blindness, that she might thus be less disturbed in the work of increasing her merits and of growing in the grace of God. St. Mandet, son of a king of Ireland, asked and obtained as a favor from God the visitation of a terrible disease, which disfigured his whole body and spread a pestilential smell about him ; and all this for no other purpose but that he might not be compelled to marry, and by virginity might preserve the flower of grace purer and brighter. When once St. Sabas, arriving in a monastery, picked an apple from a tree to refresh himself, he immediately threw it upon the floor and trampled it under foot, filled with anger because he had almost broken his strict abstinence and thus lost an occasion of merit, and for penance he forever denied himself the taste of apples.

What shall I say of all the acts of virtue, the humiliations, privations, and mortifications which the Fathers of the desert and so many holy religious have practised constantly for many years, in order to acquire daily greater merits, to become more pleasing to God and to grow in grace ? Never did human ambition or human avarice seek the goods of this world with such zeal and perseverance as the saints have sought the increase and improvement of the

grace given them. The ardent desire for it left them no rest by day or by night ; they were burning with a thirst that could never be entirely satisfied by the heavenly dew of grace. They let no moment pass by without raising their thirsting heart to the fountain of grace, without opening their mouths and begging God to fill them with His grace. They spent the day in labor for the glory of God and the welfare of their fellow-men, to gather ever greater merits, and the night they devoted mostly to prayer, which should always draw down upon them new grace.

But is it to be wondered at, if the saints sought grace so zealously for themselves, when they were no less solicitous and earnest to procure it also for others ? Behold the apostles and the other missionaries, who leave their family and their country to proclaim the blessings of grace to the most savage and cruel nations, to spread its light in the remotest places of the earth, and to do all this under countless troubles and difficulties. See how ready and happy they are to seal the truth of their glad tidings with their blood, and to shed this blood to the last drop in imitation of their Saviour, that it may become a fruitful seed of grace and salvation for their executioners. Many saints gladly gave their lives to deliver one sinner from the state of sin. Others prayed whole nights and scourged themselves, to obtain for sinners the grace of conversion ; they found no labor and no sacrifice too great, when there was a question of leading a stray sheep back into the bosom of grace.

Great God ! how can we remain idle in the presence of such examples and esteem as little that which the saints who were enlightened by Heaven's light valued so highly ! Indeed, we can never answer for it, if in the face of such sublime models we are still so indolent in gathering heavenly treasures for eternity, or if we not only neglect to cooperate in the sanctification of others, but even revolt against our pastors, who announce to us the glad tidings of grace, and if we will not be roused by them from the stupor of carnal desires and worldly lust.

3. The sublime enthusiasm of the saints for grace sprang from a deep consideration and thorough knowledge of its inestimable value. Hence they could not find sufficient words to express that sublime image as their mind beheld it, and to inflame all Christians with its love. "O Divine grace," they exclaimed, "thou lovely garden, thou instructress in life! Thou protectress, thou companion, sister, and mother! Thou shining light, thou pure and pleasant balsam, thou impregnable fortress! Thou tree of life, thou burning fire, thou brilliant torch, thou radiant sun! Thou stream of heavenly blessing, thou river of Paradise, thou beautiful rainbow! Thou precious wine from the table of God, thou milk of the children of God, thou unctuous oil and refreshing salt of our soul, thou mother of all that is good!" With these and many other beautiful names the holy Fathers celebrated the greatness of grace, in order to reveal to us its inexhaustible wealth, to impress us with its excellence, and to exhort us profoundly to esteem and diligently to preserve it.

Let us hear, for the others, the inspired exhortations of St. Ephrem, which he has transmitted in a sermon on grace, and let us impress them so deeply upon our heart, that we may never again forget them.

"Take care," says the saint, "that thy spirit always has possession of grace, lest thou be deceived. Honor grace as thy guardian, lest, being offended by thee, it abandon thee. Attend to grace as to thy invisible teacher, lest thou wander about in darkness after it has deserted thee. Without it begin no struggle, lest thou be ignominiously vanquished. Without its companionship do not enter upon the path of virtue, since the roaring lion lies in wait for thee. Without its counsel undertake nothing with regard to thy spiritual welfare, for there are many whose heart is deceived by the appearance of good.

"Render a willing obedience to grace, and thou wilt be enlightened above all things. Thou wilt be made a child of the Most High, if thou wilt adopt grace as thy sister ;

as a mother, grace will offer thee her breasts and protect thee as a child against thy persecutors ; confide thyself to the love and indulgence of grace, this queen of all creatures.

“Thou hast not yet seen the love which grace bears thee. But neither do infants yet recognize the care which their mother has for them. Be patient and submit to the direction of grace, and thou wilt receive the fruit and blessings of grace. Neither do infants know how they are nourished, but when they are grown into manhood, they admire in themselves the power of nature. So wilt thou arrive at perfection, if thou perseverest in Divine grace.”

Fifth Book.

The Acquisition, Exercise, Increase, and Preservation of Grace.

FIRST CHAPTER.

The Acquisition of Grace.

1.



MY dear Christian! If in the preceding books your attentive consideration has convinced you of the glories and the inestimable value of grace, you will now esteem it as it deserves to be esteemed; you will certainly desire nothing more ardently now than to know how you may acquire, increase, and preserve it, and how you may and ought to regulate your life in accordance with it. This will be our subject in this last book.

The first question is, how shall we *acquire* grace? We cannot acquire it by our own virtue, by our own merit. “*If by grace,*” says the Apostle,¹ “*it is not now by works; otherwise grace is no more grace.*” For “*to him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned according to grace, but according to debt.*”² Grace signifies a free, unmerited love and favor, and a gratuitous, unmerited gift of love. But especially is the grace of God, of which we speak, so sublime, heavenly, and Divine a gift, that even the purest and most sublime creature cannot in the least merit it by its own power and its own virtue. The Incarnate Son of God

¹ Rom. xi. 6.

² Ibid. iv. 4.

alone, who possesses grace by nature and in infinite measure, could strictly merit grace for us.

Much less can we of our own power *produce* grace in us. As little as we can produce ourselves out of nothing and give to ourselves natural existence, so little are we able to give ourselves supernatural existence. For grace does not grow up out of our natural power as the plant out of the root, but it is added to our nature from without, it is engrafted upon nature from above, as the scion upon the wilding. God, who has created our nature, must by His wonderful power create it, as it were, anew, or rather must regenerate us by His Spirit to make us His children.

2. But what then remains for us to do in the acquisition of grace? Very much still remains. Though we cannot merit grace and produce it of ourselves, we are nevertheless capable of *disposing* ourselves for it and of qualifying ourselves for its reception. We can and must seek it with God, we must remove the obstacles that are in its way, and must so dispose our will, that grace finds access into us, and though we be not worthy, yet at least we should not be altogether unworthy of it. We can and must adopt such a holy and godly disposition as becomes the high state which we are to enter by grace. In a word, we can and must, on our part, strive after grace and advance to meet it; then God will, according to His promise, come to us with it.

Yet neither can we do all this of our own power. It is a heresy, frequently and emphatically condemned by the Church, that man by the power of his nature can even effectually desire grace or prepare himself for it, much less merit it. For as grace is so infinitely above our nature, our nature would be obliged, at every step towards grace, to raise itself above itself and to exceed its natural sphere of activity. Yet this it can do as little as it can by its own power elevate itself into the state of grace, just as a stone is not only unable to give itself life, but even to produce in itself the first beginning of life.

Nothing, therefore, remains, but that the same Spirit of God, who infuses sanctifying grace in us, should advance us towards it by His actual graces, or rather *draw* and *bear* us up towards it. The Son of God has Himself said :¹ “*No man can come to me,*” *i. e.*, to the union with Him by grace, “*except the Father draw him.*” Yea, the Apostle teaches,² that of ourselves we cannot, even in a salutary and effectual manner, think of that which relates to grace : “*We are not sufficient to think any thing of ourselves, as of ourselves : but our sufficiency is from God.*”

Iron, which by nature is not incandescent, cannot, of its own power, become incandescent, and therefore cannot acquire that degree of heat which prepares it for this incandescence. As then the fire makes the iron glow with heat, so God by grace makes the created spirit Divine. Consequently He alone, too, can prepare the entrance into that supernatural condition by other supernatural gifts of grace. The light of day and the dawn which precedes it are of the same kind and must spring from the same source. If, then, by grace the daylight of Divine justice and holiness is to shine in our soul, and the preparation for justification be nothing else than the dawn of that day, that preparation must be a ray of the same light and an emanation from the same Divine Sun which imparts justification to us.

Indeed, we must, in preparation for justification, practise the same virtues and possess the same holy sentiments as after justification, only in a relatively different and less perfect manner. We must supernaturally believe in God, hope in Him, love Him, or, at least, earnestly desire this love of Him and the observance of His supernatural law. This, however, is impossible, unless God prevents us, by a special grace, unless He supernaturally arouses, impels, and attracts us, or even infuses some supernatural virtues before sanctifying grace. In reality, these supernatural virtues have their root in grace and are infused only with it, even in the

¹ John vi. 44.² II. Cor. iii. 5.

case of infants. But as light and warmth have indeed their source in the heat of the fire, and nevertheless may, in the object to be heated, precede the fire, so may God infuse the supernatural virtues, which form, as it were, the light and warmth of the glow of grace, at least in an imperfect form before justification, in order thus to introduce us gradually and partially to sanctifying grace.

The preparation to sanctifying grace is then, in a certain manner, its beginning and an anticipation of its effects. It is the first aspiration of the Holy Ghost, by which He does not yet dwell in us, but already moves us and acts in us in a supernatural manner. It is His first gentle breeze, by which He lets us perceive His gracious nearness, announces His coming, and invites us to open the door of our heart to Him and to seize the proffered grace. It is a supernatural magnetism, by which our soul is drawn towards God as towards its supernatural good, although it does not yet draw Him down to itself and does not yet receive Him in sanctifying grace.

Our share, then, in this preparation for justification can only consist in this: we must faithfully co-operate with the actual graces, that are given us as the messengers and the beginning of sanctifying grace. We must open our eyes to the light that dawns upon our soul, open our heart to the mysterious, magnetic attraction that seizes it. With our free will, which is elevated and strengthened by God's preventing grace, we must readily adopt the holy sentiments that God inspires in us, and that are indispensable for the reception of sanctifying grace.

3. May we now say, that by co-operating with the preventing graces we really, in the strict sense of the term, *merit* sanctifying grace? Far from it! This also were a vain error. For by this co-operation we are not prepared to receive a merit, but a grace, and this grace we do not receive because we merit it, but because God grants it out of gratuitous love.

Would you maintain that he merited your gift, to

whom you had offered it from mere charity, simply because, at your solicitation and with your assistance, he had stretched out his hands to receive it? Would you not rather consider him indebted to you, because you had not only offered him the gift, but had assisted him to accept it? and if a king promised his subject adoption as his son, provided the subject donned the royal robes presented to him and conducted himself suitably to the promised dignity, would he, by fulfilling these conditions, merit the adoption unto the sonship of the king? By no means.

The same applies to the sanctifying grace of God. God had intended it for us on account of the merits of His Son, whilst we not only were not worthy of it, but by sin were in a state of positive and entire unworthiness. Even after grace was held out to us, we could not stretch out our hand towards it to receive it, much less adopt the holy sentiments worthy of a child of God. Even if we had been capable of this, grace would always have been a free gift of God, which He would give us only on account of His merciful promise. But now, when God instils in us the first desire for grace, when He not only places it before us, but leads us to it, can we then boast of any merit, and must we not rather be doubly grateful for this twofold love of God?

True, when we faithfully co-operate with the preventing grace of God, He then cannot withhold it from us. But whence this necessity? Not from our co-operation, but because God will remain true to Himself and will perfect the work that He has begun; because, when He once has drawn us towards grace, He cannot suffer the incipient action to remain idle and fruitless, and must carry it out to its final end.


If, then, we will acquire sanctifying grace, we must, above all, follow the preventing grace of God. This grace is given to all men; it is present to us when we do not seek it, often against our will, it knocks at the door of our heart, to have it opened to the Holy Spirit. This is the myster-

ious ladder that leads us from the lowliness of our nature and from the abyss of sin to the throne of the children of God. We can, however, scale it from the first round to the last only when enlightened by the light of God and borne aloft by His power. With God's help only can we acquire those supernatural dispositions for grace, which according to the Holy Council of Trent consist in faith, fear, hope, charity, and contrition. We will treat of each of these dispositions individually.

SECOND CHAPTER.

Supernatural Faith as the First Preparation for the Reception of Grace.

1.

E have spoken in the third book already of supernatural faith, as well as of supernatural hope and charity, but only in as far as these virtues, in their intrinsic glory and sublimity, form the most beautiful royal retinue of sanctifying grace. As remarked above, however, the unjustified must prepare himself for the reception of grace by the same virtues and acts which the just must practise and perform. The justified is to merit by the practice of those virtues the inheritance of the children of God in Heaven; the unjustified must, by the practice of the same virtues, first acquire the grace of sonship, and in this particular relation we must here consider them.

The first condition for the reception of grace, which is, at the same time, the beginning, the foundation, and the root of all other conditions, and therefore, too, as the Council of Trent says,¹ the root of justification itself, is supernatural faith. Faith is the first step on the way of grace, without which we can take no other; it is the corner-stone, upon which all other salutary acts must be built up; it is the strong and living root, from which everything else that is required for grace springs up and receives life and strength. In a word: Faith is the first and most essential preparation for grace, *because it alone lets us seek and find grace.*

2. For if we will acquire grace, we must first recognize its glory and inestimable value, in order to desire and seek

¹ Sess vi. De justif., cap. 8.

it, and then we must know where we are to seek it, in order then actually to find it there.

In the first place, now, we can know only by supernatural Divine faith what grace is and how glorious and precious it is. Our natural reason gives us not the faintest idea of its Divine greatness and glory. Our reason only represents earthly and perishable gifts to us, or at the highest, only the small reward that we may expect as faithful servants of God. How could it lead us on the way to the heavenly gifts of grace? If we follow it alone, our heart will never experience a heavenly desire, no thought of a supernatural elevation to the bosom of God will be awakened in our soul, we will remain in humble narrowness and lowliness, and will imagine the little we possess to be something grand and magnificent.

But when faith, like a heavenly morning-star, lights up this earthly night, when by faith God reveals in us the mysteries of His grace and in our soul draws the image of its splendor, then an unspeakable desire is aroused in our soul, an intense longing bears us up to the grandeurs of a supernatural world, we awaken as if from a dream, and enraptured by the glories of grace we hasten to acquire it as soon as possible.

How great, then, ought to be our endeavor to preserve and confirm this supernatural faith in us, lest we entirely cut off for ourselves all access to the highest possible good; and how joyfully should we embrace it, instead of being cold and indifferent about it!

We are so ready to believe everything that may in any way bring us honor or happiness; we believe it even when we have scarcely the slightest rational ground for this belief, or if we have every evidence that the contrary is true. Every one readily believes to be true what he wishes to be true, or what flatters his vanity or self-love, and gladly permits the humblest and meanest man to predicate virtues of him which he does not possess, or to promise him something which the promiser can and will not fulfil.

Why, then, should not we accept with open arms and believing heart that which is told us of the high honor and the superhuman happiness to be imparted to us by grace, even when no indubitable and infallible authority confirms it? For what can reasonably flatter our ambition more, than that we are to be made true children of God and kings of Heaven and earth? What can more excite our self-love than that we should obtain the happiness that exists in Heaven or on earth, a happiness that hath never yet entered a human heart? Our ambition and our vanity should determine us readily and gladly to believe it, even with the risk that it might be so and perhaps is so.

But now we have in evidence the infallible authority of God, which can neither deceive nor be deceived. He reveals to us clearly the glories of grace and promises distinctly to communicate it to us; and His own greatness and omnipotence is our surety that He can and will certainly realize His promises, be they ever so great and excellent. We, therefore, know infallibly that our faith in the glories of grace is no vain and unsupported faith, but that, on the contrary, it enjoys the highest possible certainty and reliability. What, then, can hinder us from embracing with the most sincere and lively faith the great and precious promises of grace which God has made us?

Our faith in the word of God should rather be the more sincere and willing, the more we desire the gifts it promises, and the more we long after happiness and honor. The more secure and reliable the word of God is the greater should be our reverence and our desire for its promises. For faith in the word of God is, as the Apostle says,¹ not a mere idea, but "*the substance,*" *i. e.*, as it were a real apprehension, "*of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not,*" because we apprehend them in God more certainly and firmly than if we saw them with our eyes or seized them with our hands.

This we see in the faith of the saints. St. Teresa could

¹ Heb. xi. 1.

say that she did not envy those saints who beheld our Saviour with their bodily eyes, because she beheld Him as vividly in the Blessed Sacrament with the eyes of faith. St. Jerome relates of himself that he was so much affected by the belief in the final judgment, that he everywhere thought to hear the terrible sound of the trumpet which calls men to the judgment-seat on the day of doom. The Blessed Giles, one of the first disciples of St. Francis of Assisi, was wont to say, it seemed to him that his faith was rather vision than faith.

Oh, what an impression would faith make upon us, if it were as strong and lively in us as it was in the saints ! How would it induce us to seek and desire the gifts and glories of grace more even than if we beheld it with our eyes ! If this is not so, it is caused by our own fault. The Holy Ghost denies to no one His illuminating assistance ; on the contrary, He always appeals to our heart to receive in us with supernatural power the word of God. But we give Him no hearing ; we refuse to co-operate with Him. We suffer the grace of faith to remain dormant in our soul, as the fire in the flint, and do not permit it to act in us, or its light to illumine us. We make no use of this powerful weapon, more effectual and penetrating than a two-edged sword, but keep it idle in the scabbard. We neglect to make frequent and lively acts of faith, to consider the arguments which might enliven it in us, to represent its mysteries daily to our mind and become familiar with them. No wonder, then, that we are not roused from our sleep of sin ; that we in the midst of our misery abandon ourselves to quiet indolence, that we do not with longing desire contend for the paradise of grace, that we remain fixed to the earth and cannot approach nearer to God !

Alas, let us be aroused from our sleep, let us open the eyes of our soul to the light of faith and look up to the mountains of God, where His love waits for us to make us happy. If we have not sufficient courage and strength to acquire grace immediately, let us at least keep burning the

light of faith, which continues alive as embers under the ashes of sin. Let us endeavor ever more to revive this coal, that it may gradually again warm our heart and resuscitate it to a new life.

3. Faith alone lets us seek grace, it alone, too, lets us *find* it, and that for this reason that it alone can lead us to seek it. For God gives His precious grace to no one who does not appreciate and desire it. If, then, without faith we cannot appreciate grace, because we do not know it, it is evident that without it we cannot find it. On the contrary, the more we revere and esteem it, the more will God be inclined to give it to us, because then He will be appropriately honored and glorified in His gift.

Faith, again, lets us find grace, because it alone leads us to the fountain of grace. As little as we are able to recognize the greatness and splendor of grace by our natural reason, so little can we learn from it whence to expect grace. As we learn to know grace only by faith, so we know by it alone from whom and in what manner we shall receive it. We understand that by our nature we can neither acquire nor merit grace; but we cannot see how God can be so powerful and merciful as to give it to us, notwithstanding our incapacity and total lack of merit. For by our reason we can estimate the efficacy of God's power and goodness only in as far as we behold its effects in nature, and as we know that nature requires it. At any rate, we cannot certainly know, from reason alone, that God will actually reveal His infinite power and goodness by so great and wonderful a miracle. Only the revelation of God and supernatural faith can assure us of this. "*By faith we understand,*" says the Apostle,¹ "*that from invisible things visible things might be made.*" That means, by our reason we know that which is already actual or visible; by faith we know how God also produces that which is not yet real and visible, and which does not yet exist, even in its root or germ. By faith we know how God founts grace

¹ Heb. xi. 3.

as a new creation upon the soil of our nature by a very great wonder of His omnipotence and charity. We know by faith how He substitutes His infinite power for our inability, His inestimable love and the infinite merits of Christ for our want of merit.

Nothing, however, is more natural than that God, who by His omnipotence and charity gives us grace for the sake of Christ, should also require us to acknowledge Him and Christ as the source and author of grace, and that He should give it to us only when we make this confession of faith. The communication of grace to us is the greatest miracle on the part of God, and miracles we obtain from God only by a firm faith in His wonderful power and love.

As the Divine Saviour required faith in His Divine power and charity of all those who begged the restoration of life to the dead or the miraculous healing from disease; as He wrought the miracle only on account of this faith; so He still more requires this faith of those who wish to obtain the eternal life of grace. "*This is the will of my Father . . . that every one who seeth the Son and believeth in Him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up in the last day.*"¹ The Apostle teaches, likewise, that to be raised up from the death of sin to the life of grace, we must believe in the omnipotence of God in a similar manner as we confess it in the resurrection of our Lord. Abraham believed in God as the One "*who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things that are not, as those that are. Abraham against hope (hope of nature) believed in hope (hope in God), that he might be made the Father of many nations; . . . he was not weak in faith, neither did he consider his own body now dead, . . . nor the dead womb of Sara; . . . he staggered not by distrust in the promise of God, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God; most fully knowing that whatsoever He hath promised, He is able also to perform.*"² In like manner must we indeed acknowledge the barrenness of our nature for the heavenly

¹ John vi. 40.

² Rom. iv. 17-21.

life of grace, but on that very account look up with a firm faith to the power and goodness of God, who can give us this heavenly life, and according to His promise will give it.

Just then, when our natural power and merit completely desert us, we can and ought by faith to draw down upon us the power of God and appropriate to ourselves the merits of Christ. For by this faith we give God the glory due Him, and the highest glory that we are able to give Him, when we confess Him to be the only source of all, but specially of the highest and best gifts. Now God Himself says: "*Whosoever shall glorify Me, him will I glorify.*"¹ God, then, will give the glory of His grace only to him who by a lively faith acknowledges Him as the omnipotent and merciful Author of grace, and He will give it the more readily the firmer and more lively the faith is by which we do Him honor.

4. It is not surprising, then, that in Holy Writ the acquisition of grace and justification is so often and so emphatically attributed to faith, that it would almost seem as if nothing else but faith were required. Yet nothing is more foolish than the error of Protestants, who consider faith the only preparation for justification. If justification consisted in nothing else but the mere imputation of the merits of Christ, if it consisted only in a mere external justice, by which the interior wickedness and sinfulness of our soul were only concealed, then indeed the faith in Christ might alone be sufficient. But now, according to the doctrine of the Apostle, justifying faith is faith in miracles, a faith in the sublimest of all miracles, the miracle of grace. In this miracle God, by the sanctity of the Holy Spirit, destroys all wickedness of sin in us, and revives our soul from its spiritual death to a supernatural life. This faith, then, must be accompanied by other dispositions, which qualify us for the reception of that wonderful gift.

These other dispositions are to some extent already en-

¹ I. Kings ii. 30.

closed in faith, spring up from faith, and only by faith have an efficacious influence upon the acquisition of grace. For by faith we obtain from God also those graces which are necessary for a salutary fear, for hope, and for contrition for our sins. By faith we are furthermore impelled to seek grace, to fear the anger of God, to hope in God, to hate sin and love justice. By faith, finally, we hallow all the other dispositions, draw down the blessing of God upon them, and bring them into connection with sanctifying grace. For since we cannot merit grace by these dispositions, we must in the end expect it only from the power and goodness of God through the merits of Christ. And thus, as faith precedes the other dispositions, so must it follow them, and, as it were, impress its seal upon them to make them acceptable to God.

All other preparations make us only capable of receiving grace ; by faith alone we draw it from its source. By the former, we approach to grace, by faith we seize it, by it we appropriate the treasures of the infinite power and love of God and the merits of Christ. By faith we are justified even when we receive grace in the sacraments. For the sacraments are efficacious only when the receiver in faith acknowledges their efficacy. They are only the channels by which grace flows to us from God and Christ, and thus they must act under the same conditions under which Christ wrought His miracles.

Is it not perfectly true, then, that by supernatural faith we find grace, as well as that we can seek it only by faith ? As this faith exhibits to us the glories of grace, does it not in like manner procure for us access to it, as the Apostle says :¹ “ *We have access through faith into this grace wherein we stand, and glory in the hope of the glory of the sons of God.*”

When will you, my dear Christian, earnestly take to heart this important truth and regulate your life according to it ? When will you renounce that pharisaical insolence

¹ Rom. v. 2.

with which the world deceitfully tells you that you may with some miserable human works purchase the grace of God? "*Without faith it is impossible to please God; he that cometh to God must believe,*" says the Apostle.¹ He rebukes nothing more severely in his letters than the arrogance of the Jews, who by their works of the law imagined themselves to be deserving of the grace of Christ. Even of Abraham he says: ² "*If Abraham were justified by works he hath glory, but not before God.*" How much more would he condemn the works of a hypocritical, superficial, human justice, and deny it all value in the eyes of God!

As only those works which are performed in the state and in the spirit of grace merit eternal life, so only those works can lead us to grace which spring from faith and are hallowed by it. These works do not indeed merit grace, but they manifest the power and the liveliness of faith, by which we seek grace with God and expect it from His goodness, in virtue of the merits of Christ.

Glory, then, in these works alone, dear Christian; or rather glory in the root of these works, in an humble, and, therefore, magnanimous and powerful submission of faith, by which you glory, not in yourself, but in God. Sink this supernatural root deep into your soul, that it may grow into you. The deeper it is founded in you, the more strongly will it develop, and the more speedily will the tree of grace, with its abundant heavenly blossoms and fruit, grow up from it.

¹ Heb. xi. 6.

² Rom. iv. 2.

THIRD CHAPTER.

The Fear of God as the Second Preparation for the Reception of Grace.

1.

IF the light of faith, which exhibits the glories and sweetness of grace, is not actually sufficient to soften and inflame the heart of the sinner, it must certainly deeply terrify him by pointing out the fearful evils and punishments that await him in case he is and remains without grace.

The ordinary way in which the sinner recovers grace, is that of the fear of God, of the fear of God's anger and its terrible consequences. No other fear has any relation or connection with grace, and therefore cannot induce us to seek and to acquire it. Every other fear is but a natural fear, which we may possess without faith and without the grace of the Holy Ghost, and which consequently cannot introduce us into the kingdom of grace, be it ever so great.

The fear of the anger of God and its consequences, however, is a supernatural fear. It presupposes in us a supernatural faith in the Divine order of grace, and it can only be elicited when the Holy Ghost supernaturally draws us towards grace and inspires us with a lively sense of the greatness of the loss of grace and the terrible revenge of God for contempt of it. This fear is, according to the Holy Council of Trent, a gift of the Holy Ghost, a precious and mighty gift, which like a powerful sword penetrates our interior with holy violence, severs all the ties which bind us to the object of our sinful affection, and constantly hangs over our head, until we have taken refuge

under the cloak of grace, and concealed ourselves in the bosom of God. If we do not perceive in us the powerful effects of this gift of the Holy Ghost; if we continue to live in sin, blinded and hardened, and take no notice of grace, it is because we do not hearken to the exhortations of the Holy Ghost, and do not with lively faith contemplate the terrible judgment which God will pronounce upon the despisers of His grace.

2. Too true, alas, are the words that God addresses to the sinner: "*God is mighty to pour out indignation according as His mercy is.*"¹ As sublime, liberal, and incomprehensible as is His mercy to make us His children by grace, so terrible and incomprehensible must be the severity of His justice, which He vents upon him who scorns His grace. By grace God pours out upon us the whole plenitude of His blessings as an abundant rain. He melts, so to speak, with love for us, and with desire to be united to us; He promises to overwhelm us with the stream of His delight. But Holy Writ tells us also, that *God rains down His war upon the wicked,*² and that *He will accomplish His indignation upon them.*³ Nothing is more painful than despised and offended love; the greater, the more tender and sweet the love was, the more powerful, bitter, and terrible is the anger into which it is changed by contempt and rejection. Therefore, Holy Writ goes so far as to say:⁴ "*As the Lord rejoiced upon you before, doing good to you and multiplying you; so He shall rejoice, destroying and bringing you to naught.*"

God is a pure fire of infinite power and strength, in like measure a fire of love and of anger. As beneficent and agreeable as is this powerful fire, when in grace it lovingly penetrates, warms, transforms, and glorifies us, so cruel and terrible must it be when it pierces, consumes, agitates, and tortures those who were hardened against its mild effects.

As the sin of a child against its father is incomparably

¹ Ecclus. xvi. 12, 13.

² Job xx. 23.

³ Ezech. vi. 12.

⁴ Deut. xxviii. 63.

more detestable and deserves a far greater punishment than the sin of a servant against his master, so is the sin we commit as the chosen children of God against our heavenly Father incomparably greater and more punishable, than that which we would commit as mere servants of God. We must not believe, then, that we need fear only those punishments which are threatened in general for any offence against God, though even these are certainly great enough to make every reflecting person tremble with fear. No, after we have been called to grace, we have something very different to expect, of which we have as little an idea as we have of the heavenly happiness which God has promised us by grace. For us God opens another abyss of infinite depth, as immeasurably deep as the dignity of His children is inestimably high and sublime. For us He builds a new hell, as fearful and terrible as His Heaven is delightful and pleasant. For us He invents new sufferings, new tortures, a new consuming fire, as cruel and intolerable as the joys of His Heaven are infinitely sweet and happy. And as He expends His whole omnipotence to work the greatest of miracles and make us share His nature and happiness, so He employs the same omnipotence, in order, by an equally great wonder, to overwhelm the sinner with suffering not inventible by man. Or rather, He works a twofold miracle in the sinner: the one, when by His own power and by other creatures He so humbles and tortures the sinner, as would be naturally impossible; the other still more fearful, when supernaturally He does not permit the sinner to perish in His torments. For these torments are so great, that according to the course of nature they would instantly crush and annihilate the sinner.

We should scarcely believe that God will punish our sins and the contempt of His grace in so terrible a manner, had we not witnessed that His only-begotten Son was obliged to suffer so much, so infinitely much more than man has ever suffered, in order to make atonement for our sins and acquire grace again for us. But "*if in the green*

wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?''

3. Our reason is too weak to comprehend such a terrible punishment, our heart is too wretched to sufficiently appreciate such a mysterious evil and to tremble in its contemplation. Let us therefore ask the Holy Ghost, that by the supernatural light of faith He may let us cast a glance into the abyss of hell, and then by His supernatural grace He may excite in us a great and holy fear of hell. May He pierce our heart and our marrow with this fear, so that we may be afraid of nothing more than of the anger of God, and may hasten to escape its terrible judgment by an instantaneous and determined return to grace.

We are so afraid of temporal and natural evils that meet us on earth, and in order to escape them we are often induced to cast away grace, or to neglect its recovery. How much more should we tremble at the eternal and supernatural evils, and precisely for that reason, because we do not see and experience them now, and cannot even comprehend them! For this very incomprehensibility is a proof of their ineffable and inestimable greatness, and of their inexpressible might and power; it is a proof that all natural evils taken together, which here on earth have ever oppressed men, cannot attain to the smallest degree of those evils.

Oh, let us often remember how terrible it is to fall into the hands of the living God; let us, obedient to the counsel of the Holy Ghost, remember our last end, and we shall never sin; but if we have sinned, we will without delay repent of our sin and endeavor to recover grace, which alone can save us from God's terrible wrath.

The fear of the wrath of God suffers no delay; it leaves us not a moment's rest, until we have escaped it. Every moment the sword of God's vengeance is suspended over our head; we may die at any moment and then we are forever given up to our Judge.

Moreover, we do not know whether, even if we live long,

¹ Luke xxiii. 31.

we shall afterwards so easily and certainly obtain again the grace of God. For this depends less upon our free will, than upon the supernatural help of God, which is not subject to our pleasure ; and hence we can make no calculations whatever about the certainty of our future conversion. Every moment that we remain in the state of sin, we render ourselves more unworthy of grace, for the longer we remain so, the more we despise and contemn it. Finally, then, the thread of God's mercy, which still held us, must break ; finally, God must ever more withdraw His grace from us and let us sink deeper and deeper into the mire of sin. Oh, how many at present lament too late in hell that they so long despised and neglected the abundant graces offered them, and that they postponed their conversion to a later day !


Oh, let us betimes tremble at the inscrutable judgment of Divine Providence ! As it is full of goodness and blessing when we hold ourselves by its hand, so terrible and unfathomable is it when we withdraw ourselves and, as it were, mock and deride it.

Let us, then, according to the warning of the Apostle, work out our salvation with fear and trembling, whilst yet there is time. Let us greatly fear the terrible punishments of eternity, fear the inscrutable ways of God, fear our own levity and unfaithfulness, and let us not hesitate a moment to be reconciled to our heavenly Father, and thus in His bosom render ourselves secure from temporal and eternal ruin.

FOURTH CHAPTER.

Supernatural Hope in God as the Third Preparation for Grace.

1.

HE fear of God's wrath and of our own weakness would crush us and lead us to despair, were it not for the confidence in the infinite goodness and power of God, which opens again our way to grace, and grants us the certain hope that with His assistance we may certainly and infallibly recover it and preserve it until the end.

This confidence must likewise be supernatural and be a gift of the Holy Ghost, because the gift of grace, which we hope to obtain, is itself supernatural. This hope has no other support than the infinite mercy of God, which alone can pardon our sins, and the infinite power of God, which alone can so strengthen and elevate us, that we may seize and appropriate this highest of all gifts.

It therefore further presupposes us to know and believe, by a supernatural and lively faith, that God, even when we are sinners, does not cease to call us unto His grace, and places at our disposal the whole wealth of His omnipotence, to introduce us into it.

Therefore our hope of recovering grace can only be weak and feeble when our faith is wavering or dead, and when we look more upon our sins and our own weakness than upon the ineffable love and care of God for us. Let us, however, with a lively faith, always keep the latter in view, and let us listen to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, who promises us forgiveness of our sins and the return of grace. Then our hope can no longer hesitate, our soul re-

covers from its despair, it acquires a confidence that knows no fear or trepidation, and it approaches the throne of Divine mercy, where it hopes to find forgiveness and grace, and infallibly finds it.

2. God has protested nothing more frequently and emphatically in Holy Scripture than that He desires all men to be saved and wills not the death of the sinner, but his conversion and life. True, God might have been more sparing in dispensing His grace, and might have ordained that it should be imparted to those only who sought it with the greatest zeal, and after obtaining it, did not lose it again. But no; He wished the sun of His grace to rise for the just and unjust, the pious and the sinner; He wished all to bask in its light, and to receive its blessings, provided only they would open their eyes to this sun. Instead of waiting until we seek grace with Him, He offers it liberally and gratuitously at every hour; He Himself knocks constantly at the door of our heart and does not rest until we open it to Him.

Therefore the holy Fathers and all theologians unanimously teach that God will deny sanctifying grace to no one who with the aid of preventing grace does what lies in his power. Though sanctifying grace, then, be ever so high and sublime, though we be ever so deeply imbedded in the mire of sin, we are certain that at every moment we are free to again acquire and possess it. We are as certain of this as we are of the mercy of God's love, of God's fidelity to His promises, of God's omnipotence in His works. But one thing is necessary on our part,—we must have a good will and earnestly and sincerely desire to be the recipients of God's grace and mercy. All the rest will be done by God Himself. God in His love will Himself cover all our sins and so strengthen our will, that we may conquer and remove all the obstacles of grace.

Though the justice of God be ever so severe, though our sins be as numerous as the grains of sand at the seashore, great as the mightiest mountains, infinite mercy stands

beside justice and stays its avenging arm, as soon as we will earnestly escape this arm. The mildness and indulgence of mercy outweigh the severity and zeal of justice ; for “ *the tender mercies of the Lord are over all His works.*” God cannot punish us, unless we compel Him, but His forgiveness and His blessings He offers to us spontaneously, and He is deeply grieved if we reject them. He has not shed a drop of sweat in order to punish us ; but in order to accord us grace, He has offered up his sweat, His blood, and His life under the most cruel tortures. In the punishment of the sinner He has by no means exhausted His omnipotence ; but to reconcile the sinner with Himself He has expended the whole treasure of His omnipotence, and has wrought the greatest of works, an infinite work, the Incarnation of His own Son. Though we, therefore, have reason to fear His avenging justice, yet we have far more reason to trust in His mercy and to hope for the forgiveness of our sins.

3. In order to confirm us in this hope, our Saviour has proposed to us the touching parable of the prodigal son. The sin of this son was very like our own. With base ingratitude he had left the house of his father, where he enjoyed full paternal love ; he had taken along his inheritance, and in a strange country had squandered it in the meanest and most wicked manner. Who should not have expected that when afterward returning home in his misery, he would have been relentlessly and scornfully rejected by his father ? This would certainly have been his due. But instead, his father lovingly receives him again, re-adopts him as his son, and welcomes him with so much joy as to excite the jealousy of the elder brother, who had remained faithful to him.

In like manner have we left the house of our heavenly Father and wasted in the most ungrateful manner the inheritance of grace. We are no longer worthy to appear before Him, much less to obtain again the squandered in-

¹ Ps. cxliv. 9.

heritance. Nevertheless, we need only acknowledge our misery and ingratitude and earnestly again desire the favor of our heavenly Father, and He will meet us rejoicingly, will receive us again into His house, give us the kiss of peace and reconciliation, adopt us again as His children, and restore to us the entire lost inheritance. Aye, He receives us with such affection, that if His faithful children, the angels and the saints, were capable of envy, they must envy our happiness.

What injustice, then, would we do God, if after all these proofs of His infinite mercy we should still remain in despair and despondency and would perish in our misery, instead of courageously breaking the fetters of sin and casting ourselves confidently into His paternal bosom! How may we still fear our enemies, our bad habits, and our weakness, when God is ready to humble our enemies by His omnipotence, to break the yoke of our vices, and to endow our will with a superhuman strength? Why are we not daring enough to take that one step into the life-boat which God holds ready for us?


If a king, to save a poor man who had fallen into a deep well, let down strong machines for his assistance and promised on his delivery to extend his own hand to him and to donate to him the half of his kingdom, how would this unhappy man revive with courage, how confidently and zealously would he seize the proffered means of safety! God now does the same to you, O sinner! He sends you His angels to deliver you from the abyss of sin, He extends to you His own hand, not only to save you, but to seat you upon His royal throne. Why do you still hesitate, unhappy man, to extend your hand to your liberator, that He may seize it? O tardy, cowardly, and foolish suicide! God desires nothing else of you but to let yourself be saved by Him and you deny yourself and Him this trifle! Co-operate as far as you can and ought with that which God works in you. He will assist you as much as you will permit Him, and assist you more than it is necessary. He has be-

gun, do you continue and He will complete the work. He has called, do you respond and make use of His gifts, that you may ever receive additional gifts and obtain grace upon grace.

FIFTH CHAPTER.

Contrition as the Fourth and Last Preparation for Grace.

1.

NE thing still remains for us to do, with the help of God, if our hope of recovering grace shall be realized. We must sincerely detest sin, which is opposed to grace, and must be earnestly resolved to live and act according to the laws and directions of grace.

If we desire the grace of God with a lively faith, we must also endeavor to adopt those sentiments which grace requires of us. And which sentiments are these? First and always, we must have the earnest will to fulfil all those duties which we take upon ourselves when entering the state of grace, *i. e.*, we must have the firm resolution to commit no mortal sin in future, and to live as true children of God. This resolution, if it only be sincere and efficacious, is a supernatural act, because it is to form in us the beginning of a supernatural life. We can elicit this act only by following the interior impulse of the Holy Ghost, who will introduce us into supernatural life, and when we declare ourselves determined to preserve and cherish this life within us. How we are to accomplish this, will be shown in the following chapters.

But because we are in the state of sin before we enter sanctifying grace, because we have grievous sins upon our soul, which render us entirely unworthy of the grace of God and exclude it from us, we must not only make a good resolution for the future, but also seek to undo the past, as far as lies in our power. We must be sorry for having committed those sins, for having so greatly offended God

by them ; and if we are truly sorry, we must endeavor to render satisfaction to God for these offences, such as He requires of us and we are capable of rendering; in a word, we must sincerely repent of our sins and do penance for them.

2. In order that this contrition may be salutary for us, in order that it may pave the way for the grace of God, it must also be supernatural. If it were not supernatural, it would stand in no proportion to the supernatural state of grace for which it must prepare us. But when is this contrition supernatural? When in the light of faith and by the influence of the Holy Ghost we detest sin as a supernatural evil, as an offence against the supernatural law of God, by which we incur the loss of grace *for ourselves*, and withdraw *from God* the love we owe Him.

It follows from this explanation that contrition may be of two kinds: perfect and imperfect. If we repent only because sin deprives us of grace, and therefore of our highest happiness, because in consequence of this loss we must fear the greatest evils and punishments from God, then our contrition is imperfect. In such a contrition we consider grace only inasmuch as it is a good for *us*, and sin only inasmuch as it is an evil for *us*. This contrition does not yet contain the pure and perfect disposition of the children of God, which consists in the love of Him. Nevertheless, even imperfect contrition implies a sincere desire for grace and all that accompanies it, consequently, also, for the love of God. Therefore, this contrition does not yet render us worthy of the immediate infusion of grace, but prepares us sufficiently to receive grace in the sacrament of penance.

If, however, we consider how great a good grace is for God Himself, how much He is glorified by it, and how we by sin offend Him, the highest good, and withdraw from Him our dutiful, filial love, then our contrition is perfect. This contrition includes filial love of God. Then we have no longer a mere desire for the grace of the children of God ; we already act as His children, we already embrace

Him with the arms of love. Then He can no longer hesitate ; He likewise embraces us with His paternal love, receives us into His bosom, presses the kiss of reconciliation upon our brow, and immediately gives us again the grace of His children.

Imperfect contrition, even, is, therefore, good and praiseworthy ; it has a wonderful power and ought to be exceedingly dear and precious to us, because it at least qualifies us for the reception of grace. But its power cannot be compared with that of perfect contrition, which not only qualifies us for grace, but immediately introduces us into it. We should therefore not be contented with the former, and always endeavor to progress unto the latter. Aye, we should be ashamed, after losing grace so ignominiously, to omit anything that lies in our power, and to do no more than extreme necessity requires. For thus we should prove that we do not, even with regard to our own self, esteem grace as it deserves ; and if we are entirely indifferent about perfecting our contrition by love, it is evident that in reality we are not so earnest about contrition, and perhaps do not possess it even in an imperfect degree.

Oh, if we only recognized, with lively faith, and with the assistance of the Holy Ghost, the great evil of sin, which deprives us of grace, we should immediately detest it with our whole soul and banish it from our heart ! We would detest it, because in depriving us of grace it deprives us of the highest good and of the possession of God ; because it lets us fear the severest and most cruel punishments at the hands of an angry God. We would detest it still more, because by it we commit the greatest wrong and the greatest offence against the Author of grace.

For after we have been called by grace unto the worship of God, we offend Him not only as our highest and legitimate Lord, to whom we owe unlimited service and respect, but as our most loving Father, our best Friend, the most tender Spouse of our soul. We mock the ineffable love with which He embraces us, and return the basest in-

gratitude for His inestimable gifts and blessings. We disgrace and dishonor His name by dishonoring the name of His children and showing ourselves unworthy of Him. We tear our soul loose from His bosom, where He loved it as the apple of his eye, and considered it the jewel and the joy of His heart. We rend the heavenly robe of innocence and sanctity, with which He had clothed us and presented us to the whole Heaven. We desert, like Judas, our Lord and Saviour, miserably betraying Him, who by His grace had numbered us amongst His friends and beloved. Oh, what pain do we inflict upon His paternal heart, how deeply do we offend and wound it! Must He not utter the same complaint about us which by the mouth of the Psalmist He spoke of Judas: ¹ “*If my enemy had reviled me, I would verily have borne with it. . . . but thou, a man of one mind, my guide and my familiar, who didst take sweet meats together with me*”? And should we be so inhuman and devoid of feeling, as not to be moved, or to think only of the harm which accrues to us from such a terrible sin?

The offence of a son against his father is more wicked and abominable than the offence of a servant. But it would be far more wicked still if a servant, whom the particular kindness of his master had adopted as a son, in base ingratitude for such love did not hesitate recklessly to grieve and offend him. Is not this the case with us who have been made children of God by His grace and who are thus far more indebted to Him than if we were His children by nature? Oh, the crime, oh, the ingratitude! That we should even now dare to refuse Him our love and should requite His tenderness by mean disobedience!

But how great must be our sorrow, when we consider what God has sacrificed for us, in order to make us His children; how He gave His only-begotten Son for us, in order that He might, by His blood, purchase grace for us! If our heart still retains a feeling of humanity and gratitude, if it be not more cruel than the tiger and hyena, it

¹ Ps. ltv. 13-15.

must dissolve in unbounded sorrow. By sin we have trampled under foot the precious blood of the Son of God, frustrated its efficacy in us, have rejected the dearest pledge of the love of the Eternal Father. He seeks our friendship at every price and to secure it sacrifices the best He has to offer. How much must He be pained, if even so we despise His friendship and mock it !

Oh, let us have mercy on our tender Father, whom we have grieved so greatly, if we will have no mercy on ourselves ! Let us feel with Him the gravity of our sin, the greatness of our ingratitude, and let us instantly relieve His paternal heart by sincere repentance and deep contrition ! Let us hasten to ask His pardon, to wash away the stain of sin by our tears, and to redeem it, as far as possible, by a most fervent love !

Let us never be contented with our contrition, since it can never be great enough to outweigh the greatness of such a sin ; for if the infinite merit of Christ did not come to our assistance, we should never be able to render a perfect satisfaction to God, and all our possible effort would be of no value, unless the grace of the Holy Ghost rendered it precious and valuable. Let us never cease to weep and to be indignant at ourselves ; let us humble ourselves in the face of our heavenly Father, and in humble confusion confess to Him that we are not worthy of being called His children. In this manner we shall soon recover His grace, and in our sorrow experience that sweet joy which is the privilege of the child who from a long exile at last returns home.


3. True contrition must continue even after the reconciliation with God, and just then prove its sincerity. A child who has grievously offended its father will not forget him after its sin has been forgiven, but will always be pained at the recollection of its great offence ; it will in future be the more careful not to again offend its father, to whose indulgence it is doubly indebted. After we have been received again unto the grace of God, and after

our sins have been sunk into the depths of the ocean, we must forget them the less, as the forgiveness of our sins has still more manifested to us the ineffable love of God. The consciousness of reconciliation must fill us with peace and holy happiness. But we shall truly enjoy this peace and happiness only when we continue to do penance for our sins and to lament them ; for by that we become ever more worthy of the grace of God, and ever more certain of His positive pardon. This continued sorrow for our former calamity, and this remembrance of our past wickedness, will likewise alone prevent us from relapsing into the same evil and from repeating the same crime.

SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Supernatural Life that we must lead in the State of Grace.

1.

ET us give thanks to God, if by His mercy He has delivered us from our sins and received us again unto His grace. But now we have the obligation, too, of living and acting in accordance with the high dignity we hold, and of turning the talent received to the best account.

“*You were heretofore darkness,*” says the Apostle,¹ “*but are now light in the Lord. Walk, then, as children of the light: For the fruit of the light is in all goodness, and justice, and truth.*” “*Brethren,*” says the same Apostle in another place,² “*if you be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth. For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*”

Yes, dear Christian, when you are liberated from the death of sin, born again to a new life, and from a servant and an enemy have been made a child of God, then you must deem it your honor, your pride, and your highest happiness to fulfil the duties which your new state imposes upon you. You are estranged from the world, the devil, and the flesh, liberated from their tyranny; you are made a citizen of Heaven, a domestic of God, and a temple of the Holy Ghost. It, therefore, behooves you to renounce the laws of the world, the devil, and the flesh, and to live and labor henceforth according to the will of

¹ Eph. v. 8-10.

² Col. iii. 1-3.

your heavenly Father, according to the example of His only-begotten Son, and according to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

This new life must be a heavenly, spiritual, holy, and Divine life, and therefore, also, a mysterious life, as the Apostle in several places calls it. It must be *heavenly*, because you are by grace elevated from earth to Heaven; you stand with the angels before the throne of God, to praise and glorify Him as the Author of all grace and the Source of all good. It must be *spiritual*, because it is inspired in you by the Holy Spirit, who moves, vivifies, and animates the children of God, liberates them from the slavery of the flesh, and makes them so live in the flesh, as if they were pure spirits and angels of Heaven. It must be *holy*, for if God is holy His children must be holy: holy in their sentiments, holy in their words, holy in their conduct. It must even be a *Divine* life, because by grace we have been made partakers of the Divine nature, since we no longer live but God lives in us, God acts in us, God penetrates us with His being and His infinite Providence.

But on that account it is also a *mysterious* and *hidden* life, a life that remains hidden from the eyes of the world and cannot even by ourselves be known and comprehended in its whole depth and sublimity. The world, sunk in the darkness of sin and concupiscence, does not recognize in us the sublime dignity of the children of God, nor the high and intimate union with God which is the effect of grace, and therefore, it despises our quiet life, which is hidden in God, as idle, meaningless hypocrisy. Let us not be deceived by its foolish babble. Let us adhere to our holy faith, which leads us beyond the world up into invisible, mysterious regions, whither our natural eye may not penetrate. Let us not hinder God in displaying His mysterious operations in our soul, let us surrender ourselves to the direction of the Holy Ghost, who dwells in our heart and fills it with the whole plenitude of His Divinity. Let us remember that the life of the Son of God upon earth

was also a hidden life, and that in the words of the Apostle, when Christ shall appear, who is our life, we also shall appear with Him in glory.

2. The more mysterious and sublime this life is that we must lead in grace, the more do we need a visible pattern after which we must develop this life in us.

Christ, as the only-begotten and first-born Son of God, is the model and pattern of all the children of God. He and He alone could give us a worthy example how we should live as children of God; He and He alone is a model worthy of our sublime state and calling. If grace did not elevate us so high above our nature, it would have been unworthy of Him to descend in person from Heaven upon earth, in order to teach us how we must live as mere human beings and servants of God. But if grace, from servants of God makes us children of God, from earthly men domestics of God, then could the only-begotten Son of God teach us the sublime and Divine manners which correspond to this new vocation.

A man of the common people who has never seen the court of his king and is suddenly, by an unheard-of grace, adopted as the son of the king, would of course be ignorant of the manners suitable to his new dignity; much less could he learn this of others, who were his equals, and he must consequently look to the conduct of the courtiers and the true children of the king for an example. In like manner are we unable to learn, either from our reason, or from the example of other mere men, the manners and the life which become us as adoptive children of God. But since on earth we cannot behold the only-begotten Son in the Divine glory which He enjoys with the Father, therefore this Son had to descend upon earth to walk in our midst, in our own nature, to develop before our eyes His Divine life and the splendor of His holiness, and had thus to become our teacher and our model. Him we must imitate, if we would be children of God. Him we must put on, to Him we must conform, His image we

must bear, His spirit and sentiments we must appropriate, His inclinations and virtues we must study and express in us, that His heavenly Father may be honored by us as by Him and may take pleasure in us as in Him.

Oh, what honor for us that we should imitate the only-begotten Son as His brethren and as members of His body! We admire the heroic virtues and noble qualities of many men and would consider ourselves happy if we could acquire them to some extent, thereby elevating ourselves above the narrow limits of the great multitude and of every day life. How honorable, then, must it be for us, to be called to imitate and to express in us the heavenly and Divine virtues of the Son of God, which are an object of admiration for the whole Heaven!

But how disgraceful were it, likewise, if in our high state we should be contented with the vain phantom which the world calls the virtue of a righteous man! For if a natural human righteousness can adorn a man, it adorns a Christian as little as the manners and virtues of a civilian would do honor to a king. We are, as St. Peter says,¹ “*a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation.*” By baptism and by grace we are made members of Christ, and are raised to a royal dignity, to a union with Christ as our Head, and must serve and glorify Him, the King of kings, as His children, and we are to reign with Him and to share His kingdom and His happiness. We are Christians, *i. e.*, members of Christ, brethren of Christ; Christians, *i. e.*, sanctified and consecrated by the anointing of the Holy Ghost, and as such we must lead a Christian life, a life according to the example of Christ, a life for Christ and for the honor of Christ, in a word, a life in Christ, a life which Christ lives in us, as in His members, and which we live in Him as our Head.

3. Alas, Christians themselves understand too little the sublime nature and the Divine character of this Christian life; they have but a very confused and indistinct

¹ I. Peter ii. 3.

idea of it. Let us endeavor to render this idea as clear and plain as possible.

We distinguish in man, with reference to his nature, a twofold, and, if we take grace also into consideration, a threefold life: sensual life, spiritual life, and Divine life. Each life has its own principle, its own law, its own light, its own end, its own motives.

The principle of sensual life is the soul, with its sensual nature and faculties, by which it is similar to the animal. The sensual nature of man has a natural law, the law of the flesh, which impels it to seek sensual and material good and to foster and preserve bodily life. The light which directs him in the execution of this law is the light of the five senses, which proposes to him this good. Corresponding to this law, bodily life has for its end the preservation and propagation of bodily life, and for its attracting motive the sensual pleasure, enjoyment, and relish which it finds in material good.

If man now would devote himself to this sensual life and indulge in it alone, he would evidently renounce his nobler spiritual nature and the natural likeness of God in his soul; he would degrade himself to the level of the brute and even beneath it. The animal leads a sensual life, because it can lead no other, because it is called and qualified for no other. Man, however, by such a life, drags all the high and noble qualities, with which God has endowed him, into the mire; casting himself with his superior force and energy into the sensual, he does not confine himself to the limits which nature has placed for the brute, but sinks himself deeper into the sensual than the brute. Therefore our nobler nature is averse to such conduct: "*The spirit lusteth against the flesh,*" says the Apostle,¹ and the confusion, so beautifully depicted on our cheeks, is witness thereof.

This sensual life is naturally inferior and subordinate to the spiritual life in us. The principle of this life is the soul with its spiritual faculties, reason and will. Its law con-

¹ Gal. v, 17.

sists in the natural tendency towards spiritual good, which corresponds to our spiritual nature, and in the natural relations which we, as rational creatures, have towards God and our fellow-men. Its light, therefore, is our natural reason ; its end the attainment of a natural happiness and such glorification of God as He may expect and demand of His servants ; its motives, finally, lie in the affinity and conformity of spiritual goods with our spiritual nature, and in the reverence for the imperious law of our mighty Lord and Creator.

But this spiritual life may be a good and true life, or a false and bad one. It is true and good, if we follow the true tendency, which the Creator has implanted in our nature, and which, in reality, is nothing else than the law of the Creator Himself ; if we, therefore, tend to those goods which may render our nature truly perfect and happy, if we, above all, seek the knowledge and love of the Creator. It is a false life, however, if we seek only an apparent good, as the honor of men, or if, instead of following the highest good and seeking happiness in it, we would be content with a finite created good, and instead of referring the knowledge and love of creatures to the knowledge and love of the Creator, we would be satisfied with the former alone.

This false spiritual life is the life of most men who do not rush headlong into the whirl of sensual lust. It is less disgraceful and humiliating than animal life, yet it is equally vain and foolish, equally unworthy of man, and incapable of giving him happiness as is the animal life.

But is the truly natural spiritual life, which we have just described, a Christian life, a life worthy of a Christian ? Far from it. It is worthy of the natural man, and if God had given us no higher dignity, no higher destiny, we might and ought to be content with it, and God would likewise be satisfied with such a life. But if God has given us a higher dignity, a higher destiny (as He has actually done), then He can find no pleasure in such a natural life on our part, and we must not be content with

it. Since we have been elevated far above our nature by the grace of Christ, and are no longer simple men, but more than men, having been made partakers of the Divine nature and children of God, we must lead a *supernatural* life, a life that is not only far above the sensual, nor only above the vain and false spiritual life, but above the purest, truest, and most perfect spiritual life; in a word, we must lead a life that is infinitely superior to all natural life.

The principles of this supernatural life are the spiritual faculties of the soul, as transformed by grace; they are the supernatural virtues, infused by the Holy Ghost, and especially the Divine virtues. Its law is a supernatural law, which is not naturally implanted in us, but is written and impressed upon our soul supernaturally by the finger of God, and which we know neither by our senses, nor by our reason, but alone by supernatural faith in the light of the Holy Ghost. Its end is the possession and enjoyment of the highest and most sublime gifts, which God Himself possesses and enjoys, and that glorification of God which He can expect and demand as a Father from His children. Its motives, finally, lie in that supernatural and mysterious affinity with God into which we enter by grace, and in that wonderful power of attraction which God and His supernatural gifts exercise in consequence of this affinity.

Then only do we live as Christians, when our life is from grace, directed by the light of faith and the law revealed to us by the Holy Spirit, when it tends towards the heavenly happiness promised us by God, and when its acts are determined by supernatural motives. Then only is our life in harmony with our heavenly nature of grace, when it is a *supernatural* life; for the supernatural life and it alone is conformable to the man who by grace has been elevated above all the limits of his nature. The supernatural life ceases, as it were, to be supernatural for him, since it becomes his second nature, and he would, therefore, act against his higher nature if he would lead a mere human, natural life,

He would act as contrary to his nature, as when a rational man would not live conformably to the nobler part of his nature, his reason, but conformably to the lower part, sensuality. It is natural for the worm to crawl upon the earth, and it would be unreasonable to demand of it to fly. But if by the omnipotence of God it had been converted into a bird and had been gifted with wings, this demand would no longer be unreasonable, but entirely natural, and that animal would henceforth act contrary to its nature, if it would not raise itself to lofty heights, but would continue to crawl upon the earth. It would likewise be unreasonable to demand of the natural and earthly man that he should lead a Divine and heavenly life. But after he has by grace deposed the lowliness of his nature and has been clothed with a Divine nature, he would disown himself if he continued his former habit of life and would not move in a higher sphere.

4. Let us not be misled by the belief that only the great saints can and ought to lead a supernatural life. This life does not consist in those extraordinary revelations, ecstasies, and miracles with which the saints are favored by God, but rather in the intimate union with God which grace renders possible for us all, and in that holy dignity and value which the unction of the Holy Ghost communicates to all the actions of the true Christian. The general dignity and destiny of all Christians is the foundation upon which the saints constructed the high edifice of their virtues and graces; it is the root which in the saints is developed in all its richness, in all its fulness. We have, then, the same foundation, the same root of sanctity, and if in us it does not attain such splendid development, it is because we do not sufficiently co-operate with the work of grace, or perhaps even place a thousand obstacles in its way.

“*God is wonderful in His saints,*” says Holy Writ,¹ wonderful in the high degree of perfection to which He leads them, wonderful in the supernatural favors which He

¹ Ps. lxxvii. 36.

bestows upon them, wonderful, finally, in the miracles He works through their instrumentality. But God is wonderful also in every Christian who endeavors to preserve and to develop the sanctity received in baptism. Every supernatural act that we elicit, every act of faith, hope, and charity, is a greater miracle than all external signs that God works in or through His saints, and as great a miracle as the sensible, heavenly illuminations and emotions which He so often grants the saints. For really there can be nothing greater on earth than the acts of the Divine virtues, by which we partake of God's own life, and those special favors are only means by which the saints are to unite themselves to God ever more intimately in faith, hope, and charity, and are to invite others to a supernatural union with God.

Oh, how is it possible that there are still so many men who are unmindful of their high calling, and who would rather cling to the earth than be borne to Heaven by God, who would rather move within the limits of their poor nature, than transcend these limits and with the angels lead a heavenly and Divine life! I do not speak of those even who surrender themselves to the lust of the flesh and lower themselves to the level of the beast, nor of those who adhere to the vanities, if not to the filth, of this earth; but of those who at least profess to practise natural, rational virtue and piety, and despise and ridicule everything that goes beyond this as mysticism, bigotry, and hypocrisy. What greater insult could they offer to God, than to despise and contemn His highest and noblest gifts? What greater disgrace can they bring upon themselves, than to forget and disclaim their heavenly dignity and in narrow stupidity close their heart to the grace of God?

Be this far from you, my dear Christian, if you indeed know the significance of this name, and will glory in it! Follow the grace of God with your whole heart, and endeavor, as a true child of God, to become more and more like unto Christ, your heavenly pattern. Be not guided

by the laws of a perverted world, nor even by those of your normal and noble nature, but solely and alone by the law of grace and of the Holy Ghost. Keep the lofty height to which grace has elevated you ; let yourself be borne aloft by the Spirit of God and soar above the earth, above your own nature, and move only in the courts of Heaven. Be very zealous in the exercise of the heavenly virtues, which have been infused into your soul in holy baptism. This practice is the only occupation worthy of your high dignity ; it alone is the exercise of the supernatural, heavenly, and Divine life of the children of God.

SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Exercise of Supernatural Love of God.

1.

THE most peculiar, natural, and sublime act for him who is renovated and regenerated by the grace of Christ, is the act of supernatural love of God. This love is the breath that vivifies the child of God, it is the pulsation of his heart and the motive power of all his actions.

The communication of grace is the most complete and potent proof of the intimate and sublime love of God for His creatures. Grace is the kiss by which God in His supreme condescension receives the soul as His daughter, friend, and spouse. What could the soul do in return for this love, by which God approaches it so near, what could it do more appropriately than love Him again as it is loved by Him? The Latin language has a very ingenious play of words, to express the gratitude for tokens of affection received; it says: to receive grace and to return grace, to receive favor and return favor. If, in general, love must create love, then the Divine love, which is shown us in grace, must do this particularly. For when God bestows His grace upon us, He at the same time makes us worthy of His love and gives us the power to love Him again, which no other lover can do. Moreover, He unites Himself so intimately to the soul, that He not only is and remains substantially present in its interior, but forms, together with it, as it were, one whole, one spirit. What, then, is more natural than that the soul, which beholds itself thus indescribably loved by God, thus animated and attracted by Him, should burn with most fervent love for Him?

Nothing is more natural to the fire than to give light and to burn. Grace, however, makes us partakers of the Divine nature ; it is the heat which transforms the soul in God, and into the image of His Divine being, which is the purest spiritual fire. Nothing is therefore more natural to the soul than to be enlightened and warmed—enlightened in the knowledge, and warmed in the love of God. The light of grace will become perfect when it has passed into the light of glory, and lets us behold God face to face. Here upon earth it must chiefly develop its warmth, and as the vision of God is the most natural and principal act of the glorified in Heaven, so the love of God is the most natural and important act of the justified upon earth. Therefore our Lord says :¹ “ *I am come to cast fire on the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?*” Oh, that we suffered it to be kindled and to burn in us, that we also inflamed our soul by the fire of grace, which transforms and beautifies it, and that our will were converted into a living fire of love, in order to live and act only in love !

2. The love of God is not only the most natural and appropriate, but also the most *sublime* activity and occupation of the justified soul ; or rather, it is so appropriate and natural an occupation for the child of God, because it is so sublime, because it is peculiarly Divine. God Himself has no greater and more sublime occupation than the vision and love of Himself ; this occupation is alone worthy of His infinite greatness and calls into action His whole infinite power. Through all eternity He does nothing else and has no other necessity than to behold and love His infinite beauty and goodness. The whole immense work of His creation does not occupy Him so much or task His power as much as one single moment of His charity. The creation is but a small spark, that rises up from the fiery ocean of Divine love, as a slight manifestation of its infiniteness and glory. What greater thing could the creature do, what greater proof could it give of its participation in

¹ Luke xii. 49.

the Divine nature and its similarity with God, than to love Him and especially to love Him in the manner in which He loves Himself ! If all creation is nothing in comparison to the Divine love, from which it proceeded, how much less, then, are all the possible works of a creature in comparison with one act of Divine love !

Moreover, every act is the more perfect, the more sublime its object is and the more intimately it unites us with the object. But can there be a more sublime object than God, the infinite good, and can we be united to Him more intimately and perfectly, at least here on earth, than by love ? And if this be true already of the natural love of God, how much more true is it of the supernatural love, by which we hold and enjoy God in closest embrace ? Indeed, as only the love of His infinite goodness is worthy of God, so a Divine love of God is the only occupation worthy of His children. This love alone ought to satisfy us, even if we had nothing else to do on earth ; it alone makes us more like unto God than all other works, be they ever so great. We should therefore take pride in this love, and as we may boast of having been admitted by grace to the participation of the Divine nature, so we may boast of being permitted to love Him as He loves Himself.

3. Yea, this love is something so great and sublime, that theologians and spiritual writers say of it, likewise, that it deifies us and transforms us into God. Grace transforms our nature in God by the greatest possible likening and union to His nature ; supernatural love, however, *transforms our affection into a Divine affection* by likening and uniting it, as far as possible, to the Divine love and goodness. Let us endeavor to explain this mystery more fully.

As long as we consider ourselves according to our nature, we may love ourselves only on account of our own self ; we are the next object of our love, even though we must love and respect God as our Creator infinitely more than ourself. By grace, however, we are so intimately united to God,

that we are, in a wonderful manner, made one with Him, that we are made, as it were, a part of Him, as the member is a part of the body, and we live more of Him than of ourselves. Therefore God must be the next and only object of our love, so that we live only *for* Him, as we live only of Him. Furthermore, if our supernatural love is a participation of that love which God bears Himself, then our love must also resemble, in a manner, the love of God ; *i. e.*, we embrace, in the first place, only God by this love, and love every other thing only in so far as it is like unto God, is united to Him, or belongs to Him. By this love we can therefore no longer love even ourselves besides God and outside of God, but only through and in God. As we therefore by grace cast off the lowliness of our nature and transcend its narrow limits, so we must in supernatural love give up all natural self-love, and go beyond the narrow sphere of our natural life, in order to live only for God and in God, as if we were one being, one person with Him. Here we are no longer allowed to make a distinction in love between Him and ourselves, that is, we can no longer love ourselves by one kind of love and God by another. But as God loves Himself on His own account and loves us for His own sake, so we must love God for His sake, and ourselves in Him. And as we are one spirit with Him by the similitude and union of our nature with His, so must we be one spirit with Him by the similitude and union of our love with His love.

“ O chaste and holy love ! ” exclaims St. Bernard ! ¹ “ O sweet and pleasant sensation ! O pure and hallowed tendency of the will ! So much purer and holier, because there is no longer any admixture of self-love ; so much sweeter and more agreeable, as the whole object of sensation is Divine. To be thus affected, is to be deified, as a little drop of water, poured into a large quantity of wine, is lost therein and receives the taste and color of the wine ; as the iron glowing with heat is deprived of its own previous form, and

¹ De dilig. Deo. cap. 10.

made very like unto the fire ; as the air, pervaded by the light of the sun, is transformed into the same luminous splendor, to that extent that it seems not only to be illuminated, but to be the light itself ; so all human affection of the saints must one day be itself dissolved in a certain wonderful manner, and must entirely pass over into the will of God. How could God otherwise be all in all, if in man there still remained anything of man ?”

See, dear Christian, how glorious and sublime is the perfection of love, to which you have been called by grace and which is contained in grace as in its germ, and needs only your development under the assistance of God ! Do not shudder when you hear of mortification, self-denial, and self-renunciation. This is true self-love. You must surrender yourself only to find yourself again better and more beautiful in God. You must cease to love yourself with a natural human love, in order to embrace yourself in God and for God with a holy and Divine love. Mortification, says St. Bernard, is pleasanter and more agreeable in proportion to its purity and perfection ; and as grace does not destroy our nature, but glorifies it, so the Divine love which proceeds from grace only transforms your love to render it nobler and holier.

4. But as grace does not on earth so transform our nature that all its frailties and miseries disappear, but unites it entirely with God and transforms it into His image only in Heaven, so it is impossible in this life for our love and affection to be entirely deified ; that is, that we may love and perceive nothing but God alone, or in God and for God alone. Only in eternity, where God is all in all, will we enjoy this indescribable happiness. But this does not prevent us from striving after such perfection already on earth, and to attain it here to a certain extent. For by grace we are born for Heaven, and the love which has its source in grace can and must be at least of the same nature, if not the same degree of perfection, as is the love of the blessed in Heaven.

Therefore, if we cannot banish from our heart every natural love of ourselves and of other creatures, it is still possible for us to embrace ourselves and other creatures also with a supernatural Divine love and to see that the former do not antagonize the latter. That is, in truth, the limit of the law of charity, as God has imposed it on us for this earth. Yet noble and high-minded souls are not content with this. They desire to share on earth already the lot of the saints in Heaven and endeavor, therefore, to renounce completely nature and all natural love, to be immersed ever more in the abyss of grace and to cultivate and foster in themselves supernatural love only. They therefore mortify, whenever possible, their natural impulse and inclination, even if these are not opposed to grace, simply because these weaken the intimate union with God and render it more difficult. If they cannot attach all their faculties and inclinations to God, and give them a Divine disposition, they at least strive to keep their free will fixed upon God and united with Him. They strive to transform it at least entirely in God by love, so that, penetrated by Divine fire, it may desire and love what God loves and desires, and in the manner in which, and for the reason for which God loves and desires it. Thus they live in God and God lives in them, and they may exclaim with the Apostle:¹ “*I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me.*”

This is life by grace ; this is in reality a union with God by love, similar to His union with us by grace. Though not all are easily able to acquire the perfection of the saints, yet all should seek it in some measure ; otherwise, they are faithless to the grace given them, do not appropriate its virtue, nor develop its seed. Otherwise, they bury this sacred fire beneath its ashes and smother its flame ; they become lukewarm and an object of disgust in the eyes of eternal love, and are in danger of extinguishing even the live coal under the ashes. Grace abhors inactiv-

¹ gal. ii. 20.

ity more than nature abhors a vacuum. He who does not permit the activity of grace in him, despises it and despises God Himself, who gives it only to inflame us. Who does not consider the gift wasted which he has conferred upon an ungrateful man? Who is not grieved to see his gifts go to ruin unimproved? It is meet, then, that we should be grateful to God and should zealously use His grace, if we would preserve it in us.

Let us, therefore, endeavor to cultivate and develop that sacred charity which the Holy Spirit has infused into our soul, and let all our actions, all our desires, be penetrated by it. Let us clear away the ashes of sinful and earthly inclination, under which this holy fire is smouldering, and let us, then, simply permit God to act in us. He Himself will inflame and increase it, He will draw us ever more to Himself, unite us ever more closely to Himself, so that we too may exclaim with the Apostle: "*I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me.*"

EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Exercise of Supernatural Love of our Neighbor.

1.

IN the state of grace we must have a supernatural love, not only for God, but also for our neighbor ; or rather, we must practise and exercise the love of God by the love of our neighbor. For the supernatural love of our neighbor is one and the same virtue with the supernatural love of God ; the former is contained in the latter and must proceed from it.

When we love our fellow-men with a natural love, we love them because they are of the same nature as we, because they are like unto us and are connected with us by near or remote ties of relationship or society. Thus the child loves its father, the brother his sister, the friend his friend, the citizen his fellow-citizen. The Church teaches that this love is not reprehensible, but good in its kind, as long as it is not contrary to the love of God and does not transgress the limits of Divine law. But it is always a mere human and natural, not a Divine and supernatural love, and, therefore, it is not the Christian love which behooves a man regenerated by the grace of Christ, nor is it before God meritorious of eternal life. It would, therefore, be the greatest folly to be proud of and to glory in this love, or to represent it even as nobler and more beautiful than the Christian love of our neighbor, which springs from grace.

As Christians we must love our neighbor not *by* nature, but by grace, and therefore, not *according to* nature, but according to grace ; that is, we must love him because he is

united to us by grace. We must love him because he also has been made a partaker of Divine nature by grace, and has been elevated above his own nature, or at least destined to such elevation and glory.

Not his human nature, but the Divine nature, which impresses its own image upon him, not so much he himself, in and by himself, but rather God, who is united to him in grace, must be the motive of our love, and therefore we must embrace him with the same supernatural and Divine love which we have for God Himself.

And indeed, is not our fellow-man a child of God by grace, born and generated of God, God's supernatural likeness, and must not, therefore, the same love that embraces God, also extend to him as a child of God? Is he not by grace a brother, and, what is more, a living member of Jesus Christ, and can we love Christ without loving at the same time, in Him and with Him, His brethren and members? Is he not by grace a temple, in which the Holy Spirit resides truly and personally with His whole Divinity, not only as a man in his house, but as the soul in the body, and can we, then, think of separating in our affection what the Divine love has so intimately and inseparably united? No, we can and must love our fellow-men in God and on account of God; and if special ties of society or relationship unite us more with one man than with another, we must consider these ties only with reference to God, who has formed them, and thus we shall lend them a heavenly sanction and a Divine nobility.

Our fellow-men, indeed, approach us very near only in God and by grace, incomparably nearer than all natural relations can bring them to us. In grace we all are one with God, and amongst ourselves we penetrate each other, as it were, in the bosom and heart of God, who has converted us all by grace in Himself. Therefore, too, supernatural Christian love is generally called love of our neighbor. By nature one is nearer to us, another less near, and many stand almost in no relation whatever to us. Grace,

however, brings us all wonderfully together in a spiritual manner ; we are all children in God, brethren in God, stones of the same Divine temple, and members of the same mystic body of Christ ; all are our neighbors and therefore we can and must enclose all in the wide embrace of the one Divine love. Thus Christian love of our neighbor has its particular supernatural motive in the fact that our neighbor has acquired by grace a supernatural loveliness.

2. But the grace which we have ourselves received must also impel us to this love. He who is loved, we have already said, must love again ; he who receives favor must show himself grateful for it and make as great a return as he can. But we can give God nothing that will profit Him any, or that is not His already. Therefore He requires of us that as we have been loved and favored by Him, so we must love and favor, as much as possible, our fellow-men, and He, at the same time, promises us that He will so receive all we do for His children, as if we had done it for Himself. "*If God hath so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*"¹ And the Apostle exhorts us, "*Be ye kind one to another, merciful, forgiving one another, even as God hath forgiven you in Christ.*" The greater the grace is which God has extended to us, the more generous His liberality, by which He gave us Himself in grace, the more charitable, liberal, and merciful must we be to those whom we may help and assist. We should be boundlessly good and merciful towards our neighbor, as God has been infinitely good and merciful towards us. We should devote ourselves to our neighbor and sacrifice our life for his salvation, as God has given Himself entirely to us in grace, and has sacrificed His own life to obtain grace for us. Only thus shall we be worthy children of God, only thus do we give proof that we truly and perfectly acknowledge His favor and show ourselves worthy of it.

¹ I. John iv. 11.

² Eph. iv. 32.

These reasons have infused into the first Christians and into all the saints of Christian charity that sublime loftiness of spirit, that superhuman inspiration, which appeared as a phenomenon of the other world, which astonished all, and made the heathens cry out : " See how they love one another." Yes, he alone can love as the saints loved, who knows how much he, as well as his neighbor, is loved by God. How grateful he must be for the grace received from Him, and how much the neighbor, as a child of God and brother of Christ, deserves the same love and respect as God, who lives in him and to whom he belongs !

But now, my Christian reader, you also are aware of it, after you have considered and understood the glories of grace. Will you remain behind on the way of love, and not hasten to follow in the footsteps of the saints ? Will you henceforth still be indifferent towards your neighbor, and despise him, who by grace is a child of God and heir of Heaven, a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Ghost ? Will you in future still close your heart and hand, deny him your help and your services, when God has poured out upon you the whole fulness of His infinite love and has enriched you with all His treasures ? No, you will go to serve God in His children with the angels. You will be happy to return, in some measure at least, God's unbounded love for you by the benefits which you render your neighbor. You will love your neighbor and love him as God has loved him, who has descended from Heaven upon earth for his sake, has shed His precious blood and loved him unto the end, unto death. You will love him, as the Apostle admonishes, not in word or with the tongue only, but in deed and from your heart.

3. But by what action, by what works will you manifest your love for your neighbor ? With what gifts will you enrich your neighbor ?

In the first place, with those supernatural gifts of grace with which God has so lovingly endowed you, and which are the highest and most glorious gifts that He Himself

wishes your neighbor above all others. If you truly love God, you will above all desire that your neighbor also should be united with God by the same love ; and if you love your neighbor and are zealous for his true happiness, your first care will be to make him partake of the same happiness of grace which has fallen to your own lot. And how much may you achieve in this respect with the help of God, who blesses nothing more than the charitable zeal for the salvation of souls ! You may pray : pray for the infidels, that the heavenly dawn of faith, the harbinger of grace, may illumine their souls ; pray for the sinners, that God, by a sincere conversion, may lead them back again into the bosom of grace ; pray for the just, that they may increase grace in themselves from hour to hour, and persevere in it unto the end. You may let your example shine before men, that they may learn how sweet and pleasant it is to adhere to God, and how easy to overcome sin and to practise virtue with the assistance of His grace. You may instruct the erring, confirm the wearied, encourage the indolent, warn the incautious, rescue those who are in danger of being seduced. Your charity will find a thousand other occasions and means of activity ; for love is inventive, and the more inventive the more fervent and zealous it is.

Heavenly charity seeks, in the first place, to communicate heavenly gifts. Yet as the Son of God descended from Heaven upon earth, not only to bring us heavenly gifts, but to alleviate also the corporal and temporal misery of mankind ; as He went about doing good and marked His every step with wonderful blessings, so the Divine charity, which the Christian bears his neighbor, descends from the soul to the body of the neighbor, without denying its heavenly origin and character. The whole man is sanctified by grace ; the body also is made a temple of the Holy Ghost and is incorporated into the mystical body of Christ ; it also is destined one day to partake of the glorification of the soul by grace, and to enjoy the glories of grace with it. Is not this sufficient reason for the Chris-

tian to embrace it with the same holy charity as the soul? This is well understood by those enlightened souls who devote themselves to the service of the poor and sick, with far greater zeal and more tender charity than mothers extend to their children; those souls who joyfully offer their possessions, their labor, their health, and even their life, in order to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to nurse the sick. If they do not miraculously heal the sick and multiply the bread, as our Saviour did, they certainly work miracles of devotion, of self-sacrifice, of self-denial and charity, miracles which can proceed only from the wonderful power of grace.

This spirit of charity, which always lives in the Church of Christ, breathes with greater vigor and power in our own time, and the number of hearts which are seized and moved by it increases from day to day. Will you, Christian readers, also follow this impulse? Will not you also renew within yourself the earthly life and works of our Divine Saviour? God calls you; the grace of Christ presses you. Do but open the eyes of your soul and body. Your bodily eyes will exhibit to you the boundless misery which envelops and overwhelms so many of your fellow-men; the eyes of your soul will perceive their great dignity which makes them deserving of your love and sympathy, and all the more deserving, the greater is their want and necessity. If this do not move you to console and assist them according to your ability, then you are undeserving of the name of Christian, then you are no longer worthy of possessing grace; for grace is love, and love inclines to mercy.

Certainly you cannot expect God in future to be still bounteous in conferring His grace upon you. "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*" "*Give, and it shall be given to you.*" The mercy and charity which we show others is so pleasing to God and so meritorious, that our Lord, in accounting on the day of judgment the works to be rewarded, will mention only those of mercy, and in the case of the reprobates will only assign the neg-

lect of these as the cause of their damnation. The same rule which God follows in the dispensation of eternal reward, He also generally follows in the dispensation of grace. He will be liberal towards us in this dispensation, in proportion to our liberality towards our neighbor, and will be sparing therein in the measure in which we are ungenerous towards our neighbor. For we deny God what we deny our fellow-men, since they are the children, and members, and temple of God ; we give God what we give them, since He so accepts it as if we had given it to Him.


But in order that God may thus accept our gifts, it is necessary that we intend them for Him, that is, that we behold God in our neighbor, and serve our neighbor for the sake of God. If we give alms out of other motives, not directed to God, out of natural compassion and goodness, if we give them not in the spirit of faith, we then give to our neighbor only and not to God, and He will not acknowledge them as given to Him, and will not reward us with the supernatural gifts of grace.

Let us then be animated with the spirit of faith and Divine charity, and let us dispense blessing and consolation wherever possible, and the blessing of Divine grace will attend our every step.

NINTH CHAPTER.

The Exercise of Supernatural Humility and Chastity.

1.

E have seen how the glories of grace are the ground and occasion of a supernatural union of charity with God and with our fellow-men. The world does not know this charity, because it springs from the Holy Ghost and not from nature ; because it is a heavenly and Divine thing, and, therefore, peculiar to the Christian order of grace. From this charity spring all the other holy acts and exercises which distinguish the life of the Christian from that of the ordinary man. At least, these actions must be in some manner connected with charity, which is the soul of all virtues ; and if they do not proceed from charity, they must at least lead to charity, or be directed in some manner to the same supernatural end to which charity unites us.

We might now review all the different virtues and show how the Christian, in the state of grace, ought to practise them in a supernatural manner. But this is scarcely necessary, if faith and charity are alive in us. If these are perfect in us, then we shall perfectly understand and practise all supernatural virtues ; but if we be possessed only of a lively faith, then our knowledge and practice of virtue will be but imperfect.

Indeed, he who has great charity does everything out of charity, and charity itself teaches him how to do it. If, then, we lovingly embrace God by an ardent, supernatural charity, this charity will be the motive and end of all our actions, and it will give these actions the highest

supernatural value. This charity, which the Holy Ghost diffuses in our soul, is the unction of God, and St. John says of it :¹ “ *Let the unction which you have received from Him, abide in you. And you have no need that any one teach you ; but as His unction teacheth you of all things.*” He who loves, knows what it is to love ; he knows also what it is to act out of love ; he bears within him the root of all supernatural virtues, and perceives the beauty of these heavenly blossoms intuitively in their innermost nature far better than words can express it.

If, then, Christian soul, you are not yet aglow with love, and will nevertheless practise the supernatural virtues, there is no shorter and better way for you than to acquire love and to be inflamed by it ; otherwise you must behold them by faith, as it were, in the dim and far distance. But if it is too difficult for you to acquire in a short time this fervent love of God, then enliven at least your faith. Consider God, your neighbor, yourself, all your relations to others, and all your duties, in the light of faith. Consider God your Father by grace, your neighbor as your brother by grace, yourself as a child of God, a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Ghost by grace. Then you will worship God, not with servile fear, but with child-like reverence ; then you will honor your neighbor as your fellow-citizen in the kingdom of Heaven and a domestic of God ; then you will esteem yourself honorable and holy, not merely as a rational creature, but as a supernatural likeness of God, as a great and holy temple. Thus will all the rights that you must respect appear to you supernaturally hallowed with an additional claim to respect, and all duties will receive a new and holy sanction, which is communicated to all corresponding actions and gives them a supernatural character.

Although, as we have stated, these general principles might suffice, nevertheless we will specially select two moral virtues, Christian humility and chastity, and by

¹ I. John ii. 27.

means of these describe more in detail the character and spirit of the life of grace. These two virtues are also the rarest and most beautiful blossoms on the tree of Christian grace, and those that are least known and understood outside of the Christian world ; they are, more than all the others, closely connected with all the mysteries of grace and of supernatural charity. For, as grace elevates us unto God, so it disengages us from the proud selfishness of our spirit and the filth of the flesh ; and as by supernatural charity our soul is absorbed in God, and finds its sweetest pleasure in Him alone, so it learns its own value and the littleness of sensual indulgences also from charity. Moreover, these virtues render our self-love supernatural, and it is but meet that we should speak of the supernatural love of ourselves, after having spoken of the supernatural love of God and our neighbor.

2. *Humility*, in its proper sense, is scarcely known by name outside of Christianity, and even among Christians its inestimable supernatural value is but little understood. It would even seem, at first glance, that Christian grace, by so infinitely elevating our nature, favored nothing less than the practice of humility. Yet the very reverse is true.

If God so elevates us as to make us partakers of His own nature, He does this out of pure condescension and gratuitous love, and not because of our merit, and we understand this inability and lack of merit in our nature the more, the more we understand the glory and sublimity of grace. We shall readily perceive and acknowledge how little is the value of our nature in itself, how insignificant its natural perfections are, when compared with the countless gifts and perfections of grace which of itself it cannot possess or even acquire ; how little it is like and equal in itself to the great God, and how unworthy of His love and pleasure. We are confounded at the condescending, gracious love of God, who deigns to descend so low to us, in order to raise us up unto Himself, and we exclaim with

the pious Job :¹ “*What is a man, that Thou shouldst magnify him? or why dost Thou set Thy heart upon him?*”

Indeed, we may hold it to be a general rule, the more the creature is elevated by God, the more may and ought it to despise itself. Who was greater and more favored with grace by God than the Mother of God? And yet, who was at the same time more humble than she? How is this possible? Because she well knew that all her prerogatives were gifts of God, that to Him was due all honor for them, and that she of herself did not deserve them. Therefore she chanted: “*My soul doth magnify the Lord; because He hath regarded the humility of His hand-maid; for He that is mighty hath done great things to me.*” The higher she was elevated, the more she recognized the infinite distance between her natural lowliness and the glories with which God overwhelmed her, and which she of herself could neither merit nor repay, and thus, as the Mother of God, she was the most humble of His servants.

As the greatness of Divine grace ought especially to excite and foster humility and self-contempt, so God, on the other hand, requires no virtue as much as humility for dispensing His grace. Nothing qualifies us more to receive with respect and gratitude the gifts of God, than if we acknowledge our lack of merit and ability before God and give honor to Him alone. The deep conviction and sincere confession of our unworthiness and lack of all merit is the best merit and the highest degree of worthiness possible for the reception of grace. If, then, as Christians we will render ourselves worthy of the supernatural grace of God, God first and most of all demands of us that we humble ourselves before Him and confess our lowliness, and that we seek in grace, like the Mother of God, not so much our own, as His glorification. As Mary, when about to become the Mother of God, confessed herself His humble hand-maid, and accepted the proffered

¹ Job vii. 17.

maternal dignity, not out of pride or ambition, but in humble obedience and grateful submission to the gracious will of God, so must we accept in deepest humility the dignity of children of God which He offers us.

Moreover, grace so elevates us to God, that we recognize Him in the whole immeasurable depth of His gifts and love Him alone as the highest good for His own sake. But the more we know God, the more we ourselves disappear before the splendor of His glory as the mist before the splendor of the sun. The more we love Him, and by this love are immersed and transformed in Him, the more will we stifle and destroy selfishness and self-love in us and contemn ourselves, the more will we desire that God alone be loved and honored by ourselves and by others, that He be all in all. We will no longer think of seeking our own honor and greatness, but we will even earnestly desire to be despised and scorned if only God be honored and glorified thereby.

Again, the more we progress in the knowledge and love of God, the more shall we perceive how little our love, be it ever so supernatural and sublime, corresponds to the infinite greatness of God and His grace, and how little our gratitude for grace must always be; and this will stimulate our charity to desire a constant increase. We shall never boast of the virtues and good works that we possess, but rather despise ourselves, because we have loved God so little and profited so little by His grace.

Far more, however, shall we despise ourselves, and desire to be despised by others, if we have by sin offended that infinite and immensely liberal goodness of God. Had we offended God outside of the order of grace, when we were not so near Him and not so indebted to Him, this would suffice for us to humble ourselves beneath nothingness and consider ourselves worthy of eternal contempt. But now we offended Him as our most loving Father; we despised His tender love and trampled under foot His most precious gifts; now we violated the seal of His own

sanctity, which He impressed upon us. Oh, what contempt do we not now deserve; what humiliation and neglect is now so great, that we should not gladly take it upon ourselves! And especially if we again embrace God with fervent supernatural love, will we not hate, despise, and detest ourselves as the offenders of God, in the same measure as we love God above all things? In truth, if we had never committed mortal, but only venial sins, and even these only almost unconsciously, or if we had only neglected some inspirations of God, we should never more forget it and deeply detest it before God.

When we consider all this, we cannot be surprised at seeing that the greatest saints and the most favored souls were also the most humble. They who were so elevated above all creatures, humbled themselves beneath all. They esteemed their smallest failings and imperfections great and terrible, and therefore performed the severest penances in atonement for them, yea, they deemed themselves in truth far worse than the greatest sinners. They recognized the abundance of graces with which God overwhelmed them and believed that they had corresponded less zealously and gratefully than the sinners had corresponded to the graces given them. In the brightness of that light of faith which illumined their souls, and in the fervent charity which consumed them, they noticed every mote, every small defect which still clung to them, and these defects appeared so terrible to them, that they did not notice the far more grievous faults of others and believed themselves worse than all other sinners. How much greater cause, then, have we, who have committed so many and such grievous sins, to humble ourselves before God and our fellow-men and to esteem all others more than ourselves!

3. Grace, then, is the source of a supernatural humility in us, since by revealing its supernatural glory it removes every pretext for taking pride in our nature and person, and since it humbles us the more, the more it elevates us. But as it, on the one hand, dispels all self-conceit and

pride, so, on the other, it tends to destroy in us the esteem of human honor and vain ambition.

In itself it is not an evil, but on the contrary, a positive good, to see the good qualities which we really possess recognized by men, and to be honored and esteemed for them. The desire for this honor, if it is not extravagant and misunderstood, is a noble inclination, given by God and sanctioned by reason; it can even be of utility in the acquisition of virtue, provided only we esteem virtue more highly than the honor due it. Grace, however, secures us a supernatural dignity and the highest honor, not only from men, but from God Himself, from His holy angels, and from all the saints of Heaven. Compared with this, all honor that we can enjoy among men, and especially for natural good qualities, is vain and empty; all such honor must be loathsome and detestable for us, and we ought to despise and contemn it, even if it were deserved and void of danger for us. Far more ought we, however, not only to despise it, but as much as possible avoid it, because being visible to us, it is apt to withdraw our mind from the esteem of the invisible Divine honor, secured us by grace, and places us in danger of losing it.

If, then, we appreciate the glories of grace and are jealous of its possession, let us imitate the example of the saints, who, as the Psalmist says, would rather be the last in the house of God than the first in the world, and who trampled under foot crown and scepter to acquire and secure the heavenly crown of grace.

You must now acknowledge yourself, dear Christian reader, that Christian humility, insignificant though its name appear, is one of the highest and most sublime virtues, a supernatural virtue, which can only proceed from grace. This is evident with respect to the contempt of human honors, because only a heart filled with the glories of grace and borne aloft by its power can elevate itself so far above the most noble attractions of this earth. Yet it is equally evident with regard to the contempt of self, be-

cause this presupposes an exceedingly high and living knowledge of the nothingness of our nature, when compared to grace ; it presupposes a specially intimate love of God, which makes us, as it were, immerse our being in Him and forget it before His majesty. This very self-humiliation is the starting-point and aim of the highest flights of our soul, and humility alone is the truest and noblest magnanimity.

4. Equally glorious and beautiful as the virtue of humility, and therefore equally an offspring and a fruit of grace, is *Christian chastity*.

There is a natural chastity, a chastity which is a necessary adornment of the natural man, *i. e.*, of the man not elevated by grace above his nature. On the one hand, our soul is naturally already a spiritual being and an image of God, and therefore can never be carried away by the animal passions of the flesh without debasing itself. On the other hand, although our flesh is, in itself, similar to that of the animal, it has, nevertheless, by its substantial union with the rational soul, received a higher dignity, and therefore must no longer follow its own impulses and lusts, but be subjected to the guidance of the spirit and made subservient to higher, nobler ends. Man, then, must already, as man, for the sake of his human nature, preserve the natural nobleness of his soul and life pure and unspotted, and he will do this easily if, with the help of God, he keep his eye steadily fixed on the beauties of virtue and the other spiritual gifts, and esteem them higher than all lusts of the flesh.

But what does *grace*, then, do for Christian supernatural chastity ? Grace invests our soul and our body with an incomparably higher dignity than they both possess by nature. From the state of a mere creature, it raises our soul to that of a daughter, a friend and a spouse of God, and our body, which naturally is merely the dwelling of our soul, it dedicates as the living temple of the Holy Ghost, a temple in which the Holy Ghost is to dwell with

the fulness of His Divinity, as the pledge of its future glory and immortality.

Oh, what reverence and respect do we Christians then owe to our soul! With what solicitude must we not preserve this pure mirror of the Divinity from the smallest stain, to say nothing of the filthy mire of sensual lust! With how much zeal must we guard this daughter and spouse of the purest and holiest King, lest, forgetting its own dignity and that of its spouse, it dishonor itself and Him, and from the heights of Heaven cast itself down into the abyss of the lowest and meanest sensuality, too low and mean for its native dignity!

And how holy and unspotted should we preserve our body, this temple of the Holy Ghost, this member of Christ, this bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh, this body which was so often nourished with the purest flesh and blood of the Son of God! How great should be our solicitude to guard it against any contact with impurity and uncleanness! "*He that committeth fornication,*" says the Apostle,¹ "*sinneth against his own body.*" He sins against his body, because it is a dwelling of the rational immortal soul; how much more will he sin against it, when by grace it has become a temple of the Holy Ghost. The Apostle, therefore, justly remarks that among Christians, unchastity must not even be mentioned; so foreign must it be to them, so intimately connected is the virtue of chastity with Christianity and its grace.

But Christian chastity is not satisfied with forbidding, from supernatural motives, all inordinate and perverse carnal desires and acts. The natural nobility of our soul and its natural union with God in nowise forbid carnal desire and indulgence in the state of matrimony, provided it be within the proper bounds, and in the proper manner, and provided we do not become its subjects and slaves. In the natural state nothing more would probably be expected of us.

¹ I. Cor. vi. 18.

Neither does the supernatural dignity conferred on us by grace forbid this legitimate and orderly indulgence. It demands, however, that a supernatural end and motive be kept in view, such as the propagation of the kingdom of God upon earth, or the personal protection against temptation. For this end Christian grace elevates matrimony even to the dignity of a holy sacrament, which unites man and wife by a holy tie, and fosters even in them a supernatural and Christian chastity.

But if we vividly represent to ourselves this high, supernatural dignity of grace, if we will be charmed by its splendor, and lead a life entirely worthy of it, then we are irresistibly attracted to renounce all, even lawful, carnal desire and indulgence. Then the thought will ever occur to us: how can it be proper that this noble and dignified soul, elevated above the angels, should be debased, even for a moment, to a carnal, though lawful, lust or gratification? Is it becoming that I should surrender my body to another, after the Holy Ghost has consecrated and taken possession of it? And if we are of those whom God has called to a higher perfection, we will feel a mighty impulse to preserve body and soul perfectly pure in holy and beautiful virginity. Certainly that is not an obligation, because the holy use of matrimony dishonors neither soul nor body; but it is a holy, self-evident, and urgent counsel for those who feel themselves called, not only to preserve soul and body from dishonor, but to preserve them in highest honor.

5. Such a high chastity is above the capacity of the natural man, and when he beholds it in others, he necessarily admires it as something heavenly and Divine. But such heavenly virtues are precisely the peculiar fruits of grace, which not only raises man to a supernatural dignity and destiny, but gives him at the same time the power to live in accordance therewith.

For grace is accompanied by supernatural love, which the Holy Ghost breathes into the soul, in order to carry

it up from earth into the arms of its Divine Spouse. This holy and spiritual love disengages our soul from the fetters of sensuality and inclines it heavenward. This love, which finds its peace in God alone and binds us inseparably to Him, expels all sensual love; its bright, heavenly glow smothers the gloomy flame of concupiscence. It supports the Christian also in matrimony, maintains for him superiority over the flesh, and gives him power to sanctify his whole life. Where it burns and glows, there is no need of a law against unchastity, not even of a counsel of virginity. When the soul is so mysteriously attracted by its heavenly Spouse, so bound by His holy ties, so charmed and overcome by His beauty, His sweetness and delight, then it is of itself estranged from the world and the flesh, then it scorns every carnal pleasure, despises every sensual indulgence, and desires only to adhere to its Divine Spouse in all its actions and sensations. The more the soul loves Him, the more will it possess Him alone, the more will it avoid every interference in this possession and enjoyment from contact and intercourse with earthly things, the more will it belong whole, entire, and exclusively to Him, and dedicate soul and body to His service. Love, then, teaches it to understand and practise that which, according to the words of our Saviour, not all can understand. Such a soul does not find the mortification of the flesh and its lust a hard sacrifice, an oppressive burden, but accounts it rather a holy joy, a natural consequence of its intimate union with Him who was made all for it, and in whom it receives again for its earthly losses a far better, purer, and more abundant gain.

Thus Christian chastity, as well as Christian humility, is grounded in the mystery of grace. In this mystery both virtues have their foundation and their law; from it they draw their vitality, and their relation to this mystery is similar to their relation to the Divine maternity in the case of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Humility and virginal chastity were the principal and

most peculiar virtues of the Mother of God. These virtues were a necessary preparation for her sublime maternity, as they were in turn nourished and fostered by this maternity. The Blessed Virgin, now, is the arch-type of the children of God ; as these resemble her in her supernatural dignity, so must they resemble her in those supernatural virtues ; and as Mary was incited to the practice of these virtues by her exalted vocation, so ought we to be animated to the same practice by the recollection of our high vocation.

As these virtues were never perfectly practised on earth before the Mother of God, so they flourished after her, only where, by faith in Christ, the mystery of grace was known and glorified. Where grace is neglected or ignored, there these virtues will decline and be lost. Only where grace is appreciated in all its glory, will these virtues be understood, valued, and fervently practised.

If, then, Christian reader, you will acquire and cherish these virtues, you can do nothing better than to consider attentively the glories of grace, which causes such resemblance and affinity between you and the Mother of God, and by this consideration to be inflamed with a holy love and admiration for grace. And, on the other hand, if you will conform your life to the high dignity of the state of grace, then practise, besides the supernatural love of God and your neighbor, especially Christian humility and chastity, or rather, practise by Christian humility and chastity *supernatural self-love*.

With regard to the love of ourself, we have received no particular law, because we naturally already love ourselves. We are, therefore, only required to keep this love within due bounds, lest it clash with the love of God and our neighbor, and then also to hallow it by the love of God, so that we no longer love ourselves, but God, or at least love ourselves in and for God alone.

But if we will know exactly how natural self-love is made supernatural, the answer is : by loving ourselves, not ac-

ording to our natural goodness, but according to what we have become by grace, and by desiring for ourselves not natural but supernatural gifts. For we love even God and our neighbor supernaturally, only when we consider in God how He has become by grace our Father, our Friend, our Spouse, and the object of our supernatural happiness, and when we consider in our neighbor what grace has made him for himself, for God, and for us, a supernatural likeness of the Divine nature, a child of God, and our brother in Christ.

If, then, we love ourselves also according to grace, we must deeply scorn and despise all that we possess and may acquire outside of grace. We must be solicitous, above all things, to preserve pure and unstained the heavenly splendor of grace in us. And all this is secured by Christian humility and chastity.

Although these two virtues, at first appearance, seem to indicate only mortification and renunciation of self-love, they are in reality nothing less than the most beautiful and sublime expression of the purest and most perfect supernatural self-love, and nothing is more true than the statement that only the humble and chaste man loves himself truly and perfectly.

The whole supernatural law of grace, then, is expressed in the threefold command to love God, our neighbor, and ourself, according to grace. But since grace, the splendor of the Divine nature and the bond of union with God, can be loved perfectly in God only, that threefold command is resolved into the one command, to love God as the source and the end of grace. This love of God is itself the first and highest law of grace.

Let us, then, love God, our neighbor, and ourself in grace. Love is life, supernatural love is supernatural life, love according to grace and because of grace is the life of grace. All else will then come of itself. Then we are truly Christians, then we honor our name, and we may in turn account this name an honor.


7. Before we close this chapter, it will not be superfluous to observe how the doctrine of grace is the foundation of the *three Evangelical Counsels*. Since their observance is partly a means for attaining to the highest perfection, and partly a fruit of such perfection, they must evidently have a common foundation in grace. This was already shown with reference to virginal chastity. Voluntary obedience to men for the sake of God has its root in Christianumility. This virtue of humility causes us to debase ourselves completely, to subject ourselves even to man, to follow our own will in nothing, but God's will in everything, to be directed by God through the will of others, who are His vicegerents. Evangelical poverty consists only in contemning and renouncing the external means which may serve to gratify our ambition, our pride, and our sensual lust. The same foundation, therefore, which supports obedience and chastity, must also support poverty. For those, however, who are inclined to love the external goods for their own sake and for the sake of possessing them, grace again reveals the splendid and glorious dignity of the children of God, for whom these goods are altogether too base and unworthy. Grace exhibits to them the abundant wealth of heavenly riches, which it bears in its bosom, so that they are easily induced to despise and tread under foot the whole world, with all its treasures and riches.

The children of God should be free ; free from all servile bonds, free, if possible, also from all those fine cords which fasten them to the world or even entangle them in it to some extent, and which may be a hindrance to their free intercourse with their heavenly Father, a hindrance to their life in God, of God, and for God. Therefore, they who are called to be perfect children of God, receive from Him the wise inspiration perfectly to renounce their own will, their temporal possessions, their sensual enjoyments, and they are by His grace so estranged from the world, that they find no peace until they have bidden farewell to it.

TENTH CHAPTER.

Faith, the Food of the Life of Grace.

1.

S grace is the marrow of supernatural Christian life, and love its pulsation, so is Divine faith its food. “*My just one liveth by faith,*” says God in Holy Writ.¹ The just of God, that is, those just who are truly pleasing to God and adorned with Divine sanctity, as we are by grace, live *in* charity, but *by* faith. Charity presupposes faith, proceeds from it, and is animated by it. As in justification faith prepares the way for charity, so in the state of justice it is essentially necessary to and must always feed charity. Faith without charity can bring no fruit and is called dead; but charity without faith has no root, and is not only dead, but is nothing. For we cannot love anything without knowledge of the thing, and we cannot have supernatural love without supernatural knowledge. This supernatural knowledge and intelligence is faith.

Faith performs a twofold function in supernatural life. In the first place, faith must point out to us the end, the rule, and the law for our actions; and again, it must reveal to us the truths, introduce them into our soul, and bring home to us, as it were, the good which we love and by the love of which we must carry out that law. In the first relation it is rather a light than a food of our soul, a light which shows us the way; in the other relation, however, faith is a food, a wine, which animates the soul to walk in this way, a bread, which renders it strong and valiant to actively continue and finish its course. Or rather, it is in

¹ Heb. x, 38.

this relation a light also, since the spiritual soul does not live by bodily food, but by the light of truth, which it receives by intellectual cognition. As the corporeal light fills the eye with the images of external objects and then only the vital activity of the eye inclines towards these objects to behold them, so is our soul nourished by the light, which furnishes it with the images of the spiritual and supernatural good, and can, in consequence of this nourishment, only develop its vital activity to unite in turn our soul with these goods.

If, now, the life of charity in our soul must be a supernatural life, then the light, which feeds this love of charity, must be the Divine light of faith. As this charity alone must be our life, so must this faith alone be our food. As the blessed in Heaven live by the immediate vision and the full possession of the highest eternal truths, so may the children of God on earth derive their food only from faith in the same God and the same truths. This faith is the dawn of heavenly vision and takes its place; and this nourishment alone is suited to their dignity and their heavenly life.

Must we not, then, seek this nourishment with the same love and desire with which we embrace the life of grace, the beginning and the introduction to eternal life? If you saw a man unwilling to take any food for the sustenance of his bodily life, would you not conclude that he despised this life, and desired rather to die than to live? What opinion, then, must you have of yourself, if you despised or sparingly used the food of faith, which is equally necessary for your supernatural life? Would this not be evidence that you esteemed this precious life but little, and loved it less than your bodily life, for the nourishment and maintenance of which you are incessantly active?

But what must be God's judgment of you, who so lovingly and carefully prepares this food for you and offers it to you in order to sustain in you the life of His children? He will call you to account, as He once called the priests

of the Old Law to account, through the Prophet Malachias: ¹ “*The son honoreth the father . . . If, then, I be a Father, where is my honor, saith the Lord of hosts. To you, O priests, that despise my name, and have said: Wherein have we despised Thy name? In that you say: the table of the Lord is contemptible.*” Saints Cyril and Jerome well observe on this passage that these priests had not really used such impious expression; but their lives and actions were of such a nature as to indicate such interior godless opinion. You also, my dear Christian, do not probably dare impiously to express formal contempt for the table of the Lord, the bread of His faith. But you do this actually by your deeds, when you neglect this faith, rarely eliciting acts of faith, when you do not apply your faith, when you do not derive your food from it, but feed upon poisoned bread, *i. e.*, when you conform more to the respect of the world, the flesh, and the devil, than to the respect of God and the example of Jesus Christ. God will then likewise call you to account for having despised His table and His bread, and He will deliver you unto eternal death, a death which you bring upon yourself by preferring the food of death to the bread of life.

2. Indeed, every other food but the food of faith causes death to the soul. I do not mean that you can esteem and consider no other goods but those which faith proposes. But faith must always accompany these goods, it must place them into higher relations, into connection with supernatural things, it must season them, lest they cause corruption in you, that is, lest they attract your heart too much and withdraw it from the love of God. But if you are too much carried away by these goods, too much absorbed by them, if you consider them in the light of the world, the devil, and the flesh, as sources of perfect happiness—in a word, if they cause you to forget the nourishment of faith, then they are a deadly poison for you, which gives birth to sin and through sin to death.

¹ Malach. i. 6, 7.

As truth is the food of the soul, so is falsehood its poison. But you will imbibe poison whenever you do not drink of the fountain of all truth, of eternal truth by faith, or whenever your reason does not agree with faith. Reason, too, is a source of truth, and who would deny that its light, when it is pure and unadulterated, enlightens and nourishes the soul? But it does not nourish the soul unto eternal life; it is, moreover, but a small fountain of truth, a branch of the Divine fountain, and its waters easily become turbid. Now, who will draw water from a turbid stream, when he may draw much purer and better water from the original fountain? Why, then, should we feed our soul with the light of reason, when by faith we may draw immediately from the light of eternal Divine truth, and are secure against imbibing any falsehood or error?

How much less should we drink of those pools of foul, pestilential water that contain error and falsehood? How can we nourish our soul with those principles that are instilled into us under the name of reason by the enemies of all reason and truth, by the world, the flesh, and the devil? The flesh lies, when it goes counter to the spirit; the world lies, when it contradicts the message of grace; the devil is the liar from the beginning, the father of lies and of darkness, as God is the Father of light and truth. He who believes those three, feeds only upon falsehood, imbibes only poison, corrupts the natural as well as the supernatural life of his soul, and deserves no excuse or pity, since the fountain of purest and sublimest truth was open to him in faith. He is most justly assailed by the rebuke of God: "*My people have done two evils. They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.*"¹ God and the soul devoted to Him can alone contain the water of truth; everything that is separated from God is divided in itself; truth withdraws from man, if God withdraws, and the filth of falsehood alone remains.

¹ Jer. ii. 13.

3. If, then, Christian reader, you will feed your soul with truth, remain firm in your Divine faith, in your infallible faith. Then no falsehood will enter your soul, because all falsehood will be banished by faith. Faith will teach you to discern the true and eternal good from the false and apparent good, with a Divine, infallible certainty. Faith will reveal to you the sweetest and most precious fruit, concealed in a rough and unseemly hull, as well as the secret rottenness and covert poison, concealed by a shining exterior.

When the watchmen in the night time pace the streets of a city and meet a person whose identity they cannot readily establish, they raise the lantern, which they hitherto carried concealed, to his face, and then often recognize a noble and righteous man, whom they supposed to be a vagrant and reveller, and one whom they judged from appearance to be respectable, they often find to be a mean drunkard. We also journey through the night of this life, carrying faith as a lantern in our bosom. As long as we do not apply this light, the things of this world, honors, riches, and pleasures, appear to us exceeding lovely and full of happiness; virtue, however, from its rough exterior, its mortification and self-denial, and the poverty, humility, and sufferings of Christ, appear as insufferable evils. But as soon as we consider these things with the bright lamp of faith in their true light, we see clearly and plainly how rich Jesus is in His poverty, how sweet and happy in His suffering, how glorious in His humiliation, and, on the other hand, how the deceptive mask of the world only conceals so many dangers and sufferings, so much misery and ruin.

If, then, the charms of human honors, earthly riches, and sensual pleasures attract and fascinate you, produce from your soul the lamp of faith and hold it up to all these things; consider them, examine them, penetrate to the bottom of them; and you will judge them as one who belongs to Heaven and has come down upon earth; you will

view them very differently from other men, and discover in them soap-bubbles, turbid and filthy water, if not a dangerous and deadly poison.

Conversely, as children are at first frightened by a mask, but forget all fear and laugh with joy when they withdraw the mask and recognize a playmate, so we are frightened by the mask of difficulty and sadness with which our self-love and sensual inclination surround Christian virtue. Let us, with the hand of faith, boldly withdraw the mask, and beneath all these terrors we shall recognize a lovely daughter of Heaven, well known and welcome to the noblest sense of our soul, whose beauty and grace can only delight us and make us happy, but do us no harm.

As long, however, as we do not draw the terrifying mask from the true and genuine good, and the mask of deceptive beauty from the false and apparent good, so long we live, though waking, in an uninterrupted dream. In dreams the images of good and bad things impress themselves upon our soul, contrary to the judgment of our reason, as true and real, and they thus delight or alarm us. In like manner, when the light of faith is dormant in us, we are carried away by our imagination and by the attractions of visible things, until we suddenly awake, and all these images disappear at once.

Then our hands contain nothing but an empty soap-bubble ; the whole splendor of our cherished and adored happiness, the pleasant witchery that enchanted us, the phantasms that lulled us asleep, vanish in the air. Faith alone can always keep us awake, so that no dreamy vision may deceive and mislead us ; it alone preserves from cruel disappointment, and what is more, from despair and eternal misery, which will certainly be our lot, if we notice our deception too late, and have no time left to acquire true and eternal happiness.

4. Without the food and medicine of faith we do not only dream, we are sick ; sick from our perverse inclinations, our passions, our evil habits, which disturb the or-

gans of the soul, its sight and taste, apprehend all objects after their own perverse manner, and thus vitiate the judgment of reason. As the eye is so influenced by the diseased bile as to see all things either with black or white color ; as a coated tongue finds everything sweet, or bitter, or sour, according to the nature of the different diseases, so the avaricious man esteems his money, the voluptuous man his sensual lust, the ambitious man earthly honors as his highest good, as his god, and devotes and gives himself up to it. The devil, too, is not idle, but like a skilful painter he paints the images with such lifelike colors, that they seem to live and breathe, and like a clever cook he seasons the sweetmeats so as to make them still more sweet and delicious. Thus, “ *Man passeth as an image ;*”¹ thus, “ *The bewitching of vanity obscureth good things ;*”² thus, “ *Every man is a liar ;*”³ thus, “ *The sons of men are liars in the balances ;*”⁴ because they balance all heavenly and eternal goods with the smallest earthly honor and pleasure.

Faith, however, exposes the sickness of our soul and thereby heals it ; it demonstrates to us that sensuality and ambition do not estimate things according to their true objective value, but according to their own subjective pleasure ; faith thus prevents our judgment from being misled by their suggestions. Faith represents all things, not in their appearance, but in their essence ; faith determines their true value without falsehood and deception, and throws light upon them on all sides ; faith dispels the dream, tears off the mask, washes off the stain and varnish ; it gives the dimmed, blinded, and near-sighted eye of the soul its natural, healthy vigór, and restores to its coated and vitiated palate the true taste. Let us, therefore, have recourse to faith, with its ointment let us anoint our eyes, as the angel once anointed the eyes of Tobias with the gall of the fish. Let us preserve and cherish this faith, which is itself the true food of our soul, and at the same

¹ Ps. xxxviii. 7.² Wis. iv. 12.³ Ps. cxv. 2.⁴ Ibid. lxi. 10.

time enables us to find all the other true nourishment of our soul, which nourishes us, in order to heal us, and heals us, in order to nourish us. Let us confide alone in this faith, so that we may say with the Apostle: ¹ “*And that I live now in the flesh: I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself for me.*”

And Thou, O true and original Light of the world, Light of Light, my God, my Teacher, and Saviour, “*enlighten my eyes, that I never sleep in death*”! ² Nourish and strengthen me with Thy light, “*lest at any time my enemy say: I have prevailed against him.*” ³

¹ Gal. ii. 20.

² Ps. xli. 4.

³ Ibid. 5.

ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Continual Progress we must make in the Supernatural Life of Grace, and the Facility of such Progress.

1.

IF our life is to be worthy of God and His grace, it is not sufficient that we acquire grace and live conformably to it ; we must likewise endeavor always to promote and increase the life of grace in us, according to the desire of the Apostle, who prays ¹ “ *that we may walk worthy of God, in all things pleasing : being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with all might, according to the power of His glory.* ”

All life in this world naturally tends to develop itself and become ever more perfect, and the absence or ineffectualness of this tendency is a certain indication that the life is spent, its power is broken, its resources exhausted, and that death has already devoured its marrow. The source of the supernatural life of grace, however, cannot, as we all know, become exhausted ; the blossom of grace, which has its root in the bosom of God Himself, can never decay for want of nourishment ; this splendor of the Divine nature can never cease to grow, until it has passed from the vicissitudes of time into the quiet of eternity. We should, then, be very ignorant of its glory or do it great injustice, if we did not improve its inexhaustible fertility and make every possible endeavor to contribute towards its development. We should, notwithstanding the grand vital power within us, appear more dead than alive, if we permitted it to lie dor-

¹ Col. i. 10, 11.

mant, as the grain of seed in the earth, and did not let it grow up into a mighty tree !

No, grace can and must grow, as the grain of mustard-seed in the Gospel, for, like this, it contains an abundance of vitality and power, though it appears small and insignificant. It must grow from moment to moment, from glory to glory, as the dawn of morning grows unto the break of day and the light of day unto the noonday sun. “ *The path of the just,*” says the Wise Man,¹ “ *as a shining light, goeth forwards and increaseth even to perfect day.*” We must grow as members of the mystical body of Christ, until we are strong and perfect, or, as the Apostle says,² “ *until we all meet into the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ.*”

2. But in what manner are we to progress in grace and the life of grace ? You think, perhaps, Christian reader, in the same manner and by the same means as we progress in natural virtue or in the acquisition of science, with this difference only, that we there apply the natural faculties of intellect and will, but here the already acquired supernatural faculties of grace. Yet this is only partly correct. If we will qualify the intellect for a more perfect and quick intelligence, the will for a more firm and decided tendency towards good, we only need call into action the dormant faculties in the soul, and by practice develop and strengthen them, as has been explained before. Grace, however, and the supernatural virtues, we can increase directly by our own activity as little as we can by our own activity produce them. It is true, that the acts which we perform in the state of grace are supernatural acts, and far more virtuous than natural acts, and acts performed outside the state of grace ; those acts, therefore, naturally contribute to facilitate the exercise of supernatural virtue. But this facility of exercise is only an extrinsic and accidental, not an intrinsic and essential increase of supernatur-

¹ Prov. iv. 18.

² Eph. iv. 13.

al virtues. This intrinsic increase consists in the greater fruitfulness which the soul acquires, and in the greater merit and value which the acts enjoy. This increase, then, takes place only when God raises us to a higher degree of grace, as He has before raised us to the first degree of grace and of supernatural virtue ; when He now glorifies our soul in a higher measure, as He before glorified it to a certain extent by the first rays of His light ; when, finally, He now infuses a larger measure, of supernatural vitality into our soul, as He before infused its first degree.

God alone is the immediate and efficient cause of the increase of grace and the life of grace in us ; of Him alone must we expect it, of Him alone ask it. But since He has deposited the treasures of His grace in the holy sacraments, we can do nothing better than to receive these very frequently and with the best possible disposition. In the holy sacraments we have the stream of grace, rising in the Sacred Heart of the Son of God, and flowing to us in inexhaustible abundance. We need only approach the stream and draw from it, to be filled with new grace and new supernatural vitality. We receive, however, according to our disposition. The more ardent our desire is, the more the vessel of our heart is dilated by a firm hope ; the more it is rendered susceptible for the precious balsam of grace by hatred of sin and purity of sentiment, the more we shall obtain.

Above all other sacraments, however, ranks Holy Communion, which has been specially and expressly instituted to increase in us grace and the life of grace. The other sacraments are channels of grace ; this sacrament contains the fountain of grace itself in all its abundance. In it we eat the bread of life, which contains the fulness of the Divinity, and drink the same blood which vivified the humanity of the Son of God. As often as we receive it we are more closely united to Christ, as branches to the heavenly vine, and grace, the Divine sap of this vine, is ever more diffused in us for the increase and nourishment of supernatural life.

If, then, dear Christian, you have at heart the increase

of grace, be nourished and strengthened very often with this heavenly food ; hasten to your Saviour and with ardent desire and a lively faith beg of Him His daily bread ; ask of Him, with the Samaritan woman, the living water, which springs up unto eternal life.

3. "But," you will interpose, "may I not, by my own works, by the practice of supernatural virtues, myself increase these virtues and grace?" In a certain manner you may. Though you cannot of your own power raise yourself to a higher degree of grace, and by your own activity cannot increase the measure of grace and virtue which you already possess, you may, by your good works, merit and obtain of God that *He* may increase and augment His grace in you ; and in as far as you induce God thereto by your merit, you may consider yourself the cause of the increase of grace. The efficacy of your supernatural good works lies in their value and merit, and by this merit they co-operate in the increase of grace, as in the acquisition of heavenly glory. Therefore, the Holy Council of Trent condemns all those who say, "that the justified, by the good works which he performs, does not truly merit increase of grace and eternal life,"¹ and consequently those also who say, "that the good works are merely the fruits and signs of justification, but not a cause of the increase thereof."²

And indeed, precisely because the good works are fruits of grace, they are not merely signs of the existing grace, not only give us a claim to a heavenly reward, but a claim also to a higher degree of grace. For by using the grace which we already possess, and letting it bear fruit, we are made ever more pleasing and acceptable to God, and that in the same measure in which we co-operate faithfully and zealously with grace and produce good and beautiful fruit. And since this pleasure cannot remain without fruit, He will, for every good work, infuse a higher degree of grace and raise us to a higher condition of virtue.

¹ Sess. vi. de justif., can. 32.

² Ibid., can. 24.

The branch of a tree receives new sap from the trunk only in the proportion in which it has employed that already received in the production of blossom and fruit. In like manner, God, who is the root of our supernatural life of grace, infuses new power of grace into us, in the proportion only in which we have let the previous power develop into the blossom and fruit of good works. There is this difference, however, between the two cases, that the branch of the tree consumes its power by using it, whilst the soul retains and increases it, and consequently grows greater and stronger by the new influx of vital power.

The plant is exhausted in producing its fruit; the soul, however, in the state of grace feeds and grows by its fruit, or rather, it nourishes *itself*, in delighting and pleasing *God* by these fruits. Its good works are beautiful blossoms, which delight the eye of God, and delicious fruits, which refresh His paternal heart, whence the spouse in the Canticle of Canticles sings:¹ “*Let my beloved come into His garden, and eat the fruit of His apple trees.*” If we delight the eye of God and comfort His heart by our good works, then new light must stream again upon us from His eye, and new life from His heart. The preciousness of our good works sends a sweet fragrance to Heaven, which descends again upon our soul from the bosom of God, as a fruitful shower of grace, and increases its treasure of grace in the same proportion in which it bore fruit.

Is not such a co-operation on your part in the increase of grace and of supernatural virtue almost as wonderful as if you yourself produced grace? At all events, is not its power far more wonderful than that of your natural endeavor and labor to acquire facility in the practice of good and the knowledge of truth? For here you not only acquire a facility in the exercise of a faculty, but a new, higher, and greater faculty; and what is more, by every act of every single supernatural virtue you acquire an increase, not only of this particular virtue, but of all other virtues likewise.

¹ Cant. of Cant. v. 1.

4. This is a very beautiful and well substantiated teaching of the greatest theologians.¹ In the natural order the practice of an individual virtue effects an increase of this virtue only. If one, for instance, exercises himself in fasting and has rendered fasting easy to himself, he has not thereby yet acquired a facility in being liberal to the poor, in justice, in bridling his tongue, etc., because these virtues are of a different species. By the acts of supernatural virtue, however, we acquire, in the first place, an increase of sanctifying grace; but since sanctifying grace is the root of all supernatural virtues, and feeds all equally with supernatural vital force, it must be attended by an increase of all the other virtues likewise. If you, then, being in the state of grace, practise mortification, you not only strengthen and nourish the virtues of temperance and abstinence, but also those of love of God and your neighbor, of mercy, of holy silence, etc.; and when in future you perform an act of these virtues, that act will be more perfect, valuable, and pleasing to God, than if you had omitted the first act of mortification.

It is, of course, self-evident, that this increase in grace and all virtues is greater and quicker in proportion to the dignity and value of the virtue and to the zeal and effort in placing the act. Since the love of God is the most noble and precious of all virtues, the increase of grace must depend chiefly upon it. The life of grace consists principally in this love, which may be called its barometer; for in the same measure in which we love God, we are loved again by Him and filled with His grace. Love is, moreover, the mother, the root, and the perfection of all other virtues. It is the mother, because it produces all the other virtues in the soul; the root, because it feeds, vivifies, and actuates all; the perfection, because it directs all to the highest end and gives them their final sanction. The growth of love must therefore, in an especial manner, promote the growth of grace and of all supernatur-

¹ Suarez, de gratia, l. 9, c. 4.

al virtues, and is evidently the shortest and surest way to find and acquire the greatest wealth of grace and virtue.

The greater and speedier increase in grace, however, depends, as already stated, not only upon the noble quality of its fruits of virtue, but also upon their number and greatness, that is, upon the frequency of our performing acts of supernatural virtue and especially of love, and upon the greatest possible exertion and zeal in performing them. The greater our zeal is in the practice of virtue, the greater and more numerous will be the fruits produced from grace, and the more will grace itself be nourished and increased.

This will be the case, especially, when we apply our zeal to the noblest virtue, to acts of love, and endeavor to make them as frequent and perfect as possible.

Fortunately, the practice of no other virtue is so easy and agreeable as that of love. For the practice of other virtues we often want the necessary means and opportunities. Thus, we cannot always practise a high degree of patience, because we have not always to endure great suffering; not all persons can practise rigorous fasts, or give large alms. But we are always able to love, to love fervently and to love ever more. Love requires no great labor or effort; for love is purest sweetness and heavenly delight, so pleasant and agreeable that it makes us forget all trouble and bitterness which the practice of other virtues may cause us.

5. See, then, Christian soul, what wonderful power and fruitfulness God has granted you, that you may incessantly and infinitely increase in His grace and in all virtues! And should you leave it unimproved? Should you sit idle and not labor with the greatest zeal to build up this temple of God within you? You might pretend some excuse, if the increase of grace cost an immense labor and trouble, if you were obliged to storm Heaven in order to secure it; though even then you ought to shun no sacrifice to obtain so great a good. But when I point out a way to you

which is very easy, without any steep ascent, without thorns, almost without any difficulty, a way that you need only enter upon with the foot of a good will, then, certainly, you are no longer excusable.

In the first place, you may secure a continual increase in grace, simply by offering up to God your daily actions, even the most trifling and insignificant, and sanctifying them in the spirit of grace by a holy intention. For this end you need perform no extraordinary, great, and difficult works, if you only perform your ordinary labors in a good and holy manner. Not only by fasting or almsgiving, but by eating, by recreation, by repose, you are made more pleasing and acceptable to God, and you increase in grace, provided you offer up these actions to God.

This will be the case still more, if in your actions you form not only *one* good intention, but several; for thus you practise at the same time several virtues and acquire a twofold and threefold merit. Thus you may offer up your daily prayers to God for His glory, in thanksgiving for His benefits, for the conversion of sinners, for the relief of the poor, and you will practise at the same time the reverence and gratitude due to God, and the works of corporal and spiritual mercy. You may likewise labor with the intention of supporting your family and the poor, of doing penance for your sins and of suffering for the love of God, and thus practise at the same time the virtues of parental and filial love, of mercy, of penance, and of love of God. In this manner will each of your good actions prove a branch of the tree of grace laden with divers fruit, which is offered to God and in turn draws down upon you streams of Divine grace.

But not only those actions obtain for us an increase of grace which we really perform, but those also which we desire to perform, though we are unable to do so. You say you cannot fast, you cannot chastise yourself, you cannot give alms. But God does not require impossibilities of you. Who will, however, prevent you from entertaining

at least an ardent desire to perform these good works? God considers the heart, not the hand, the good will, not the work, the interior, not the exterior, and grace is an interior and spiritual good, which we must acquire by interior and spiritual acts. Before God the act is done, when the desire to perform the act has been elicited by the will.

As the sinful will displeases God and deprives us of His grace, even if it be not carried out, so the virtuous will alone already renders us pleasing to God, and obtains grace for us, even if it cannot be carried out in the external act.

Yet, what am I saying? Not only the desire for new works renders you more acceptable to God, but also the joy and pleasure which you take in all the good works that have been performed by yourself or by others, or that are still performed for the glory of God. If you had committed an evil act, for instance, an act of revenge, and would afterwards rejoice at that act, you would commit a new sin and again lose the grace of God, if you had regained it after that act. Must it not, then, make you more acceptable to God, if you rejoiced in having performed some good act, provided this joy were rooted in the love of God, and not in vain self-complacence?

In like manner, if you rejoiced at the sinful deed of another, you would become accessory to his sin, and with him incur the displeasure of God. May you not equally rejoice at all the good works performed in the world, at the missionary labors of apostolic men, at the holy zeal of so many priests, the self-sacrifice of religious persons in instruction, in nursing the sick and in penance for their fellow-men, and will you not deserve the pleasure of God and an increase of grace by this approbation of good works, and by the joy at seeing God thus glorified?

And this will be more abundantly so, if you, not content with this joy, repeat your former good actions and endeavor to perform others. If you have before offered yourself to God with all your thoughts and desires, offer yourself

again, renew your good intentions, your promises, your vows, and you will as often grow in grace. God does not, like man, reject the gift when offered a second time; for He does not consider so much the gift as the perseverance and constancy of the will in the offering and in His service. It is His greatest delight to receive again and again the gifts already offered Him, and He accepts them each time, as if they had never before been presented to Him.

Neither does He demand that we offer none but our own gifts; He accepts the good works of others in our name, if we unite ourselves with them and offer up their holy actions with the desire to perform the same works for His glory and, that being impossible, to glorify Him becomingly, at least by offering these works. Thus you may offer up to God all the good works which have been performed from the beginning of the world, not only by the saints, the apostles, martyrs, confessors, and virgins, not only by the angels, but also by the Blessed Virgin Mary and by Jesus Christ Himself. You may adore God with the adoration of His own Incarnate Son and of all the saints, praise Him with their praise, love Him with their love, render thanks to Him with their thanks, pray to Him with their petitions, and suffer for Him with their patience. You may rejoice that they have served God with such love and devotion, and offer up this faithful service in atonement for your neglect and indolence. In this manner, you may participate in the fruit of all these numerous and perfect works, and secure a higher degree of God's pleasure. But what an inexhaustible treasure have you then found for the increase of grace within you! How easy is it, then, for you to be enriched with grace daily and hourly, without any other trouble but the recollection that you may make this offering a hundred times every day, without neglecting in the least your business and daily labor!

Let us adore this Divine Providence, let us honor and embrace this infinite Goodness, which prepares so many

and such easy means for our daily advancement in grace, and thereby in sanctity and perfection ! How rare would this advance be, if God's liberality were less great, if His wisdom took less pains to overwhelm the just with secret benefits and hidden favors in order to render them still more just ! Yet it would seem as if the greater number of Christians were more negligent in acquiring a higher degree of grace, precisely because God had made this acquisition so easy. Let us at least be no longer of this ungrateful number, and if we are not induced by our own advantage to seek the precious gifts of God, let us seek them in order not to be guilty of the meanest ingratitude towards our Creator !

6. This ingratitude would be aggravated by the fact that we could not pretend the excuse of forgetfulness for our negligence. For God, by His actual graces, incessantly rouses the soul from its torpor and urges it on to activity and progress. By these graces He points out to it how far it is still removed from its end, what a distance it has still to overcome, what a height it still has to climb, and points out also the means by which it may approach this end. Yea, He supports its foot, that it may hasten its steps, directs and strengthens its hand, that it may seize His gifts. If we still withstand, if we still will persist in our torpor and sluggishness, we indeed deserve to be robbed of all His gifts.

Instead of opposing our progress in grace so foolishly, or rather so perversely, ought we not rather to seek every means of furthering this progress, and especially not only to improve these actual graces, but endeavor to obtain them in ever greater abundance ? Actual grace is for the growth of the soul what sunshine and rain are for the growth of the plant ; with this difference, however, that rain and sunshine influence the growth of the plant immediately, whilst the illuminations and inspirations of the Holy Ghost further the growth of grace only mediately. Actual grace, namely, leads us to produce the good works as fruits of

sanctifying grace, and by these fruits, then, sanctifying grace is again fed and increased. Without actual grace, our soul, though endowed with sanctifying grace, would remain cold, barren, and fruitless, and could not even give a sign of life, much less grow and increase.

The Holy Ghost dispenses the rays of His heavenly light and the rain of His beneficent assistance among all the just, as the sun and the clouds let their blessings descend upon all living plants. But if we wish to progress in grace more easily and speedily, we must endeavor to secure not only His general care and solicitude, but a very special and particular care. For as plants grow more quickly and luxuriously when, besides the rain, they are irrigated by the gardener, and placed in a hot-house to receive a greater degree of heat, so will grace develop in the soul more beautifully and abundantly, if we place it under the special and particular care of the Holy Ghost. This we can do best by inviting the Holy-Ghost, in humble prayer, to take the place of gardener in our soul, and by incessantly beseeching Him to diffuse in it ever greater light and strength. No prayer will be more certainly heard than such prayer. The Holy Ghost will joyfully accept this position and will bestow a tender care upon us, in proportion as our prayer is ardent, confident, and persevering. He Himself has the greatest desire to further our progress, and waits only until we dispose ourselves by such prayer for His particular assistance.

Without this prayer we are scarcely disposed for His special assistance, because we express no desire for it; we are like the plants that keep their flower-cups closed. In prayer only we open the flower-cup of the soul, to imbibe the heavenly dew of the Holy Ghost and absorb His blissful rays. In prayer only we open our mouth to breathe the life-breath of the Holy Ghost, as the Psalmist says: ¹ “*I opened my mouth and panted.*” If progress in grace necessarily requires good works, and good works

¹ Ps. cxviii, 131,

again presuppose prayer, then prayer must likewise be an essential and a most necessary condition of this progress.

Well, then, my dear Christian, seize with both hands these two means, which the goodness of God offers to you, and progress in grace, according to the Divine command : “ *He that is just, let him be justified still.*”¹ To encourage you in this progress, the Son of God, although He possessed in His humanity from the beginning the fulness of wisdom, sanctity, and grace, would, nevertheless, reveal it gradually only, just as the sun, without increasing in light itself, develops its splendor gradually from morning till midday. You do not, of yourself, possess the light of grace ; therefore, you must progress in reality as our Lord did in appearance. Endeavor, then, with the assistance of God, to increase “ *in wisdom, virtue, and grace with God and men.*” God’s blessing will not be wanting to you, if you only confide in Him.

“ *Blessed is the man,*” says the royal Psalmist,² “ *whose help is from Thee, O God ; in his heart he hath disposed to ascend by steps. For the law-giver shall give a blessing ; they shall go from virtue to virtue, the God of gods shall be seen in Sion,*” *i. e.*, until after their assumption into Heaven, the vision of God will be the reward of their aspirations.

¹ Apoc. xxii. 11.

² Ps. lxxxiii. 6, sq.

TWELFTH CHAPTER.

How Careful we should be not to Stain and Dishonor Grace by Venial Sin.

1.

IF we are in the state of grace, it is becoming that we should increase and augment it; but it is far more obligatory upon us to keep it pure and unsullied, and especially to preserve it from destruction. By mortal sin we lose grace, by venial sin, however, we stain it and prepare the way for its complete destruction. Therefore we shall speak in the two following chapters of the guarding and preserving of sanctifying grace, and first of protecting it against venial sin.

Many think that, as mortal sin entirely destroys grace, so venial sin diminishes it, so that we gradually lose those degrees of grace which we have already acquired by the liberality of God and our own merits. But we may hold, in accordance with nearly all theologians, that venial sins, neither singly nor collectively, essentially diminish the grace already acquired and the supernatural virtues even by one degree.

The natural virtues and the corresponding acceptability of the soul to God are diminished not only by grave, but also by slight faults. For as these virtues are acquired and increased by the exercise of their acts, so they are weakened by the omission of these acts and still more by the practice of contrary acts. They are like the base metals, which are not only stained by contact with dirt, but are decomposed and dissolved.

Now, in as far as the supernatural virtues are similar to the natural virtues, that is, in as far as with them too a fa-

cility of exercise is acquired by diligent practice, in so far they also are weakened and diminished by venial sins. But since this facility of exercise is only an extrinsic, accidental perfection of these virtues, and does not constitute their essence, this weakening and diminution cannot affect their essence. They are like pure and solid gold, which may be covered with dirt and immersed in it, but cannot thereby be decomposed in its essence, or even lose one degree of its intrinsic purity and beauty. They are like a powerful, unquenchable fire, that may be covered with incombustibles and then cannot burn as briskly and strongly, but can in nowise be deprived of its intrinsic heat.

As the strength of the supernatural virtues is not essentially diminished by venial sin, so neither the splendor of grace and the corresponding acceptability of our soul to God and the merit of our works. This is true already because grace is the source of these supernatural virtues. By venial sin we offend God as our greatest and best Friend, we merit His displeasure and deserve a great punishment. But this displeasure of God may very well co-exist with grace and with a high degree of grace. The offence is sufficiently punished if God imposes different penalties upon us for it and especially if He withholds from us for a time His beatific vision. At the same time, He may withhold many favors, which He had intended for us, but He need not, on that account, take away from us any degree of grace that we already possessed. If, therefore, a man have committed ever so many venial sins, he retains the claim to the same degree of heavenly glory as before, and his works are as pleasing to God and as meritorious as before, though he may, at the same time, have accumulated many demerits. The gold of grace in him is no less precious because it is covered with much dirt and mixed with much chaff. The stain may be washed off by tears of penance, the chaff be consumed by fire. Then we should stand again before God with all the undiminished treasure of grace, which we had acquired before or at the time of these venial sins.

2. Though we need not fear, then, that venial sin will destroy or diminish in us the treasure of grace which we possess, shall we, therefore, be less on our guard against it, or hate and detest it less? God forbid! On the contrary, for that very reason must we admire the infinite love of God for us, who does not even withdraw His grace from us, when we soil and stain it, and we ought, out of gratitude, to beware in future of such an outrage!

From this we may best learn the preciousness and sanctity of grace, from this we may see how little grace has in common with sin and every imperfection, and how solicitous we ought to be to keep it pure and unstained! For if it were not so essentially pure and holy, if it were not an emanation of Divine light, if it were not as purest gold, it would certainly be decomposed and rendered inferior by sin; that it is not so affected, is due not to any insignificance of sin, but to its own invulnerable, heavenly nature. Yea, that same purity and holiness which renders the co-existence of grace and mortal sin impossible, is the cause of its not being affected by venial sin; so that we are indebted for this blessed fact not to sin, but to grace.

If iron is not only externally stained by dirt, as gold is, but is also internally corroded, it is because the nature of iron is not so superior to every union with filth as gold is. But is the stain upon gold less objectionable than upon iron? By no means. Iron is not so deformed by this stain, because its nature is not so inconsistent with it; or rather, precisely because the stain eats into it and mixes with it. The stain upon gold, however, appears far more ugly, because it cannot mix with the gold and unite with its essence: and thus the glaring contrast between the bright gold and the filthy stain is all the more conspicuous. When the stain does not destroy the brightness and cannot even harm it, then it appears most ugly and abhorrent.

The less, therefore, grace is corroded and diminished by venial sin, the purer is its nature, and the more detestable is it to bring it into contact with the stain of sin. It is

detestable beyond expression to drag the golden ornaments of the spouse of God into the mire of sin. It is an inconceivably detestable act to asperse the golden vestment of the children of God with filth and dust, when it cannot lose its shining brightness.

How much, then, should we abhor venial sin, though it cannot diminish grace, or rather for that very reason, since it disfigures our soul the more on that account! As the eye instantly attempts to reject even the smallest foreign body that would enter into it, and if it is not successful, becomes very uneasy, so should our soul oppose every venial sin and not rest until it had expelled it. A lifeless mirror does not object to the dirt thrown upon it. But our soul is by the grace of God a living mirror of the Divine sanctity, an eye enlightened and purified by Divine light. Oh, that we always preserved it full of life and brightness! Would that we were all eye, like the mysterious animals in the Apocalypse, which were covered with a thousand eyes upon all sides! How easily we should then keep aloof from every dust and stain!

Let us imitate the doves, which are always extremely careful to preserve their snowy white plumage clean and unsoiled, and therefore avoid all things and places by which it might be stained. For the soul in the state of grace is likewise a dove, whose silvery plumage appears as purest gold in the splendor of the Divine sun, a dove, which the Holy Ghost will bear up from the filthy depths of this earth to the pure and bright mountain tops of Heaven. Let us not then crawl upon the earth, let us not cling to earthly things, let us tear ourselves loose from them, whenever possible, and let us touch them as lightly as the dove, when we must be occupied with them. And if, perhaps from carelessness or incautiousness, we have permitted our wings to be stained, let us immediately shake off the dust and hasten to be cleansed again in the streams of the blood of Christ.

3. Besides the stain, venial sin produces two other effects very harmful to grace. Though it does not essentially

diminish grace, it weakens its fervor and fertility, as St. Thomas teaches, and on the other hand gradually induces its complete destruction. On the one part, venial sins are prickly thorns, that prevent a happy growth of the life of grace ; on the other, gnawing insects, that bite through its roots, and loosen more and more the soil of our soul, wherein grace is implanted.

Indeed, he who commits many venial sins withdraws himself from the influence of grace, and even opposes it, represses it, smothers thereby its flame, so that it cannot burn brightly, smothers its vitality, so that it cannot develop after the tendency of its nature. Where so many poisonous weeds grow up beside it in wildest luxuriance, there the heavenly germ of grace cannot prosper. Their proximity deteriorates its soil, infects its atmosphere. They deteriorate its soil, because they employ our whole activity and absorb our whole strength ; they infect its atmosphere, because the Holy Ghost withdraws the light and dew of His gracious assistance from this soil, which is covered with weeds, and thus would frustrate all His beneficent action. In this manner the growth of grace is greatly retarded and impeded by venial sin, and this alone were an incalculable harm, great enough to induce us to detest it from the bottom of our heart. Let us not delay, therefore, to root out these poisonous weeds to the last fibre, lest the fire of grace should become extinct in us and its fertility die out.

What is far worse, however, venial sins, as already stated, undermine the roots of grace and loosen them until they are finally torn out altogether. For although only mortal sin cuts off the roots of grace in us, and venial sins can never amount to a mortal sin, yet the terrible sword of mortal sin could not easily penetrate into our soul, if venial sins had not prepared the way. As sickness precedes death, so venial sins precede mortal sin. Not as if grace could become diseased,—this is as impossible as that it should be essentially decomposed and diminished—but because venial sin weakens and paralyzes the influence of

grace upon our nature, just as the body, by the disturbance and destruction of its organs, is made an unfit instrument of the soul. What the organs of the body are for the soul, the natural faculties and inclinations of the soul are for grace. As in the body a disturbance of the vital organs, if not arrested and corrected in the beginning, must lead to the necessary dissolution of soul and body, so venial sins estrange our nature ever more from grace and withdraw it from the influence and control of grace, by turning the natural faculties away from God and towards creatures, and thus giving them a perverse direction. Then it requires but the least additional pressure to sever the last tie that unites nature and grace.

It is true, only mortal sin can directly affect grace, but venial sins, too, always remain sins and are kindred and allied to mortal sin. They storm against the temple of grace within us, though powerless against it; they can only stain it and undermine its foundations; yet they are the vanguard of a more powerful enemy, who follows close upon them and easily completes their work of destruction.

Is not this sufficient, Christian reader, to make you detest venial sin as a most dangerous enemy of grace? Is not this a far greater harm than if they only deprived you of some degrees of grace? And if this be so, how can you so inconsiderately enter into friendship with these deceitful enemies, who deprive you of everything whilst they pretend to deprive you of nothing? They are less noticed and feared because they appear insignificant, but they are on that account more dangerous, because they carry on their work of destruction in a more undisturbed manner. Therefore, hate them, flee from them, destroy them. Hate them as your own greatest enemies.

4. But hate them still more because they deeply offend God, your best Father, your most loving Friend, your sweetest Spouse. In the state of grace you are more obliged than ever to love Him and give Him pleasure. In this state you are so intimately united to Him, so overwhelmed

with His benefits and favors, that your heart ought to breathe only love and gratitude for Him. How must it offend Him, then, if in many things you deny Him your dutiful service, even though you do not renounce His friendship? How much must it displease Him if you withdraw your filial obedience and reverence from Him, even though you do not desert His paternal bosom? How much must it grieve your heavenly Spouse if you do not preserve yourself pure and holy, if you cast a longing glance towards His enemies, even though you do not tear yourself loose from His loving embrace? And what makes this crime greater and this ingratitude meaner is your knowledge that even thus He will not withdraw from you one degree of His grace!

Oh, when will you recognize the unspeakable baseness that lies in one single venial sin? When will you begin to serve God with more fidelity and zeal, and render all your actions pleasing to Him, after He has made you an object of His pleasure by His grace?

But if you will not be induced to do this out of gratitude and love for Him, be induced thereto at least by the fear of the terrible punishments which He visits upon such ingratitude and baseness. These punishments are, indeed, inestimably and inconceivably great, and must be so great because your sins are inconceivably great. Because the holy fire of grace could not exclude this sin from your heart, or rather because this fire was repressed by sin, therefore, God must kindle an equally supernatural fire of revenge to consume these stains in your soul; a fire such as all created nature knows and can produce as little as the fire of grace, a fire which only the powerful and glowing love of God could invent and create to cleanse His favored souls from these stains. But why do I speak of this fire of revenge? Far more terribly will you be tormented by the fire of grace itself, when God does not immediately after death admit you to the beatific vision of His Divine nature. Then the fire of grace will kindle in you such a desire, such

a burning thirst for this vision, which is the natural end of grace, that this pain will cause you to forget every other pain, and would immediately consume you, did not the hand of God support you. And this pain will be greater in proportion as you supposed yourself near your happiness and in proportion to the degree of heavenly glory which awaited you in Heaven.

Oh, hasten, then, to extinguish this terrible fire by the tears of true penance, and to collect no more chaff in your soul to feed this flame ! Hasten now to fan the mild flame of grace and Divine love in you, and to consume by it all stain, to keep away from your soul all chaff of sin, and to burn it immediately upon its appearance ! Thus you will keep grace pure and unsullied, you will not only preserve it from destruction, but will constantly increase it and immediately after death enjoy its fruit.

THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Preservation of Grace until the End.

1.

ALL our efforts to obtain grace and to increase it were in vain, if we did not preserve it and especially preserve it until the end of our life, so that we may appear with it before the throne of God. Then only is grace perfectly ours, if it is ours forever, then only does grace perfectly make us children of God, when we are no longer in danger of degenerating from this dignity, when we return with it to the bosom of our heavenly Father, to possess Him and to be His forever. Then only will we derive salvation from grace and enjoy its highest, eternal fruit, if thenceforth we do not destroy its living germ in us. Aye, its loss would only be more ignominious and ruinous for us, than if we had never possessed it.

Let us, then, think of preserving this precious treasure with the greatest solicitude, especially since we bear it, as the Apostle says, "*in earthen vessels.*" The earthen vessel of the heavenly treasure of grace is our poor, weak, earthly nature, in which God has deposited and poured out His grace, and this vessel is as frail as the treasure which it contains is holy and precious. As much as our nature in its nobler part, which is the natural image of God, is susceptible of grace and embraces and holds it as its highest good and as the source of Divine happiness, so much is it in its lower elements foreign, even hostile to grace, and seeks to expel it from the soul, so that it be undisturbed in the full and unimpaired gratification of its self-love and sensual pleasure. This lower part, then, by seeking to draw down to its own level and to subject to itself the higher

nature, draws the will of man away from grace, and grace no longer finds a place where it may rest quietly and securely. Instead of being cherished with tender love, it is repelled and its beneficent balsam is thrown away. Our nature, then, instead of uniting and concentrating all its faculties for the purpose of holding grace, divides them in its attachment to earthly things, divides itself thereby, and loses the precious treasure which it bore in its bosom. Thus the preservation of grace is rendered very difficult and almost impossible for us; the more so, since our vessel is not only weak and frail, but exposed to a thousand enemies, who will destroy and rob it. For the world and the devil constantly surround us with the hostile intention of wresting this treasure from us, now by covert theft, now by open assault.

On the other hand, this treasure is itself the best protection for its preservation. Grace is a heavenly balsam, which heals the frailty of our nature; it hallows, purifies, and strengthens the vessel that contains it. Like the oil, it is easily spilt; but by its unction it refreshes and strengthens us against our enemies, as well as against our own weakness and misery. Nevertheless, it is essentially necessary that we carefully guard our treasure and its vessel, and have it guarded by reliable custodians.

2. In the first place, we must *ourselves* guard it, that is, with solicitude, caution, with all possible zeal, aye, with a holy jealousy must we take care of it and ward off its enemies. We must keep it clean with the greatest care, lest anything unclean enter which would expel grace therefrom, and must carry it about cautiously, lest it collide with a stone and be shattered to pieces. We must guard against the secretly growing evil inclinations and habits, which gradually infect our soul and dislodge grace from it. We must guard against the proximate, and even against the remote occasions of mortal sin, lest we be suddenly surprised and overwhelmed by a superior force of the enemy, before we could make use of our weapons.

But if the enemy attacks us openly and with great force, if, notwithstanding our precaution, the concupiscence of the flesh bursts forth in high flame, if the world and its seductive charms will throw the noose about our neck, if the hellish dragon threatens to devour us; then we must courageously defend our treasure in open, heroic battle; then we must fear no sacrifice, no pain, no wound for its preservation. We must not hesitate to risk even our lives in defence of our Divine dignity, our crown, our throne, our heavenly kingdom. As the serpent, says St. John Chrysostom, exposes its whole body only to save its head, so must we be ready to expose everything, our whole nature and all that is dear to it, if we only save grace, because grace will one day make good a hundred-fold all the sacrifices that we have made for its sake.

But our own custody will not suffice to guard and defend securely our precious treasure, considering the frailty of our nature and the power of our enemies. Therefore, our Divine Saviour tells us: "*Watch ye and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.*" By prayer, and that by persevering, earnest, and confident prayer, we must call other sentinels to our aid, who may assist our frailty as well as destroy the power of our enemy, and we must beg them to place our treasure in some securer place than we can afford it. Let us first beseech the holy *angels*, whom God has given His children as a royal body-guard, that they might bear us and our treasure up in their hands, lest we dash our foot against a stone, and lest we take harm walking upon the asp and the basilisk. They will come to our assistance with the greatest readiness. They are equal and superior to the infernal lion, that goes about seeking to devour us. They will undertake the fight for us, and will gain for us a glorious victory. They will expose the secret snares of the enemy and will destroy them, before we think of avoiding them. With flaming sword they will station themselves before the door of our soul as before Paradise, to guard the tree of life in us, which is

grace, lest it be touched and robbed by unhallowed hands.

Let us, then, also commend our soul and its treasure to the maternal bosom of the *Mother of God*, who is likewise the Mother of grace and of all the children of God. Her bosom is the sealed fountain, which was neither infected by the poison of human frailty, nor accessible to the prince of darkness. In her our nature was restored to its original purity and strength, in her the power of hell was crushed. If we have recourse to this sanctuary, if we hide in it, we shall infallibly triumph over our frailty; we too shall place our foot upon the head of the hellish dragon, and it will in vain lie in wait for our as for her heel. Mary will receive us unto her bosom with truly maternal tenderness, because we come to conceal in it that precious jewel for which she gave the precious blood of her Son, which had flown in her own veins, and offered her heart to the heavenly Father in the flames of most fervent love and of most cruel pain.

We will do still better to commend our soul and its treasure of grace to the *Divine Heart* of the Son of Mary, to the heart of Jesus Christ. For grace is nothing else than the price of that most sacred blood which flowed from this Heart, it is, as it were, itself the blood of a Divine life, which we draw from the Divine Heart of the Son of God, by which we live in Him and of Him, so that no longer we live, but Christ lives in us. Oh, how tenderly and lovingly will the Divine Saviour, if we entreat Him, preserve in us that treasure for which He has paid so dearly, preserve in us that life which He Himself lives in us! How lovingly will Christ receive our grace into His heart, and nurse and cherish it, after He has shed for it His heart's blood to the last drop! And how secure shall we know our treasure in this holy and inviolable vessel! What enemy will dare to wrest it from this sanctuary? What power can approach it, what cunning can enter it? How can even the frailty of our own vessel harm us, as long as we keep it enclosed with our treasure in this holy tower which

repairs and protects our frailty by its solidity, our weakness by its Divine power ?

Let us finally commend our treasure to the arms, to the bosom, to the heart of our *heavenly Father*, who has presented it to us. As He has raised us on His arms from the depths of our nature, has regenerated us of His bosom, and pressed us to His heart as His children, so will He guard and preserve us this grace of sonship, especially if we earnestly beg it of Him. Our treasure is His treasure ; it is the fruit of His bosom, the price of the blood of His only-begotten Son, the end of all His works ; it is the most precious thing that He has given us and that He Himself possesses in us. Therefore, he will also preserve it with His own infinite power, love, and wisdom ; He will guard us with it as the apple of His eye, as He has assured us through the Prophet Zacharias :¹ “ *He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of My eye.*” But if we are so secure already in the hands of His angels, in the bosom of His spouse, in the heart of His Son, how secure shall we be in His own eye ! How carefully will His all-seeing eye watch over us, how effectually will His omnipotent hand protect us, how tenderly will His love hold us embraced !

Let us, therefore, watch and pray without ceasing ; watch in holy fear of our own weakness and of the power of sin, and pray with holy confidence in the watchful protection of the angels, of Mary. of the Son of God, and of the heavenly Father Himself.

3. “ *He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall,*” says the Apostle ;² and again : “ *With fear and trembling, work out your salvation. For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will.*”³ These words are very remarkable and express a great mystery ; the reason which the Apostle indicates for our fear is at the same time the reason of our hope and firm confidence. We should work out our salvation with fear and trembling, because the will and the ac-

¹ Zach. ii. 8.

² I. Cor. x. 12.

³ Phil. ii. 12, 13.

complishment depend upon the grace of God ; on this account we must endeavor always to co-operate faithfully with the grace of God, lest God withdraw it from us, and leave us to ourselves, in which case we could do nothing more for our salvation. On the other hand, if it is God who works in us the will and the accomplishment, if God, as the Apostle says in another place,¹ “ *as He who hath begun a good work in you will perfect it unto the day of Christ Jesus,* ” then we need not despair on account of our own frailty ; then we are certain that by co-operating with the assistance of God, we shall infallibly preserve grace in us and arrive at its happy end.

In like manner we must tremblingly fear the mystery of God’s predestination and pre-election. For, as it is God who works salvation in us, so it is He who predestines us for its attainment. “ *You have not chosen me,* ” says our Lord,² “ *but I have chosen you.* ” Therefore we must be extremely careful not to frustrate the intentions of God with us, not to depart from the ways by which He will lead us, otherwise we shall not attain to our end. We know, likewise, however, that, as He has called us to the grace of His sonship, and to the inheritance of Heaven, so He will, with infallible certainty, preserve that grace in us and lead us to this inheritance, if only we do not forsake Him. As God wills that all men be saved and as He calls every one unto salvation, it rests with us only to respond to His call and to realize His pre-election in us. Whence St. Peter admonishes us :³ “ *Labor, brethren, that by good works you may make sure your calling and election.* ” As long as we let grace bear fruit in good works, as long as we preserve it from sin and by earnest prayer commend ourselves to the hands of God, so long we are of the elect, of whom St. Paul says, that to them all things work together unto good, and that God will glorify them, as He has called and justified them. As long as we are faithful to God, He is faithful to us, according to the words of the Apostle :⁴

¹ Phil. i. 6.² John xv. 16.³ II. Peter i. 10.⁴ I. Cor. x. 13.

“*God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it.*” “*For the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance ;*”¹ that is, the vocation and the grace which He has once given us He does not withdraw again, except we neglect and reject them.

We may and must, then, have the firmest assurance that we can preserve grace until the end and by it hereafter attain to eternal happiness. Let us not forget the words of the Apostle :² “*Know you not, that they that run in the race all run indeed, but one receiveth the prize? So run that you may obtain.*” Let us also be mindful of the admonition of the Son of God in the Apocalypse :³ “*Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*”

If we only once lose grace again, we are in danger of dying in this condition, and of never recovering it. We have then to fear that God will remove our candlestick, upon which we have extinguished the light of grace, out of its place, as God in the Apocalypse threatened the bishop of Ephesus ; that He will forever take away our talent, and give it to another, who will more faithfully preserve and invest it.

God has no need of us, much less can we dictate to Him how to dispense His grace. As He rejected the people of Israel, when they had made themselves unworthy of all the favors with which He had overwhelmed them, and in their stead called the heathens unto His kingdom of grace ; as He elected the shepherd-boy David in place of the disobedient Saul, the penitent thief in place of the traitor Judas, the unbelieving and worldly-minded Augustine for the proud monk Pelagius, the poor Indians for the apostate nations of Europe, so He will perhaps reject us and give our place to another soul, which we perhaps supposed to be lost.

¹ Rom. xi. 29.

² I. Cor. ix. 24.

³ Apoc. iii. 11.

Oh, what confusion were it for us, on the day of judgment, if we beheld others occupying the throne and wearing the crown which were intended for us, and to which we had already acquired a claim by grace! This confusion alone would be a new hell for us, especially if we considered how many merits we had already acquired, how wantonly we had forfeited this treasure, and how easily we might, with the help of God, have preserved and increased it.

Therefore, "*hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*" Preserve grace as a favor, as an unmerited, exceedingly precious gift of Divine goodness. Preserve it in humility, without becoming conceited, without boasting of your pre-eminence, and despising others. Preserve it with humble gratitude towards God, for nothing makes you more unworthy of His grace than ingratitude. Preserve it with wholesome fear of your own weakness and faithlessness, but at the same time with a lively confidence in the power and fidelity of God, who has given it to you.

Let us, in conclusion, give ear to the exhortation of the prince of Apostles, as we have in the beginning learnt most clearly from his explanation the nature and high value of grace :

*"Do ye all insinuate humility one to another ; for God resisteth the proud, but to the humble He giveth grace. Be you humbled under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in the time of visitation : casting all your care upon Him, for He hath care of you. Be sober and watch : because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour : whom resist ye, strong in faith. . . But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little, will Himself perfect you, and confirm you, and establish you. To Him be glory and empire forever and ever. Amen."*¹

¹ I. Peter. v. 5-11.

STACKS BT761.S33 1886ax c. 1
Scheeben, Matthias Joseph,
The glories of divine grace



3 5282 00168 4755