

Hunolt's Sermons.

Vol. IV.

The Bad Christian;

OR,

Sermons on the Seven Deadly Sins, and the different Sins
against God and our Neighbor which flow therefrom.

IN SEVENTY-SIX SERMONS,

ADAPTED TO ALL THE SUNDAYS AND HOLY DAYS OF THE YEAR. WITH A FULL
INDEX OF ALL THE SERMONS, AND AN ALPHABETICAL INDEX OF
THE PRINCIPAL SUBJECTS TREATED, AND

COPIOUS MARGINAL NOTES.

BY THE

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ON INGRATITUDE.

THIRTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

ON INGRATITUDE AS A VICE HATEFUL TO GOD, AND YET VERY COMMON.

Subject.

Ingratitude towards God for benefits received is an abominable vice, hateful to God, and yet a very common vice.—*Preached on the thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

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

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

Introduction.

Of the ten lepers who were cleansed, only one returned to give thanks to his beneficent Physician; “There is no one found to return and give glory to God, but this stranger.” Why was he the only one who showed his gratitude? Did not the other nine receive just as great a benefit? Why did they not also return thanks for it? That is what Christ complains of in to-day’s Gospel; “Were not ten made clean? and where are the nine?” The same complaint was always a common one, and might be made too, in our days; for gratitude is a rare virtue in the world. Sir Thomas More, the great English chancellor and martyr, used to say that, “we write benefits on sand and injuries on marble;” so that we never forget the latter, while the former soon disappear from our memory. To-day’s sermon, my dear brethren, will be directed against ingratitude, not that of which men are guilty towards each other, but that of which most men are guilty towards God, and I say,

¹ Beneficia pulveri, et si quid patimur marmori sculpsimus.

Plan of Discourse.

Ingratitude towards God for benefits received is an abominable vice, hateful to God, and yet a very common vice. Such is the whole subject.

O God of goodness, one benefit we ask of Thee, which will however ensure our receiving all future graces, and that is, that we may have grateful hearts, so that we may always praise and bless Thee for the countless benefits Thou hast hitherto bestowed on us; this we ask of Thee through the intercession of Mary and our holy angels guardian.

It is not ingratitude for one who has received a benefit to make no return for it, if it is impossible for him to do so, as long as he humbly acknowledges the obligation he is under, and honors, praises and loves his benefactor; in that way even a beggar can show gratitude. We see an example of it in the stranger whom our Lord cured of leprosy; he was very poor, and yet he showed the greatest honor to Christ by coming back and prostrating himself before Him, and publicly thanking Him in presence of all the people. Our Lord thought more of this man than if the treasures that Naaman offered to Eliseus, had been presented to Him. So that ingratitude does not consist in not making a return for benefits received, but in not acknowledging and fulfilling one's duty and obligation. And according to the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas, there are three kinds of it. The first causes us not to acknowledge our benefactor, or the benefits we have received from him; the second makes us forget the benefits that have been conferred on us, so that we do not return thanks for them; the third is the worst of all, and it consists in repaying with injuries the benefits received.

This vice is so hateful to every one, that Ausonius did not hesitate to say that, "the earth brings forth no greater monster, than an ungrateful man;"¹ while it is, so to speak, intolerable to God; nay, St. Bernard says, that there is nothing so displeasing to God as the vice of ingratitude; "nothing is so displeasing to God, especially in the children of grace, as ingratitude."² We have another instance of this in the ten lepers: "Were not ten made clean?" said our Lord with displeasure, when He saw that the stranger was the only one who returned to thank Him, "and where are the nine?" But, O dear Lord, what a question for

¹ Nihil homine terra pejus ingrato creat.

² Nihil ita displicet Deo, præsertim in filiis gratiæ, quam ingratitude.—S. Bern. Serm. de Septem panibus.

In what in-
gratitude
consists.

It is odious
to man but
especially to
God.

Thee to ask, as if Thou didst not know where they were! Art Thou not infinite Wisdom, whose all-seeing eye penetrates all places, more searchingly than the rays of the sun? Art Thou not that God before whom the deepest abysses of the earth, as well as the most secret recesses of the heart are bare and open? whom nobody can escape, either above the earth, or on it, or under it? Dost Thou not know well then, where the nine are? Why then dost Thou ask where they are? The reason of His asking that question was, as the glossa says, to show how He disliked and detested ingratitude; for, whenever God speaks as if He did not know a certain thing, as is frequently the case in the Gospel, and as He will speak to the wicked on the last day, "I know you not" His intention is to show the special hatred and anger He has conceived against that thing: "thus He looks on the ungrateful as if they were unknown to Him, and He asks where they are."¹

St. Bernard gives us the reason of that hatred; "ingratitude blocks the way against grace, and grace finds no entrance where it is."² Imagine, my dear brethren, the state of one who has a passionate affection for another: he desires nothing more than to please the object of his love, and to shower benefits of all kinds upon him. But nothing troubles him more than to find that the latter attaches no value to his proffered services, or that other people interfere to prevent him from bestowing his favors on the object of his love. If the sun in the heavens had reason, it would be greatly angered if its rays were intercepted from falling on the earth; if the spring of water were capable of feeling pain, it would suffer very much if it was stopped up and not allowed to flow freely; because both the sun and the water would then suffer violence against the natural tendency which God has given to the one, to shed its light, and to the other, to render the earth fruitful. Now, there is no created thing which has a stronger natural tendency to bestow itself on others, than the living Sun of justice and the perpetual Spring of all goods, God Himself, has to shower down His graces and blessings on all, especially His rational creatures. What black cloud can intercept the rays of this beneficent Sun? What can stop this Spring from flowing? What violence can set bounds to the Omnipotent, and compel Him to restrain His wishes and desires, so that He may not distribute His benefits as He wills? He is the Lord of all, and who can re-

Because He is thereby hindered from bestowing His favors.

¹ Sic habet ingratos quasi ignotos; ubi sunt, inquirunt Dominus.

² Vias enim obstruit gratiæ, et ubi fuerit illa, jam gratia accessum non invenit.

sist Him? No angel in Heaven, no demon in hell, no potentate on earth. Ingratitude alone is able to do this; for its hateful malice violently binds the hands of the good God, so to speak, and keeps them closed, so that they dare not show their generosity and bestow their blessings. Truly, as St. Bernard says, “ingratitude is a burning wind which dries up the fount of goodness, the dews of mercy and the springs of grace.”¹ Just as we deserve new favors by acknowledging and returning thanks for those already received, so by ingratitude we close the way to all favors. From this we can see how very displeasing and hateful this vice must be to God, who is by nature infinitely good, merciful and generous, and how true are the words of St. Bernard; “nothing is so displeasing to God, especially in the children of grace, as ingratitude.”

The only return God expects from His creatures, is gratitude and love; the ungrateful man deprives Him of this.

Another circumstance that increases the malice and deformity of ingratitude, is the fact, that it steals away from God the only good that He expects from His rational creatures, namely, their grateful recognition of His benefits, and the honor and love they owe Him. In order to show His people how unjust they were to Him in this respect, He says publicly to them by His Prophet David: “Hear O my people, and I will speak O Israel, and I will testify to thee,” and will tell thee what thou hast to do; “I am God, thy God.”² Thou must acknowledge Me as thy God from whom thou hast all that thou art; everything thou possessest is a benefit of mine; all thou desirest and hopest for must come from My generous hand; and therefore it is only right and just that thou shouldst make Me some return. And what canst thou give Me for all the gifts and blessings I have lavished on thee? I am not in need of the temples thou buildest in My honor, for, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof;”³ the whole world belongs to Me, and yet it is only a narrow dwelling for Me. Do you think perhaps that I am satisfied with the holocausts and sacrifices, with the sheep and oxen you offer on My altars? Oh no; these things are not enough for Me; “I will not take calves out of thy house; nor he-goats out of thy flocks. For all the beasts of the woods are mine, the cattle on the hills and the oxen;”⁴ they are all gifts which thou hast re-

¹ Ingratitudo ventus urens est, siccans fontem pietatis, rorem misericordiae, fluenta gratiae.—S. Bern. Serm. 51 in Cant.

² Audi populus meus, et loquar, Israel, et testificabor tibi: Deus, Deus tuus ego sum.—Ps. xlix. 7.

³ Domini est terra et plenitudo ejus.—Ps. xxiii. 1.

⁴ Non accipiam de domo tua vitulos, neque de gregibus tuis hircos. Quoniam meae sunt omnes ferae silvarum, jumenta in montibus, et boves.—Ps. xlix. 9-10.

ceived from Me. If I were in need of any of those things, I should not have to ask thee for it; “If I should be hungry, I would not tell thee. Shall I eat the flesh of bullocks? or shall I drink the blood of goats? I know all the fowls of the air.”¹ Nor have I any need of thy treasures; for, “with Me is the beauty of the field.”² Turn whither thou wilt, look about thee on all sides, thou canst find nothing with which to make a return to Me for the benefits I have conferred on thee, unless what I, as Sovereign Lord, already fully possess. There is only one thing which I have left to thy free will, and which I can receive from thee, namely, the gratitude and thankfulness, the honor and love that thou owest Me for the countless blessings I have bestowed on thee; this is the only return that I expect. “Offer to God the sacrifice of praise, and pay thy vows to the most High. The sacrifice of praise shall glorify Me.”³ That alone will be a sufficient return for all My benefits. “And now Israel,” says the Lord elsewhere, “what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but that thou fear the Lord thy God, and walk in His ways and love Him, and serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and keep the commandments of the Lord,” and that too, “that it may be well with thee.”⁴ Ungrateful man, who either refuse to acknowledge the benefits you have received from God, or forget them, or even return evil for them, see how you take from God by your ingratitude the tribute of honor and praise which is due to Him for so many reasons, and which is the only one He expects!

And from this, too, you can have a clearer idea of the hideous deformity and injustice of the vice to which you are subject; inasmuch as you refuse to make to God that return which you could make Him so easily at any moment, and which depends on your own free will. In the Old Law God forbade fish to be offered as a sacrifice to Him. What was the reason of that, my dear brethren? Are there not good fish which have a delicate flavor? There are, says Abulensis, but they cannot be caught without trouble; they live in the depths of the waters where no one can see them; they have their hiding-places under the banks

The ungrateful man acts odiously, because God does not require anything difficult from him.

¹ Suesuriero, non dicam tibi: Numquid manducabo carnes taurorum? aut sanguinem hircorum potabo? Cognovi omnia volatilia caeli. —Ps. xlix. 11-13.

² Pulchritudo agri mecum est. —Ibid. 1'.

³ Immola Deo sacrificium laudis, et redde Altissimo vota tua. Sacrificium laudis honorificabit me. —Ibid. 14. 23.

Et nunc Israel, quid Dominus Deus tuus petita te, nisi ut timeas Dominum Deum tuum, et ambules in viis ejus, et diligas eum, ac servias Domino Deo tuo in toto corde tuo, et in tote anima tua: custodiasque mandata Domini, ut bene sit tibi? —Deut. x. 12-13.

of rivers and among reeds, in which they can easily conceal themselves, so as not to be caught; and therefore God did not wish to have them offered to Him in sacrifice, because He requires no gift from us mortals, unless one that is always at the disposal of our free will, so that we can offer it to Him with little trouble. For the same reason too, He would not accept wild animals in sacrifice, because it takes some trouble to hunt them. All He required was what people had at hand every day, such as oxen, sheep, goats and other domestic animals. He would accept no birds but doves, because they were tame and easily caught. And now in the New Law God has abolished all those sacrifices among Christians, because it would be too difficult for the poor to provide them; and He is perfectly satisfied to receive from us, as a return for the benefits He has conferred on us, what we can give Him without the least difficulty, namely, our grateful acknowledgment of His goodness. "For if the will be forward," says St. Paul to the Corinthians, "it is accepted according to that which a man hath, not according to that which he hath not."¹

But a very easy thing, which man neverthe- less refuses.

O God of infinite goodness, how much easier it is to show gratitude to Thee, than to the most abject of mortals! How more is required to satisfy a mere mortal for some trifling service he has rendered, than to satisfy Thee for the countless benefits Thou bestowest on us at every moment! Let some one who has received a favor from a rich man, go and say to him, I thank you; and see whether he will be satisfied with that, if it is in the power of him who has received the favor, to make any other return. With what frowns and signs of ill humor this expression of mere gratitude will be received! Oh no; in this case something else is expected; one must not come empty-handed; a thankful heart, and words to express one's gratitude are not at all sufficient. Let a rich man say to his lawyer, who has gained an important case for him, or to his doctor, who has cured him of a dangerous illness: Sir, I thank you, and will always be grateful to you for what you have done me; I will never forget you, and during my whole life I shall hold you in special honor and esteem. Oh, the other would answer, that is all very fine; but what is the good of your gratitude or esteem to me? It will not fill my purse, nor help me to support my

¹ Si enim voluntas prompta est. secundum id, quod habet, accepta est, non secundum id, quod non habet.—II. Cor. viii. 12.

family. I have used my skill and knowledge, and given myself a great deal of trouble for you; I have therefore earned a certain amount of money, to which I am justly entitled, and I should be very glad indeed if you paid me; you can then be as grateful to me as you will, and hold me in esteem if that is any satisfaction to you. But Thou, O God of goodness, from whom we have received every good thing we have, Thou art content with that which hardly any one in the world would consider a sufficient return for an act of kindness! "God does not want a reward," says St. Augustine, "but honor"¹ and gratitude. And not even that little can He get from us, for ingratitude robs Him of it.

Even inanimate creatures pay their daily tribute of praise and honor to their Creator; "The heavens show forth the glory of God," as the Prophet David says, "and the firmament declareth the work of His hands."² The three youths in the fiery furnace invite all creatures to unite with them in singing the praises of God: "All ye works of the Lord bless the Lord; praise and exalt Him above all for ever. Sun and moon, shower and dew, fire and heat, ice and snow, nights and days, mountains and hills, seas and rivers, all ye fowls of the air, all ye beasts and cattle, praise and exalt Him above all for ever. Oh, give thanks to the Lord because He is good; because His mercy endureth for ever." But how can those creatures praise and thank their God? They have neither reason nor understanding to recognize the benefits of God, nor a tongue to praise and thank Him. But the wonderful diversity of their natures, their beauty, their usefulness, their power and the different effects they produce, are all so many tongues with which they cry out to men: See how God loves you; for your use and benefit, for your wants or pleasures, we are all created; and thus they admonish us, although they are dumb creatures, that we owe a debt of gratitude, honor and praise to our Creator and sovereign Benefactor. And shall man, a reasoning being, be the only one who refuses to contribute his share in thanking and praising God?

Alas, such is the case. In former times, as Plutarch writes, there was a common saying to the effect that, "no one except Pyrrhias ever sacrificed an ox in testimony of his gratitude."³

He is put to shame by inanimate creatures.

A great number of men are ungrateful to God.

¹ Non præmium postulat, sed honorem.—S. Aug. Serm. 219, de temp.

² Coeli enarrant gloriam Dei, et opera manuum ejus annuntiat firmamentum.—Ps. xviii.

1.

³ Nemo bene merito bovem immolavit, præter Pyrrhiam.

The saying arose from the following circumstance. As Pyrrhias was one day walking along the sea-shore, some pirates happened to land; amongst the captives they had in their ship there was an old man, who begged Pyrrhias most piteously to ransom him from slavery. Pyrrhias yielded to his prayer, and having paid the pirates the sum they required, brought away the old man, and with him a barrel of pitch which he insisted on carrying off. When they came into the town, the old man told Pyrrhias that the barrel contained golden pitch, which he gave as a present to his liberator. Pyrrhias opened the barrel and found that in reality it was more than half full of gold. He was so delighted with this discovery, that he treated the old man ever after as a father, and even as a god, and actually sacrificed an ox in his honor. From that arose the saying. Could not the same be said of us, my dear brethren? Is it not true that countless numbers of men are to be found nowadays who are utterly ungrateful to God, and hardly one in ten, or one in twenty can be found to return Him thanks properly for His goodness?

For they
do not ac-
knowledge
His benefits.

For if it is ingratitude not to acknowledge one's benefactor, or the favors received from him; how many there are who are blessed with special gifts of the soul, such as a good understanding and memory, prudence and skill; of the body, such as health and strength, and beauty, and who have besides temporal blessings of fortune, such as riches; how many there are of that kind who never think that they owe all they have to God, and never dream of showing Him the gratitude they owe Him. Riches they look on as the fruit of their own labor, or as an inheritance they receive as a matter of course from their ancestors, or else they ascribe them to blind chance; the gifts of body and soul they consider only as objects of a vain self-complacency. Every thing they possess they use like swine feeding in the forest, which wander about all day eating all the acorns they can find, and when they are filled lie down to sleep without once looking up at the beneficent tree that furnished them with such abundance of food.

They forget
them.

If it is ingratitude to forget the benefits one has received, oh, what bad memories we have in this particular! St. Peter Damian writes of the lynx, that it is such a forgetful animal, that while it is actually looking around, it forgets what is going on in its very presence. Such, I imagine, is the state of most men, when there is question of remembering the divine benefits. While

Pharao's butler was still in prison with Joseph who interpreted his dream, there was no end of his promises to speak to the king for him. But in spite of all his promises, as soon as he was set at liberty, he forgot all about Joseph who had to languish in prison for some years longer. "But the chief butler," says the Sacred Scripture, "when things prospered with him, forgot his interpreter."¹ As long as we have the gifts of God directly before our eyes, that is, while we are actually receiving them from His hand, then we thank Him, if we have so much gratitude left; but hardly have we turned our backs and enjoyed what was given us, than we completely forget our Benefactor. And that is what the Lord complains of by the Wise Ecclesiasticus: "Till they receive, they kiss the hands of the lender, and in promises they humble their voice."² Hardly have they got what they desired, than they are like the ungrateful people that God complains of; "They forget His benefits, and His wonders that He had showed them."³ How many there are who, occupied with temporal cares the whole week, hardly think of God, although they are in need of the benefit of the divine help in the very midst of their work? How many Christians would we find, if we were to examine them, who think of returning thanks to God for the many benefits they have received from Him, even once in the day before retiring to rest? Hardly one in ten, or fifty, or even a hundred.

Finally, if it is ingratitude, and the worst kind of it, to return evil for good, oh how many there are who act like that thankless bird, of which Aldrovandus writes! Henry VIII., king of England, had a parrot which was very clever at talking. One day the bird with its cage fell out of the window into the Thames; when it saw itself in danger of being drowned, it cried out as loud as it could, "a boat, a boat; twenty pounds sterling for a boat." A waterman who was near, heard the cry, and thinking that he had a good chance of making some money, sprang into his boat, saved the parrot from drowning, and brought it to the king, whom he asked for the promised reward. Certainly, said the king; but let us first hear the bird say how much it promised. The man was full of joy, and kept repeating to him-

And return
evil for
them.

¹ Et tamen succedentibus prosperis, præpositus pincernarum oblitus est interpretis sui.—Gen. xl. 23.

² Donec accipiant, osculantur manus dantis, et in promissionibus humiliant vocem suam.—Ecc. xxix. 5.

³ Obliti sunt benefactorum ejus, et mirabilium ejus, quæ ostendit eis.—Ps. lxxvii. 11.

self, "twenty pounds sterling, twenty pounds sterling;" but the parrot only stared at him, and at length cried out, "give the rascal a hundred blows of a stick;" such was its gratitude to the man who had preserved its life. Have we not reason to be angry with such a thankless bird, my dear brethren? And yet it had not reason, and could only repeat what it had heard from others. But we have certainly reason enough to be angry with ourselves. Have not many of us Christians acted far more ungratefully to God, since, after having been redeemed from eternal death, and preserved so long in life, we are not ashamed to offend and insult such a good God by sins of all kinds, instead of returning Him thanks? And how many of us can say that we are free from this abominable ingratitude? Who can say with truth, I have never offended by a single mortal sin, the good God from whom I have received every good that I possess?

And even after the great benefit of having their sins forgiven.

And would that we always could say with truth: I have offended my God by sin, and been ungrateful to Him; I have returned Him evil for good; but I am heartily sorry for it, and will never do so again! St. Thomas asks which of the two has the greater reason to be thankful to God: he who has never committed a mortal sin, and by a special grace been enabled to preserve his baptismal innocence, or he who, having committed mortal sin, has received the grace to repent and thus to save his soul from hell? What do you think of the matter, my dear brethren? Is it not a precious grace, that of preserving one's baptismal innocence, so that one has never lost Heaven, nor made an enemy of God? Certainly, answers the holy Doctor, this grace is in itself the more excellent and rare, and is more to be desired, than the grace of repentance; still, since this latter grace is less due to him who has offended God grievously, and since God has less reason for giving such a grace to His enemy, whom He could at once and without further delay, hurl into the eternal fires of hell; the converted sinner has more reason to thank God, than the innocent man who never deserved hell. Just as a malefactor, who after having been condemned to death, is pardoned by his prince, is certainly under a greater obligation to the latter than one who was publicly declared by him to be innocent.

They offend God by fresh sins.

Ah God of goodness, how few of us there are who really acknowledge that incomparable benefit as we ought! Has not our dear Saviour, Jesus Christ, far more reason to make of His ungrateful Christians the complaint He made of the nine lepers,

who did not return to thank Him after He had cured them? “Were not ten made clean; and where are the nine?” Is not absolution given in the holy Sacrament of Penance to hundreds of thousands of sinners, whose immortal souls were infected with a deadly leprosy? And amongst that great number there are hardly a few who prove their gratitude as they ought, for such a benefit; hardly a few who endeavor to continue in Thy grace and friendship by serving Thee zealously; hardly a few who do not return to their former sins and vices! Thy heart overflows with mercy and compassion when Thou seest unhappy souls bound in the slavery of the devil; Thou openest their eyes by the light of Thy grace, and softenest their hearts by sorrow and repentance for their past sins; Thou loosenest the bands of their tongues and sayest to them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests,” and make an open confession to them of the bad state of your consciences, and they will cleanse you from the foul leprosy of sin. They did as Thou hast commanded, and Thou hast admitted them to Thy Table, and fed them with Thy own Flesh and Blood; and that too, more than once. Yet after all these benefits, there is hardly one who makes a proper return to Thee. Where are the nine whom Thou hast made clean? Where are all the sinners whom Thou hast so often freed from hell? They are in the same state as before, in their former sins. They are as full as ever of pride and vanity, of avarice, usury and injustice, of abominable impurity, through which they seduce many immortal souls; of hatred and vindictiveness, of gluttony and drunkenness, of swearing, cursing, fault-finding and blasphemy; nay, they are worse than before. Such is their gratitude to Thee!

But, Thou wilt say, O Lord, let them go on; their intolerable ingratitude will soon exhaust My patience. “Thus saith the Lord God; Because thou hast forgotten Me, and cast Me off behind thy body,” along with the benefits I conferred on thee, “bear thou also thy wickedness;”¹ that is, thou shalt bear the punishment of thy wickedness. What punishment is that? We are told by the Prophet Osee: “I will not add any more to have mercy on the house of Israel, but I will utterly forget them.”² Hear, ungrateful Christian, for these words are said to you; I will not have mercy any more, but, since you thus shamefully

God will
also forget
and despise
them.

¹ Hæc dicit Dominus Deus: Quid oblita es me, et projecisti me post corpus tuum, tu quoque porta scelus tuum.—Ezech. xxiii. 35.

² Non addam ultra misereri domui Israel, sed oblivione obliviscar eorum.—Osee i. 6.

forget Me, I will allow you to drop out of My memory, and I will abandon you to your unbridled desires. O most terrible of all punishments, which brings with it eternal damnation!

Conclusion
and exhortation
to be grateful to
God.

Ah, my dear brethren, let us not expose ourselves to that fearful threat, that terrible punishment, but without delay atone for whatever faults we have committed through ingratitude. If we have hitherto failed to acknowledge our sovereign Benefactor, as He deserves, let us henceforth show Him our gratitude whenever He sees fit to send us trials and crosses, by bearing them with patience and humility; and let us not forget that it serves us perfectly right to be so tried on account of our past ingratitude to so good a God. If we have hitherto forgotten the divine benefits, let not a day pass in future, on which we shall not remember them in order to return due thanks for them. The best time for this is the evening, during the examen of conscience, a practice that no Christian ought to omit before retiring to rest. Some say they can remember nothing when they try to think of their sins. If you have committed no sin that you can remember during the day, well and good; but even in that very circumstance you have reason enough for the greatest gratitude to God. Examine then this, and all the other countless benefits that He has bestowed on you, and you will find reason enough to thank Him, and also to feel a hearty sorrow for ever having offended such a generous God by deliberate sin. If we have hitherto made a bad return to God for His goodness to us, let us now make atonement by avoiding even the least wilful sin, by serving Him more zealously, by doing His will more exactly, and by loving Him more sincerely. Let no word proceed from our mouths, no work from our hands, no thought form itself in our minds without being directed by a supernatural intention to His honor and glory; so that, according to the exhortation of St. Paul, we may “offer the sacrifice of praise always to God.”¹ O God of goodness, give us the grace to do this, in addition to the countless benefits Thou hast already bestowed on us, the value of which we do not properly know, and for which we cannot sufficiently thank Thee! Amen.

¹ Offeramus hostiam laudis semper Deo.—Hebr. xiii. 15.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for Easter Sunday.

Text.

Maria Magdalene, et Maria Jacobi et Salome emerunt aromata, ut venientes ungerent Jesum.—Mark. xvi. 1.

“Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought sweet spices, that coming they might anoint Jesus.”

So that no one but these three pious women determined to show the last honors to our dead Saviour, Jesus Christ, and to anoint His sacred Body in the sepulchre. And yet, I cannot help thinking, were there not many people in the city of Jerusalem on whom our Lord had conferred great benefits during His life? Did none of them go to the sepulchre? No; they had already forgotten His benefits: in fact many of them were amongst those who cried out to Pilate, “Crucify him, crucify him.” But had none of His Apostles, whom He had made choice of before all the others, and taught for three years, courage or good will enough to visit His grave? Not one. They hid themselves for fear of the Jews, and already had begun to doubt of the divinity of Christ. With reason might our Lord have complained on this occasion, as He did when He cured the ten lepers and only one of them returned to thank Him: “There is no one found to return and give glory to God, but this stranger.”¹ All my friends and acquaintances have abandoned Me; there is no one to pay Me the last honors but those three women. That very complaint, my dear brethren, was a common one at all times, and in our own days too, it is common enough; namely, that gratitude for benefits received is such a rare thing in the world. Sir Thomas More used to say, etc.—*continues as before.*

¹ Non est inventus, qui rediret, et daret gloriam Deo, nisi hic alienigena.—Luke xvii. 18.

THIRTY-NINTH SERMON.

ON THE ODISIOUS INGRATITUDE OF THOSE WHO ARE UNDER MOST OBLIGATIONS TO GOD.

Subject.

Those who are under most obligations to God are generally speaking, the most ungrateful to Him. How abominable their conduct is.—*Preached on Easter Tuesday.*

Text.

Nullam causam mortis invenientes in eo, petierunt a Pilato, ut interficerent eum.—Acts. xiii. 28.

“And finding no cause of death in him, they desired of Pilate that they might kill him.”

Introduction.

Who were those cruel men who insisted on Pilate condemning our Lord to death, although they knew Him to be innocent? As we read in to-day's Epistle according to St. Paul, who reproaches the Jews with their ingratitude and wickedness, it was “they that inhabited Jerusalem,” who were guilty of that crime; that is to say, they whose sick were healed, whose blind were made to see, whose lame were made to walk by the loving Saviour; they through whose city He passed daily doing good. These I say, had neither peace nor rest, until they put their greatest Benefactor to death. And so it is in the world, my dear brethren; God is continually showering down benefits on us mortals; He bestows them on us most lavishly; but what little gratitude we show Him for them; as I complained in my last sermon when I spoke of the vice of ingratitude which is so hateful to God and yet so common. And what is still worse, if we wish to know what real ingratitude is like, we must seek it amongst those who, like the inhabitants of Jerusalem, are favored more than others by the divine liberality; as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

Those who are under most obligations to God, are generally speaking, the most ungrateful to Him; how abominable their conduct! Such is the whole subject of to-day's sermon; the object of it is, to teach us the deformity of this sin, and how we ought to be always grateful to God for the benefits He daily bestows on us.

Give us Thy light and grace thereto, O God, through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

It is hard to believe what Herodotus writes of a certain people, who have such a hatred of the sun, that when they see him rise in the morning, they gnash their teeth at him, assail him with all kinds of abuse and curses, and even throw stones and shoot arrows at him to drive him away. What foolish people they are, to be sure! If they were the people who live where the sun is very sparing of his rays, so that they seem to be only step-children of Heaven, they enjoy so little light, or if they dwelt in the extreme north, where the night lasts for half the year, their madness would find some excuse. But how do those latter act in reality? The less they enjoy of the benefits of the sunshine, the more thankful they are for it; for when their long night is at an end, they go out singing and playing musical instruments to welcome the sun at his rising.

There are people in the world who hate the sun.

Do you wish to know who are they who hate the sun so bitterly? They are the people who enjoy most of his benefits, and whose mountains and plains are filled with gold, silver and precious stones through the sun's beneficent action; namely, the Atlantes. What a barbarous and savage people they must be! Yet since they are barbarians, there is some excuse for their mad hatred of an inanimate creature such as the sun.

And they are those who derive most benefit from him.

Is it possible, my dear brethren, that refined and civilized people can act in the same way towards their God of infinite goodness? Alas yes, says Lactantius; "then especially do men forget God when they enjoy His benefits in greater abundance, and are consequently under a greater obligation of honoring Him."¹ The holy Pope, St. Gregory, confirms this when he says: "they are most violent in their rebellion against God, who are most enriched beyond their merits by His liberality."² But, O great Saint, if I had not thy authority for that, should I not look on it as a mere invention? Yet, alas, when I read the Sacred Scripture, and see how men were wont to act in every age of the world, I must confess that what thou sayest is the truth, and that there are none who hate God so much as those to whom He has been most generous.

So do many people act towards God; they are the most ungrateful who have received the greatest benefits from Him.

In the Book of Deuteronomy we find examples of that kind of ingratitude amongst the Israelites, of whom their leader, Moses,

The Israelites are an example of that.

¹ Tum maxime Deus ex memoria hominum labitur cum benefaciis ejus fruentes honorem dare divinæ indulgentiæ deberent.

² Magis contra Deum elevantur, qui magis ab ejus largitate contra meritum ditantur.

says, after enumerating all the benefits that God had conferred on them; "The beloved grew fat, and kicked; he grew fat, and thick and gross, he forsook God who made him, and departed from God, his Saviour."¹ Mark the word, "beloved" my dear brethren; for thereby the Scripture gives us to understand that the Israelites had received special favors from God; He chose them from among all the nations and peoples of the world, and called them in a special manner His own people, the people consecrated to Him; He protected them in quite an extraordinary manner from all their enemies; He sent His angels from Heaven to accompany them; He caused the stormy sea to divide so as to leave them a dry passage; He made the heavens to rain down bread and other food for them; He caused water to flow from the hard rock to quench their thirst; in a word, God was so generous to His people, that the Scripture says they grew fat, and thick, and gross. But see what odious ingratitude they were guilty of, "the beloved kicked, he forsook God who made him," "they provoked Him by strange gods, and stirred Him up to anger with their abominations;"² "they sacrificed to devils and not to God, to gods whom they knew not; they angered Me with their vanities."³

So are Saul,
Solomon and
Jeroboam.

Did men act any better later on? Saul, who otherwise had the name of being the best man in the whole country, as the Scripture says, was hardly raised above the original obscurity of his condition to the dignity of first king of Israel, when he began to grow disobedient and obstinate towards God, who was so good to him. Solomon, whom God had blessed with wisdom, honors, riches, and pleasures above all the kings and princes of earth, so that no one ever was or will be so highly gifted, abandoned the true God, built temples and altars to the false gods of his concubines, and bent the knee to them. Consider the example of Jeroboam; he was one of the subjects and servants of King Solomon and could never have dreamt of being his successor on the throne, yet God, through special goodness to him, promised him by the Prophet Ahias, to make him king of the ten tribes of Israel, and besides that, that the sceptre would never pass out of his family, that He would be his Adviser in all

¹ *Incrassatus est dilectus, et recalcitravit: incrassatus, impinguatus, dilatatus, dereliquit Deum factorem suum, et recessit a Deo salutario suo.—Deut. xxxii. 15.*

² *Provocaverunt eum in diis alienis, et in abominationibus ad iracundiam concitaverunt.—Ibid. 16.*

³ *Immolaverunt dæmonibus, et non Deo, diis, quos ignorabant; irritaverunt in vanitatibus suis.—Ibid. 17, 21.*

doubts, his Helper in difficulties, his Protector in dangers ; “ and thou shalt reign over all that thy soul desireth,”¹ said God to him, provided only thou remain faithful to Me. Who would not think that Jeroboam, who was thus so wonderfully exalted and favored by God, would prove a model of piety, devotion and gratitude towards God ? And yet, who would believe it, if the infallible word of God did not assure us of it ? hardly was he placed on the throne, when he publicly declared himself a sworn enemy of God, forbade his people under pain of death to go to the temple of Jerusalem to offer sacrifice to the true God, and set up two golden calves, which he commanded the people to adore ; “ And finding out a device, he made two golden calves, and said to them : Go ye up no more to Jerusalem ; Behold thy God O Israel, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt.”² Such a determined enemy of God did Jeroboam become, that, to his perpetual infamy, the Holy Scriptures say of the godless kings who came after him ; “ and he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nabit, and in his sins wherewith he made Israel to sin.”³ And he remained an enemy of God to the end of his life ; “ After these words Jeroboam came not back from his most wicked way ;⁴ but became worse and worse. Oh how true is the saying of St. Gregory, “ they are most violent in their rebellion against God, who are most enriched beyond their merits by His liberality ! ”

But why should I talk so much of the ingratitude of others, when our own is enough to make us blush for shame ? Let us consider, my dear brethren, what goes on in the Catholic world nowadays. Those who are favored above others by health and strength, by mental endowments, prudence and discretion, by corporal beauty and other evidences of the generosity of their Creator ; those who are placed in high positions, so that others must look up to and serve them respectfully ; those who are provided with magnificent houses, and large estates, whose business is so blessed by God, that it brings in more and more every year ; those who can lead a comfortable, easy life, because they have no need to work for their support, and who can eat and drink of the best every day ; in a word, all those who are abundantly

Experience shows of Christians nowadays, that they who have received most from God, are most careless in His service.

¹ Et regnabis super omnia, quæ desiderat anima tua.—III. Kings xi. 37.

² Et excogitato consilio fecit duos vitulos aureos, et dixit eis : Nolite ultra ascendere in Jerusalem : ecce dii tui, Israel : qui te eduxerunt de terra Egypti.—Ibid. xii. 28.

³ Ambulavitque in omni via Jeroboam filii Nabat, et in peccatis ejus, quibus peccare fecerat Israel.—Ibid. xvi. 26.

⁴ Post verba hæc non est reversus Jeroboam de via sua pessima.—Ibid. xiii. 33.

endowed with the gifts of Providence, in preference to so many poor, oppressed and lowly people, how do they act towards God? Are they not obliged to be more grateful to Him than the others? Grateful indeed! If there are a few of them who are models of piety and devotion, are not the most of those favorites, so to speak, of God, they who are most forgetful of Him, who are ashamed to show Him proper honor in the church, or in the street, when the Blessed Sacrament is carried past, who are seldom to be seen approaching the sacraments, who rarely join in public devotions, or hear a sermon, who only mock at and make fun of the Gospel truths, and who regulate their conduct according to the vain customs and manners of the perverse world?

They even
abuse His
benefits to
offend Him.

Nay, do not many of them act like the ungrateful Eribatus, who having received an immense sum of money from King Croesus as a present, used it to hire a number of soldiers to rebel against his generous sovereign? Do they not act in the same way? They use the special benefits which God has conferred on them as weapons wherewith to wage war against God all the more daringly, and to transgress His laws all the more boldly. The precious time, which is given to them that they may have more leisure for the service of God, in preference to others who have to work hard for their daily bread, they squander away in sleep, idleness, useless talk, gaming and amusements, without any profit to their souls; they are not satisfied with the beauty that nature has given them, but they must try to enhance it by artificial means, by painting their faces, and by all sorts of luxury, extravagance, and even scandalous indecency in dress, and thus they inflame the impure passions of others; they abuse their mental endowments to cheat and commit injustice, their high position to indulge their pride, and to contemn and oppress others; they spend in gluttony and drunkenness the superfluous wealth that the common Father of all has given them that they may help the poor, and feed and clothe them; they neglect the children which God has entrusted to them, that they may train them up in the Christian virtues, and bring them up with the greatest care for their last end in the fear and love of God; they teach those poor children all manner of worldly vanity, or allow them to go into the danger of sin, whereas they should carefully keep them, especially the daughters, at home; they permit them to go into company which endangers their innocence, and thus they lead them on to evil, turn them away from God, and deliver them over to the devil. Can we not say of them therefore,

that, "they are most violent in their rebellion against God, who are most enriched beyond their merits by His liberality?"

And how do we act, my dear brethren, when the good God averts from us some public calamity, so that we have reason to think that all danger is past, as far as we are concerned; or when He gives us a fruitful year, so that our vineyards are filled with grapes, our fields with corn, our trees with fruit? Do we thank God sincerely for His goodness, visit the church more frequently, attend devotions and hear sermons more zealously, spend more time in prayer, show more modesty and humility in our outward demeanor, have a more heartfelt sorrow for our past sins, guard more carefully against future sin and its occasions, amend unbecoming abuses and grow more and more in the love of God? Is that the way we act? Certainly, that is what the divine liberality deserves from us. But is not our conduct, generally speaking, the very contrary of that? Do we not imitate the rich man in the Gospel of St. Luke, who enlarged his barns, and said to himself in his arrogance, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy rest, eat, drink, and make good cheer"?¹ In the same way, when the evil is averted, and we have received many benefits from the divine goodness, we cry out: God be praised that danger is over, we have enough to eat once more. And we begin with the gluttony and drunkenness, the cursing and swearing, the pride and vanity just as bad as ever. Is this not the case, my dear brethren? Is not a rich harvest the time at which most excesses are committed? Has not experience proved it often enough? And, alas, is it not true that in those troublous times, with wars and their attendant miseries at our doors, when poor people, who feel most keenly the pressure of the hard times, have to bewail with bitter tears their poverty and distress; is it not true that they who, through God's goodness, are least exposed to suffer from the general distress, indulge in greater luxury and foppery, and allow themselves greater liberty on that account; as if it were lawful and becoming for them to still further excite the divine anger against the whole city and country by their wanton excesses? I wish I could speak plainer, but I dare not. I can only wonder how such a thing is possible. See, that is the gratitude we show to God when we begin to enjoy the benefits that we owe to His liberality. Is it any wonder that He so often

In fruitful years we generally show the greatest ingratitude to God.

¹ Anima, habes multa bona posita in annos plurimos: requiesce, comede, bibe, epulare.— Luke xii. 19.

afflicts us in His just anger? Have we any reason to complain of those afflictions, when we make use of the benefits only as a means of attacking and offending the benefactor?

What odious and fearful ingratitude that is! The wildest barbarian among the most savage people on earth would be ashamed to act in that way towards his fellow-man. We are justly indignant at the conduct of Joseph's brothers, who determined in their wicked councils to put their innocent brother to death: "Behold the dreamer cometh. Come let us kill him;"¹ and that too, at the very time when he was bringing them a basket full of provisions. We are justly indignant at the ingratitude of King Saul, who tried to pierce David with his lance, at the very moment when the latter, after having slain the giant Goliath and conquered Saul's enemies, was playing the harp to free him from the spirit of madness. We are horror-struck at the cruel ingratitude of the emperor Basil, who caused one of his most trusty courtiers to be beheaded on the market-place, because the latter had once saved his life while out hunting at the risk of his own, and the proud emperor was ashamed to owe his life to one of his own subjects. What an ungrateful wretch he must have been! we think. Ah, Christians, why are we not angry and displeased at our own unheard-of ingratitude to God, whose countless benefits we have so often abused to despise Him and to offend Him all the more wantonly, and whom we put to death again, as far as we can, by our repeated sins?

"Hear O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken;"² such is the bitter complaint that God makes by the Prophet Isaias; although you cannot hear; for reasoning men refuse to understand it. What then? "I have brought up children, and exalted them; but they have despised Me."³ I, the common Father of all, have shown them a special love in preference to all people; but they have despised Me. "My friends and My neighbors have drawn near and stood against Me. And they that were near Me, stood afar off."⁴ Such is the complaint that God makes by the Psalmist. But how can that be, asks St Augustine. How can the same people be near Thee O Lord, and far off at the same time? Yet such is the

¹ Ecce somniator venit. Venite, occidamus eum.—Gen. xxxvii. 19–20.

² Audite, cœli, et auribus percipe, terra, quoniam Dominus locutus est.—Isa. i. 2.

³ Filios enutrivi et exaltavi: ipsi autem spreverunt me.—Ibid.

⁴ Amici mei, et proximi mei adversum me appropinquaverunt, et steterunt.—Ps. xxxvii. 12.

What a gross injustice that is.

Of which God complains in the old Testament.

case with the ungrateful. Those whom I approach with My benefits, retreat from Me; they look at Me only from a distance, as if they did not know Me; those on whom I daily bestow temporal benefits in abundance, keep away from Me, from My Church, from My altar, from the Table I have prepared for them, from the food of their souls, from My divine word. Hear how bitterly God complains of them by the Prophet Job: "Who said to God: Depart from us; and looked upon the Almighty as if He could do nothing."¹ Go away from us; we know Thee not; we have nothing to do with Thee. And when did they say that? Was it when God was chastising them; when He was taking away their dear friends by a premature death; when He was visiting them with a severe illness; when He was afflicting them with poverty, misfortunes and trials of all kinds? No, indeed; for at such times they sought to appease the anger of their God, and to regain His friendship. And when then? "Whereas He had filled their houses with good things;"² when He was filling their cellars with wine, their granaries with corn, their chests with money; when He was providing them with abundant yearly revenues and bestowing all sorts of benefits on them, then they said to Him, "Depart from us;" then they despised Him, and would not serve Him. One hand they stretched out to receive His gifts, and with the other they drove Him off. "They looked upon the Almighty as if He could do nothing."

"Whereas he had filled their house with good things;" in these words the Holy Ghost gives us to understand how odious to Him is the vice of ingratitude; and could He not justly complain in the same terms of many Christians nowadays? What odious ingratitude! If I had left that woman in her former condition in which she was just able to support herself decently, how humble, modest, pious and zealous in My service she would now be. But now that I have enabled her to marry above her condition so that she can live in opulence, she has forgotten Me; she has become proud, vain and haughty; because I have filled her house with good things, she no longer knows Me. While that man was living in a small house, and working hard to support himself and his family, he was very generous to the poor, he heard Mass every day, he was often at morning devotions, he went to Confession and Communion every fortnight, he was one

He can make the same complaint of many Christians.

¹ Qui dicebant Deo: Recede a nobis: et quasi nihil posset facere Omnipotens, aestimabant eum.—Job xxii. 17.

² Cum ille implesset domos eorum bonis.—Ibid. 18.

of the first to come to sermons; his children were brought up in a Christian manner, and trained to virtue and the fear of God. But when I filled his house with good things, when I made his employment more profitable, his business more lucrative, when I raised him to a higher position and enriched him, then it was that he changed altogether; now he knows no more poor people, they are too low for him; he sleeps so long in the morning that he cannot go to Mass; he never goes to the sermon on Sundays and holy-days; he is never to be seen at morning devotions; there is an end to his frequent Confessions and Communions; his wife and children must conform to the usages of the perverse world. If I had allowed that man to lose that important lawsuit, if I had prevented that other from inheriting that property, if I had not freed a third from his sickness and delicacy, I should still be their dear friend; but now that I have given them what they so long sought for and desired, when I certainly should have reason to hope that they would be still more zealous in My service, they despise Me, and turn their backs on Me. "They said to God: Depart from us; whereas He had filled their houses with good things." Christians, what abominable ingratitude that is! To forget God, and be more slothful in His service, more careless of obeying Him, and more reckless in offending Him, just because He shows greater generosity!

"I fear, ah, I fear very much," says the learned Pacciuchelli, in his Doctrinal Exposition of the Book of Jonas, to an ungrateful man of this kind; "I fear that when you are lying on your death-bed, the devil will drive your dog into your room, and, when the dog begins to howl and to announce your approaching death, the demon will cry out still louder in your ear: Ungrateful wretch, does not this dumb brute put you to shame? How faithfully has he not served you for the crust of bread and the bone you threw to him? And how have you acted towards God, who has so generously bestowed on you all that you have? The more kindly you treated your dog, the more eager he was in caressing you and testifying his willingness to serve you. But the more generous God has been to you, the more slothful you became in His service; and the more you refused to obey Him through pride and obstinacy. Unhappy wretch, what will become of you now? Where will you go to? How can you dare appear before the face of your offended Judge, who will point to the benefits He has bestowed on you, and let them pronounce your sentence."

Who are
put to
shame by
dumb
brutes.

I hope, my dear brethren, that none of us will have to dread such a fearful reproof. Let us, then, never be guilty of such black ingratitude, as to misuse, as a means of offending Him, the good things that God gives us; but let us rather look on them as an additional incentive to gratitude and love for such a generous Benefactor. Represent often to yourselves the chaste Joseph when he was steward in Potiphar's house, and was tempted by the wicked wife of his master, to commit a grievous sin with her. How did the pious youth act? He showed her at once that what she required of him was utterly impossible, and that she should put the thought of it out of her head. Hear how modestly and impressively he spoke to her: "Behold my master hath delivered all things to me, and knoweth not what he hath in his own house; neither is there anything which is not in my power, or that he hath not delivered to me, but thee, who art his wife; how then can I do this wicked thing?"¹ How can I commit this crime and sin against my master? How can I make such an evil return for his goodness to me? Must I insult and injure him who has raised me to such an honorable position, and placed me over all he has? How could that be possible? If I were guilty of such a crime, I should not deserve the name of man; I should be worse than a wild beast that has not reason. Not all the thunderbolts of Heaven would be enough to punish such black ingratitude as it deserves; not all the water of the sea could wash out such a crime. No; you are my mistress, and I know that a servant must be always ready to obey his superiors; but to sin against my master, and do such an abominable thing, how could it be possible? Mark, my dear brethren, the logical conclusion that Joseph draws; he first of all recounts the benefits he received from his master, and then concludes: therefore it is impossible for me to do him this wrong. He does not say, it is not lawful, or I ought not to do it; but, how can I do it? It is clearly impossible.

Conclusion and resolution often to remember God's goodness, like the Patriarch Joseph.

So should we also think in all dangerous occasions and temptations to sin, especially if God has blessed us with a large share of temporal goods or natural gifts; we should think, if we have any gratitude left, my Lord and my God has been very liberal to me in preference to so many hundreds and thousands of other people; He has given me abundant means, while others have

And never to offend God.

¹ Ecce dominus meus, omnibus mihi traditis, ignorat quid habeat in domo sua: nec quidquam est quod non in mea sit potestate, vel non tradiderit mihi, præter te, quæ uxor ejus es: quomodo ergo possum hoc malum facere.—Gen. xxxix. 8-9.

great difficulty in finding their daily bread ; He has raised me above the common people, and given me a high position, etc. How, then, could I be so ungrateful as to offend my good God by sin ? How could I forget Him or be so slothful in His service ? How could I be so proud and self-conceited as to be ashamed to show Him publicly the devotion and reverence I owe Him ? How could I be so heartless and niggardly as to refuse to help my poor brethren and sisters whom He has recommended to me ? How could I have so little respect for the law of His holy and humble Gospel, as to become a servant and an imitator of the perverse world ? How could I be so dishonorable as to prefer the love of a creature or the momentary gratification of a sinful passion to my good God ? How could I be so sensual and so carnal as to squander on idleness and luxury, on extravagance in dress, on gluttony and drunkenness, the means with which He has so liberally endowed me ? In a word, how could I ever offend the good God by a grievous sin ?

But to serve
Him all the
more zeal-
ously.

No ; I cannot do it, and let this be my unalterable resolution. Because Thou, my God, hast bestowed so many blessings on me in preference to others, and hast given me wealth and a high position, I will never offend Thee any more by a deliberate sin, I will be more faithful and zealous in Thy service, I will be more humble and modest in my outward demeanor, I will be more charitable to the poor and needy, I will be more regular in attending public devotions and hearing Thy word, I will lead a more temperate life and give edification to others, so that all may see that I am not one of those ungrateful men who repay their Benefactor by injuries, but rather one of those who take the goods Thou so liberally bestowest on them and use them only that they may by their means love Thee alone above all things. Amen.

FORTIETH SERMON.

ON INGRATITUDE TOWARDS THE HOLY GUARDIAN ANGELS.

Subject.

He is an ungrateful man who forgets his guardian angel. 2. Still more ungrateful is he who grieves his guardian angel.—*For the feast of the guardian angels, or the feast of St. Michael.*

Text.

Angeli eorum in cœlis semper vident faciem Patris mei.—*Matth. xviii 10.*

“Their angels in Heaven always see the face of my Father.”

Introduction.

This text, my dear brethren, is already introduction enough to my sermon, and no doubt you understand from it what I am going to speak of, so that I need not spend any more time on the introduction. “Their angels,” that is, our holy guardian angels, the bare mention of whose name is in itself an exhortation to us to pay them all honor, gratitude and love. Certainly he is an ungrateful man who forgets his guardian angel; and still more ungrateful is he who grieves his guardian angel. Yet I am afraid that there are many such people. I intend speaking of them to-day, and I say,

Plan of Discourse.

He is an ungrateful man who forgets his guardian angel; the first part. Still more ungrateful is he who grieves his guardian angel; the second part.

O holy angels, you, as I must acknowledge, have suggested the words to my mind and to my pen; make them now so impressive, that they may move my heart and the hearts of all, to bewail our ingratitude to you, and henceforth to show you the greatest gratitude, honor and love. Help us thereto by thy intercession, O Mary, Queen of angels.

He is a thankless, ungrateful child who forgets his own mother to whom he owes more reverence, love and gratitude than to any one else on earth. Therefore the old Tobias, when he thought he was about to die, gave this impressive exhortation to his son: “Thou shalt honor thy mother all the days of her life; for thou

It is a wicked child who forgets his mother, from whom he has re-

ceived so
many
benefits.

must be mindful what and how great perils she suffered for thee.”¹ And in fact, what is there that a mother does not do and suffer for her child, from the moment of his birth, until he grows up to manhood? For his sake she undergoes all the pains and anguish of child-bed; during the first years of his life she carries him about on her arm the whole day; she must often interrupt her sleep during the night; she must feed him, and often mortify herself for his sake that his health may not suffer; she is often uneasy and anxious lest some misfortune should happen to him; she sheds bitter tears if he is suffering; great is her trouble if he is sickly and delicate; for many years she must labor to feed and clothe him decently, and she must live with the greatest economy, so as to be able to leave him something after her death; in a word: that the child lives, is brought up, and attains a state in life, is due under God to no one but his father and mother. Wicked, ungrateful and godless children you are, if you forget all that your mother has done for you, and do not love and honor her as well as you can; but how much more wicked you are, if you afflict and grieve her, as the Scripture says, “The eye that despiseth the labor of his mother, let the ravens of the brooks pick it out.”²

No motherly
love can be
compared
with the
love and
care the
guardian
angels take
of their
charges.

But why do I dwell so long on this? O parents, fathers and mothers, no matter how great is your love for your children and your care for their welfare, they are not near so great as the love and care that the holy guardian angels have for their charges. Your chief anxiety for your children is, generally speaking, during their childhood, while they are still unable to look after themselves; but when they are settled in life, your care is at an end, and, if they are good children, you have your joy and consolation in them. The angels never lay aside their motherly vigilance during the whole life of their charges; from the first moment of life to the last breath, their watchfulness, care and protection are unceasing. “In their hands they shall bear thee up; lest thou dash thy foot against a stone;”³ says the Lord of the angels whom He gives to us as guardians; just as mothers carry about their children. Mothers, in spite of your watchfulness, you have not eyes enough to see every step of your children, nor feet enough to accompany them everywhere they go, nor hands enough

¹ Honorem habebis matri suæ omnibus diebus vitæ ejus : memor enim esse debes, quæ et quanta pericula passa sit propter te.—Tob. iv. 3-4.

² Oculum, qui despiciat partum matris suæ, effodiant eum corvi de torrentibus.—Prov. xxx. 17.

³ In manibus portabunt te, ne forte offendas ad lapidem pedem tuum.—Ps. xl. 12.

to help them in all circumstances. But, God “hath given his angels charge over thee; to keep thee in all thy ways;”¹ in all places, at all times, at home and in the street, by day and by night, sleeping and waking, they must watch over you. If the mother were to forget her child, they could with truth say in the words of the Prophet: “Yet will not I forget thee.”² If your mother has to go out, and leave you alone in your cradle, yet I am there to look after you; if you are out and your mother at home, I am your faithful companion who will never leave you; when your mother is asleep, I am awake and watching you. Thus do the holy angels guard us in all our ways.

Your care, O mothers, is directed mostly to the welfare of the mortal body, and to the temporal prosperity of your children; your chief anxiety is to see that they are well fed and clothed, well brought up, and well provided for in worldly matters; and oftentimes your care in this regard is so inordinate, that you cause the eternal ruin of their immortal souls, by leaving them unjustly acquired wealth, by omitting to instruct them in and bring them up to virtue, by not exhorting and punishing them and keeping them away from evil; by teaching them vanity and encouraging them to follow the frivolous customs and maxims of the luxurious world, and by giving them bad example; so that instead of thanking you, they will one day curse you in a miserable eternity. The angels, besides taking care of your children’s bodily welfare, and protecting them from harm, are chiefly concerned about the salvation of their immortal souls. To this, as to the most important end, are directed all the holy inspirations of those guardian spirits, all the movements they give the heart, all the salutary fear they inspire the conscience with in the imminent danger of sin, all they do to avert the occasions of sin, all their prayers and intercession with God; in a word, to this end is directed all their care and trouble.

And that too, for the salvation of their souls.

No matter how watchful you are over your children, O mothers, you are not able to protect them against the attacks of the devil and the evil designs of sorcerers and dealers in witchcraft. Oh, if it were not for the holy angels, how many children would be bewitched! Witches have often confessed that, instigated by their master the devil, they have for years looked out for an opportunity of injuring a certain child by their hellish

They protect them against the devil and his followers.

¹ Angelis suis mandavit de te, ut custodiant te in omnibus viis tuis.—Ps. xl. 11.

² Ego tamen non obliviscar tui.—Isa. xlix. 15.

arts; but each time they endeavored to put their design into execution, they were defeated by the guardian angel of the child.

They help
them
in the hour
of death.

Finally, O mothers, no matter how you help your children during their lives, by your careful training, salutary advice, holy exhortations, and by your money and temporal goods; still you cannot help them at that terrible moment when they are most in want of assistance, I mean, in the moment of death, when the soul is about to wing its flight into eternity. You can stand by your children's death-bed, give them the medicines prescribed, console them, smooth the pillows for them, and give way to bitter tears, thus distressing them more than ever in a moment which is so full of anxiety for them; all this you can do and nothing more. But can you drive off the temptations of the devil, who like a sleuth-hound, watches every chance to fill the departing soul with despair by reminding it of its past sins; can you bring ease and peace to the troubled conscience, console the mind with heavenly comfort, and lead and accompany the departing soul into a happy eternity? Can you do that? No; not even your motherly affection can enable you to do that. This is a moment in which a far more powerful motherly care is needed; namely, that of the guardian angel, who, since a whole eternity depends on the last moment, uses his utmost endeavors to prevent his dear charge from being lost, unless the latter through malice frustrates his benevolent intentions. In a word, we must say of our guardian angels what the young Tobias said to his father of the benefits he received from the companion of his journey, the angel Raphael; "We are filled with all good things through him. What can we give him sufficient for these things."¹ Whatever good we have in us, we have received from God through our guardian angels. Wise and true was the answer made by Joanna of Orvieto, of the Order of St. Dominic, when in her childhood she was deprived of her parents, and was once in jest called by some one an orphan without father or mother; she pointed to a picture of the guardian angel, and said, "You must know that this angel is my mother, and a far better mother too, than she whom death has taken from me."²

Therefore
they are
very un-
grateful

Thankless, ungrateful and wicked you must be, I repeat, if you forget your angels, your greatest benefactors, and do not pay them all possible honor, gratitude and love! But alas, how

¹ Bonis omnibus per eum repleti sumus. Qui d illi ad hæc poterimus dignum dare.— Tob. **xxii.** 3.

² Scito hunc angelum mihi in matrem esse.

many there are who do not think of their angel guardian once in a day, a week, or even a whole month! Daily he bestows countless benefits on them; yet they do not even know from whom those benefits come, much less do they return thanks for them. With reason may our holy angels complain in the words of our Lord to His Apostles: "So long a time have I been with you; and have you not known Me?"¹ You are now twenty, thirty, forty, or more years old, and I have not left you for a single moment of that time; I have been always at your side, I have protected you from many evils, instructed you, and even waited on you as a servant; and yet, you have not known me. So little do you think of me! I was with you on that journey when you lost your way, and I brought you on the right road; I was with you in that doubt when you knew not what to do, and I gave you good advice, so that your undertaking turned out well; I was with you that day when you were near being drowned, and I saved your life in a wonderful manner; I was with you when you fell under the wheels of that wagon and could easily have broken your ribs, and I saved you from all harm; I was with you that dark night when you fell down the stairs and were in danger of breaking your neck, and while you were actually falling I held you up so that you suffered no injury; I was with you when that beam of timber fell on your head, and would certainly have broken it, had I not turned the falling beam aside, so that you came off with a mere scratch; (I know a person, my dear brethren, who has met with all these accidents, and who must ascribe his safety under God, to his guardian angel) these and still more numerous benefits, of which you are not even aware, I have been bestowing on you for such a long time, and that through sincere love and affection for you, and yet you act as if you did not know me, and had never heard of me before!

who forget their guardian angel, and they give him just reason to complain. The benefits he confers on the body.

I was with you in that violent temptation, on that dangerous occasion, when you would certainly have fallen into sin, had I not turned away your thoughts, your ears, and eyes to other things. I was with you when you had already determined to go into that house, into that dangerous company; I placed an obstacle in your way against your will, so that you could not carry out your design, and thus were freed from many sins. I was with you when you were in the state of sin, and were on the point of being struck by lightning, or being hurried off by a violent

Those which he confers on the soul.

¹ Tanto tempore vobiscum sum, et non cognovistis me?—John xiv. 9.

or a sudden death, and hurled into hell; I prayed to God for you that He might spare you for a while longer, and I made your conscience uneasy, until you were converted and by true sorrow obtained the friendship and grace of God again. And yet you know me not, and you have hardly once thanked me for all these benefits, although I have been so careful of you the whole day long for so many years. Ah, my dear brethren, how great our ingratitude must be if our holy angels can thus complain of us!

Therefore
we must
daily thank
our guard-
ian angel.

What else can we do then, but acknowledge our manifold obligations to our faithful guardian, and return him thanks for his goodness every morning and evening with grateful hearts? Plutarch relates that when Alexander the Great was still a child, he was assisting at a sacrifice that was being offered to the false gods, and seeing that the incense caused a great smoke when it was thrown on the burning coals, he took whole handfuls of it and threw them on the fire; "Wait," said his tutor to him, "when you have conquered Arabia you can then be prodigal with the incense." Afterwards, when Alexander had really conquered Arabia, and sent home many ships laden with spices, he remembered what his tutor had said to him when he was a boy, and he called his attention to the precious cargo of the ships, and told him that he must not now be niggardly to the gods, to whom such great success in war was to be attributed. A similar exhortation is given to me and to all of us, not by a heathen to honor false gods, but by St. Bernard to be especially grateful to our guardian angels, who do so much daily for our bodies and souls, that we should not be niggardly in showing devotion and love to them. "Be with them," he says, "by constant recollection, and fervent prayer; for they are always with you to guard and protect you." ¹ Now, if it is a gross ingratitude for a child to forget his mother, for a man to forget his guardian angel, and not to thank him for his goodness, and there are many such men, what black ingratitude it must be to grieve that holy spirit in any way, instead of thanking and honoring him, and to make him an evil return for all his benefits? Yet there are a still greater number of people who are guilty of this crime; as we shall see in the

¹ *Frequentate eos sedula cogitatione, et oratione devota; quia semper vobis adsunt ad custodiam.*

Second Part.

The fable told at great length by Father Bidermann, but which I will relate to you in a few words, will help me to explain my subject. A peasant was once going through a gloomy forest, when he heard sounds of lamentation and wailing issuing out of a neighboring thicket; he went to the place where the voice came from, thinking that it might be a dying man who was calling for help; but he found no one. At last it seemed to him that the voice came out of a hole that was covered over with a large stone. Ah, whoever you are, said the voice, take pity on me; I am a prisoner here, and am buried alive; take away the stone and set me free, and I will be very grateful to you, as grateful as one man can be to another. The peasant, moved with compassion, put forth all his strength, and by great exertions managed to roll the stone away; when to his great astonishment, a monstrous serpent sprang forth, and coiling itself about the peasant's body, made as if it were about to devour him. Is that your gratitude, said the poor man, trembling with fear; is that the way you keep your promise of being grateful to me after I have set you free? Certainly, answered the serpent; that is the return that men make for the benefits they have received, and I did not promise you any other. It is not true, said the peasant; no man would act so ungratefully as that. It is true, answered the serpent. Finally, after a long dispute, they agreed to refer the matter to a third party, who should be empowered to decide it as judge. For this purpose they chose the fox, as the most cunning of beasts. The fox heard what both had to say; but he whispered in the peasant's ear, that, if he would leave his fowl house open for him, he would decide the case in his favor. The peasant agreed willingly. The fox then went to the serpent, and said that he would decide in his favor, but that he must first see whether the thing was possible as narrated, and whether such a long body could really be confined in such a small hole. The serpent, to convince him, crept back into the hole; whereupon the peasant at a sign made him by the fox, came up at once and closed in the serpent as before. That same evening the fox came to the peasant's house to get the promised meal; the window of the fowl house was opened for him at once according to the agreement and he sprang in; but as soon as he did so, he was caught by the neck in a noose that was hung under the window, and there he was strangled. Ah, cried he before the breath left him, it serves me perfectly right,

The ingratitude of men who return evil for good, shown by a fable.

because I have given an unjust judgment! The serpent was right; there is no animal so ungrateful as man, who repays benefits by injuries.

Many are guilty of this ingratitude towards their guardian angels.

And such is generally speaking the case amongst men, my dear brethren. Even the most savage beasts, lions, tigers, serpents, dragons, as history tells us, have often shown their gratitude to those who have been kind to them; but how do we often act? To stick to our subject, how do we thank our most faithful guardians and protectors, I mean our holy angels guardian? Ah, how often does it not happen that, like the serpent, we lie in a hole under a heavy stone without strength to roll the stone away. When we were for a long time in the habit of sin, or in the proximate occasion, did we not often confess our misery, and cry out for help, and beg that the stone might be taken away? Did we not often wish to be freed from that miserable state in which habit kept us enslaved? It was our holy angel, who by his prayers for us, came to our aid, and who obtained for us that powerful grace that restored us to the freedom of the children of God. How often have we not, like that peasant, fallen into the claws of the hellish dragon, who would certainly have devoured us, unless our angel had found the means of gaining time for us, so that we might do penance? Countless other benefits has he bestowed on us at every moment of our lives, and his goodness still continues unwearied. But where is the gratitude we owe him? Instead of thanking, we grieve and offend him.

Namely all who commit mortal sin.

This is the case whenever we determine to commit a grievous sin, in spite of his inspirations and in his very presence. For, just as, according to what our Lord says, the angels rejoice when a lost sheep returns to God by penance: "I say to you, there shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance"¹ so also it would be impossible to cause them greater sorrow, if they were capable of feeling sorrow, than what they would experience at seeing the beloved souls entrusted to their charge, whom they endeavor night and day with unceasing efforts to keep on the right path, rushing wilfully to destruction. St. Frances of Rome, who enjoyed the constant visible society of her angel guardian, saw him cover his face with his hands whenever she committed the least fault. With what horror and disgust would he not turn away his eyes, if he saw his God offended and insulted by mortal sin. I take as witness to the truth of

¹ Dico vobis: Gaudium erit coram Angelis Dei super uno peccatore poenitentiam agente.—Luke xiv. 10.

this any loving mother, who could tell you what trouble and grief it would be for her to see her darling son, whom she leads carefully by the hand that he may not fall, tearing himself away from her and breaking an arm or a leg.

All sinners in general make this evil return to their beneficent angels, but especially those who lead unchaste lives. Chastity is called after the angels, the Angelical Virtue, because the angels are most pure spirits who love the pure of heart. Therefore, St. Bernard reckons virgins amongst the angels;¹ and according to Tertullian, the body that is kept free from all stain of impurity, is changed into an angelic nature.² Never do the angels show greater zeal in protecting souls, than when this virtue is in danger. Agnes, Cæcilia, Lucy, and many other holy virgins, you, when you were in danger of being robbed of this treasure by violence, experienced how your angels protected you visibly, and drove off your shameless assailants! In the Annals of our Society, a detailed account is given of how an angel in the shape of a beautiful young man, once knocked loudly at the door of one of our houses in a certain town, while the fathers were at table, and asked to see a certain priest on most urgent business. Go, father, said he, when the priest came to him, go quickly to that house in which you will find one of your scholars who is still innocent, but is now in very dangerous company where he will see and hear things that will imperil his chastity. Before the father had time to look round, the young man vanished, nor could any tidings be heard of him ever after. However, the priest ran off at once to the house, and saved his scholar from the danger he was in. In my opinion (and I speak from experience) one of the best means of conquering temptation to impurity, is to have recourse with child-like confidence to one's guardian angel, in the words of the young Tobias, when the fish was about to devour him: "Sir, he cometh upon me."³ My dear angel, there is the enemy of my soul who wishes to destroy me; help me and defend me! From this it follows, my dear brethren, that there is nothing more intolerable to the angels than the foul vice of impurity, and if they ever would be inclined to abandon those entrusted to their care, it would certainly be when they see them addicted to this vice. O ye unchaste discourses, desires, songs, looks

But especially the unchaste.

¹ Virgines de angelica familia deputantur.

² Fit caro angelica.

³ Domine invadit me.—Tob. vi. 3.

and touches, (there are infamies that I dare not name) what great grief and sorrow you cause the holy angels! And this is the thanks that those beneficent spirits get for their goodness!

And worst of all those who give scandal.

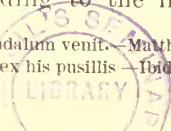
Still there is no sinner who treats the angels more ungratefully and injuriously, than he who gives scandal to others. Why so? Because he openly declares himself their enemy. The good that the angels try to do the souls entrusted to them, he tries to undo, and thus he endeavors to frustrate all their plans. For, in the first place, the angels endeavor to lead on their charges to the love of God and to virtue by good inspirations; he who gives scandal works in the very opposite direction, for by his scandalous words, acts, manner, behavior and dress, he only causes bad thoughts or excites to impure passion; these evil influences, since they work on a nature that is already weak and inclined to evil of that kind, and are perceived by the senses, are far more powerful than the inspirations of the angels, which affect only the inward powers of the soul. Besides, the angels are always trying to inspire their charges with a horror, fear and aversion for all kinds of sin; scandal-givers do quite the opposite; for by their bad example, which invites imitation, they take away all disgrace and deformity from vice, and make it not only decent almost, but even fashionable. In the third place, when their charges have fallen into grievous sin through weakness, the angels try to raise them up again as soon as possible, and to preserve them from a relapse. Scandal-givers, on the contrary, try to keep the sinner in his guilt by placing sinful objects and occasions before him constantly. Fourthly, the object which the angels wish to attain is to promote the kingdom, the honor and the glory of God, and to spread them through the world; but scandal-givers promote and extend the vain kingdom of the world, and the vicious kingdom of the devil. In a word, the holy angels have no more venomous and bitter enemies amongst men, than those who in any way give scandal, or are to others an occasion of sin.

Proved from Scripture.

With reason then has the Church appointed this Gospel, about avoiding scandal-giving, to be read to-day, the feast of the angels, and also on the feast of St. Michael, the prince of the angels. "Woe," says Christ, "to that man by whom the scandal cometh."¹ "See that you despise not one of these little ones;"² that is, according to the interpretation of St. John

¹ Vae homini illi, per quem scandalum venit. — *Matth. xviii. 7.*

² Videte, ne contemnatis unum ex his pusillis — *Ibid. 10.*



Chrysostom, see that you do not scandalize one of those weak little ones; and why? "Because their angels in Heaven always see the face of my Father;" their angels see the scandal you give, and it does not escape their notice that you are trying to steal away their souls. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "Therefore ought the woman to have a power over her head because of the angels."¹ And why because of the angels? Are then, the angels, as pure spirits, in danger of having sinful thoughts, through seeing a woman's head uncovered? No, says William of Lyons; but the reason of the prohibition is, "that they may not offend the angels by slaying the souls of those whom the angels have to guard."² O holy St. Paul, who looked on it as so important that women should cover their heads on account of the angels, come into the world now, and see how many there are to whom you would have to throw a veil, to cover their necks and shoulders, lest they scandalize the souls that the angels have charge of! And there is many an immodesty in dress besides this, that you would have to forbid, lest the angels take offence at it. Perhaps if you came, you might do some good! As it is, there is little use in our preaching to people on this subject. The perverse world is ruled by a different law nowadays, from that which obtained in Christendom in your time. Nor is there much use in our preaching to little children about it; for the poor innocents cannot help doing as their parents tell them. Come, St. Paul, see for yourself, you will find unfortunate children dressed out in flounces and furbelows, until they look broader than they are long! O ye angels, who are always with those children, what think you of that? What do you think when you see the innocent souls entrusted to your care, brought up to vanity from their tenderest years, by those who should help you in your loving efforts to lead them to Heaven? That is the gratitude you get from us, thankless mortals, in return for so many benefits!

My dear brethren, we have been ungrateful enough hitherto. Do we now wish to love and honor our holy angels, whom we ought to love and honor far more than a child does its loving mother? If so we must be particularly careful not to offend them in any way, or to make them our enemies. How will it be with us amid so many dangers of body and soul, if we wilfully deprive ourselves of their favor and care? How will it

Woe to all
who are
thus un-
grateful to
their guard-
ian angels.

¹ Ideo debet mulier potestatem habere supra caput propter Angelus.—I. Cor. xi. 10.

² Ne scilicet offendant Angelos occidendo homines quos ipsi custodiunt.

be with us in the hour of death, if they are unwilling to make an effort to save our souls, when they see them in the claws of the devil, and if they drive us into despair by saying to us: "We would have cured Babylon, but she is not healed, let us forsake her;"¹ let us leave her to the hellish birds of prey. How will it be with us on the day of judgment if those angels appear as witnesses against us, and as accusers to demand that sentence of condemnation be pronounced against us? If they say to our Judge: We have done all we could to induce these men to serve Thee; we have given them good inspirations by means of preachers and confessors to whom we suggested what they should say to them; we have often tried to move their hearts, to deter them from vice and to exhort them to amend their lives; but they would neither hear nor obey us, and besides, they have robbed us of other souls too, by their scandal and bad example. O supreme Judge, pronounce a just sentence on them now!

Conclusion and resolution to honor them constantly. Ah, dearest angel, before things go so far, I will try to act better to thee and to myself! I know that I have hitherto been very ungrateful to thee, that I have made thee an ill return for all the benefits I owe thee, that I have sinned and sinned grievously in thy presence, and been the occasion of sin to others also, to thy great grief; although, as I must again acknowledge, if I look back on every day of my life, from my youth to the present moment, I shall find that on account of special, countless and evident benefits thou hast conferred on me, I owe thee my life a thousand times, and I still daily experience thy concern for my welfare. I thank thee therefore, with all my heart, and repent of my past ingratitude to thee! By thy intercession and the help of God, I shall never be guilty of it again. One of the most powerful reasons for me to avoid all sin, and especially to avoid giving scandal, shall be thy presence and the horror thou hast of sin. Not only will I never grieve thee again; but I will love and honor thee during the remainder of my life, as a dutiful child does its mother. Every day I will thank thee for the benefits I receive from thee; every day I will commit myself to thy tender care; every day I will fly to thee, like a child to its mother, in all doubts, temptations, dangers and necessities of body and soul. Whenever I can I will promote thy honor, that thou mayest continue to protect me during life, and mayest save me in the hour of death, and bring me to that place in which I shall praise thee, my benefactor, and with thee my God for ever. Amen.

¹ Curavimus Babylonem, et non est sanata: derelinquamus eam.—Jer. li. 9.

FORTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON THE PUNISHMENT OF INGRATITUDE.

Subject.

How and in what manner the Almighty is wont to punish the ungrateful even in this life.—*Preached on the second Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Cognosco meas.—John x. 14.

“I know mine.”

Introduction.

O happy souls whom the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, will recognize as His. They are the only ones who, on the last day, will be separated from the reprobate goats, and will be placed as the elect on the right hand of the Judge to hear the joyful invitation, “Come ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you.”¹ Woe to the great number who will not be recognized by Christ on that day! But why? Does not the eternal Wisdom know each and every one? Yes, but He does not know all as His own. There are many to whom He has already said what He will repeat to them on the judgment day, “I know you not,” and they are those who during life, have not wished to know God, or to honor Him, but who preferred to drive Him away from them by their wickedness. Amongst the number of these are especially the ungrateful, as the Glossa says of the words in the Gospel of St. Luke, Chapter xvii, where it is said that, of the ten lepers who were cleansed, only one returned to give thanks to our Lord: “Were not ten made clean? and where are the nine?”² Such was the question our Lord asked, as if He did not know where they were; for, “He looks on the ungrateful, as if they were unknown to Him.”³ We have recently seen, my dear brethren, how ungrateful most men are to their good God, especially those who have received most benefits from Him; these latter may conclude that they do not belong to the number of those of whom the Good Shepherd

¹ Venite, benedicti Patris mei, possidete paratum vobis regnum.—Matth. xxv. 34.

² Nonne decem mundati sunt? et novem ubi sunt?—Luke xvii. 17.

³ Sic habet ingratos quasi ignotos.

says, "I know mine;" but that they will hear from His lips the terrible words, "I know you not." But will the God of justice never be tired of our ingratitude, so that He will leave it unpunished until the last day? Ah, what a question that is! Is it not punishment enough not to be recognized by Christ? Still, ungrateful mortals, take care. If the thought of that punishment does not affect you, you must know that ingratitude is a vice so hateful to God, that He, who is otherwise so merciful, is forced to punish it most severely even in this life, as I shall now show you, in order to make an end of this subject.

Plan of Discourse.

How and in what manner the Almighty is wont to punish the ungrateful even in this life. Such is the whole subject of this sermon, to the end that the thought of this punishment may induce us to render due and unceasing thanks to our good God.

Give us Thy light and grace to this end, O God of mercy, through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

He who really wishes to do good to another, must never talk in his presence of favors conferred, or boast of them, or say, I have done so and so for you; it was well for you that I was there to help or advise you, etc. He who acts thus is an intolerable boaster, and makes even his benefits disagreeable to others. "Odious is the conduct of those," says Cicero, "who are constantly praising their own good acts."¹ He who has received a kindness must certainly be grateful for it, remember it and praise it; but not so he who confers it. Nay, a really good-hearted man tries to make the benefits he confers greater by never speaking of them, and by concealing as far as possible, his own part in bestowing them. Such was the conduct of the holy Bishop, St. Nicholas, who, as is well known, stealthily threw into the window of a house belonging to a poor family, as much money as was necessary to form a marriage portion for the three daughters of that family. Such, too, was the conduct of Booz with regard to the poor Ruth, as we read in the Book of Ruth, Chapter ii. The latter was compelled by want to glean corn in the field; Booz said to his reapers that they must not interfere with her: "If she would even reap with you, hinder her not; and let fall some of your handfuls of purpose, and leave them that she may gather them without shame, and let no

¹ Odiosum genus hominum beneficia exprobrantium.—Cic. in dial. de Amic.

No upright man upbraids another with the benefits he confers on him.

man rebuke her when she gathereth them.”¹ The best kind of alms are those which are received by the worthy poor, without their knowing where they come from; and therefore Christ says in the Gospel of St. Matthew, “Therefore when thou dost an alms-deed, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. But when thou dost alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth; that thy alms may be in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret, will repay thee.”²

St. James says of God, our sovereign Benefactor, that, “He giveth to all men abundantly and upbraideth not.”³ Hundred and thousandfold are the benefits that we receive daily from Him, for He protects us from dangers and provides us with the necessaries of life, nor do we even know that we receive those benefits from His hand, for He upbraids no one with them.

But why do I say this, my dear brethren, when my intention was to speak of the punishment of ingratitude? To show that it is the ungrateful alone who compel the Almighty and most generous God to put them to shame by upbraiding them with benefits He so liberally bestows on them, making them see the deformity of their ingratitude, and showing them the justice of the punishment He inflicts on this vice. Thus He said in His anger by His angel to the Israelites: “I made you go out of Egypt, and have brought you into the land, for which I swore to your fathers; and I promised that I would not void my covenant with you for ever. . . and you would not hear my voice; why have you done this?”⁴ He says by the Prophet Ezechiel to the ungrateful synagogue: “I clothed thee with embroidery, and shod thee with violet-colored shoes, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and clothed thee with fine garments. But trusting in thy beauty thou hast played the harlot because of thy renown; and thou hast prostituted thyself to every passenger to be his.”⁵ When King David had committed adultery

Much less does God do so to us mortals.

It is the ungrateful alone that He must upbraid with His benefits.

¹ Etiamsi vobiscum metere voluerit, ne prohibeat is eam; et de vestris quoque manipulis projicite de industria, et remanere permitte, ut absque rubore colligat, et colligentem nemo corripiat.—Ruth ii. 15, 16.

² Cum ergo facis eleemosynam, noli tuba canere ante te, sicut hypocritæ faciunt in synagogis et in vicis, ut honorificentur ab hominibus. Te autem faciente eleemosynam, nesciat sinistra tua, quid faciat dextera tua, ut sit eleemosyna tua in abscondito, et Pater tuus, qui videt in abscondito, reddet tibi.—Matth. vi. 2-4.

³ Dat omnibus affluentur, et non impropert.—James i. 5.

⁴ Eduxi vos de Aegypto, et introduxi in terram, pro qua juravi patribus vestris: et pollicitus sum, ut non facerem irritum pactum meum vobiscum in sempiternum. . . et nolulistis audire vocem meam; cur hoc fecistis?—Judges ii. 1-2.

⁵ Vestivi te discoloribus, et calceavi te ianthino, et cinxi te byso, et indui te subtilibus. Et habens fiduciam in pulchritudine tua, fornicata es in nomine tuo, et exposuisti fornicationem tuam omni transeunti, ut ejus feres.—Ezech. xvi. 10, 15.

and murder, God sent the Prophet Nathan to reproach him: "Thus saith the Lord the God of Israel; I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee from the hand of Saul, and gave thee thy master's house. Why, therefore, hast thou despised the word of the Lord to do evil in my sight?"¹ All these words were as so many sharp arrows in the heart of him whom God thus upbraided.

This will be a great torment for the ungrateful on the last day.

O Christians, what an intolerable torment it will be on the last day for the wicked, when in the presence of the whole world, of the angels and saints of Heaven, and of the demons and reprobates of hell, the Lord will remind them of all the benefits He bestowed on them, and to their public shame and confusion, will reproach them for their ingratitude! See, He will say, I have created you out of nothing; I have ransomed you from eternal death, by dying on the Cross for you; I have brought you, in preference to many thousand others, to the one true faith; I have enriched you with many gifts of soul and body, and with temporal blessings; I have given you many occasions of doing good; I have so often enlightened you by means of My inspirations, and by sermons also, if you had gone to hear them; I have so often overlooked your faults and borne patiently with them, although I could have condemned you to hell for one mortal sin, etc. And yet you have continued to despise Me and My law! Ah, this reproach and the confusion it will cause them before the whole world, will be worse than hell itself, so that they will cry out for shame to the mountains and hills to fall upon and hide them!

God punishes the ungrateful in this life, by depriving them of His benefits, as He did the Israelites.

Besides this severe reproach, which God often causes the ungrateful to feel in their consciences during life, He punishes them also by withdrawing His benefits from them; for, according to St. Thomas, just as he who is grateful, merits a continuance of the benefits hitherto bestowed on him, so the ungrateful man deserves to be deprived of those benefits.² Such was the punishment inflicted on the ungrateful Israelites. Hear what God says by the Prophet Osee: "And she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold;" so many benefits have I conferred on her (that is on the synagogue); but, "they have used them in the service of Baal;"³

¹ Hæc dicit Dominus Deus Israel: Ego unxi te in regem super Israel, et ego erui te de manu Saul; et dedi tibi domum domini tui. Quare ergo contempsisti verbum Domini, ut faceres malum in conspectu meo.—II. Kings xii. 7-9.

² Propter ingratitude[m] meretur aliquis beneficium perdere.

³ Et hæc nescivit, quia ego dedi ei frumentum et vinum, et oleum et argentum multiplicavi ei, et aurum, quæ fecerunt Baal.—Osee ii. 8.

they have misused My benefits to offend Me, and have sacrificed them to the devil. How ungrateful they were! But what was their punishment? "Therefore will I return and take away My corn in its season, and My wine in its season, and I will set at liberty My wool, and My flax. And I will cause all her mirth to cease; and I will make her as a forest, and the beasts of the field shall devour her."¹ I will send the Assyrians, Chaldeans and Egyptians to attack her, to burn her houses and lay waste her fields and vineyards, and make her cities deserted, etc. See what a just punishment is inflicted on ingratitude.

The philosophers of old experienced the same punishment. St. Paul writes of them to the Romans, that God bestowed on them greater wisdom and understanding than on other men, so that they knew their Creator and penetrated the secrets of nature: "Because that which is known of God is manifest in them; for God hath manifested it unto them. When they knew God, they have not glorified Him as God, or given thanks," for the wisdom they received from Him, and therefore, they "became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened,"² as a chastisement for their ingratitude: "For professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."³ Commenting on these words, St. Augustine remarks, that "what God gives gratuitously, He takes away from those who are ungrateful."⁴ Rupertus thinks that the first sin of our first parents whereby they lost paradise and were plunged into misery, was really due to their ingratitude in not thanking God for having placed them in such a garden of delight.

Christians, we often complain of temporal misfortunes and calamities, of unfruitful seasons, and other miseries that afflict our lives. Do you wish to know why God, who is so good, sends us those afflictions? Think for a moment, of the use we have made of the benefits bestowed on us by Him, and of our conduct while we were still enjoying them, and you will find that it is only right and just that we should be deprived of them as a punishment of our base ingratitude. For instance, God has

To the philosophers of old.

There are ungrateful people of that kind amongst Christians nowadays.

¹ Ideo convertar, et sumam frumentum meum in tempore suo, et liberabo lanam meam et limum meum; et cessare faciam omne gaudium ejus; et ponam eam in saltum, et comedet eam bestia agri.—Osee ii. 9, 11, 12.

² Quod notum est Dei, manifestum est in illis; Deus enim illis manifestavit. Cum cognovissent Deum, non sicut Deum glorificaverunt, aut gratias egerunt; evanuerunt in cogitationibus suis; et obscuratum est insipiens cor eorum.—Rom. 19, 21.

³ Dicentes enim, se esse sapientes, stulti facti sunt.—Ibid. 22.

⁴ Quod Deus dederat gratis, tulit ingratiss.

given you wealth and enriched you in preference to so many others, by making you successful in business; He has caused you to fall heir to a rich legacy here and there; your fields and vineyards have been most fruitful; you enjoy a certain income from the capital you have invested, etc. What use have you hitherto made of these free gifts of God's goodness? Perhaps you have, like the Israelites, sacrificed them to false gods, and have misused them to gratify your pride and contempt of others, your love of idleness, your gluttony, your love of gambling, and your extravagance in dress; but you had little or nothing for the poor Christ in the person of His poor, or for the glory of God, or the salvation of your soul. See how ungrateful you have been. God has given you good mental gifts, a good memory, a quick understanding, learning and skill; what use have you made of those gifts? Have you not imitated the philosophers of old, and used your talents to deceive and cheat others, and to oppress the weak and ignorant; or else have you not occupied yourself with reading useless, dangerous and impure books and love stories? God has given you bodily health and strength; what use have you made of them? You have squandered them in intemperance, impurity, and sensual pleasures. God has enabled you to marry well; you are happy in the married state and can live in peace and quiet, in love and harmony; oh certainly that is a great blessing which falls to the lot of few married people, as you yourself must acknowledge; but what use have you made of it? You have misused it only to indulge your sensuality and love of bodily comfort by immoderate indulgence in sleep, and in eating, drinking and amusements; so that you have become slothful in the service of God, and careless about the sacraments, the devotions you were accustomed to practise, and the hearing of sermons, because you find pleasure enough at home. "I have married a wife," you say like the man in the Gospel, who was invited to the feast, I find all my pleasure at home, "and therefore I cannot come."¹ The Providence of God has given to those children a pious, prudent father, or a devout and careful mother, through whose diligence and care they are abundantly supplied with temporal goods, as far as their bodily welfare is concerned, while their spiritual welfare is also attended to, inasmuch as they are trained up to virtue and the fear of the Lord; what a great benefit that is! and also, let me add, what a rare one, too! Not that God is unwilling to bestow it on

¹ *Uxorem duxi, et ideo non possum venire.*—Luke xiv. 20.

parents, but because most parents are unwilling to receive it, or to use it properly. But what use do the children make of it? They forget their duty as children; they disregard the teaching and exhortations of their parents; they go secretly and stealthily into bad company; they grieve and trouble their parents by disobedience and obstinacy. On the other hand, God has given those parents good, obedient, docile and healthy children, according to their wish, so that their children are a pride and a pleasure to them; what a great benefit that is! But how do they use it? They bring up their children from their tenderest years in all the vanity of the world; they put no restraint on them; they approve of everything they do, except when they try to live piously and save their souls, and gain Heaven; if they try to do that, they are stupid, naughty, foolish and disobedient children. Alas, is it not too true that there are Catholic parents who keep away their children from God, bring them into the dangerous occasions of sin, and actually force them to walk in the broad way that leads to eternal ruin? See what ingratitude theirs is.

What punishment has God in store for all those people? "I will cause all their mirth to cease," He says; they are not worthy of My benefits, and therefore I will put an end to their prosperity; therefore "I will take away my corn;" I will deprive them of all the blessings I have hitherto conferred on them. I will take from them by death their son, their daughter, their dearest and only child; or else the child who is now the greatest joy of its parents, will afterwards be their greatest trouble and torment because they have trained him up in worldly vanity. I will punish those disobedient children by putting an end to their prosperity; I will deprive them of their father or mother by a premature death, so that, through their inexperience, they will have trouble enough to provide themselves with their daily bread. I will put an end to the joy of that vain woman, by depriving her of her husband, or I will punish that man by taking away his wife, so that the happiness they find in the married life will be destroyed. I will make the joy of that strong and healthy man to cease; I will send him a long and wasting illness, that will make him weary of life. That curious, inquisitive man shall become weak in his understanding, confused in his imagination, and shall pine away in uneasiness and melancholy. I will soon put a stop to the pride and conceit of that wealthy man; I do not require the Assyrians or Chaldeans for the purpose, as in olden times; there are others at hand who will reduce

Whom God
also de-
prives of
His benefits.

him to poverty; I will cause his house and property to be destroyed by war; I will make his fields and vineyards unfruitful; I will cause him to lose his yearly revenues by the ruin of his debtors. Thus I will revenge Myself on all those ungrateful people by taking away from them the benefits I bestowed on them. And, says St. Augustine, "it is a most just punishment of sin for a man to be deprived of what he was unwilling to make a proper use of."¹

Another punishment of ingratitude is in being deprived of the blessings God intended to bestow.

The third chastisement of ingratitude consists in the withdrawal of the blessings that God was prepared to bestow on him had he proved himself grateful for those he had already received. Again a most just punishment. For, according to St. Gregory, "he is not worthy of future benefits, who has not been grateful for those that have been conferred on him in the past."² Suppose that a man has made his will in favor of another, but he finds that this other is not at all grateful to him for the favor he intends conferring on him; will he not at once think that his kindness is ill-bestowed, and make another will? I meant well towards him, he will say, but since he shows such ingratitude to me, he shall have nothing from me. In the same way God told the Prophet Samuel to announce to Saul, after the latter had disobeyed His command by beginning the sacrifice; "Thou hast done foolishly, and hast not kept the commandments of the Lord thy God, which He commanded thee. And if thou hadst not done thus, the Lord would now have established thy kingdom over Israel for ever."³ But since thou hast been so ungrateful, He has cast thee away from His sight, and will take thy kingdom from thee: "Thy kingdom shall not continue. The Lord hath sought Him a man according to His own heart; and him hath the Lord commanded to be prince over His people, because thou hast not observed that which the Lord commanded."⁴

A punishment that hangs over many, who least expect it.

There are no prophets nowadays, my dear brethren, to foretell us clearly what divine Providence has in store for us, or what favors and graces It has prepared for us if we are grateful for those bestowed in the past; still God acts with us in the

¹ Illa est poena peccati justissima, ut amittat unusquisque illud, quo bene uti noluit.—S. Aug. lib. 1. de lib. arbitr.

² Non est dignus dandis, qui non egit grates de datis.

³ Stulte egisti. nec custodisti mandata Domini. Dei tui, quæ præcepit tibi. Quodsi non fecisses, jam nunc præparasset Dominus regnum tuum super Israel in sempiternum.—I. Kings xiii. 13.

⁴ Nequaquam regnum tuum ultra consurget. Quæsit Dominus sibi virum juxta cor suum, et præcepit ei. Dominus, ut esset dux super populum suum, eo quod non servaveris quæ præcepit Dominus.—Ibid. 14.

same way, although we know nothing about it. He meant well with that man whom He intended to raise to a high position; with that poor man, for whom He had prepared a rich legacy; with that tradesman, for whom He had good fortune in store, but who now has to work hard for his daily bread; for that son, that daughter He had prepared a rich and happy marriage; for that country, that city, He had decreed prosperous times, and so on; already God had determined to bestow great blessings on them. But how do they act towards Him? There is no trace of piety, fear of the Lord, or of a Christian life in their actions. A trifling gain, a momentary pleasure, human respect, vanity, any creature at all is capable of taking away their heart and love from God; they commit sin without fear, and in the very midst of public calamities, their only thought is of amusements, etc. Oh, the Almighty must think, certainly My gifts are ill-bestowed here! Is that the way in which you act towards Me? If that is all you think of My honor and friendship, then I will take no more care of you, away with you; you shall have nothing more from Me! Thus in a moment He changes all His plans with regard to that gentleman for whom He had prepared a high position, that rich man who has no heir to inherit his wealth, that son, or daughter for whom He had prepared an advantageous marriage. In an instant His design is altered, and none of those people receive any of the blessings intended for them. They complain, and say, oh, witchcraft has been at work against me; calumnious tongues have not been silent, the envy of others is to blame; this or that person has stood in my way; etc. Not a bit of it. You alone are to blame, and it is against yourself that your complaints must be directed. Accuse yourself, and say, I am not worthy of receiving benefits; my ingratitude, my sloth in the service of God, my pride and vanity, my sins and vices stand in my way; they have prevented the Lord from giving me the blessings He had intended for me; if God still wished to bestow them on me, not a demon of hell nor any man on earth could prevent Him; but I have acted ungratefully to God, and therefore He has abandoned me. "He is not worthy of future benefits, who has not been grateful for those that have been conferred on him in the past."

The fourth and last punishment of ingratitude, as far as temporal things are concerned, is a premature death, by which God takes the ungrateful man out of the world. Many are of the same opinion as the rich man in the Gospel, who, considering

The fourth punishment is a premature death: proved from Scripture.

the abundance of his riches, said to himself: "What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? This will I do; I will pull down my barns, and will build greater. . . And I will say to my soul: Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy rest, eat, drink and make good cheer;"¹ enjoy yourself, sleep, play and spend your time in amusements and in sensual pleasures. See, O God, the fruits of the benefits Thou bestowest so liberally on men! But unhappy wretches, if you continue in your ingratitude, the day, the hour will come, and perhaps soon, when the unexpected and sorrowful news will be announced to you, as it was to that rich man: "Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee," although you think you have nothing to do but to enjoy yourself, "and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"² And Our Lord concludes with regard to all men: "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God."³ Nearly the same thing happened to King Ezechias; God had given him a wonderful victory over his enemies, and had miraculously destroyed a hundred and eighty-five thousand of them; but a short time after He sent the Prophet Isaias to him with this message: "Thus saith the Lord God: Give charge concerning thy house, for thou shalt die and not live."⁴ But what was the cause of this sudden change on the part of God? After having saved the life of His otherwise faithful and beloved servant Ezechias from so many thousand enemies, He now wishes to deprive him of life. Why? Because Ezechias did not act rightly towards Him. In what did his fault lie? For he says of himself before God: "I beseech thee O Lord, remember how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is pleasing before thee."⁵ And it was perfectly true, but still he had to die. And do you know why, my dear brethren? After enabling him to gain such a great victory, God expected, as was just, that he would be extraordinarily grateful; but instead of that, Ezechias became vain of his power, and therefore, says St.

¹ Quid faciam, quia non habeo, quo congregem fructos meos? Hoc faciam: Destruam horrea mea, et majora faciam. . . Et dicam anima mee: Anima, habes multa bona posita in annos plurimos: requiesce, comede, bibe, epulare.--Luke xii. 17-19.

² Stulte, hac nocte animam tuam repetunt a te: quæ autem parasti ejus erunt?—Ibid. 20

³ Sic est, qui sibi thesaurizat, et non est in Deum dives.—Ibid. 21.

⁴ Hæc dicit Dominus Deus: Præcipe domui tuæ: morieris enim tu, et non vives.—IV. Kings xx. 1.

⁵ Obsecro, Domine, memento quæso, quomodo ambulaverim coram te in veritate et in corde perfecto, et quod placitum est coram te, fecerim.—Ibid. 3.

Cyril, he was warned of the approach of death, because an ungrateful man is not worthy of a long life.

When describing the creation, Moses mentions in order all the creatures that God made by a single word; with the sole exception of fire, of which he says nothing. Did he perhaps forget it? By no means; for it was under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost that he wrote. Perhaps God did not create fire? It would be a most grievous error to believe that. Is fire then such a worthless thing that it does not deserve special mention? On the contrary it is the noblest, most subtle and most powerful of all the elements. Why then is there no mention made of it? St. Ambrose and the Abbot Rupert assign the following cause; fire, they say, is by its nature fruitless and ungrateful. God created the heavens with their twinkling stars, and they at once commenced to praise their Creator, as David says, "The heavens shew forth the glory of God."¹ He created the earth, and it brings forth countless fruits; the water, and it feeds and nourishes the fishes; the air, and it serves as a habitation for the birds. God created fire also; but what fruits does it bring forth? Not one. Everything that is thrown into it, is at once devoured; fuel is the nourishment and support of fire, and the fire destroys its own support. Thus it is a perfect symbol of an ungrateful man, who is supported by the blessings that God bestows on him, but devours them all without producing the least fruit or making the least return for them. "Such is the ungrateful man," says the Abbot Rupert, "he devours many benefits, but makes no return for them; and therefore he should be excluded from the number of living creatures."²

Confirmed
by a simile.

We hear people say sometimes, when a young man dies suddenly or prematurely: What a pity he died so young! How clever and learned he was, what nice manners he had! He would have been a fine man had he lived, and he could have done a great deal of good. Is it not a pity that such rare gifts and talents should be buried so soon? That is true enough; all those talents and endowments were gifts of the divine liberality; but do you know what use that young man made of them? No; that we cannot find out. God could tell us, and if He were pleased to do so, we should perhaps discover that that young man was guilty of the greatest ingratitude towards God, that he

Thus many
die prematurely, on
account of
ingratitude.

¹ Coeli enarrant gloriam Dei.—Ps. xviii. 1.

² Talis plane est ingratus; multa beneficia devorat, nihil redonat; dignus plane ut ex numero creaturarum excludatur.—Rupert Abb. lib. 1 in Gen. c. 8.

misused the talents bestowed on him to indulge in pride, impurity and other vices, and thus to treat his good God with the greatest contempt; so that the divine justice was forced to cry out in anger: Away with the wretch, he is not worthy to be numbered any longer amongst living creatures, his name must be blotted out; go, O Death, and hurry him away from the world, he is not worthy to live any longer!

These punishments are just: shown by a fable.

A just punishment for ingratitude! You know, I presume, my dear brethren, the fable that I am going to make use of here as a simile. A young deer that was pursued by the hunters over mountain and valley, came to a vineyard; it was so tired that it could not run any farther, so it lay down under a vine, that spread its leaves and branches over it and concealed it so effectually that the hunters could find no trace of its whereabouts. After a time the deer put its head carefully out between the branches and looked all around, but could see no sign of the hunters far or near; Oh, that is all right, it said; all danger is over now; and thereupon it turned round, and commenced eating the leaves of the vine, nor did it stop until it had devoured them all. While eating however, it made such a noise that the hunters heard it, and made after it again, when they caught and killed it without difficulty, as it had eaten away the friendly leaves which had before served to hide it. But before the unlucky animal breathed its last, it cried out in a fit of useless repentance, "It serves me quite right, because I did not hesitate to devour my protectress,"¹ who saved me from such imminent danger. This is only a fable my dear brethren, but it is verified only too often in the case of reasoning beings, who, after having been protected by God from many misfortunes, preserved in many dangers to life, and richly endowed with temporal goods, still do not hesitate to offend their sovereign Benefactor by sin. And if God in His anger deprives them of the benefits, the protection, or the blessings and prosperity He has hitherto bestowed on them, or if He refuses any longer to regard them with favor, or takes away their health by a tedious illness, or their life by a sudden or premature death, what else can they think or say but that it serves them quite right, that they are justly deprived of their prosperity, their health, their life; for they are not worthy of anything better, since they have been ungrateful to their sovereign Benefactor?

¹ Merito hoc mihi evenit, quid violare non dubitavi servatricem meam.

Ah my good God, I must cry out, how long is it now since I have deserved all these punishments? None of them is too great or too severe for my gross ingratitude towards Thee. Yet, what shows still clearer Thy goodness and mercy, Thou hast had such patience with me, an unworthy sinner, and hast borne with me so long in my thankless life, without visiting me with the well deserved chastisement. Shall I then still further presume on Thy mercy, and continue to make Thee such a bad return for Thy goodness? Ah, woe to me if I do! for then I shall have a far greater punishment to expect, than those of which I have spoken and which affect only the mortal body. How would it be with me, if, remitting those punishments, Thou wert to reserve Thy vengeance for my immortal soul? If Thou wert to withdraw from me Thy special grace, and to allow me to go on the broad road that leads to hell? No, O God of infinite mercy, now at this very moment, in this very place, I detest my past ingratitude! From now henceforth I will show by my repentance and amendment, and by renewed zeal and constancy in Thy service, and I will show publicly before the world, that I acknowledge Thee as my greatest Benefactor, and love Thee with my whole heart above all things. Amen.

Conclusion and resolution to be grateful to God.

On the Gratitude we owe to God for the Forgiveness of Sin, see the following Third Part; on Gratitude for other Benefits, see the following Fourth Part.

ON THE NEGLECT AND ABUSE OF DIVINE GRACE.

FORTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON REJECTING THE LIGHT OF THE HOLY GHOST.

Subject.

1. Many men are stupid and without understanding in things that concern God and their eternal salvation, because they are not enlightened by the Spirit of God. 2. They are not enlightened by the Spirit of God, because they do not wish to receive His light.—*Preached on the Monday of Pentecost.*

Text.

Lux venit in mundum, et dilexerunt homines magis tenebras, quam lucem. John iii. 19

“The light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light.”

Introduction.

Is it then possible that there are men in the world who hide themselves from the light of the sun, and prefer to remain in the darkness of night, rather than bear the daylight? Yes, as Herodotus relates, there are human owls of that kind; but they are barbarians, as I have elsewhere explained. Yet this is not of very great importance. What is especially to be lamented is the fact that there are men, and countless numbers of them, who hide themselves away from the divine light, and seek to keep their souls in darkness; and it is of these that Jesus Christ complains in to-day's Gospel in the words of the text: “The light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light.” And who are those men? Not merely heathens

and infidels, nor Jews and heretics, who deliberately reject the sufficient enlightenment that they receive from the same Light, which according to St. John, "Enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world;"¹ and refuse to acknowledge the truth of the one true faith; but there are also Catholic Christians, who, although they are in the midst of the brilliant sun light of divine faith, yet prefer to wander about in the darkness like bats. Is not that the case? How many are there not who understand little or nothing of the Gospel truths that concern their souls and their salvation, the service of God and the observance of His law; although there are teachers enough to explain all these things to them? Whence comes this my dear brethren? The Spirit of God, who according to the words of Christ, must teach us all truth, is wanting to them; or to speak more truly, they do not want to be instructed by this Spirit. "And men loved darkness rather than the light." That I shall now proceed to explain.

Plan of Discourse.

Why are many men so stupid and void of understanding in things that concern God and the salvation of their souls? Answer; Because they are not enlightened by the Spirit of God; this will be the first and longest part. Why then are so many men not enlightened by the Spirit of God? Answer; Because they do not wish to receive His light; this will be the second part.

O most blessed Light, fill the hearts of Thy faithful;² that we may see our blindness and stupidity in spiritual things, and receive Thee henceforth with greater eagerness. O most enlightened Virgin, and you holy angels, obtain this light for us by your intercession.

If one is stone blind, or spends his life in a gloomy cavern, what wonder is it that he knows little of things in general, and cannot discern beauty from deformity, and that, even when a thing is explained to him, he is still unable to understand it? You remember my dear brethren, the case of the man born blind, whom Jesus restored to sight, as we read in the ninth chapter of the Gospel of St. John; before he was healed by our Lord, he lived like other men amongst all sorts of visible creatures, and yet he could not say nor imagine how a single one of them was formed. No doubt he often asked his parents and relations where they were leading him to, and what sort of a place they were

One who is born blind, since his eyesight is wanting, cannot form any idea of the appearance of visible things, no matter how they are explained to him.

¹ Illuminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum.—John i. 9.

² O Lux beatissima reple cordis intima tuorum fidelium.

in; and they told him as well as they could, of the greatness of the earth; but what could the blind man understand of it all? He felt something hard and immovable under his feet, and he asked what it was. It is the earth, was the answer; it is dark-colored, and it produces all kinds of fruits for our nourishment; it is beautifully divided into mountains and valleys, in which all sorts of wild animals live; into brooks and rivers, in which fishes of various kinds swim about; into gardens and meadows, which are covered with verdure, and ornamented with white, yellow, red and blue flowers, for the delight and pleasure of those who behold them; into towns and villages, in which people live in houses great and small. But what is the use of talking to a blind man about red and yellow, blue and green, towns and villages? You may repeat it a hundred times over to him, and he may listen to you; but what wiser will he be at the end? Not a bit, because he does not know what a color looks like. He knows well enough that he breathes, and he gropes about with his hands. What is that, he asks; I cannot feel anything. Oh, that is the air, and is illumined by the brilliant light of the sun; when that light disappears in the evening, the earth is in darkness, and we cannot see unless we light a lamp or a candle. In the air too, are numbers of birds that fly about above our heads; they differ in size, appearance, beauty and the color of their feathers; most of them fly about during the day, others such as the owl and the bat, prefer the night. Poor blind man, what do you say to all this? What can I say? I hear your words, but it is impossible for me to understand what the things of which you speak, are like. I wish I could see them! And yet they are nothing compared to the heavens and the firmament which extend over the atmosphere like a roof made by the hands of God, in which are numbers of fixed stars that twinkle by night, but are invisible by day, because their light is overpowered by the exceeding brilliancy of the sun. The most of these stars are motionless and remain where the Creator placed them in the beginning; others are planets and have their appointed revolutions through the heavens. Under this firmament, when the weather is gloomy, the clouds are black and sombre, but when it is fine, they are white and fleecy, and form a pleasant sight for the eye to rest on. If these things were explained to the blind man, what do you think, would his idea of them be? Doubtless he would be lost in amazement, and would form a mental picture of some

wonderful machine; but he would know just as little as before, even if a hundred years were spent in explaining things to him. It is in fact impossible for him to understand anything about such things, because the human understanding, as long as it is surrounded by this mortal body, cannot form an idea of a visible thing unless it sees it with the eyes of the body. True indeed is the saying, "A blind man is a poor man;" all visible beauty is to him as if it were not. Imagine what the blind man must have felt when Jesus opened his eyes. How astonished and delighted he must have been! How eagerly he must have employed the newly restored sense on the first day! For everything he saw was new to him, and had been hitherto unintelligible.

See, my dear brethren, there you have a picture of the man who is inexperienced in spiritual things and who is not enlightened supernaturally. What the eyesight is to the body, in order to enable us to form a true idea of the outward appearances of creatures, that the light of the Holy Ghost is to the soul, to enable it to understand invisible and supernatural truths that concern God and our eternal salvation. "Come O Light of our hearts," the Church sings to the Holy Ghost, "without the influence of Thy light, there is nothing in man."¹ No one can have a good thought, nor speak a good word, unless by the grace of the Holy Ghost: "No man can say, the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost," says St. Paul to the Corinthians; "To one indeed by the Spirit is given the word of wisdom; and to another, the word of knowledge," to a third the grace of faith, to a fourth the gift of prophecy, to a fifth that of discernment of spirits, to a sixth, that of tongues; "But all these things one and the same Spirit worketh, dividing to every one according as He will."²

Men are blind in that way in divine things, when the light of the Holy Ghost is wanting to them.

What were the Apostles and disciples of Christ before they received this light in the coming of the Holy Ghost? They were very ignorant and inexperienced. Christ, the Eternal Truth and Wisdom, who says of Himself, "I am the light of the world,"³ spent three years teaching them; He spared no pains to instruct them daily in the divine mysteries and the great truths of faith, partly by the clearest explanations, and partly, that they might understand them better, by the most

How ignorant the Apostles were before the coming of the Holy Ghost.

¹ Veni lumen cordium; sine tuo lumine nihil est in homine.

² Nemo potest dicere: Dominus Jesus, nisi in Spiritu Sancto. Alii quidem per Spiritum datur sermo sapientiæ; alii autem sermo scientiæ. Hec autem omnia operatur unus atque idem Spiritus, dividens singulis, prout vult.—I. Cor. xii. 3, 8, 11.

³ Ego sum lux mundi.—John viii. 12.

beautiful parables and similes; “And they understood none of these things,” says St. Luke, “and this word was hid from them, and they understood not the things that were said.”¹ If they learned anything, they forgot it immediately. He often spoke to them of His eternal kingdom that was to come; they thought He meant a temporal kingdom, and that He would reign like an earthly king or potentate; therefore James and John asked their mother to obtain for them the first places in His kingdom. He often preached to them of humility, and told them that they must become like little children if they wished to enter Heaven, and that he who wished to be the greatest among them, must become the servant of the others; He Himself gave them an example of the greatest humility, and yet, at the Last Supper, when He was speaking to them of the sufferings that were in store for Him, “there was a strife amongst them,” as St. Luke says, “which of them should seem to be greater.”² He had often and clearly foretold to them that He would rise from the dead on the third day, and yet in spite of all the miracles they saw Him working, they did not believe Him. Nay, even after He had actually appeared to some of them and spoken with them, they were still doubtful whether it was really He. What was the cause of this blindness? The light of the Holy Ghost was wanting to them, as Christ Himself said to them: “I have yet many things to say to you; but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will teach you all truth.”³ And what wonderful wisdom the same Apostles, who were once so stupid, exhibited after they had received the Holy Ghost!

He who is not enlightened by the Spirit of God, does not understand supernatural things, no matter how well they are explained to him.

Without this divine light, my dear brethren, no natural knowledge is of any use to us; without it “the wisdom of this world is,” as St. Paul says, “foolishness with God.”⁴ No matter how cleverly and clearly you explain divine, heavenly and supernatural truths to one who has not this light; he will be like the man born blind, who could form no idea of visible things. You may explain those supernatural beauties to him; but he will know as little of them, as the blind man does of color. Clever men give themselves no end of trouble in writing books, preach-

¹ Et ipsi nihil horum intellexerunt, et erat verbum istud absconditum ab eis, et non intellegebant, quæ dicebantur.—Luke xviii. 31.

² Facta est contentio inter eos, quis eorum videretur esse major.—Luke xxii. 24.

³ Adhuc multa habeo vobis discere, sed non potestis portare modo. Cum autem venerit ille Spiritus veritatis, docebit vos omnem veritatem.—John xvi. 12, 13.

⁴ Sapientia hujus mundi, stultitia est apud Deum.—I. Cor. iii. 19.

ers cry out from the pulpit on Sundays and holy-days, that according to the infallible word of God, all earthly things, all the pleasures, honors and riches of this world are but vanity, and deserve to be trampled under foot and to be despised as dross; that it is future, heavenly and eternal goods that are alone worthy of our love; that the human soul is almost infinitely more precious than the body; that sanctifying grace is so great a treasure, that he who has the least portion of it, should esteem himself happier than if he had all the kingdoms and principalities of the world in his possessions, etc. There are many people who read all this in books, and hear it in sermons; but there is hardly one in twenty who understands what it all means. The words are plain enough, and they reach the ear; but since the understanding is without light, those truths fail to touch the heart. There is many a one who, enlightened by his natural reason, thinks that those truths must be very great and sublime; but he knows nothing about them; he understands as little of them, as a blind man does of color.

It is useless to describe to him the fearful malice of offending God by mortal sin; useless to tell him that it is the greatest, nay, the only evil we have to dread in this life, because it is the only one that can make man really miserable; useless to tell him that a great king or emperor in the state of sin, who is seated on a throne, ruling over nations and enjoying every imaginable pleasure, is to be looked on as far more miserable and unhappy, than the poor beggar in the state of grace, who has to beg his bread from door to door; more unhappy than the prisoner in the state of grace, who is loaded with chains, and beaten and scourged, and forced to tug at the oar the whole day in the galleys, in hunger and thirst. For the king who has a mortal sin on his soul, is an object of hatred and execration to God, and an abject slave and thrall of the devil, and he has to expect the eternal pains of hell as his just punishment; so that he has no reason ever to sleep quietly, to rejoice or to laugh; but rather to weep and lament, and look on himself as the most miserable of men. A man who has not received the light of the Holy Spirit, will hear all this, and he will think to himself: Now if that is true, it is strange enough. Perhaps he may go so far as to admit the possibility of its being true. Nay, it may cause him to be somewhat afraid; but to understand this truth thoroughly, so as to be deterred from sin, and be induced to amend his life, that is an impossibility for him. He is like the blind man who cannot judge of color.

It is useless to describe to him the malice of sin.

Useless to
preach the
Gospel
truths to
him.

It is useless to cry out against certain abuses that are dangerous to the soul, and contrary to the Christian law. There is many a one addicted to them, who does not believe they are so bad as is said; the supernatural light is wanting to him; he is a blind man to whom you are speaking of color. Tell him that he is on the wrong road, and that he will be fatally deceived by the false rules and maxims of the vain world, which are opposed to the holy and humble Gospel of Jesus Christ as St. James says distinctly in his Epistle: "Know you not that the friendship of this world is the enemy of God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of this world, becometh an enemy of God."¹ Tell him that the manner of life which Jesus Christ, the Infinite Wisdom, embraced during His mortal career, is the best and safest in order to gain Heaven; and because He chose extreme humiliation, contempt, poverty and privation of all worldly goods and pleasures, and spent His life in trials and suffering, that therefore a sensible man, who is at liberty to do so, ought certainly to make choice of a life like His in preference to any other. For Our Lord has said, "Blessed are the poor," and he should esteem himself happier in poverty than in riches, happier in sufferings and trials than in pleasures and delights, happier in contempt and persecution than in honor and authority; because he can thus approach nearer to that perfect life which the great God chose for Himself, and can become more like his Head, Jesus Christ, resemblance to whom is a necessary condition of gaining Heaven. When he duly considers all this, he will say that it is likely true, that it is right enough that the servant should not be better than his master, and that a man may justly consider it an honor to resemble the King of Heaven; still he will not see the beauty and excellence of such a life; he finds it impossible to believe that happiness can be found therein, and he has not the least desire or inclination for a life of that kind. And why should he? The light of God's Spirit is wanting to him; he is a blind man to whom one talks of color.

Useless to
speak of the
happiness of
the servants
of God.

But if you were to say to him that an enlightened soul finds far more pleasure, peace and contentment, more joy and sweetness in mortifying itself severely, and in constantly chastising the flesh, than a sensual man finds in all the pleasures of the world; that there is more glory in extreme humiliation and contempt of self, than in the most heroic achievements and vic-

¹ Nescitis, quia amicitia hujus mundi inimica est Dei? Quicumque ergo voluerit amicus esse sæculi hujus, inimicus Dei constituitur.—James iv. 4.

tories of kings and emperors; that to be separated from the world, to be unknown to it, to be despised and laughed at by it, to be without any earthly joy or consolation, and to occupy one's self with God alone, nay, to be visited with many trials and torments for the sake of God and Heaven; that in this consists the true happiness of souls that are enlightened by God, a happiness that many saints have incessantly desired and longed for, and have rejoiced over when they attained it as if they had found a paradise on earth and a foretaste of the joys of Heaven: not a word of all this will he be able to understand. He will say that they are great and sublime spiritual thoughts, fit for the saints, but not for men like him. Talk to him for a hundred years of truths of that kind, and at the end he will be just as wise as before. Why so? The light is wanting to him; he is a blind man who cannot form the least idea of color, no matter how it is explained to him.

Come Holy Ghost, come light of hearts, take pity on this poor blind man! Give him a ray of Thy divine light, that he may begin to see! Oh how clearly he will then perceive all those truths, that he could not understand before! How astonished will he not be, more so than that blind man whose eyes were opened! Christian humility, he will say, before, thou appearedst to me as contemptible and despicable; now I see that thou mountest in thy beauty above the angelic thrones. Christian poverty of spirit, before thy very name terrified me; now I see that thou possessest all things; for thy real treasure is God Himself. Crosses, trials and difficulties, I formerly thought that you were not to be endured; now I see to my greatest consolation, what heavenly sweetness is concealed in you, when you are borne for God's sake with contentment and perfect resignation to the divine will. World, and everything that is in vogue or esteem in the world, formerly you attracted my blind heart altogether to you, and I thought that I must live as others and conform to your fashions; alas, what vanity, what treachery, what palpable falsehood! Away with the vain toys which kept me from my God, my greatest good, and prevented me from loving Him with all my heart.

And while I say this, the blind children of the world stand there and listen, but they do not understand; they wonder, but they cannot conceive how any one could find his happiness in such things. A soul enlightened by God could tell them that it is true however, but that they cannot see it, because the light is

The soul enlightened by God, understands all this very clearly.

But the blind children of the world do not.

wanting to them and they are stone blind in heavenly things. In olden times in Athens, a beautiful painting was once hung up in the market-place. Every one who passed by, looked at it, admired it, and went his way. At last one who was skilled in works of art came up, and seeing the painting, was so rapt in admiration, that he could hardly leave it. What a fool you are, said a passer-by; what do you see in the picture more than any one else who has looked at it? and yet you are not tired of gazing at it. "You would not ask me," said the other, without turning his eyes away for a moment, "if you had the same eyes that I have."¹ Any soul enlightened by God might say the same thing to the blind children of the world; you would not be astonished at my finding my greatest and only happiness in the service of God, in Christian humility, in poverty and mortification, if your eyes were like mine, and if you saw as I do, those divine truths. Come O Holy Ghost, I beg of Thee again, come and enlighten our miserable blindness, that we may see the things of God in their proper light! But why do I cry out to Thee? Why should I attribute our blindness to Thee? Thou art the light of all hearts, Thou dost nothing but enlighten, Thou offerest Thyself to all men who come into the world, that they may see; but they do not wish for Thy light. And such is the case, Christians; the only reason why so many are not enlightened by the Holy Ghost, is because they do not desire His light. And this I shall show briefly in the

Second Part.

They do not wish to be enlightened by the Spirit of God.

I go into a house and find a man sitting there in a dark room, with the shutters closed, so that not the least ray of sunshine can reach him. I ask the people of the house what is the matter with him. Oh, they say, he has been like that for the last month. But has he done anything wrong? No; he has not done anything wrong. Well then, I say, let the poor fellow have a little comfort; open the windows, that he may have some light at least. We are willing to do so, they say, but he does not want the light; he went into that room of his own accord, and shut up the door and windows, and if we even bring him in a candle, he blows it out. Oh, I think, if that is the case, he is not right in his mind; nor have I any pity for him because he has his own way. My dear brethren, that is the manner in which many Christians act. The light of the Holy Ghost shines in all

¹ Non me interrogares si meos oculos haberes.

places; "He enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world," and is ready to instruct every one in good and to impel him to it; but many creep away and hide themselves in the darkness so as to avoid this light; they shut up all the windows and doors of their hearts, so that it cannot penetrate into them; they love their blindness and ignorance in things that concern God and the duties of a Christian life; they do not desire instruction or enlightenment; they reject all good inspiration; they say like those people in the Book of Job: "Who have said to God; Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;"¹ we do not want to know anything of the way of penance and of the Cross, which Thou hast pointed out to every one, as the only way that leads to Heaven; we do not wish to hear of it; it is enough for us if we live respectably before the world.

Therefore they do not come to sermons, lest the preacher, according to his duty, should make known eternal truths to them, disturb their consciences and make them uneasy, and admonish them to perform the duties of their state of which they know nothing and wish to hear nothing. Thus they close their hearts to the light of the Holy Ghost; and even when they do come to sermons, it is without any preparation of the heart, and without a proper intention. They wish to see the people, but not to hear the salutary words spoken to them; or to hear what the preacher has to say, and how he says it, but without the least idea of trying to understand and to practise the truths he explains for the good of souls. If a ray of grace manages sometimes to penetrate their hearts, so that they have a clear knowledge of a certain truth, they blow it out at once; they seek all kinds of pretexts and excuses to persuade themselves that they are not bound to practise that truth; they go about from one to another explaining in a garbled and incomplete manner what it is that troubles them, until at last they find a confessor after their own heart, who makes little of their uneasiness, and lets them see that in his opinion they are not bound to do the good to which they were exhorted; and so they imagine that they are bound to nothing. But if they cannot find any argument against the truth brought forward, if they must acknowledge that this or that is unlawful and vicious, and that it should be therefore abolished, they refer to others what is said, and try to persuade themselves that they only are alluded to who are much worse than themselves in regard to that vice. In fine,

They therefore neglect or misuse the word of God in sermons.

¹ Qui dixerunt Deo : Recede a nobis, et scientiam viarum tuarum nolumus.—Job xxi. 14.

if they cannot escape the clear light that is shining on them they take it in at the window and let it out at the door; they have heard the truth and acknowledged it, but that is all, they remain as they were; they do not practise what they have learned, or else they defer it to a time which never comes. Thus the light of the Holy Ghost has shone on them in vain; they remain in their former blindness and darkness.

Or they
drive away
the Spirit of
God by the
spirit of the
world, or
by the flesh.

There are others who receive the divine light and instruction and take it to heart; but they act like one who lights a candle and goes about with it in broad daylight; it is not of the least use to him, for the greater light completely overpowers the smaller one. Such is the conduct of those who wish to be good and pious and to live according to the divine inspirations; but at the same time to unite the spirit of the world or the flesh with the Holy Ghost. They want to divide their hearts between God and the world; in certain things which they think respectable, they are ready to obey God and to observe His law; in certain other things of which they have a different opinion, they prefer to conform to the customs and maxims of the vain world; they do not wish to put off the old man, but to put on the new man over the old, as they put on one coat over another. Like the Apostle, they might say, "We do groan being burthened; because we would not be unclothed, but clothed upon."¹ Their idea is to keep their old habits and still get new grace from Heaven. In a word, they try to be earthly and heavenly, vain and humble at the same time. But they can never succeed. Just as they cannot have two souls in their bodies, so also they cannot have two different spirits ruling together in their souls. The idol Dagon, as we read in the Old Testament, could not stand in the presence of the ark of God; neither can the Holy Spirit of God bear the presence of the vain spirit of the flesh or of the world. "Let the Ark of the Testament enter into you," says St. Augustine, "and throw down the idol Dagon;"² if you wish the Holy Ghost to enter into your soul, you must expel the spirit of the world. As long as the false laws of the perverse world are the rule and guide of your conduct, the light of the Holy Ghost cannot shine on your soul, as our Lord expressly says to His Apostles: "I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete. . . the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive."³ He who lives according to the world

¹ *Ingemiscimus gravati, eo quod nolumus exspoliari, sed supervestiri.*—II. Cor. v. 4.

² *Intret in te arca Testamenti, et ruat Dagon*

³ *Ego rogabo Patrem, et alium Paraclitum dabit vobis. . . Spiritus veritatis quem mundus non potest accipere.*—John xiv. 16-17.

and its perverse usages cannot receive this Spirit; so that if you remain attached to the world, you are like one who carries about a lighted candle in broad daylight, and who is of course not at all helped by so doing.

“The Spirit breatheth where he will,”¹ said Christ to Nicodemus. Now there are very many who wish the Holy Ghost to come and enlighten them, but in a way to please themselves; not as the Holy Spirit Himself wishes. If His light comes with regard to a truth that pleases them, they readily open their hearts to receive it; but if the truth is opposed to their evil inclinations, they shut all the doors and windows of their hearts against it, and like owls, fly the light. Is it not true that many a one comes to church to hear a sermon, with these, or similar thoughts: I will do all that God tells me by the voice of the preacher, as long as he does not touch on a certain point; for in that I am determined not to listen to him. He need not say anything to me of Christian humility, or try to persuade me that I must give way to another and be the first to ask pardon and to propose a reconciliation. No; I cannot do that; it is against my nature. The preacher, thinks another, is talking about poverty of spirit, and he says that I must withdraw my affections from money, give alms liberally and not accept bribes; but he will never persuade me to that; I am in want of money; priests do not know anything about it, nor what it costs to bring up a family decently. It is useless, says a third, to tell me that I must give up going to that house, and avoid that occasion or break off that intimacy; it cannot be done; I am in need of those people. It is all right, thinks a fourth, to mortify my eyes now and then, as well as my ears and other senses; but no one need try to induce me to mortify myself in such a way as to give people cause to talk of me. The preacher should not speak of this or that fashion, says a fifth; and I will not change my mode of dress, no matter what he says; it is the fashion, and I must be as good as others in that respect. I know that by changing in this matter, I could give a good example to others and publicly advocate the glory of God; but I do not wish to be the first to combat an abuse. If any one is scandalized at seeing me dressed as I am, he need not look at me. Thus there is hardly any one, no matter how pious he may be, who does not refuse to give up some pet point which has captivated his natural inclinations; so that he does

Most people receive the light of the Holy Ghost; but not in everything.

¹ Spiritus ubi vult spirat.—John iii. 8.

not give his whole heart to the Holy Ghost, but blows out His light when he sees it coming, and therefore must remain in the dark; because the Spirit of God will not be content with a part; He must have the whole heart, or none of it; "It filled the whole house where they were sitting,"¹ says St. Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, describing the coming of the Holy Ghost.

Conclusion
and resolution
to open
the heart
fully to the
Holy Ghost.

Thus, O Holy Ghost, God of truth, Thou shinest on and enlightenest every man that cometh into the world; and yet the souls of most men are in darkness, because they neither desire nor are willing to accept Thy light: "Men loved darkness rather than the light"! As for me, I cannot deny that Thou hast hitherto most generously enlightened me. Oh how much good I have learned, and how many occasions I have had to practise it! But I must also confess with sincere sorrow that I have lived so little in accordance with Thy light, that I have not followed Thy inspirations, nay that I have deliberately extinguished Thy light, through the influence of bad habits, or fear of difficulties that were only imaginary, through inordinate and blind love of creatures, through human respect and fear of what people might say. O woe to me if, after I had rejected Thee so often, Thou hadst kept Thy light from me and left me in darkness! I must acknowledge that hadst Thou done so, I should not have reason to complain of being treated unjustly. I should have richly deserved it. But O Spirit of meekness and love, deal not with me according to my deserts! Behold my heart is open to Thy divine light, ready to receive without exception all the truths Thou wilt teach me, and to practise them diligently! If my weak nature now and then contradicts Thy inspirations, on account of difficulties; do Thou, O Spirit of strength, drive on my obstinate and lazy will; leave me no rest until I have fulfilled Thy will in all things as far as it shall be made known to me; and grant that I may constantly walk in that way which by Thy light, will alone lead me where I can praise the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost forever. Amen.

¹ Replevit totam domum, ubi erant sedentes.—Acts ii. 2.

FORTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON REJECTING THE DIVINE INSPIRATIONS.

Subject.

It is a very dangerous thing not to obey and follow the divine inspirations; for to reject and disregard even one divine inspiration may be the occasion of eternal ruin.—*Preached on the feast of St. Andrew, Apostle.*

Text.

At illi continuo relictis retibus, secuti sunt eum.—Matth. iv. 20.
“And they immediately leaving their nets, followed him.”

Introduction.

Happy fishermen, who, being called by Christ, at once obeyed and followed Him! It was a twofold happiness for them; for, in the first place, they had to thank the special favor and affection with which Christ regarded them, for being called by Him without any merit of their own, and in preference to so many others, to be His Apostles. Again, that they obeyed the call so readily, and left their nets and followed Him, was due to a special efficacious grace, and also to their own co-operation; if this latter had been wanting, the former would not have helped them to attain that great happiness. For, had they not immediately obeyed the call of Christ, in all probability the grace would never have been offered them a second time, and they would have fared like the young man in the Gospel of St. Mark, of whom we read that Jesus cast an eye of favor on him too: “And Jesus looking on him, loved him, and said to him: One thing is wanting unto thee; go, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven; and come, follow me.”¹ But the young man was fond of his riches and could not make up his mind to part with them, so he went away sorrowful: “Who, being struck sad at that saying, went away sorrowful.”² Nor did he get another call, and so probably he was excluded from Heaven as Christ appears to indicate by what He said immediately after to His Apostles. “How hardly shall they that have riches enter

¹ *Jesus autem, intuitus eum, dilexit eum, et dixit ei. Unum tibi deest: vade, quæcumque habes vende, et da pauperibus, et habebis thesaurum in cælo, et veni, sequere me.*—Mark x. 21.

² *Qui contristatus in verbo, abiit mœrens.*—*Ibid.* 22.

into the kingdom of God.”¹ My dear brethren, God still cries out with an interior voice to the hearts of men and invites them to follow Him. Happy they who, like Peter and Andrew, at once obey the call! But on the other hand, how unfortunate they who reject the invitation and are deaf to the call! Nor do I speak now merely of the call to the true faith, or to the religious state; but of each and every divine inspiration by which we are inwardly impelled to do good or to avoid evil according to the divine will. Ah Christians, be careful of graces of that kind. See that you never deliberately reject them. And why? Because by rejecting them, you may cause your eternal ruin, as I now mean to prove.

Plan of Discourse.

It is a very dangerous thing not to obey and follow the divine inspirations; for to reject and disregard even one divine inspiration may be the occasion of eternal ruin. Such is the whole subject.

Christ Jesus, who with the words, “Follow me,” caused Peter and Andrew to come after Thee, give us all Thy powerful grace, that we may always follow Thy inspirations. This grace we ask of Thee through the merits of Mary and our holy angels guardian.

How and
whence the
divine in-
spirations
come.

An inspiration of God is nothing more than a sudden, unexpected enlightenment of the understanding, by which one knows that he can do something pleasing and grateful to his God, if he now performs or leaves undone a certain thing. And it is at the same time an impulse given to the will, by which one inwardly feels himself urged to do or to omit that thing. For instance; a man is in the state of sin, or is given to a certain vicious habit; a thought suddenly strikes him which disquiets and disturbs him. Oh, he thinks, it is time for me to change. I must go and confess my sins; I must give up that bad habit; I must leave the house in which I have committed so many sins, break off all connection with that person who has been a stumbling-block to me, restore what I have unjustly acquired, give up the habit of excessive drinking which has caused me so much harm, etc. Another has been hitherto very careless and cold in the service of God, and has been living according to the usages of the vain world; he too gets a sudden thought; life, he thinks, cannot go on forever like this, nor can this mode of living end well, for it certainly is not the narrow way of the Cross that leads to Heaven.

¹ *Quam difficile, qui pecunias habent, in regnum Dei introibunt.*—Mark x. 23.

I must make a general confession of my whole life, and live better in future. For the sake of God I will give up those luxurious habits which are so inconsistent with Christian modesty and humility. I will get up earlier in the morning and hear Mass every day; I will go to Confession and Communion every fortnight; I will be regular in hearing sermons in order that I may be impelled to do good; I will look more carefully after my children, etc. One who is still unmarried gets the idea of leaving this wretched world and serving God in the religious life; a thought that remains in his mind for a long time after he has duly pondered on it. I see a poor man, and am suddenly reminded of the duties of mercy and charity, and feel an impulse to give him an alms. I am sitting at table eating something I am very fond of, when I feel a sudden inclination to mortify myself and eat something else. I am very thirsty and am about to drink, when the thought occurs to me that I should wait a few minutes longer and mortify myself for God's sake. That was what David did once when he was very thirsty; he was fighting against the Philistines one very warm day, and overcome by the heat he cried out, "O that some man would give me a drink of the water out of the cistern that is in Bethlehem by the gate."¹ Three of his bravest soldiers hearing him express this wish, burst through the enemy's ranks and brought their king a draught of cool water. When David was about to drink, he hesitated for a moment, and, with the greatest self-denial, poured out the water on the ground without tasting it, and offered it to the Lord in spite of the thirst that oppressed him; "but he would not drink but offered it to the Lord."² I am lying in bed in the morning and intend to enjoy another hour of sweet sleep, when the thought strikes me that I ought to get up and give that hour to God. I am invited to meet pleasant company, when I recollect that it might be better for me to remain away so as to avoid the danger of sin. If I am actually in company and uncharitable conversation is being carried on, I am just on the point of joining in it, when something warns me to hold my tongue. I am in a passion and am about to revile the person who has vexed me, when I suddenly remember that such conduct is contrary to Christian meekness and charity. The same thought occurs to me when I am about to contradict others, etc. Curiosity drives

¹ O si quis mihi daret potum aquæ de cisterna, quæ est in Bethlehem juxta portam.—II. Kings xxiii. 15.

² At ille noluit bibere, sed libavit eam Domino.—Ibid. 16.

me to the window to find out the meaning of the noise I hear in the street, when I am on the point of going, something tells me that it would be better to remain where I am and mortify my curiosity for God's sake. In these and similar circumstances, when I feel an impulse to do something good and pleasing to God, or to avoid something evil and dangerous, I may, generally speaking, conclude that these impulses are so many inspirations from God. They come in two ways; either inwardly from God who is speaking immediately to the heart, or from our guardian angels who in the same way enlighten the understanding and excite the will; or else they come outwardly from hearing sermons, reading spiritual books and the Lives of the Saints, getting wholesome advice from one's confessor or friends, seeing the good example of others, being frightened at the unexpected death of a friend, or suffering misfortune or calamity, crosses or trials, by which many are induced to enter into themselves, to avoid evil and to do good.

To neglect such inspirations, may be the cause of eternal damnation; because thereby the good God is contemned.

Now, my dear brethren, it is a most dangerous thing to reject those inspirations and to refuse to follow them, no matter how they come; and deliberately to reject and despise a single inspiration, especially when it is clearly recognized as coming from God, may be the just cause and first and chief reason of an unhappy death and eternal damnation. Why so? First, because it implies a shameless contempt of the good God. Nothing causes more chagrin to a noble, generous and well-meaning man, than to see that people despise his benefits, and make little of his proffered favors; for it is quite evident that they who do so, have little respect for their benefactor himself. One who has any nobility of sentiment would rather be hated than despised; for hatred comes from the fear that the other has of being injured, or else from the desire of being revenged for some wrong; while he who is the object of contempt is simply looked down upon and scorned. It is often looked on as an honor to be feared; but to be despised is always considered an insult. Now, if men are so sensitive on this point, that they cannot bear themselves or their gifts to be scorned by others, how grievously must not the Almighty feel Himself insulted when a miserable worm of the earth treats Him with contempt, although He is jealous of His honor and glory? Now, good inspirations are graces that God offers to men, knocking at the door of their hearts, calling them and inviting them in a friendly manner either to abstain from evil, to avoid the present danger of sin, to begin to lead

better lives and thus to save their souls from hell; or else to do good, to advance in virtue and perfection, and thus to increase their merits and have a greater reward in Heaven. They are graces, and special graces too, which God is not bound to give to any one; graces that He does not offer to many thousands, but which He gives through special favor and mercy, in certain circumstances, to whom, when, how and where He wills. Therefore, to turn a deaf ear to those inspirations, to refuse to receive them, to reject them, or not to obey them, is equivalent to saying, Away with Thy graces, O God; I do not want them; I do not desire them; I know that Thou offerest them to me because Thou desirest to give me a special mark of Thy love; yet I will not have them; keep them for Thyself; I will not do as Thou wishest me. O my Lord and my God, says the royal Prophet, "Thou art terrible, and who shall resist Thee?"¹ No potentate of earth, no power of Heaven, no fury of hell can do it. But there is one thing that can resist the Almighty; and what is that? "The human heart," says Lorinus, writing of the seventy-fifth Psalm, "resists God, who touches it," with His divine inspirations when it rejects them and refuses to obey them.

And has not the sovereign Lord, who means so well to us, just reason to be angry at being treated in such a manner? Who ever heard of servants or subjects rejecting with contempt the favors offered them by their master or their king? If the master calls his servants, or merely gives them a sign, they are at once all eagerness to know what his wishes are and to fulfil them; but the great Monarch of Heaven, whose will is immutable, whose designs are inscrutable, whose decrees are infinitely wise and provident, who is all-powerful in accomplishing His will, and who is absolutely independent of the service of any creature, calls, invites, begs and entreats a mere mortal to do something for that mortal's own greater good and eternal salvation, and He cannot find a hearing! A wretched creature dares to turn his back on Him, and say, I do not wish to do what Thou now askest of me; Thou canst call and invite me as long as Thou wilt, I refuse to do in those circumstances what I know to be Thy will. Certainly no earthly master is treated with such contempt. It is God alone who is despised and insulted in that way by men. You can see now, my dear brethren, whether despising or rejecting the divine inspirations, is not a just reason why God, who is not in want of His creatures, should abandon the daring mortal

And He is
justly in-
censed
thereat.

¹ Tu terribilis es, et quis resistet tibi?—Ps. lxxv. 8.

who thus insults Him, and allow him to die an unhappy death.

Therefore
God with-
holds other
graces also.

Again, although it is not always sinful in itself to reject the divine inspirations, since they are not commandments of God, and therefore disobedience to them cannot be the immediate cause of an unhappy death; yet it can prepare the way for future sins and for final impenitence, just as deliberate venial sins do; because as a punishment for despising His grace, God may withdraw the graces He had in store as a reward for co-operating with those already given, so that thus a man becomes unable to fight against temptation and falls into mortal sin. Let no one say then, that it is no great harm to reject an inspiration now and then, since those inspirations do not bind under sin. True, they do not bind under sin; but what can you expect if you despise the grace which you know very well came from God, and if you refuse to do the service He expects from you?

Shown by
similes.

A traveller does no wrong by lying down to rest under the shade of a tree; but, he thinks, if I remain here I will not get on towards the end of my journey before night. Still a second thought occurs to him, it is no harm for me to rest awhile; it will be time enough for me to continue my journey when I am quite rested. Meanwhile the day is declining and the evening coming on, so that when he eventually prosecutes his journey, what are the consequences? It is quite dark, he has no light to guide him, and he is in imminent danger of losing his way, or of being attacked by robbers or devoured by wild beasts. Such may be the consequences of his laziness, although he was under no obligation to go on. The sailor who is about to cross the ocean, does no wrong by not taking immediate advantage of a favorable wind that happens to be blowing. But what may follow from the delay? That the wind may cease to be favorable, so that he will not be able to set sail, or that he will be blown about by contrary winds and dashed on the rocks and wrecked. The pearl-oyster is not bound to open its shell in the morning to receive the dew-drop. But if it remains closed, what follows? It will be unfruitful, because it cannot form the precious pearl that it could have formed by receiving the dew-drop. What is a divine inspiration, my dear brethren? It is a heavenly dew, by which God intends forming in your soul, O man, a costly pearl of virtue. It is a favorable wind that blows you along gently over the dangerous sea of this world, and brings you safe to the harbor of eternal glory. It is the light of the Sun of justice which shines on your soul, so that you may walk

more securely on the way of salvation and avoid mortal sin. If you do not accept this light and it goes out, if you do not profit by the favorable wind, if you close your heart against the heavenly dew, it is true you do not always commit a sin thereby, but what may be the consequences? Oh what fearful loss and injury to your soul! What lamentable falls in temptations! And what a deplorable shipwreck at the end!

Consider the case of the Apostle St. Thomas; to deny that Jesus Christ was really risen from the dead, after He who is the infallible Truth and Wisdom had so often and emphatically foretold it, is a manifest sin of unbelief; to deny it in presence of the other Apostles who assert that they have seen the Lord and spoken with Him, is a sin of pride and obstinacy; to protest deliberately that he will not believe it unless he sees Christ and puts his finger in His wounds, is a sin of presumption; to remain in that unbelief for a whole week in spite of what the other Apostles and the holy women said to him to convince him of the truth of the resurrection, is a fearful sin of stubbornness and obduracy. Such was the abyss into which an Apostle of Christ so lamentably fell. What was the cause of his fall? His having rejected one single divine inspiration by absenting himself from the society of the other Apostles when Christ appeared to them; "Now, Thomas, one of the twelve, who is called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came."¹ If he had not separated himself from the holy company, if he had obeyed the good inspiration, he would have had the same happiness as the other Apostles, that of seeing Christ in person, and would have been saved from all those sins, which afterwards cost him such bitter tears of sorrow and repentance.

By the fall
of the
Apostle, St.
Thomas.

O Christian, you are often aware of a divine inspiration urging you to hear Mass on a week-day when you have time, or to hear a sermon or attend public devotions on a Sunday or a holy-day; but through fear of the slight mortification and difficulty there is in obeying it, or because the weather is too cold, or too warm, or too damp, or because you persuade yourself you have something to do at home, although you could easily put it off to some other time, or because you are engaged in some unnecessary conversation for the sake of pleasing men, or simply because you are too lazy, you put the thought out of your head and stay at home. You are often aware of a good inspiration urging you to

They who
reject the
divine in-
spirations,
must bear a
similar fall.

¹ Thomas autem unus ex duodecim, qui dicitur Didymus, non erat cum eis quando venit Jesus.—John xx. 24.

go to Confession and Communion on a Sunday or feast-day, so as to gain an indulgence; but the tempter puts all kinds of difficulties in your way, and you reject the thought. What is the result of your doing so? True, you do not commit a sin by not hearing Mass, or going to the devotion, or the sermon, or by not confessing or communicating; nor did St. Thomas sin when he absented himself from the common prayer of the other Apostles; but what will be the result of your rejecting the inspiration? You deliberately deprive yourself of the light and knowledge that God had prepared for you if you had heard the sermon, in which He would have shown you the deformity of this or that vice, so that you might repent of it, or avoid it, or else would have encouraged you to practise some virtue or good work; you deliberately deprive yourself of the special grace and help which He had determined to give you in the Holy Mass, or in Confession and Communion, or in the public devotion, in order to strengthen you against temptations and dangers of sin. And what then? Alas, the first occasion you meet with, the first temptation that assails you, you will fall miserably into sin! One sin will bring on another, until the habit of sin becomes inveterate, after that the conscience grows callous, final impenitence follows, and what can be the end of it all but an unhappy death? See, that is what comes of rejecting deliberately the divine inspirations.

Because they thus destroy the order of the graces that God had prepared for them.

To make this still clearer, mark, my dear brethren, what theologians, following St. Augustine and St. Thomas, the Angel of the Schools, teach of predestination or the selection of those who are destined for eternal happiness; they say that, if we consider it as a special favor and benefit conferred on men by God, it consists in the preparation and determination of a chain, as it were, of graces with which God has foreseen that a certain individual will do good and persevere in the state of grace to the end of his life. Now, the All-wise and most just God has not decreed to give these graces in order to each one unconditionally; for to many of them He has attached a certain condition, namely, that the individual to whom a grace is given in certain circumstances, corresponds with it; if that condition is fulfilled, He will give other graces with which that individual will be enabled to work out his salvation; if it is not fulfilled, if the first grace is despised and rejected, then God will withhold the other special graces that He had determined to give one after the other, until the death of that individual. If you take a link out of the centre of a chain, you break the chain so that it no longer hangs to-

gether; in the same way it may happen that if one grace offered by God is rejected, the whole chain of graces falls to pieces. Since, therefore, no man can know what are the inscrutable decrees of God in his regard, and what order of graces is determined for him, it follows necessarily that it is a most dangerous thing to reject even one divine inspiration, especially when one clearly recognizes it as such; because the consequence of rejecting it may be eternal damnation. In that sense what the holy Fathers say is true, namely, that our salvation, or our damnation depends on a very little. A single good inspiration that we receive and obey with a great amount of self-denial, may be the occasion of our salvation and future happiness in Heaven; a single good inspiration that we clearly acknowledge as such, but despise and reject, may be the beginning of a vicious life and the occasion of our eternal damnation.

That was the reason why our Lord wept so bitterly when, looking on the city of Jerusalem, He predicted its temporal and eternal destruction: "And when he drew near," says St. Luke, "seeing the city, he wept over it, saying: if thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace; but now, . . . the days shall come upon thee, and thy enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and straiten thee on every side; and beat thee flat to the ground, and thy children who are in thee, and they shall not leave in thee a stone upon a stone." Why? "Because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation."¹ That, too, was the reason why our Lord gave such little hope of salvation for that young man, whom, as we have seen in the beginning of the sermon, He invited to sell all he had and to follow Him, but who rejected the invitation and went away sorrowful. Although he had observed all the commandments of God from his youth upwards, yet it appears that he was lost, because our Lord said immediately after, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God."²

Menochius writes of another young man, named John, who was called by divine inspiration to enter the Cistercian order, and had actually made up his mind to do so; but after a time his zeal grew cold, and he abandoned the idea of becoming a

As appears
from Sacred
Scripture.

Shown by
an example.

¹ Ut appropinquabit, videns civitatem flevit super illam, dicens: Quia si cognovisses et tu, et quidem in hac die tua, quæ ad pacem tibi, . . . venient dies in te. et circumdabunt te inimici tui vallo, et circumdabunt te, et coangustabunt te undique, et ad terram prosterent te, et filios tuos, qui in te sunt, et non relinquent in te lapidem super lapidem, eo quod non cognoveris tempus visitationis tuæ.—Luke xix. 41-44.

² Quam difficile, qui pecunias habent, in regnum Dei introibunt.—Mark x. 23.

religious. I can save my soul in the world, he thought, and like so many others, lead a good and holy life and thus gain Heaven. Acting on this idea, he redoubled instead of lessening his works of devotion, and set out on a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Apostle, St. James, at Compostella, in order to obtain the grace of perseverance in piety. After he had finished his devotions at the shrine, he saw in a vision Christ our Lord, accompanied by St. Peter and St. James, holding in His hand an exceedingly beautiful book in which John's name was written with golden letters. As we may readily imagine, John was delighted at seeing his name written in the Book of Life; but to his great alarm he heard our Lord say to St. Peter, "Blot his name out of my Book, because he has not been faithful to his resolution."¹ "I beg of Thee, O Lord," said St. James, "spare him because he is a pilgrim of mine;"² he will be obedient to Thy inspiration and I will answer for him. The vision then vanished, and John full of fear and anxiety, at once entered the holy order to which God had called him, and lived therein a holy life. Mark this example, my dear brethren; to have obeyed the inspiration calling him to religion, meant for that young man the keeping his name in the Book of Life; while not to have obeyed it meant having his name blotted out of that Book, and losing his soul consequently. It is a well-known fact in the life of the wonderful Saint Teresa, that Christ once showed her the place that was appointed for her amongst the demons in hell, if she had not obeyed a certain inspiration she received in her youth, urging her to give up a certain vanity, an act of renouncement that she was encouraged to perform by a salutary thought that at the time made a vivid impression on her.

Prayer for
pardon for
faults of
this kind,
and resolu-
tion of
amend-
ment.

The conclusion of all this is evident; to reject and despise a divine inspiration, once we recognize it as such, may justly be the cause of an unhappy death and the eternal damnation that must follow. Alas, my Lord and my God, since that is so, woe to me! What will become of me, who have so often put away out of my mind Thy salutary inspirations, as soon as I noticed them, and have so often neglected to hearken to Thy invitations, although I recognized them well enough? How often has not a clear light been given to me that I might see the danger of certain attachments and renounce them, that I might avoid that dangerous company, abandon that worldly vanity, reform that

¹ Dele nomen ejus de libro meo, quoniam resiliit a proposito suo.—Menoch. miscell., part 3, § 317.

² Obsecro Domine, parce illi quia peregrinus meus est, ego fide jussor illius sum

abuse, renounce gambling, calm my uneasy conscience by a general confession, live more in conformity with Thy humble, and holy Gospel, receive the sacraments more frequently, be more regular in hearing Thy word in sermons? but my rebellious will has always resisted Thy fatherly invitations. How often have I not received inspirations urging me to moderate my love of sleep, and to rise earlier in the morning, to make a better use of the precious time given me for the sole purpose of working out my salvation, to turn away my eyes from dangerous objects, to mortify my sensuality and the desires of the flesh, to moderate my anger, to restrain my talkative and uncharitable tongue in company, to be more generous to the poor and needy, to practise the works of Christian charity when the opportunity was given, and to bear patiently for Thy sake the difficulties of my state of life, and the trials and crosses Thou hast sent me? And yet I have not done so. I have despised and neglected all those graces; which, if I had followed, since they came from Thy special favor to me, oh, what great merits I might have gained for my soul, how many beautiful virtues I might have acquired, how many eternal joys I might have heaped up in Heaven, which are now irretrievably lost to me. Woe to me, if Thou wilt hereafter reproach me with this neglect! What will then become of me? How can I hope to obtain the grace of perseverance, which I cannot merit by any good work, if during my life I have rejected and despised so many graces that thou hast offered me with such goodness? What am I to do? Must I despair of my salvation? No; O Lord, I beg of Thee spare me, do not blot my name out of the Book of Life, although I deserve that punishment; have mercy on my poor soul! I did not know that it was such a dangerous thing to reject Thy inspirations; now that I know better, I will amend my conduct in this respect; I will be more attentive in listening to and obeying Thy calls, and I will not allow one of them to escape me without profiting by it. Thou art my sovereign Lord and God, and I am Thy lowliest servant depending on Thee for everything. It is for Thee to command, and for me to obey Thee in all things. "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."¹ Speak to my heart, and by Thy holy inspirations make me to know Thy will; but give me at the same time Thy powerful grace, that I may fulfil Thy will and pleasure, and thus make sure of living a Christian life, dying a happy death, and enjoying eternal happiness with Thee in Heaven. Amen.

¹ Loquere, Domine, quia audit servus tuus.—I. Kings iii. 10.

FORTY-FOURTH SERMON.

**ON THOSE WHO REFUSE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE DIVINE
INSPIRATIONS.**

Subject.

Many, especially tepid Christians, generally reject good thoughts with contempt, because they are unwilling to recognize them as divine inspirations; others, who are indiscreetly pious, look on all their apparently good thoughts as divine inspirations; both are wrong.—*Preached on the feast of the Epiphany.*

Text.

Vidimus enim stellam ejus in oriente, et venimus adorare eum.
—Matth. ii. 2.

“For we have seen his star in the East, and are come to adore him.”

Introduction.

But were these three wise kings the only persons who saw that extraordinary star in the East? No; that is hardly likely; for since the star shone brightly in the heavens, there can be no doubt that others saw and admired it. Nor is it less certain that the three wise men were not the only ones in their country who looked on the star as a sure sign that the Saviour of the world was born. Why then were those three the only ones who came to Bethlehem? Why did not a great many people accompany them in order to see their Saviour and pay Him due homage? They certainly would have received great graces from Jesus if they had done so. Doubtless if they had clearly known who the great Lord was who was inviting them by the star, many of them would have undertaken the journey; but it was with them, as it often is nowadays with us in similar circumstances. Most of them did not believe that the star was a sign of the birth of the Redeemer; others, although they had been told the meaning of the sign by the wise men, were unwilling to expose themselves to the danger of being deceived by what they considered a doubtful sign, and so they would not leave their homes to undertake such a long and uncertain journey in the winter season. The three kings alone, with their attendants, acknowledged the truth fully, and despising all the difficulties that might lie in their way, de-

terminated on setting out in search of the Saviour, whose birth was clearly indicated to them by the star, no matter in what part of the world He might be. Thus they alone had the rare happiness of seeing Him: "We have seen His star," they said, "and are come to adore Him." My dear brethren, a divine star shines on us from Heaven, as often as God urges us to do good by the inward inspirations He gives us; would that we were always like the three kings, ready to follow that star! What great treasures of grace would then be ours! But, generally speaking, we are like the people in the East, we pay little attention to those inspirations, and through fear of the slight difficulty we might find in doing the good to which they urge us, we reject them or refuse to believe in them. I have already explained to you that this is a most dangerous proceeding, because the neglect of a single divine inspiration may be the cause of an unhappy death and eternal damnation. The next important thing to know, is how to find out when we must look on good thoughts as divine inspirations. The apparent doubt that might arise on this point is occasioned by a great mistake on the part of two different classes of men.

Plan of Discourse.

The first, who are the most numerous, especially amongst tepid Christians, generally reject good thoughts with contempt, because they are unwilling to recognize them as divine inspirations. The others, who endeavor to be pious, but who are indiscreet, are too ready to obey, because they look on all their apparently good thoughts as divine inspirations. Both are wrong; but the fault of the former is much more grievous and inexcusable than that of the latter. Both these faults will form the subject of the present instruction. The conclusion for the former will be, that by thus rejecting the divine inspirations, they place themselves in danger of an unhappy death and eternal damnation.

But, O dear Saviour, do Thou preserve us all from such a misfortune, and let the star of Thy grace shine on us; this we beg of Thee through the merits of Mary and our holy angels guardian, that we may always hearken to Thy voice and follow Thy star.

First, then, there are many who reject and despise good inspirations because they neither recognize nor wish to recognize them as stars of grace shining from Heaven and sent by the good God; when, as we have seen in the last sermon, they are aware of an inward impulse to do this or that good work, to go to

Many do not wish to recognize good thoughts as divine inspirations.

public devotions or to hear a sermon, to keep away from that house or that company, to restrain their anger, to abstain from uncharitable conversation, to give alms to the poor, to renounce that worldly vanity, to mortify themselves in this or that particular, etc. Oh, they think, how do we know where those thoughts come from? How can we tell whether they are from God or some other source? He who is too ready to believe may easily be deceived. The matter must be well looked into first. I must see whether it suits me, my disposition, and my position in life, to do such a thing; otherwise, I should have enough to do to follow every fancy I get. I cannot be certain that it is an inspiration from God, etc. Thus all inspirations, without distinction are immediately rejected, no matter how the conscience objects to the proceeding.

That comes from self-love and fear of difficulties.

This is a deceit practised by self-love, which comes either from fear of the difficulty and mortification in following the good inspiration, or from human respect, which must be overcome, in order to do the good or to avoid the evil proposed, or else it arises from sensuality and love of ease, which would be interfered with by hearkening to the good inspiration. This self-love and fear of difficulties goes so far with some, that they are afraid to mention their doubts to their confessor or others, who know more about the matter than themselves, and they dread asking advice lest they should be told that the inspiration comes from God, and so be obliged to do something opposed to their natural inclinations. If they are exhorted in the confessional or in a sermon to do something which is against their will, instead of looking on that exhortation as a divine inspiration, they act like the friends and sons-in-law of Lot in Sodom, when the latter warned them to leave the doomed city: "So Lot went out," says the Holy Scripture, "and spoke to his sons-in-law, that were to have his daughters, and said: Arise, get you out of this place, because the Lord will destroy this city."¹ And what did they do? They began to laugh at him and treated the whole matter as a joke: "And he seemed to them to speak, as it were, in jest."² In the same way, I say those Christians act who have a certain wish and desire to serve God and save their souls; but they wish to serve Him in a manner suitable to their own tastes and inclinations, and not as He tells them that He wishes to

¹ Egressus itaque Lot, locutus est ad generos suos, qui accepturi erant filias ejus, et dixit: Surgite, egredimini de loco isto: quia delebit Dominus civitatem hanc.—Gen. xix. 14.

² Et visus est eis quasi ludens loqui.—Ibid.

be served so that they may save their souls; they are unwilling to do violence to their evil inclinations, in order to gain Heaven, although Jesus Christ says that it is to be gained only by great labor and mortification: "The kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away."¹ If they hear a voice from Heaven speaking by the mouth of a preacher or their confessor, advising and warning them to change their mode of life, to renounce that custom which is unbecoming to a good Christian, etc., they look upon it in the light of a jest; they say it is the mere fancy and frightened imagination of the priests, who know a good deal about their Breviary, but very little about the way in which men of the world have to live; and it would be a fine to-do if people had to conform in every little thing to the advice of the priests. Afterwards when they go into the company of kindred spirits, they laugh at the whole affair, and try to quiet their consciences by the approval of others.

But I hope that at the end of their lives they will not fare like the sons-in-law of Lot, who, after they had laughed at his friendly warning, were suddenly consumed by fire from Heaven, and hurled from temporal into eternal fire. At all events, it is very dangerous thus to despise the good inspirations and graces that God sends in that manner, and to pay no attention to them; the good inspirations and graces, I say, that God sends; because thoughts of that kind urging to good can, generally speaking, come from no other source but God. How so? Mark well what I am now about to say, my dear brethren. The thoughts and movements of our minds come from three sources; either from our own nature, or from the devil and his followers, or from God by means of the holy angels guardian.

Now I ask you in the first place; is it likely that movements and thoughts which tend to keep you away from evil, to exhort you to good, and urge you to restrain an evil inclination, to mortify sensuality and the desires of the flesh, to avoid worldly vanity, to fly the dangerous occasions of sin, to renounce bad company, to change and amend your life; is it likely, is it even credible that thoughts of that kind can come from our own nature, which is so woefully corrupted and inclined to all sorts of evil on account of the sin of our forefather Adam that we bring into the world with us? A nature that always seeks its own ease and comfort? A nature that avoids all discomfort, mortification, crosses and trials so carefully? Can a nature of that

And is very dangerous to the soul.

Those thoughts cannot come from our own nature.

¹ Regnum cœlorum vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud.—Matth. xi. 12.

84 *Refusing to acknowledge Divine Inspirations.*

kind exhort a man, and by actually making him uneasy, urge him to do things that are contrary and difficult to itself? No, that is neither likely nor credible, but is, so to speak, a natural impossibility.

Nor from
the devil.

I ask again, is it likely that those thoughts and inspirations come from the evil spirit, the devil? No indeed; that would be a strange quarter from which to expect help in the salvation of our souls! That rebel and enemy of God, who has sworn eternal hatred against the Almighty, how could he try to extend and increase the honor and glory of God, by inspiring men to do good works? That arch-enemy of souls, who, wherever he finds fruitful ground, is bent on sowing tares in it, that, as the Gospel says, will afterwards be tied up in bundles and burned; how could he endeavor to sow the good seed, which may bring forth a hundredfold that shall be hereafter gathered into the heavenly granary? That fierce lion who goes about seeking whom he may devour, how could he change so completely as to act the part of a good shepherd of souls, to lead them on to the right path, and exhort them to continue in it? That tyrant Pharaoh, who uses all possible means to enslave the people of God and keep them under his yoke; how could he exhort souls to fly the servitude of Egypt, to shun the dangerous customs of the world, and to enter on the narrow path of penance in order to escape hell? That accursed prince of darkness, as St. Paul calls him, who blinds the human reason that it may not see what is an evident occasion of eternal ruin; he who hardens the will and makes it obstinate in evil so that it may continue therein without repentance and amendment, how could he send forth rays of salutary light to enlighten men that they may not miss the road that leads to Heaven? In a word you feel yourself urged to repress anger, vindictiveness and the desires of the flesh, to renounce idleness, luxury and dangerous society, to avoid evil, to do good, to amend your life, to overcome yourself, to please God; can thoughts of that kind possibly come from the devil, the cruel enemy of your soul? No; neither from him, nor from our own nature can such movements of the mind be expected.

But from
God; and
therefore
they must
not be
despised.

Therefore they can have no other origin but the all-wise and truthful Spirit of God, who is interested in the salvation of your soul, and who in that way invites you to enter on the path that leads to His kingdom. Why, do you hesitate, O man, asks St. Bernard, as to whether you shall follow inspirations or not? "The angel of the great council is calling you; why do you wait

to take counsel from another?"¹ Why do you wait so long, and spend so much time in considering where the voice comes from? The great God offers you His help and grace; so that, if you despise His inspirations as mere fancies and empty imaginations, you despise God Himself, while He is in the very act of helping you, in preference to so many others, to your eternal salvation.

But, you say, that good thought and inspiration, that movement and impulse given to my heart, I felt when listening to a sermon, or meditating, or reading a pious book, or considering the example given by a good Christian, or after having heard of the sudden death of a neighbor, or experienced some temporal misfortune or calamity, etc. These are not divine, but purely natural voices and inspirations, and they come from men or from other creatures. Do you then mean to say that you will not acknowledge a divine inspiration, until you hear the voice of God speaking to your ears in a sensible manner? or until an angel comes down from Heaven to make known the divine will to you? If so, you will have to wait a long time! Men who speak to you, the good example you see, the good books you read, the terrible accidents you hear of, the calamities you experience, and other natural circumstances, are, you must know, but instruments which the all-wise God makes use of to knock at the doors of our hearts by His inspirations, and to declare to us His holy will and pleasure. What was the origin of the sanctity of the holy hermit St. Antony, or of the Seraphic Father St. Francis, but the reading of the Gospel during Mass? Where did the holiness of that great Doctor of the Church, St. Augustine, come from? Was it not from reading accidentally the Epistles of St. Paul? Did not the holiness of St. Nicholas of Tolentino come from hearing the word of God in a sermon? That of St. Francis Borgia, from seeing the putrefying body of the empress Isabella? That of St. Ignatius, from reading the Lives of the Saints, which in default of a profane book that he had asked for, was brought to him as he lay on a sick-bed? The sanctity of so many others, who were suddenly changed from being vain children of the world, into poor, humble religious of the most austere orders, where did it come from? Was it not from some sudden calamity, or from being put to shame in some trivial matter before the world? To say nothing of other examples, such was the case with St. Gonsalvus of the

God speaks
to our
hearts by
natural
means.

¹ *Vocat magni concilii Angelus; quid aliena consilia præstolaris?*—S. Bern. *Serm. super Ecce nos reliquimus.*

order of St. Dominic; when he was a young man, he was once riding at full gallop through the streets of the town, when his horse stumbled and to the great amusement of those who were looking on, threw him head foremost into a heap of mud. This accident, and the shame it caused him was the beginning of eternal happiness for Gonsalvus; for, as he lay in the mud, he thought to himself: Is this the way you treat me, O false world? You have served me a scurvy trick, but you shall pay for it; whereupon he left the world and entered the order of St. Dominic. If all these saints had looked on all those movements of their hearts as mere natural thoughts and despised and rejected them as empty fancies, would they have led such holy lives? Perhaps they would have caused the loss of their own souls and the souls of many others also. For instance, if St. Ignatius had not followed the inspiration he got when reading the Lives of the Saints, he would not have founded the Society of Jesus; and then, O great St. Francis Xavier, you would not have been converted and chosen for such a great mission, nor would so many hundred thousands of souls in India and Japan have been baptized and brought to the Catholic faith; nor would so many heretics have been converted, nor so many books have been written, nor so many schools opened for the eternal welfare of souls. In a word, so many souls would not have gone to Heaven, and would have been lost forever. See, my dear brethren, how much depends on obeying or rejecting a single inspiration sent by God.

Still, in weighty matters we must not take every thought that occurs to us, as a divine inspiration.

Still I acknowledge the truth of what St. John says in his First Epistle: "Dearly beloved believe not every spirit," that is, according to the commentators, believe not every inspiration; "but try the spirits if they be of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world."¹ I acknowledge that not every thought that occurs to us, and which has the appearance of being good, should be looked on at once as a divine inspiration; I acknowledge too, that the spirit of darkness, the sworn enemy of souls, sometimes transforms himself into an angel of light, and thus deceives men. Such is the case especially with regard to sudden resolutions following on inspirations that concern matters of great importance and long duration, as for example, the choice of a state of life, on which, generally speaking, the whole life of a man, and his happiness or misery for eternity depend.

¹ Carissimi, nolite omni spiritul credere, sed probate spiritus, si ex Deo sint, quoniam multi pseudoprophetæ exierunt in mundum.—I. John iv. 1.

If one is too hasty in a matter of this kind, and follows the first thought that occurs to him, even if it leads him to the holiest state, or if he is too hasty in binding himself by vow to some duty or obligation that it will take a long time to fulfil, or if he undertakes devotions and good works that interfere with the fulfilment of the ordinary duties of his state, he may make a great mistake. As for example, if servant-maids, or others who, by divine decree, have to work hard for daily bread, were to spend the whole forenoon or the half of it in the church hearing Masses, or at home praying, reading spiritual books, and meditating, in-consequence of some thought that occurred to them which they took as a divine inspiration, although in reality by following it they neglect the duties of their state and so do not fulfil the will of God; or if pious works are undertaken which hinder greater good from being done, such as for instance, indiscreet austerities, long vigils, fasting, chastising the body in such a way as to injure the health and make one incapable of serving God in greater and more laborious things; or if works of piety are undertaken that involve dangerous occasions of sin and temptation, such as a pilgrimage to some distant shrine; oh, how many return from such pilgrimages with their consciences laden with sin, who were innocent when they set out! One must not be over ready to believe in these and similar inspirations, nor to act on them blindly; but should first ask counsel from God and from an experienced confessor before coming to any determination with regard to them.

They err in this respect who look on all their fancies and imaginations as heavenly stars and divine inspirations; and who are obstinate in following their own ideas with regard to devotions. If such persons are advised by their confessor, or by some friend who understands the matter, not to practise those devotions, they get angry and accuse their confessor or friend of trying to hinder them from doing good, or practising piety, etc. There is no use in arguing with them; they are firmly persuaded that God must approve of whatever they themselves invent in the way of piety; and if they do not hear the three or four Masses they have prescribed for themselves, or visit the different churches, or say the vocal prayers to the last syllable, or go on the pilgrimages, or join in the processions they have determined on, or if they do not fast till evening on the days they have fixed, they think that all is lost, and they are quite inconsolable. Otherwise they are not at all concerned by the fact that their

Many err
in this particular.

obstinacy in those devotions hinders them from performing their duty; nor do they think of mortifying their passions and evil inclinations in accordance with the inspirations that God really sends them. In fact, since they are so bent on doing things according to their own ideas, they are all the less likely to do the will of God, and, in the long run, they will find that they have been deceived by the devil and by their own self-love.

And are of-
ten deceived
by the
devil:
shown by
an example.

Balladinus relates out of the Annals of the Friars Minor, an instance of a certain novice who used to follow his own ideas with regard to the practice of virtue and the study of perfection, without ever consulting his superiors or his confessor. Every whim that entered his head he looked on as a divine inspiration, if it had only the least appearance of good, and he followed it without delay. That was a fine opportunity for the devil, who was not slow to profit by it; for he began to appear to the novice in visible shape, but always with a heavenly beauty as if he were the Blessed Mother of God herself. The foolish young man allowed himself to be deceived to such an extent that he really believed that it was the Blessed Virgin who deigned to appear to him; for he did not think that the repeated exhortations he received in each apparition to chastise his body, could come from the evil spirit. Therefore the disguised spirit spoke to him only of great austerities, terrible scourgings and fearful torturings of the body. The poor young man obeyed punctually all the directions he received, and scourged himself daily until the blood flowed in torrents. The tempter also suggested fasting to him, and the consequence was that he abstained from all food and drink for several days. The whole design of the pretended heavenly messenger was simply to so injure the novice's health, that he would be turned out of the order as unfit, or else would have to receive extraordinary care on account of his delicate health. Nor would the tempter have failed to secure his object, had he not gone too far on one occasion. For the young man at last got so foolish that he determined to nail himself to a cross, so as to resemble his crucified Redeemer. He made a cross, therefore, stretched himself out on it, and seizing a heavy hammer, nailed one foot to it; but the wound he thus inflicted on himself was so severe, that he fainted. His moans and the noise he made attracted the attention of the other religious, who ran up at once and found him bathed in blood. They released him from the cross, and with a great deal of trouble succeeded in healing his wound. On his recovery the

novice found out how he had been betrayed by the crafty tempter, and he resolved never to follow any such inspirations in future without asking advice.

How many out of an indiscreet zeal bind themselves to all sorts of pious works, such as almsgiving, fasting and processions, by promises and vows, which they break afterwards when their zeal grows cold, and thus commit mortal sin in the state of which they remain for years! How many there are who rashly determine to enter some strict religious order, and who afterwards return to the world perhaps after having made their vows, and having thus become renegades from religion, lead godless lives and die unhappy deaths! Therefore in inspirations of that kind the safest plan is not to follow one's own idea, but to ask counsel from God in long and humble prayer and to seek the advice of a learned, pious and experienced confessor. By practising obedience in that way we are far surer of doing the will of God; since Christ Himself has said of all superiors, both lay and ecclesiastical, as well as of parents, pastors of souls and confessors: "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me."¹ "Consult prudent men," said God once to a religious who was engaged in prayer, "and do as they tell you."² In that way, besides the merit of the good work, although it may not have been as successful as we intended, there is the great merit of renouncing and acting contrary to one's own will and inclination.

Hence in such cases, one should ask advice from his confessor.

With regard to other movements of the soul and impulses to good, which do not involve long, uncertain and dangerous obligations, and which concern daily events in our lives, such as going to confession and recovering the state of grace as soon as possible when one is in mortal sin; changing one's mode of life, when one knows well that a change would be for the better; beginning to lead a more perfect life and one more in accordance with the precepts of the Gospel; frequently hearing the Word of God in sermons, avoiding dangerous company, mortifying the eyes and the other senses, restraining talkativeness, yielding to those who now and then contradict us, temperance in eating and drinking, and abstaining from some favorite morsel; overcoming sensuality by not indulging in too much sleep; renouncing a certain worldly vanity, etc., in these and similar cases I say, we can and should at once follow any inspirations we get,

Not to follow other good inspirations is very dangerous.

¹ Qui vos audit, me audit, qui vos spernit, me spernit.—Luke x. 16.

² Consule discretos viros, et acquiesce illis.

certain that we shall act well and please God by so doing, and that we do not incur the least danger of sin ; because such inspirations can come only from God through the good angels ; and to refuse to recognize them as divine, and to reject them out of sensuality, fear of difficulty, or human respect, means simply to despise God, to drive Him away from our hearts, and to treat Him with a contemptuous indifference at the very moment when He offers us His grace and invites us in the most friendly manner to accept it ; and therefore it means placing one's self in danger of being abandoned in the hour of death by the God who has been so insulted, as we have seen in the last sermon.

Because
by rejecting
them, one
makes him-
self un-
worthy of
the last
grace of
final per-
severance.

In confirmation of this I must now remind you of a most important fact, namely, that the grace of perseverance or of a happy death, is nothing but a special inspiration and illumination which God gives the soul as a mark of special favor and good will, so as to enlighten the mind and give the will additional strength in the last fight against temptation, and to confirm the soul in the love of God that it may give itself up into the hands of its Creator in the state of grace when it leaves the body. This grace, as theologians teach, no man can merit, no matter how innocent and holy he may be, by all the good works he does during his whole life ; not that the good works we do in the state of sanctifying grace and with a supernatural intention, are not of such value in themselves as to merit that final grace ; but because the whole merit of all our good works goes to increase sanctifying grace here, and eternal glory hereafter, so that the great grace of perseverance must be obtained by humble prayer and a zealous fulfilment of the divine will. Now, if a man has habitually despised and neglected the divine inspirations and graces during his life, how can he, without presumption, expect that God will give him that great and final grace which He is bound to give to no one ? Even the holiest and most zealous servants of God, who always tried to find out the divine will and to fulfil it with the utmost exactness, have nevertheless acknowledged with fear and trembling, that they required great mercy and favor on the part of God to obtain the grace of perseverance at the end of their lives. How then can they, who nearly always give way to their evil inclinations, and who constantly stop their ears so as not to hear the voice of God calling to them, and reject the graces He offers them during life, how can they expect that at the end of their lives He will force upon them an extraordinary light and grace, that they may die well

and happily? Ah, who does not see that at least they run great danger of being deceived in their presumptuous expectations?

Hear what Eliu, a friend of Job, says of the just God: "He also shall open their ear, to correct them and shall speak, that they may return from iniquity; if they shall hear and observe they shall accomplish their days in good, and their years in glory."¹ "But if they hear not," if they do not pay attention to My voice, nor obey it, what then? how will it be with them? "They shall be consumed in folly; their soul shall die in a storm."² That is, as commentators say, they will die an unhappy and premature death. Mark the words, "they shall be consumed in folly," my dear brethren. How so? Just as fools and madmen despise others, even the cleverest men, and are laughed at and ridiculed by the latter in return; so God will reject and treat with contempt at the end of their lives, those who rejected and despised His inspirations and graces during life. "Turn ye at My reproof," says God by the Wise Man, and if you refuse to do so, "behold I will utter My spirit to you, and will shew you My words. Because I called and you refused; I stretched out My hand and there was none that regarded; you have despised all My counsel, and have neglected My reprehensions."³ I have spoken to you so often, but you did not wish to recognize My voice; I have freely offered you, in preference to many others, and with the best intentions towards you, manifold graces, and you have despised and neglected them; but I will have satisfaction for that. "I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock. . . when sudden calamity shall fall on you and destruction as a tempest shall be at hand; when tribulation and distress shall come upon you. Then shall they call upon Me and I will not hear; because they have hated instruction, and received not the fear of the Lord, nor consented to My counsel,"⁴ when I made known My will to them by My salutary inspirations.

God threatens such people with destruction

¹ Revelabit quoque aurem eorum, ut corripiat: et loquetur, ut revertantur ab iniquitate. Si audierint et observaverint, complebunt dies suos in bono, et annos suos in gloria.—Job xxxvi. 10-11.

² Si autem non audierint, consumentur in stultitia; morietur in tempestate anima eorum.—Ibid. 12, 14.

³ Convertimini ad correptionem meam: en, proferam vobis spiritum meum, et ostendam vobis verba mea. Quia vocavi, et renuistis: extendi manum meam, et non fuit, qui aspiiceret. Despexistis omne consilium meum, et increpationes meas neglexistis.—Prov. i. 23-25.

⁴ Ego quoque in interitu vestro ridebo, et subsannabo, . . . cum irruerit repentina calamitas, et interitus quasi tempestas ingruerit; quando venerit super vos tribulatio, et angustia: tunc invocabunt me, et non exaudiam; . . . eo quod exosam habuerint disciplinam, et timorem Domini non susceperint, nec acqleverint consilio meo.—Ibid. 26-30.

Confirmed
by an ex-
ample.

The Venerable Bede, in the 5th. Book of his history of England, relates that he knew a certain lay brother, who was very clever and skillful at his work, but very cold and tepid in the service of God and in the observance of rule. God often spoke to his heart by inward inspirations, and urged him to begin to live a holy life and one more in conformity with the constitutions of his order; but the lay brother always rejected those inspirations as idle fancies. His brethren often tried to urge him to amend both by word and example; but he simply laughed at them. At last God sent him a dangerous illness, and when he saw that his last hour was come, he sent for all the brethren, and turning to them his face which was fearfully distorted, he said to them, as clearly as his agony allowed him to speak: See, there is the place that I shall soon occupy in hell; I can see the abyss already opened, and Lucifer in the lowest depths; I can see Caiphas too, and the other murderers of Christ, and near them is the place where I shall suffer eternal torments. The terrified brethren told him to remember the infinite mercy and goodness of God, who never rejects the repentant sinner, and who at the last moment is ready to pardon the greatest sinner who is really contrite, etc. No; said the unhappy man; it is all at an end for me, my time for mercy is over; the divine mercy called me often enough during life, but I despised and laughed at all its graces and inspirations. Now my sentence is already pronounced; I am lost; I am going to hell! With these despairing words on his lips he breathed his last, without Confession or Viaticum, thus giving a terrible example of what may happen, and likely will happen to those obstinate people who do not recognize nor accept the divine inspirations. "I have called, and you refused; I also will laugh in your destruction."

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion.

O merciful God, save me and all men from such a terrible end. I am heartily sorry that I have ever despised the graces Thou hast offered me; and I must confess before the whole court of Heaven that I have often despised them. Forgive me my disobedience! With the help of Thy grace I shall never be guilty of it again. I renew the resolution I have made already; I will follow Thy star; I will hear Thy voice, and will be most obedient to Thy inspirations. I shall never let any light and grace Thou offerest to me go by without profiting by it; but will use it to amend my life, to make progress in the Christian virtues, and to receive, as I hope, the grace of perseverance in the hour of death, relying for this on Thy infallible promise: "But he that

shall hear Me, shall rest without terror, and shall enjoy abundance without fear of evils.”¹ Let that be the case, O Lord, with me and with all men! Amen.

FORTY-FIFTH SERMON.

**ON THOSE WHO DO NOT AT ONCE FOLLOW WHAT THEY
KNOW TO BE DIVINE INSPIRATIONS.**

Subject.

Not to obey at once, according to the will of God, what we know to be divine inspirations, is to place ourselves in the greatest danger of an unhappy death.—*Preached on the Feast of the Annunciation of the B. V. Mary.*

Text.

Ecce, ancilla Domini; fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.
—Luc. i. 38.

“Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word.”

Introduction.

Thus was the consent given, which the eternal Father sought from His chosen daughter, the Son of God from His future Mother, and the Holy Ghost from His chosen Spouse, by the angelic ambassador, in order to begin and to accomplish the great work of the redemption of the world; this was the consent which gave such joy to the angels, which the holy souls in Limbo had sighed for, for so many hundred years, and which the faithful on earth were so eagerly longing for: “Be it done to me according to thy word.” As soon as this consent was given the Divine Word descended from Heaven and became man in the virginal womb of Mary, in order to fill up the vacant places in the angelic choirs, to release the holy souls from their prison, and to save all men from eternal death. O Mary, most lowly handmaid in thy own eyes, but glorious Mother of the Lord in the eyes of God, “Blessed art thou,” for so I must now cry out to thee with heartfelt congratulation in the words of St. Elizabeth at the Visitation; “Blessed art thou that hast believed, be-

¹ Qui autem me audierit, absque terrore requiescet, abundantia perfruetur, timore malorum sublato.—Prov. i. 33.

cause those things shall be accomplished, that were spoken to thee by the Lord.”¹ Blessed art thou because as soon as thou hast believed, thou hast at once conformed thy will to the will of God! Blessed art thou because thou hast conceived and given birth to the Saviour for the redemption of the world! Would to God, my dear brethren, that we were all thus ready and willing to obey our sovereign God and Lord, whenever He asks anything from us by His inspirations! For we are well aware that whatever He asks of us in that way is for His own honor and for the greater good of our souls. But alas, how seldom God finds this ready consent amongst men. Most people reject good inspirations at once; because they are unwilling to recognize them as coming from God, that they may not be forced to do violence to their evil inclinations, as we have seen on a former occasion. There are others who appear to act a little more courteously to their God when He sends them inspirations, and yet they do not obey Him as they ought. They know that those inspirations are from God, and they do not refuse them; “behold the handmaid,” the servant, “of the Lord,” they say, “be it done to me according to thy word;” but they do not wish to do immediately what God desires from them: they put off the fulfilment of His will to some future time. Again, a very dangerous thing to do, as I shall now prove, to make an end of this subject.

Plan of Discourse.

Not to obey at once, according to the will of God, what we know to be divine inspirations, is to place ourselves in the greatest danger of an unhappy death. Such is the whole subject.

O God of infinite goodness, give us Thy powerful grace, which we ask of Thee through the intercession of Thy most obedient Mother, Mary, and the holy angels guardian, that we may at once obey and follow Thy known inspirations, and that we may be always ready to say, “Behold the handmaid, the servant of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word!”

There are two classes of people for whom this sermon is especially intended.

Although what I am about to say is to be understood of every divine inspiration, due proportion being observed, in the sense that those inspirations should be at once carried into effect, yet it concerns especially two classes of people; namely, sinners who are in the state of mortal sin, and the vain children of the world who do not appear to be addicted to any of the greater

¹ Beata quæ credidisti, quoniam perficientur quæ dicta sunt tibi a Domino.—Luke 1. 45.

vices, and yet lead sensual, tepid and disorderly lives, and do little for their eternal salvation. The former are called by the divine inspirations to be converted and to do penance; the latter to change and amend their lives, and to serve God with greater zeal. The former, when they hear a sermon, or read a spiritual book, or see a dead body, or experience some temporal calamity, or otherwise receive a divine inspiration by whatever means it comes to them, feel an inward impulse to make a general confession, to repent sincerely of their past wickedness, to restore ill-gotten goods, to avoid the proximate occasion of sin, to remove what is a cause of scandal, to be reconciled to their enemies, etc. The latter, that is to say, tepid Christians, also frequently feel themselves urged to amend certain habits which they look on as venially sinful, such as, idleness, unnecessary sleep, vanity, dangerous company, and to attend more to prayer and works of devotion, to be more regular in receiving the sacraments, to hear the word of God in sermons frequently, and so on; as I have frequently told you already in the hope that it will make an impression on you.

Now, in what way do those people act when they experience similar movements of the spirit? They cannot deny that such movements come from God, nor are they ignorant that it is their bounden duty to hearken to the voice of God, and to obey it at once. To refuse those graces which God offers is the same as saying: go away from me, O Lord, I will not do what Thou requirest of me; and they dare not do that, because their conscience would torment them if they did. How do they act then? That they may not seem to reject God altogether, and at the same time may have some means of quieting their uneasy consciences, they say: yes, I will obey, I will follow, I will do as Thou wishest, but not at once, on some future occasion; I will repent of, and confess my sins on some great feast; I will avoid the proximate occasion of sin when my year's service is expired, when I go to some other place, when the person to whom I am attached is gone away; I will restore what I possess unjustly to its rightful owner, when I have made better provision for myself; I will be reconciled with my neighbor when he has first given me some marks of friendship; I will remove the cause of scandal when I see that others do it; I will begin a better and more zealous life, be more regular in devotions and more earnest in the practice of the Christian virtues, go more frequently to Confession and Holy Communion, make a better use of the precious time for the salva-

Who recognize divine inspirations very well: but defer obedience to them.

tion of my soul, renounce all vanity and sensuality, hear the Word of God in sermons more frequently, etc., but not just now; all these changes cannot be effected in a moment: there will be time enough for them later on. See, that is the way in which most people try to calm their uneasy consciences, and at the same time to have the appearance at least of obeying the divine inspirations.

They resemble lifeless statues.

The will is always ready with them; but they hardly ever carry out its resolution. Father Athanasius Kircher writes of a crypt that was discovered in France, in which the water dropping down formed stalactites in the shape of monks singing in choir.¹ If one were to look at those statues from a distance, he would almost expect the supposed monks to begin the Office, but he would have to wait a long time for them to begin, because stones have no voice; the statues open their mouths as if to sing, but no sound proceeds from them. The people of whom I speak are like those statues; "They are like the stones that are hewn out of the mountains,"² as the Prophet Baruch says of false gods. God expects them to do this, or to omit that; they open their mouths and say, I will obey; but they go no farther than that; they are like the stone figures.

And act in a way that is most dangerous to themselves; because they treat God unjustly.

This is that most dangerous road by which the devil drags down to the eternal flames of hell nearly all the souls that are cast off by God and lost forever; namely, delay in corresponding with the graces that God offers. For, in the first place, is it not treating the good God most unjustly in the very moment in which He offers us His grace and favor with the best possible intentions towards us? Is it not making sport of the infinite Majesty of God and trying to put Him off with empty words to an uncertain future; nay, is it not turning Him away from us, as we would turn away a beggar from our door, saying to him, I have nothing for you now; if I could help you I would do so willingly: come later on and I shall likely give you what you want? "What a grievous insult it is," says St. Bernard, "and what a severe punishment it deserves, for a vile worm of the earth to disdain to listen to his Creator who deigns to speak to him."³ Miserable mortal, what are you thinking of? Does not the Almighty God deserve to be obeyed at once? Do you not owe him all you have and are? Does He not deserve all your

¹ Cadurei in Gallia Narbonensi crypta reperitur, ubi distillans lapidificus humor duodecim veluti statuas monachorum in choro cantantium effecit.—Kircher in mund. subter. l. 2.

² Lapidibus de monte similes.—Baruch vi. 38.

³ Quanta hæc est injuria et quam graviter vindicanda, cum vilissimus vermis clamantem ad se audire dedignatur Creatorem universitatis.—S. Bern. serm. de 3 Spln.

love and service, as well in the present as in the uncertain future? There is no doubt of it, as you yourself must acknowledge. But when, after having received an inspiration which you know well comes from God, you resolve to serve Him at some future time, or in a manner different from that in which He wishes you to serve Him; you make up your mind, as a matter of fact, not to serve God now, or else to serve Him in a careless manner. Is that the right way to act towards a God who deserves all honor and love? Is not that the way to rob Him of the service and love which He actually desires from you? Tell me; would you be satisfied with a servant who says to you, when you give him an order: No sir, I will not do it; and to-morrow when you repeat the same command, you get as an answer: No, I will not do it now; wait a while longer; in a month's time I will begin to be really obedient? What would you think of such a servant? Away with him, you would say, with just anger and displeasure, he shall not remain a moment longer in my house; he ought to know that I have hired him not only for the next month, but for the whole year, and during all that time he is bound to serve me; for that I pay him his wages; if he refuses to obey now and when I will, he may go away. See, O man, you act towards your God like that servant, when you delay the fulfilment of what He suggests to you by His inspirations; you refuse Him the obedience and service you owe Him as your sovereign Lord, as your Creator who has given you all you have, as your Redeemer who has ransomed you by His death, and saved you from eternal death, as your only good and last end, whom therefore you should serve without intermission during your whole life. Oh, "woe to that time in which I have not loved Thee," says St. Augustine, full of repentance for the sins of his early years, "woe to that time in which I have grievously offended Thee."¹ Such will one day be your thought too, but it will be too late.

Again, you say, hereafter I will be converted and lead a better life: hereafter I will serve my God and will love him with my whole heart, etc. Tell me, when is that "hereafter" to come? Must you not acknowledge in your heart that you have often experienced similar salutary impulses and movements of the spirit? And on each occasion you put off obedience to them to some future time, so that your resolution has come to nothing. So will it be with you in the future; you will always find the same or still greater difficulties in your way; so that you will never be able

Inasmuch as they will hardly obey His inspirations later on.

¹ *Vae tempori illo quo non amavi te, vae tempori illo quo te graviter offendi.*

to carry your faint-hearted resolution into effect, and consequently will never properly obey the divine inspirations. Is not the God who now calls on you to be converted, or to amend your life, the same God whom you expect to give you the same call on some future occasion? Does He not deserve to be heard now, as well as in the future? But if His boundless authority and endless Majesty cannot move you now to hearken to his voice how will they be able to do so afterwards? Consequently, what conversion or amendment is to be expected from you then? Believe me, just as little as now.

And that is the great object of the crafty enemy of souls, the devil. When, while hearing a sermon, or reading a spiritual book, or at some other time, you are aware of a grace moving you to repent or to amend your life; he will not tempt you directly to oppose the good inspiration, or to reject it, for he has good reason to think that such a temptation would not succeed. And what does he do then? All he wants in the beginning is that you put off for a while the fulfilment of the good work to which the inspiration urges you; he acts with you as the men of Jabes did with King Naas, as we read in the First Book of Kings. King Naas had besieged the town of Jabes with a great army, and reduced the inhabitants to such extremities that they were on the point of surrendering to him. There was only one resource left. And what was that? The ancients of Jabes went to King Naas, and demanded a respite: "And the ancients of Jabes said to him: Allow us seven days."¹ The imprudent King having granted this request, they sent for help throughout all Israel, and Saul collected a large army and marched at once to the defence of the besieged; and defeated King Naas so completely that not two of his army were left together: "He came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch, and he slew the Ammonites until the day grew hot, and the rest were scattered so, that two of them were not left together."² O sinner, in this King you have an image of your precious soul, which is sometimes so strengthened and encouraged by powerful graces, that it resolves to expel the devil and the many sins which have taken possession of it, and to lead a better life. When the wicked tempter finds himself thus reduced to extremities, all he can do is to ask for a respite; allow me seven days, he says; wait

¹ Dixerunt ad eum seniores Jabes: Concede nobis septem dies.—I. Kings xi. 3.

² Ingressus est media castra in vigilia matutina, et percussit Ammon usque dum incalesceret dies; reliqui autem dispersi sunt ita. ut non relinquerentur in eis duo pariter.—Ibid. 11.

Which is
the very
thing that
the devil
seeks.

a little longer and I will go away. Yes, you answer, I will give you so much time, and then I will be reconciled to that man, and forgive him from my heart, after he has felt my anger and resentment a while longer; I will leave that company, that house which has been the proximate occasion of sin to me, but in order to save my good name and prevent people from suspecting anything, I will hold on for a month or two longer, until the time for which I engaged has expired; after a while I will sin no more with that person, as we may marry, but until that time we can continue our unlawful intimacy as hitherto; I will confess all my sins, but I will wait until the next feast of the Blessed Virgin; meanwhile I can continue indulging my impure desires, as the one confession then will make everything right; after that I will not offend God any more. Allow us seven days. Such is the contract you make with the devil. Ah blind soul, do you not see how your arch-enemy is deceiving and betraying you? He will use that delay for your eternal destruction; he will call on all your wicked passions and inclinations, that are growing stronger every day; to help him, he will entangle you still more in the meshes of your bad habits, and will gain such a mastery over you, that your resolution to be converted will never be kept, and he will succeed in ruining you utterly.

Thirdly, supposing even that you will be more susceptible to grace at some future time, how do you know that the grace and inspiration will then be offered to you? Will not God, who has hitherto so often called you in vain, get tired at last of calling you? If the master of a house sees a candle or a lamp burning late at night, and no one making any use of it, either to come in or to go out, while the servants are all asleep; what does he do? He blows the light out. What is the use of it? he thinks when the lazy servants awaken they can get a light for themselves. In the same way God acts with the light of His grace, which He causes to shine on you by His inspirations; if you make no use of it, either to leave the state of sin, or to enter on the way of virtue; if you continue to sleep in your vices, or in your tepidity, the light will be taken away from you; for why should it burn any longer, when you are making no use of it? Bye and-bye you will have to look out for a light for yourself. As St. Augustine remarks, it is with the Almighty God nowadays in the world, as far as the distribution of His graces and inspirations is concerned, as it was formerly with our dear Saviour, Jesus Christ, when He went through Judea dispensing His ben-

Because those graces will likely never be offered again.

efits. "He went about doing good,"¹ as St. Peter says of Him in the Acts of the Apostles. Ah, says St. Augustine, how terrible the word "pertransiit," he went by, seems to me. "I tell you, my dear brethren, and I tell you openly, that I fear Jesus when He passes by."² For, he who passes by seldom comes back to the same place, or else he does not come back until after a long interval. You have reason to fear, then, O slothful Christian! When you feel a good inspiration and impulse, then Jesus is in your house, and is desirous to do you good; ah, I beg of you, take at once the benefit He offers you; for it may be a long time before He comes back again with the same light and grace; perhaps even, He may never return during your whole life!

Therefore when God calls, He must be obeyed immediately.

Therefore He warns you and me: "Yet a little while the light is among you. Walk whilst you have the light, that the darkness overtake you not."³ Now while the light is shining, you should be converted, abstain from your accustomed sins, leave the dangerous occasions of sin, renounce that unlawful affection, etc. Do not say that you will do so later on, for the light is passing by, and will never perhaps return. Now, while the light is shining you must correct your slothful habits; do not say, I will do so some other time; Jesus is passing on with the light; afterwards when you want Him He may not come back, and may leave you in the dark. Now the light is shining on you; you should at once betake yourself to the church and hear a sermon; do not put it off to the next Sunday; the light, the grace, the movement of the heart, the knowledge that God has prepared for you in this sermon, may not come next Sunday, it may never come again during your life; use it now while God offers it to you. "Yet a little while the light is among you," use it when and as long as you can; "walk whilst you have the light, that the darkness overtake you not," and that you may not be hurled from temporal into eternal darkness.

Because He has a certain number of graces and inspirations prepared and appointed for each one.

To make still clearer the danger of not obeying at once the calls of God, mark, my dear brethren, in the fourth place, this terrible, but certain truth, which the Holy Scripture frequently and emphatically inculcates in us; that namely, God has fixed all His designs and exterior operations to a certain number and meas-

¹ Pertransiit benefaciendo.—Acts x. 33.

² Fratres hoc dico et aperte dico; timeo Jesum transeuntem.—S. Aug. serm. 18. de verb. Dom.

³ Adhuc modicum lumen in vobis est. Ambulate, dum lucem habetis, ut non vos tenebræ comprehendant.—John xii. 35.

ure, which He will not exceed. "Thou hast ordered all things," says the Wise Man, "in measure, and number, and weight."¹ "Weight and balance are the judgments of the Lord,"² as we read in the Book of Proverbs. "And I will set judgment in weight, and justice in measure;"³ says the Lord Himself by the Prophet Isaias. A certain number of creatures has been fixed by God, to be drawn by Him out of their original nothingness, in preference to an infinite number of others, nor will He go beyond that number. He has determined the years and days that His Providence has decreed for each man to live, nor will any one live longer than God has appointed. He has fixed the number of sins that He will bear with patiently from each one, nor will His patience go beyond that number. He has determined the graces and inspirations He will give each one, nor will He give any more. Now, since the number fixed for me is known to God alone, whose judgments are inscrutable, it is certainly a dangerous thing for me to reject even one grace, to defer to some future time obedience even to one good inspiration, be the number of graces and inspirations great or small; because I know not, and cannot know how many there are still in reserve for me, and the very grace or inspiration that I now reject and despise, may be the last one which completes the number and measure appointed for me.

In order to give us timely warning of this, God has shown us in the Old Testament, as well as in the New, by different figures and parables, that He has prepared and appointed more graces and inspirations for some, than for others. When the town of Jericho refused to open its gates to the Israelites, God commanded Moses, His Prophet, and the leader of His people, to summon the stubborn inhabitants seven times to surrender, and meanwhile the army of the Israelites was to march seven times around the walls to the sound of the trumpet, without exercising any act of hostility against the town; but if the town was not surrendered on the sixth invitation, God assured Moses that the walls would fall in of themselves on the seventh, and the inhabitants would be left to the mercy of the conquerors. And so it happened in reality; when the trumpets sounded for the seventh time, the walls of the town fell in, and gave an easy entry to the besieging forces, who put all the inhabitants to the sword without distinc-

Shown by
figures in
the Old
Testament.

¹ Omnia in mensura, et numero et pondere disposuisti.—Wis. xi. 21.

² Pondus et statera judicia Domini sunt.—Prov. xvi. 11.

³ Et ponam in pondere judicium et justitiam in mensura.—Isa. xxviii. 17.

tion of sex or condition, and without the least mercy or pity, and reduced the town itself to ashes. This is a clear figure of a sinful soul that rebels against God, whom the merciful Lord invites by His good inspirations to do penance and to surrender itself to Him that He may occupy it; but, mark this well, the invitation is given only six times and not oftener; that is, those inspirations are limited in the inscrutable designs of God to a certain number, so that if the soul waits for the seventh, the number may be already complete, and the eternal ruin of that soul decreed.

From the words of Christ in the New Law.

In the New Testament we read how Jesus Christ wept bitterly over Jerusalem, and addressed that city in the following words: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldst not? Behold, your house shall be left to you desolate. For I say to you, you shall not see me henceforth."¹ See there again prefigured in the city of Jerusalem, the order and measure that the just God observes with souls. "How often would I have gathered;" there you have the fixed number of graces which God had appointed to give a certain soul that it might be converted or lead a better life, and of which He keeps an exact account. "And thou wouldst not;" there you see how graces are rejected and despised, and obedience to them deferred. "Your house shall be left to you desolate;" "you shall not see me henceforth;" the number of graces is complete and the reprobation of that impenitent soul is decreed, because it refused to correspond to so many invitations on the part of God: now the Lord will close His beneficent hand, and will give no more lights or inspirations to that soul, so that it will fall miserably into sin after sin, in punishment of its obstinacy, and will be lost forever. In the same Gospel of St. Matthew we read that Jesus, being hungry, passed by a fig-tree, and sought for fruit on it, but found none; "And seeing a certain fig-tree by the wayside, he came to it; and found nothing on it but leaves only;" whereupon he cursed it: "and He saith to it: May no fruit grow on thee henceforward forever; and immediately the fig-tree withered away,"² to the great astonishment of the dis-

¹ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, quæ occidis Prophetas, et lapidas eos, qui ad te missi sunt: quoties volui congregare filios tuos, quemadmodum gallina congregat pullos suos sub alas: et noluisti? Ecce, relinquetur vobis domus vestra deserta. Dico enim vobis: Non me videbitis amodo.—Math. xxiii. 37-39.

² Videns fici arborem unam secus viam, venit ad eam, et nihil invenit in ea nisi folla tantum, et ait illi: Nunquam ex te fructus nascatur in sempiternum. Et arefacta est continuo ficulnea.—Ibid. xxi. 19-20

ciples who were looking on. But, we might think, the poor tree did not deserve such a severe punishment; for, as the Evangelist St. Mark says: "And when he was come to it, he found nothing but leaves; for it was not the time for figs."¹ But if it was not the time for figs, the tree could not be expected to bear fruit; why then should it be cursed? The holy bishop, St. Paulinus, answers this question: "In that tree we have a figure of Our Lord hungering for the salvation of souls, and desiring from men the fruits they owe Him."² Whenever the Lord by His inspirations, invites man to serve Him, it will not do to say that it is not yet time for fruit; for, at all times God expects us to do His will, and to fulfil without delay what He requires of us. This fig-tree is then a figure of certain souls who, having rejected the first inspiration and grace of God, although they well know that it came from God, are, in the most just designs of the Almighty, abandoned to unfruitfulness, and will never be visited by another inspiration.

Further, you will find in the Gospel of Jesus Christ the well-known parables, of the great supper, the royal marriage-feast, and the laborers in the vineyard; all symbols of the divine vocation of souls to the kingdom of Heaven; but see what a difference there is; the same guests are invited twice to the supper. "A certain man made a great supper, and invited many;"³ as they did not come at the appointed time, he sent his servants to call them; "and he sent his servant at the hour of supper to say to them that were invited, that they should come, for now all things are ready. And they began all at once to make excuse . . . then the master of the house being angry, said . . . I say unto you that none of those men that were invited shall taste of my supper."⁴ It is probable, my dear brethren, that the guests did not wish to be excluded altogether from the supper, and that they excused themselves on this occasion, because they had other things to attend to; "I have bought a farm," said the first, "and I must needs go out and see it."⁵ "I have bought five yoke of oxen," said another, "and I go to try them."⁶ "I have married

From different parables in the same Law.

¹ Et cum venisset ad eam, nihil invenit præter folia; non enim erat tempus ficorum.—Mark xi. 13.

² In illa arbore salutem hominis asuriebat, et ab homine debitum sibi fructum petabat.—S. Paulin. exp. 33.

³ Homo quidam fecit cœnam magnam, et vocavit multos.—Luke xiv. 16.

⁴ Et misit servum tuum hora cœnæ dicere invitatis, ut venirent, quia jam parata sunt omnia: Et cœperunt simul omnes excusare . . . Tunc iratus pater-familias, dixit . . . dico autem vobis: Quod nemo virorum illorum, qui vocati sunt gustabit cœnam meam.—Ibid. 17, 18, 21, 24.

⁵ Villam emi, et necesse habeo exire, et videre illam.—Ibid. 18.

⁶ Jugam boum emi quinque, et eo probare illa.—Ibid. 19.

a wife," said a third, "and therefore I cannot come."¹ Thus they did not absolutely refuse to accept the invitation, and expected to receive it again on another occasion. Why then did not the master of the house invite them again? O fearful secret of the inscrutable decrees of God! the number of invitations was already complete for them: "None of those men that were invited, shall taste of my supper." On the other hand, all sorts of people are invited to the marriage-feast; but each one receives the invitation only once. Many different laborers are called to the vineyard at different hours of the day, some early in the morning, others at noon, others in the evening; but we do not read that any of them was asked more than once to come. Many disciples and Apostles were called to follow Christ, at different times and in different ways; but each one of them was called but once. We read of St. Peter and his brother, St. Andrew, that Our Lord invited them more than once to follow Him; but according to what the holy Fathers and the commentators say, they were not called for the same end and object. Our Lord called them the first time, according to St. Augustine, that they might learn to know Him, and the second time, that they might follow Him always. St. Thomas Aquinas thinks they were called three times; first, that they might know Our Lord, secondly, to be instructed by Him, and thirdly, to leave all earthly things and follow Him. Yes, you think, and they all obeyed the first call. That is true, but if they had not done so, who knows whether they would have been called again? The first invitation to perfection, would probably have been the last for the Apostles, and if they had rejected it, they would not have received another; as we see clearly exemplified in the case of the young man who was invited by Christ to sell all he had and give it to the poor, and to follow Him; but the young man went away sad, and Christ never spoke to him after that. A certain number and measure of divine inspirations appointed for each one: what a terrible truth that is! "Let no one," says the holy Pope St. Gregory, "despise the divine invitation, lest if he wishes to enter afterwards, he may not be admitted."²

Warning to sinners not to defer any longer hearkening to the voice

Now, O sinners! Christians who are slothful in the divine service! Vain children and lovers of the world! You who are always ready with an excuse when God invites you to repent, and to change and amend your lives; you who think and say, by-

¹ *Uxorem duxi, et ideo non possum venire.*—Luke xiv. 20.

² *Nemo contemnat, ne dum vocatus excusat, cum voluerit intrare non valeat.*

and-bye, some other time, on some future occasion I will obey the call of God (this sermon is for you alone); have you looked into the Book of God's inscrutable decrees? Do you know the exact measure and number of the graces and inspirations that God has prepared for, and determined to give you? No, you do not; for no one, to whom God has not expressly revealed it can know it. How then can you be so rash and presumptuous as to put off to some future time the fulfilment of even one good inspiration? Perhaps that which is now given you, is the last invitation, the last call, the last light of grace; think well on it; your eternal happiness or misery depends on it! Suppose, what may really be the case, especially since you have so often despised and rejected the well-meant calls of God, suppose that this is the last grace for you, and that you reject it also; what will become of you? Whom will you have to blame for your eternal damnation? Will you blame the Almighty, because He has refused to give you any longer special graces, which He is bound to give to no man, and which He dispenses with infinite wisdom, when, how, where, to whom and in what measure He pleases? Oh, no; you alone are to blame; and you must attribute your eternal damnation to yourself and to no other, because you refuse to see the light and to follow it, when God so generously offered you His graces.

of God calling on them to repent.

Julius Cæsar, who was afterwards so foully assassinated, was often warned and exhorted by a faithful friend, to be on his guard against some of the members of the Senate, who had conspired to take away his life; but Cæsar, depending on his army, and deceived by the flattery of false friends, took no precaution whatever. One day as he was entering the Senate house, the conspirators thronged around him, and his friend managed to get through them and to hand him privately a note disclosing the danger that threatened him, and begged of Cæsar to read it at once. The latter, who was busy at the moment with a number of people, thought that it would do to read the note later on, and went boldly into the Senate house, where he was at once set upon and stabbed to death, still holding in his hand the note which would have saved his life, had he read it. Sinful and tepid Christians, there you have a picture of the unhappy end of your soul! God sees you hurrying to eternal ruin through that unlawful passion, that dangerous company, that vicious habit, that ill-gotten property, that tepidity which is daily increasing; He sees hell opened and all the infernal spirits conspiring against

That they may not be lost forever.

your soul, and now he comes forward as your best friend, who would willingly have you with Himself in Heaven, and, by His good inspirations He gives you warning of the danger that threatens you. He sends you, so to speak, a confidential note, whenever He exhorts you by sermons, spiritual books, or temporal misfortunes, to free yourself from the state of sin by true repentance and amendment of life; but you always think you can read the note later on, and amend your life on some future occasion. Alas, before that time comes your enemies will have surrounded you, and with the note still in your hands unread, with the divine warnings and inspirations that you refused to follow, still ringing in your ears, will drag you down to the abyss of hell; for, either death will surprise you in the state of sin, or, since you have received the full measure of the graces allotted to you, there is no more hope of repentance for you!

Conclusion,
to obey
good in-
spirations
at once.

Therefore, "To-day if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts."¹ Think, whenever you are aware of a good inspiration: this is perhaps the last time that I shall hear a voice from Heaven calling me to repentance and amendment; I am not certain that it is so; yet it may be so. Therefore I will not delay, nor defer doing what that voice urges me to do; I will obey it at once. I will at once repent of, and confess my sins; I will at once abandon that dangerous occasion and company; I will at once get rid of those ill-gotten goods, and restore them to their lawful owner; I will at once be reconciled to my neighbor, with whom I have hitherto been at variance, and will be a true friend to him; I will at once begin to lead a better, more virtuous, humble and perfect life, and will persevere therein to the end. So it shall be, O God, with Thy grace! Amen.

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

ON NEGLECTING TO HEAR, AND MAKING A BAD USE OF, THE WORD OF GOD IN SERMONS.

FORTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE DANGEROUS STATE OF THOSE WHO SELDOM HEAR THE WORD OF GOD.

Subject.

To hear the word of God in sermons but rarely, when one has an opportunity of hearing it frequently, is a very bad and dangerous sign for a Christian. For, generally speaking, they whose souls are in a bad or dangerous state, seldom hear the Word of God.—*Preached on the Feast of the Dedication of a Church.*

Text.

Et festinans descendit, et excepit illum gaudens.—Luke xix.
6.

“And he made haste and came down, and received him with joy.”

Introduction.

How wonderful that a man can be so completely changed by a single word! Zachaeus had hitherto been an unjust usurer, who defrauded and deceived people in every possible way; and now he makes superfluous restitution, for he gives back fourfold: “If I have wronged any man of anything, I restore him fourfold.” He had been a heartless miser, and now he becomes a generous father of the poor and needy. “Behold Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor.” He had been a public sinner, and a chief of sinners; now he is a public confessor and follower

of Christ: "He received Him with joy." That sudden change was effected by those few words of our Saviour: "Zachaeus, make haste, and come down, for this day I must abide in thy house. And he made haste and came down, and received Him with joy;" he was completely converted, so that he deserved to hear from the lips of Jesus, the joyful assurance: "This day is salvation come to this house." What wonderful power, then, I cannot help thinking, the divine word has over the human heart! And on the other hand, what a great good ~~it was~~ it was for Zachaeus that he was, in preference to so many others, in the way of being spoken to by Our Lord, and that he came down from the tree at the first call, and received Our Lord into his house. My dear brethren, how much good would not the Word of God still effect nowadays among us Christians, if we were all as eager and as ready as Zachaeus, to listen to it! We have plenty of opportunities of doing so in Christian churches, in which the Word of God is frequently announced, but, alas for the deplorable carelessness of so many Christians! Those opportunities are seldom or never made use of by many. What shall I think or say of them? The least I can say is this:

Plan of Discourse.

To hear the Word of God in sermons but rarely, when one has an opportunity of hearing it frequently, is a very bad and dangerous sign for a Christian. Why? Because, generally speaking, they whose souls are in a bad or dangerous state, seldom hear the Word of God. Such is the subject of this instruction.

Christ Jesus, Thou who didst induce Zachaeus to follow Thee by a few words, give us, and increase in us, a love of Thy divine Word that we may henceforward hear it often, receive it with joy, and derive from it great fruit for our souls; this grace we beg of Thee through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of our holy angels guardian.

They whose souls are in a bad or dangerous state, seldom hear the Word of God.

One thing I must remind you of, and it is of great importance; namely, that it is one thing to say, they whose souls are in a bad state, seldom, as a general rule, hear sermons; and another thing to say, all those who, as a general rule, seldom hear the Word of God, are in a bad state as to their souls. This latter statement I cannot defend as it stands; God forbid that I should usurp the functions which belong to His inscrutable divine decrees, and dare to look on any one as bad, unless I am quite certain he is bad. But I do say that it is a bad sign for a

Christian, especially for one who has all sorts of worldly business and anxieties to distract him, and who neither reads nor hears anything of spiritual things during the week, to neglect, as a general rule, the frequent opportunities he has of hearing the Word of God in sermons on Sundays and holy-days; I look upon it as a bad sign, on account of what Jesus Christ, the Eternal Truth, has said: "Every one that doth evil, hateth the light;"¹ and I maintain that they whose souls are in a bad or dangerous state, have no love for the Word of God.

And they consist, first, of those who, having been accustomed to indulge in certain vices for a long time past, do not yet think of being converted and of amending their lives. Such are, for instance, those who knowingly possess ill-gotten goods, which they do not intend to restore to the lawful owner; those who, being immeshed in the toils of an unchaste passion, do not give up nor avoid the proximate occasion of sin, or who allow a secret mortal sin to remain on their consciences for many years, because they are ashamed to declare it candidly in confession. All these people will not readily go to sermons, or at all events, they will not be eager to hear them, but will do all they can to avoid them, especially those sermons in which the truth is told in an impressive manner. And why? Because they cannot bear the bitter reproaches of their own consciences, which are touched and disquieted by the explanation of the Gospel truths, and because they dread losing the false peace they have hitherto enjoyed in the midst of their sins.

They are, first; those who will not give up the habit of sin.

A monkey cannot bear a looking-glass, nor a camel clear water; because they see their ugly figures reflected therein; therefore, the one will break the looking-glass, or throw it away in anger, and the other will trample about in the water until it becomes muddy, and is no longer transparent. The Word of God is a looking-glass which places clearly before the eyes of sinners the fearful state of their consciences, the filth and deformity of their sins and vices; they hate this looking-glass, says St. John Chrysostom, because they cannot look at their own vileness without shame and fear. Pliny and Salines write of a certain nation in Morocco, who, as I have mentioned elsewhere, because they are coal-black in color, love the darkness better than the light, as it suits their color better; while they have such a hatred of the beautiful and pleasant sunshine, that they pursue the sun when he rises, with all sorts of execrations.

They hate sermons, because they are disturbed by them.

¹ Omnis enim, qui male agit, odit lucem.—John iii. 20.

Foolish and mad people they must be indeed! But are we much better nowadays? The Word of God is a shining light, "the light of truth," *lumen veritatis*, as the Scripture calls it. Now, just as the children of the light, that is, pious souls who are desirous of their eternal salvation, seek and receive this light with the greatest eagerness; so also, there are Moors among European Christians, souls as black as a coal, who begrimed as they are with the filth of sin, love and seek the darkness of their ignorance and error, while they hate and fly the light of truth, as Our Lord says in the Gospel of St. John: "The light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light;"¹ although that light is so abundantly distributed every day. And He gives the reason of that: "For their works were evil: For every one that doth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, that his works may not be reprov'd."² You cannot cause greater annoyance to a man who is lying in a deep sleep and wants to rest, than to shake and pull him about, and hold a lighted candle before his eyes. Oh, he will cry out, turning away his face, go away with that light, and let me alone! It would not be half so bad, if you were merely to talk, laugh, or make a noise in the room in which he is sleeping. Why so? Because the light shining in the eyes is surest to interrupt the sleep that he is so anxious to continue. That is the reason, my dear brethren, why the habitual sinner has such a hatred of sermons; he is buried in the deep sleep of his sins; he finds a false peace and pleasure in sensuality; he does not wish to be disturbed or awakened; the light of truth, the Word of God in sermons is likely to disturb this sleep most effectually; it shines in his eyes; it cries out: "Rise thou that sleepest;" and therefore, he cannot bear it; away, he says in thought, away with the light; away with sermons! I will have nothing to do with them.

For that very reason they should be diligent in hearing sermons.

But, says St. John Chrysostom to those people, that is the very reason why you should be all the more diligent in coming to sermons, and all the more eager and attentive to hear them, that the light may arouse you out of the sleep of sin, which otherwise will certainly be followed by the sleep of eternal death. Come, he says, listen to me! I will make you uneasy, but with an uneasiness that will gain eternal repose for you. The church

¹ Lux venit in mundum, et dilexerunt homines magis tenebras, quam lucem.—John iii. 19.

² Erat enim eorum mala opera; omnis enim, qui male agit, odit lucem, ut non arguantur opera ejus.—Ibid. 19–20.

in which the Word of God is preached, is an ark, and a far better one than that of the Patriarch Noe; the latter held animals of all sorts, and saved them from temporal destruction in the Deluge; but they left the Ark the same as they entered it; the wolf went in, and came out a wolf still; the raven went in, and came out a raven; the swine went in, and came out a swine, etc. It is far different with the ark of the church, in which I preach the Word of God, "if I find a wolf, I will turn him into a lamb;"¹ if a black crow comes in, he will go home a white dove; he who comes to the sermon a slave of the devil, will go away from it a beloved child of God; by a change, not of his nature, but of his will, which shall be converted and turned to God! This change shall be effected, not by my weak tongue, which speaks to the bodily ears, but by the supernatural light and powerful grace of God, which uses my tongue as an instrument to call to the hearts of the hearers, and to move them to amend their lives. So far that holy and zealous preacher, St. John Chrysostom. But most people do not want a change of that kind; the unjust wolf, greedy of gold, wishes to remain a wolf; the unchaste swine wishes still to wallow in the filth of his passions; the raven blackened by sin, wishes still to cry "caw, caw," and to put off repentance to some future time; and therefore, they will have nothing to do with sermons, or the Word of God. But woe to those, who through fear of being changed and converted, fly the light of truth! Jesus Christ Our Saviour, has already pronounced sentence on them in that passage of the Gospel of St. John that I have already quoted: "And this is the judgment; because the light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light."² That is, according to Alcuin's interpretation; since they fly and avoid the light of truth, they need not be judged any further; for they are already judged, and the sentence of eternal damnation is pronounced against them.

The other class of men who seldom hear the Word of God, are those who lead lives that are apparently not very bad or vicious, but neither are they good or pious. They are neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm and tepid; they are quite satisfied if they do nothing that is, in their opinion, evidently a grievous sin against the commandments of God and of the Church. Otherwise, they

In the second place, they who lead an idle, worldly life, seldom hear the Word of God.

¹ El lupum invenero, ovem faciam. — S. Chrysos. hom. 3. de pœnit.

² Hoc est autem judicium, quia lux venit in mundum, et dilexerunt homines magis tenebras, quam lucem.—John iii. 19.

hardly trouble themselves as to how they fulfil many obligations of their state that bind under pain of sin. They would be very glad to go to Heaven; but at the same time their hearts cling to earth and earthly things; so that they spend the day from morning till night according to the rules laid down by the vain world for people of their condition, indulging in sensuality and love of ease; they sleep late in the morning, are extravagant in dress, given to good eating and drinking, and the greater part of the precious time, that God has given them to work out their salvation, they spend in idle conversation and unnecessary visiting. It does not at all harmonize with the life that such people lead to hear the Word of God in sermons frequently; for if they did so, their minds would be raised up to God, their last end; they would be inflamed with a desire and love of heavenly goods, and would be encouraged to practise the Christian virtues. Therefore, they remain away from sermons, either through fear of becoming scrupulous and anxious, and thus being induced to change their mode of life; or else through carelessness or negligence, inasmuch as the thought of going to hear a sermon never occurs to them, and they imagine that they are not in want of the Word of God, and are under no obligation to hear it; or else they are so sensual and unmortified, that they will not put themselves to the slight trouble that is necessary to hear the Word of God. In the winter, they cannot bear the cold, and the harsh wind; in summer, the heat oppresses them, or they are afraid of draughts, or of rain; nearly always, when there is question of going to the sermon preached in the morning, which is the time when both head and heart are best disposed to be influenced by the grace of God, it is too early for them; they require such an amount of sleep, and take such a long time to dress, that they can hardly manage to get to church; and very often they cannot rise earlier, because their heads are heavy from sitting up late at a party the night before. In a word, the light of truth, the heart-penetrating Word of God, the food that the good God has prepared for our souls is not for them.

Their souls
are in a very
dangerous
state.

What a lamentable mistake! What a deplorable error theirs is! With reason does the Prophet Job say of such people: "If the morning suddenly appear, it is to them the shadow of death; and they walk in darkness as if it were in light."¹ They live in great uncertainty and carelessness of their eternal salvation; and

¹ Si subito apparuerit aurora, arbitrantur umbram mortis: et sic in tenebris, quasi in luce ambulant.—Job xxiv. 17.

yet they imagine they are on the straight road to Heaven. If these men, I say, and such as these are not in a bad state, a question which I will not now discuss, there is no doubt that they are in a very dangerous state, and, I might add, in a more dangerous state than the former class, who are openly addicted to gross vices, but who know the unhappy condition in which they are, and may yet be touched by divine grace and repent sincerely and amend their lives. But since the others see nothing in their lives that is wicked, and that ought to be repented of, and amended, what means have they of being really changed for the better, and of turning their tepid hearts to God? The life they lead is at best a luxurious, effeminate and idle life, it is not a mortified, or penitential one, it is not fixed to the Cross with Jesus Christ, and therefore it is not a Christian life, since it does not lead to Heaven by the rude way and through the narrow gate of penance; and, according to the words of Christ, the kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and only they can gain it who do violence to themselves.¹ If they came constantly, or at least frequently to sermons and instructions, they would often hear those truths explained; and if they heard them with duly prepared and eager hearts, they would soon be penetrated like the other hearers, by the supernatural light of the Holy Ghost; they would believe practically in those truths, and would lead far different lives. But since they neglect to hear the Word of God, they continue in what they imagine to be light, but which is in reality darkness: "they walk in darkness as if it were in light." What a light and knowledge will break upon them, but too late, when the eyes of the body shall be closed in death, and the eyes of the soul shall be opened in the house of their eternity! "Therefore," they will say with the fools in the Book of Wisdom, "we have erred from the way of truth, and the light of justice hath not shined unto us, and the sun of understanding hath not risen upon us."² Because through laziness and sloth we refused to see, and to receive that light, that shining sun: "We have walked through hard ways, but the way of the Lord we have not known;"³ we refused to allow it to be shown to us! Now we acknowledge that we have missed the right road to Heaven. Fools that we are! What an irreparable mistake we have made!

The third class consists of those who flatter themselves, and

Thirdly,
they seidem

¹ Regnum cœlorum vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud.—Matth. xi. 12.

² Ergo erravimus a via veritatis, et justitiæ lumen non luxit nobis, et sol intelligentiæ non est ortus nobis.—Wis. v. 6.

³ Ambulavimus vias difficiles, viam autem Domini ignoravimus.—Ibid. 7.

hear the Word of God, who are in ignorance through mistaken piety.

persuade others too, as far as their outward actions are concerned, that they are devout and pious; while in reality they are in utter ignorance of many things that are useful and necessary to their eternal salvation, and they are addicted to many serious faults and imperfections. These people seldom hear the Word of God, or at least they do not hear it regularly; not because they hate and avoid it, but because they have no taste or desire for it. They think they can employ their time better in some other way for the glory of God and the salvation of their souls. The whole substance of their piety consists in certain special devotions to churches, meditations, vocal prayers, hearing several Masses one after another, making their usual Confessions and Communions, etc.; the whole day is occupied with these and similar devotions, and each devotion has its own particular hour fixed for it; there must be no interruption, change, shortening, and least of all, omission in the list of devotions; if anything occurs to be done during the day, no matter what it is, it is put aside, if it interferes with them. The bell may ring a hundred times for the sermon; no, they say; I have not time to go now; I have something else to do; this is the time for visiting that church, for prayer, for Mass, meditation, and so on.

No works of devotion should, as a general rule, interfere with hearing sermons.

I acknowledge that it is an excellent thing, very profitable for the soul, and very pleasing to God, who performs all His works in a certain number and measure, to have a fixed order for one's daily devotions, as far as the duties of one's state allow; and I acknowledge too, that all those devotions I have mentioned, when they are performed in the state of grace, and with proper fervor, are very good, meritorious and pleasing to God. But when a fixed order for daily devotions prevents one, as a general rule, from hearing the Word of God, or makes one careless about it; then I have not the least hesitation in saying that all those prayers and pious works are of no good, and that it would be far better to omit them, nay, sometimes to omit even Confession and Holy Communion, or put them off to some other day, rather than not hear the Word of God; for that divine word is far more necessary for the due instruction of those people, and consequently more advantageous for their eternal salvation, and more helpful to them in the practice of solid virtue, than all their other pious works.

Such people are pious only in appearance,

If we consider the conduct of those people while they are in church at their devotions, and compare it with the way in which they behave at home, or during the performance of the duties

of their state, which the law of God obliges them to fulfil under pain of sin; what a striking contrast we should find! During their prayers and meditations they are like angels in modesty and humility; they shed tears of sweet consolation when they read in their prayer-books about the love of God; a thousand times they offer to God, with the lips, their bodies and souls, and all they have, and they profess to belong entirely to God, and to be ready to accept from Him, crosses and trials, sickness or health, life or death, etc. That is the kind of piety that suits their taste; that is what makes them look on themselves as really devout; and it is a piety and devotion that they have no chance of finding by hearing sermons. But how do they act sometimes, when they have finished their devotions and get to the end of their pious affections, and go home to do the will of God, not by empty words and with the lips only, but in deed and work? Oh, that is quite a different matter! It does not belong to their usual devotions; and so if they are commanded to do anything that does not exactly chime in with their own ideas, they are full of murmurs, complaints and opposition; they do only what pleases themselves, and what best suits their own convenience. If a person whom they dislike, ventures to say a word to displease them, they show just as much proficiency in abusing and reviling that person, as they did when in church in repeating their prayers. If some trifling thing annoys them, if, so to speak, a cross of straw is laid on their shoulders, there is no more talk of offering themselves altogether to God, to be disposed of according to His will, etc. In a word, all their piety and devotion is on their lips, and in their outward demeanor; while in reality they have neither true devotion, nor true virtue, nor true holiness and sanctity. And yet they are so obstinate, or to speak more truly, so infatuated and superstitious in observing the devotional practices they have prescribed for themselves, that they would look on any one who tries to detach them from those devotions, as an enemy of God's honor, and their salvation; while if they are obliged to interrupt their usual practices on account of some unforeseen occurrence, they are full of scruples and uneasiness during the whole day, as if they were guilty of some grievous sin; although they make light of neglecting the duties of their state, a neglect which they have reason enough to be uneasy and anxious about.

I cannot help comparing them to King Saul. We read in the First Book of Kings, chapters xiv. and xv., that in order

and in their own imagination.

They are like Saul when he

disobeyed
the com-
mand of
God.

to gain a victory over his enemies he had bound himself and his army by an oath not to taste food till sunset, under pain of death: "And Saul adjured the people, saying: Cursed be the man, that shall eat food till evening, till I be revenged of my enemies."¹ Jonathan, his son, who knew nothing of his father's oath, and the command he had laid on his army, finding some honey, tasted a little of it to refresh himself, as he was very tired: "But Jonathan had not heard when his father adjured the people, and he put forth the end of the rod which he had in his hand, and dipt it in a honey-comb; and he carried his hand to his mouth."² And did Saul look on this as an unpardonable crime? Yes, and he condemned Jonathan to death on account of it: "As the Lord liveth, who is the Saviour of Israel, if it was done by Jonathan my son, he shall surely die."³ All the people begged for mercy for Jonathan; but Saul was inexorable; he had taken an oath, and given a command that was transgressed, and he looked on that transgression as a crime that should be punished with death: "May God do so and so to me, and add still more: for dying thou shalt die, O Jonathan."⁴ And he would really have been put to death, had not the people saved him: "So the people delivered Jonathan that he should not die."⁵ See, my dear brethren, how exact Saul was in observing the law he had laid down for himself; but mark how he acted on another occasion. God had commanded him by the Prophet Samuel to destroy the Amalekites utterly, and not to spare one of them: "Now therefore go and smite Amalec and utterly destroy all that he hath; spare him not, nor covet anything that is his,"⁶ etc. How did the King observe this command? Self-love and avarice furnished him with excuse enough for sparing the King of Amalec through pretended pity, and taking the best of his possessions: "And Saul spared Agag, and the best of the flocks of sheep and of the herds, and the garments and the rams, and all that was beautiful."⁷ And he

¹ Adjuravit autem Saul populum, dicens: Maledictus vir, qui comederit panem usque ad vesperam, donec uleiscr de inimicis meis.—I. Kings xiv. 24.

² Porro Jonathas non audierat, cum adjuraret pater ejus populum; extenditque summitatem virgæ, quam habebat in manu, et intinxit in favam mellis, et convertit manum suam ad os suum.—Ibid. 27.

³ Vivit Dominus salvator Israel, quid, si per Jonatham filium meum factum est, absque retractione morietur.—Ibid. 39.

⁴ Hæc faciat mihi Deus, et hæc addat, quia morte morieris, Jonatha.—Ibid. 44.

⁵ Liberavit ergo populum Jonatham, ut non moreretur.—Ibid. 45.

⁶ Vade, et percute Amalec, et demolire universa ejus, non parcas ei, et non concupiscas ex rebus ipsius aliquid, etc.—Ibid. xv. 3.

⁷ Et pepercit Saul Agag, et optimis gregibus ovium et armentorum, et vestibibus et arietibus, et universis, quæ pulchra erant.—Ibid. 9.

thought he had acted well in doing so; for he boasted to the Prophet: "Blessed be thou of the Lord, I have fulfilled the word of the Lord."¹ What was the reason of the different state of his conscience on those two occasions? He observed the law he had made for himself with the utmost exactness, so as even to condemn his own son to death; while he had not the least scruple or anxiety in transgressing the command of God. Do you wish to know the reason of the difference, my dear brethren? The command to destroy the Amalekites came from God through the Prophet Samuel; but the observance of the fast till sunset was a law that Saul bound himself to under a vow, through special private devotion; this latter law had to be kept with the utmost exactness, while, as he imagined, the former did not require to be observed so strictly, although in reality it was of far greater importance than the oath.

There you have an example of how we often act. To be humble of heart, meek towards our neighbor, no matter who he is, to love those who in any way offend us, and to show that love by doing good to them, to obey at once and with reverence those whom God has placed over us, to bear the faults and frailties of others with patience, to be exact in the performance of the duties of our state, etc., these are things that we are commanded to do by the divine law, and in the fulfilment of them our true piety and holiness consist; yet sometimes we do not scruple to transgress in these matters. On the other hand, special private devotions, to which we are not bound by any command of God, are a law that we have invented and prescribed for ourselves, and we think that if we do not observe them all exactly, we do wrong, but if we have fulfilled them properly according to our own ideas, we congratulate ourselves on having "fulfilled the word of the Lord," and served God properly. But how fearfully our self-love deceives us herein! The words that St. John was told to say to the Angel of the Church of Laodicia could well be applied to us: "Thou sayest, I am rich, and made wealthy, and have need of nothing; and knowest not, that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."² You think you are pious, devout and rich in merits, and you know not that your soul is in a state of ignorance and misery. All this is mostly attributable to want of proper instruction, which must be re-

Such is the way in which those pretended pious people act.

¹ Benedictus tu Domino, implevi verbum Domini.—I. Kings xv. 13.

² Dicis: Quod dives sum et locupletatus, et nullius ego: et nescis, quia tu es miser et miserabilis, et pauper, et cæcus, et nudus.—Apoc. iiii. 17.

ceived from the light of the Holy Ghost, teaching us by the Word of God. If those seemingly pious people came often to sermons with well prepared hearts, they would soon learn in what true Christian virtue and piety consist.

Fourthly, they seldom hear the Word of God, who are too busied with temporal affairs.

The fourth and last class consists of those who are overwhelmed with worldly cares and business, so that they have no time or leisure to hear the Word of God in sermons. For these I have very few words, or rather nothing, but a sigh of profound pity. Pitiabie indeed is your state, O unfortunate people! you bury yourselves of your own accord, so deeply in temporal things, that you have no time to devote to the consideration of eternity! you undertake so many different kinds of business, that you must neglect the all-important business of your souls! Tell me, in God's name, why are we on this earth? To know God, to love Him, to keep His commandments, to do His holy will in all things, and to save our immortal souls; this is the one necessary business, to which all other things must be directed. Long ago, St. John Chrysostom bewailed in the pulpit in Constantinople all those who did not come at least twice a week to hear the Word of God. Ah, said he, you send your children twice a day to school to learn to read and write, and fence and dance, and sew and spin; but you are so involved in worldly cares, and so careless and negligent about your precious souls, that you cannot spare two hours in the week to acquire the knowledge necessary for your eternal salvation. What would he have said of those who hardly once in a month, nay, hardly once or twice in a whole year, hear a sermon with attention? I must say, in the words of our Lord, what does it profit a man to gain by his energy and industry the whole world and all its riches, and treasures, if his soul suffer loss thereby.¹

Therefore it is a dangerous sign to hear the Word of God but seldom.

For God's sake, Christians, think of this, and let those of you who seldom come to sermons, see for yourselves whether you have not grave reason to fear that you may belong to one of those poor classes of people whose souls are in a bad state, or at all events in a very dangerous state. No matter who you are, it still remains true, that to go to sermons rarely, when one has an opportunity of going frequently, is a very bad sign for a Christian. "He that is of God, heareth the words of God," says Christ, "therefore you hear them not, because you are not of God."²

¹ Quid enim prodest homini, si mundum universum lucretur, animæ vero suæ detrimentum patiat. — Matth. xvi. 26.

² Qui ex Deo est, verba Dei audit. Propterea vos non audistis, quia ex Deo non estis. — John viii. 47.

What a terrible conclusion that is to draw! yet it must be true, for Christ Himself says it.

But what is the use of speaking to those who are absent, and who therefore cannot hear what I say? The whole fruit of this sermon is for you, my dear brethren, who form my regular audience. Continue to refresh your souls and encourage yourselves in the divine service by constantly hearing the Word of God, unless some pressing business prevents you. Constantly I say, for to come once to a sermon and stop away two or three times after that, is not the sign of a man who is really anxious to save his soul, and who hungers for its spiritual food. The loss of one sermon may entail an eternal loss, for an opportunity of doing good once lost never comes back again, even if the same sermon were repeated. Still it is not certain that God, who by His grace, is the Author of all the good that is done by sermons, and who gives to each individual the special grace He has prepared for him, it is not certain that God will offer that grace again. "The Spirit breatheth where He will."¹ Therefore, you must take the light whenever you can. "He that is of God, heareth the words of God;" let that be verified in us all; we are of God, and therefore we have derived fruit enough for to-day and we can rejoice and say, "This day is salvation come to this house;" that is, to our souls. Amen.

Exhortation to all to hear sermons constantly.

Another introduction for the same sermon for the first Sunday after Epiphany.

Text.

Stupebant autem omnis, qui eum audiebant, super prudentia.
—Luke ii. 47.

"And all that heard Him were astonished at His wisdom."

How fortunate the Jews were at that time in having in Jerusalem the Incarnate Son of God to preach to them the eternal truths! If they had only profited by their good fortune! "If thou also hadst known," says our Lord, when weeping over the city, "and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace."² But what good did the Divine Preacher do His beloved city, towards which He meant so well? He only made its sin more inexcusable, and its wickedness more damnable. "All that heard him were astonished;" but they did not become any better. "They were astonished," says St. Augustine, "but they were

¹ Spiritus ubi vult spirat.—John. iii. 8.

² Si cognovisses et tu, et quidem in hac die tua, quæ ad pacem tibi.—Luke xix. 42.

not converted.”¹ Do you not wish, my dear brethren, that we had to-day the good fortune of hearing Christ Himself speak to us? Oh, what attentive and eager listeners we should be! But what am I saying? Have we not opportunity enough, if we only wish to make use of it, of hearing the Word of God in several churches, on all Sundays and holy-days, announced and explained to us by preachers who speak in the name of God? But, deplorable is the negligence of many Christians, etc., *continues as before.*

FORTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

ON THOSE WHO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD WITHOUT FRUIT.

Subject.

Many hear the Word of God in sermons, but without fruit or profit; because the seed falls by the wayside.—*Preached on the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Surdos fecit audire.—Mark vii. 37.
“He hath made the deaf to hear.”

Introduction.

O dear Lord, how necessary a miracle that would be nowadays for many Christians, namely, that Thou shouldst make the deaf to hear! For there are many who, like deaf people, never, or at all events, very seldom hear Thy divine Word, although they have splendid opportunities of hearing it. Yet, why do I wish that a miracle should be wrought for them? They wish to be deaf; they have no desire to know and to understand the Word of God. I have spoken of those people already, my dear brethren, when I explained the dangerous state of those who seldom hear the Word of God in sermons. Now I go on to speak of those who are constant in hearing sermons, and amongst them too, a great many deaf people are sometimes to be found; those, namely, who listen very attentively, but derive as little fruit and profit for their souls from what they hear, as if they were really deaf and unable to hear a word. How can that be? What I say is not an invention of my own; it is founded on the infallible

¹ *Mirabantur, sed non convertebantur.*

Truth, Jesus Christ Himself, who speaks of those people in the parable of the sower in the Gospel of St. Luke: "as he sowed some fell by the wayside, and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it; and other some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it had no moisture; and other some fell among thorns, and the thorns growing up with it, choked it; and other some fell upon good ground, and being sprung up, yielded fruit a hundredfold."¹ Thus we learn from the mouth of Jesus Christ the four causes why the seed of the Word of God produces little or no fruit in most of those who hear it; and at the same time we have the subjects of four instructions which I intend giving wherever the Gospel of the day affords the opportunity. I begin now with the first, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

Many hear the Word of God in sermons, but without fruit or profit; because the seed falls by the wayside. Who they are. Such is the subject of this instruction.

O loving Saviour, who canst make the deaf to hear, grant by Thy grace that we may henceforward amend this fault, and never hear Thy word without fruit! This we ask of Thee through the merits of Thy Mother Mary and the holy angels guardian.

There are three causes which prevent the seed that falls by the wayside from bearing fruit. The first is, because the wayside is an open public place, where the seed can easily be blown away by the wind; the second, because the seed not being covered with earth, cannot strike root; the third, because it is liable to be trodden under foot by the passers-by, or to be eaten by the birds. In like manner the devil has three ways of taking the Word of God out of the hearts of those who hear it, so that it brings no fruit or profit to the soul. Some, as if they were like a public way that is open on all sides, he prevents from understanding the Word of God; and these, says St. John Chrysostom, are the idle; others he prevents from attending to the roots, that is, to the principal truth that is explained; and these are the curious; with others again he causes the truths they have heard and understood, to be trampled on and devoured; and these are

With three kinds of hearers the Word of God falls without fruit by the wayside.

¹ Dum seminat, aliud cecidit secus viam, et conculcatum est, et volucres cœli comederunt illud. Et aliud cecidit supra petram, et natum aruit, quia non habebat humorem. Et aliud cecidit inter spinas, et simul exortæ spinæ suffocaverunt illud. Et aliud cecidit in terram bonam, et ortum fecit fructum centuplum.—Luke viii. 5-8.

the tepid and lukewarm. With all these people the efforts of the devil are to "take the word out of their heart, lest believing they should be saved."¹

The first consists of those who hear the sermon with distracted minds.

First then, there are those idle people who come to church to hear a sermon, not through a supernatural impulse to learn something good, and to be aroused to do good; but simply to pass away the time, or to accompany others, or to pass themselves off as good Christians, or merely that they may be able to say that they have been to the sermon. Thus they are in the church in which the sermon is preached, but they are, so to speak, not present at the sermon; their bodies are there, but not their minds and hearts, which are occupied with a hundred voluntary distractions, so that they hear the sound of the preacher's voice by the outward organs of sense, and yet understand little or nothing of what he says. They go to a part of the church where they can fix their eyes, not on the preacher, but on the congregation, so that they may see what strangers are present, greet those who are coming in, or going out, and even laugh and talk with those who, like themselves, have little desire to hear the Word of God. If they stand or sit in the midst of the congregation, they show clearly enough by their constant looking about at the least noise, by their nodding and bowing to those who come in, and sometimes too, by going asleep, that they have not brought attentive minds and hearts to the sermon, and that they are not listening with any desire to profit by what they hear. There are others who, through sheer ignorance, rob themselves of the fruit of the sermon under the appearance of devotion, by saying vocal prayers, or, when they see a priest going out on the altar (which does not occur in well-ordered churches during the sermon) by hearing Mass, and thus, as they think, doing two good works at once, and satisfying two obligations at the same time; but in reality neither of the obligations is fulfilled properly; the holy Mass is not heard with due devotion, nor the sermon with due attention. Prayer and hearing Mass are two good, praiseworthy and meritorious works; but when a sermon is being preached is not the time for them. These, and amongst their number may also be reckoned those who habitually come too late, show that they have not much desire to hear the Word of God, and that it does not matter to them whether they understand it or not, although they thereby certainly lose the light and knowledge that the good God had prepared for

¹ Ne credentes salvi fiant.—Luke viii. 12.

them in the explanation of the Gospel truth, a light that they will hardly have another chance of receiving.

What trouble a conscientious preacher gives himself during the week, studying, reading and writing! How many sighs and prayers he sends up to God and to the holy angels! Why? For what purpose? To obtain the light of the Holy Ghost for himself, that he may properly explain to the Christian people what God wishes him to explain to them; and for his hearers, that they may understand clearly the Gospel truths that are preached to them, take them deeply to heart, see from them what their own duties and obligations are, and regulate their lives and actions according to them. Now, you can easily imagine how grieved he feels, when he sees that all his trouble and labor are fruitless for many, who take up in a wrong sense what God has inspired him to say to them, or listen without attention, and therefore without fruit.

Such people make the labor of the preacher fruitless.

Demosthenes once delivered an oration in the city of Athens, before a great concourse of people, on a subject of vital importance to the welfare of the State. He saw some of the audience sleeping, others talking and laughing, and others staring about them. Interrupting his speech, he cried out to them in a loud voice: Hear, O Athenians, I am about to tell you something interesting that has just happened. All the sleepers awoke at once, and pricked up their ears. But Demosthenes stopped again, and made as if he were going away, when the people signed to him that he should continue the interesting story. Oh! the intolerable stupidity of man, cried out Demosthenes then, with every mark of displeasure, when I relate to you a foolish tale, you listen with the greatest eagerness; but when I speak of matters concerning the well-being of our whole country, you seem not to have the least desire of listening to me. Ah, how much more reason have we not to utter the same reproach against many Christians who come to sermons! If the preacher were there simply to amuse them with foolish tales, the church would be too small to contain all the people, and they would listen to him with all possible attention. But it is the Gospel truths that are treated of, which concern the welfare of our immortal souls that have been bought by the Precious Blood of Christ, and that have an eternal hell to avoid, an eternal Heaven to gain; and those truths interest people so little, that they listen, so to speak, with only half an ear, and thus show what small interest they take in what concerns their souls. Oh, intolerable and deplorable stupidity of the human heart!

And show that they are not much concerned about their souls.

And give great joy to the devil, for it is he who strives to distract their attention.

Shown by examples.

And that is the very result that the spirit of envy, the devil, tries so hard to bring about. He knows what harm the Word of God can do him, when it is listened to with a certain amount of attention and eagerness; it fills him with bitter envy to see so many souls thereby freed from his slavery and led to love God zealously; and therefore he tries, in every possible way, when he cannot prevent people from coming to the sermon, at least to distract them, so that they understand little or nothing of it.

As St. Vincent Ferrer was once preaching with great fervor in a public square in the town of Murcia in Spain, three runaway horses came towards the assembled people at full gallop. The frightened people began to look about for some means of escape. Be still! said the holy man, do not be afraid, my dear Christians; those are not wild horses but devils. Thereupon he made the sign of the Cross over his audience, and commanded the evil spirits in the name of Jesus Christ to leave the town and never return to it; a command which was at once obeyed. See, he said to the people, those accursed spirits that you have just beheld in the form of wild horses, have been in this town for a long time past for the sole purpose of hindering people from deriving any fruit from the sermons they hear; now that they have seen how eagerly and attentively you listen, they could no longer contain their rage, and therefore they tried to distract your attention by running towards you and frightening you. But, thanks be to God! they were foiled in their design! St. Antony of Padua discomfited the devil in a similar manner. Once, while he was preaching, a messenger came in a great hurry, made his way through the crowd of people, and went up to a noble lady, who was listening very attentively to the sermon, and gave her a note, begging her to read it at once, as it contained something of the greatest importance. The news contained in the note was to the effect that her only son had been killed. St. Antony saw through the trick at once, and cried out to the lady: Do not be alarmed, your son is alive and well; the messenger is the devil, and his only object was to prevent you from paying attention to the Word of God; it was for that reason he invented that sad news for you. These examples will suffice to show what joy the devil experiences when he sees people giving way to voluntary distractions during a sermon; for without any trouble on his part, he secures what he most longs for. And what is that? That they may not attend to the Word of God, and so derive no fruit from it, "lest believing, they should be saved."

The second class of those who scatter the seed of the Word of God by the wayside, where it can neither strike root nor produce fruit, are the curious, who listen to sermons with great attention, nay, with great pleasure and eagerness, but do not pay any attention to the fundamental truth that is being explained; for they are simply anxious to hear how the preacher treats his subject, but they are not at all concerned about deriving profit for their souls from what they hear. They listen for the sake of an intellectual treat, not to have their wills moved to do good or to avoid evil. They are, to my mind, like those artists who come to the churches to look at the pictures of Christ and the saints. What do they look at them for? Their chief idea is to see whether the picture is in accordance with the rules of art, how the outlines, shades and colors harmonize with the subject, whether the limbs are in due proportion, etc. That is all they are concerned about. Oh, they exclaim with pleasure, what a beautiful picture! It is a real masterpiece! Whoever painted that knew what he was about! That other picture over the altar there, is not much of a success; there is too much straining after effect; the foot is too short, the hand is too long; and so they run on without the least devout or pious thought occurring to their minds. But if a pious man comes into the church and looks at the same pictures out of devotion, on his knees and with folded hands, they bring to his mind Christ, or the saints of God, and excite in him a true sorrow for sin, fervent love of Jesus Christ crucified, and a profound sense of humility and self-abasement by representing to him the lives of the saints. The others go away as they came; they gained nothing by looking at the pictures, except that they can say: I have seen a beautiful painting in such and such a church.

Those who go to sermons out of curiosity; represented by a simile.

Such is the case with many Christians who hear the Word of God constantly and with eagerness and pleasure; their curiosity is excited by the manner in which the preacher deals with his subject; they want to see how he proves it, and to hear the examples, parables, similes, traits of history, interpretations and adaptations of Holy Scripture, and the oratorical skill with which he develops it. Thus it is only the outward colors they consider, in order to gratify their curiosity; they pay no attention to the substance of the truth itself which is explained with a view of moving the hearers' hearts, nor to the cogency and weight of the arguments that are adduced to make them detest their sins and amend their wicked lives.

Such people
do not profit
by sermons.

Therefore, those people go away from sermons just as they came, nor have they gained anything except that they can say: oh, that was a fine sermon; that preacher knows his business, etc.; or else, that sermon was not worth much; the preacher did not take much trouble to prepare it, etc. Alas, is that all you have been able to learn from the Word of God? Oh, how I regret that you should have spent a precious hour so unprofitably! How sorry I am that you should have shown such patience in listening to no purpose! What a bad return you make the preacher for all his labor and trouble; for he certainly expected to do something more for you, than merely to tickle your ears, and excite your admiration! I know very well that the explanation of the Scripture truths must be made with a certain pomp and magnificence of language, so to speak, becoming the infinite Majesty of God, who speaks by the preacher's mouth; just as the altars in the churches are decorated with beautiful flowers, silken hangings, gold and silver vases and costly paintings, in order to show that the great God is really present there. I acknowledge, too, with St. Bernard, just as pills are gilded or sweetened, in order to make them less distasteful to the sick man who has to take them; so, in order to lessen the dislike that some weak Christians have for the Word of God, and to induce them to hear it more frequently, the Gospel truths must be explained by all means with earnestness and vigor, in order to instruct the hearers and to move their hearts, but at the same time they must be sugar-coated by being presented in an agreeable form, with apt similes, and examples, and in a pleasing style of oratory. "A sermon," says St. Bernard, "must be pleasing to the ear, solid in the nutriment it affords, and efficacious in healing."¹ But to seek the first of these qualities, alone, and to aim at nothing beyond the mere pleasure of having an intellectual treat, and so to pay little attention to the truth explained, that means simply to pervert the end for which one should hear the Word of God, and to rob one's self deliberately of all spiritual profit.

They are
sick and
do not wish
to be healed.

If the sick man were simply to taste the sugar that covers the pill, but to reject the pill itself with disgust, what good would that do him? None, certainly; it would only make him worse. Alas, what dangerous and mortal illness of the soul many people have, who come to hear a sermon; illness which the good God

¹ *Delleciosa ad saporem, solida ad nutrimentum, efficans ad medicinam.*—S. Bern. serm. 67 in Cant.

is then and there prepared to cure by His all-piercing word! People come who are ill of a foolish, loquacious, blasphemous, slanderous, or impure tongue; of curious and lustful eyes; of unguarded ears; of impure, or thievish hands; who are sick in nearly all their actions and behavior; whose hearts are filled with the poison of hatred and envy against their neighbor, or burdened with the raging fever of impure passion, of pride, of avarice, of gluttony and drunkenness, of anger and ill-will, etc. The medicine that God has prepared to cure their diseases, is the preaching to them the truths of faith, in order to enlighten and to arouse them to a sincere repentance and amendment. Now, if those sick people seek only the outward ornament, and throw away the real medicine, the Gospel truths, without thinking of them; how will that medicine help to cure their spiritual diseases? Ah, certainly it is a sign that they do not know the miserable state in which they are, and do not desire a remedy for it; or, at least, there is no doubt that they have no hunger and thirst for the Word of God. He who is really hungry, is not in need of sweetmeats and delicacies to provoke his appetite; he is satisfied with plain, substantial food, and does not care how it is prepared. A piece of dry bread and meat tastes very well to him, although he has to eat it without sauce. On the other hand, he who has no appetite for wholesome food, but longs for sweetmeats and delicacies, gives evident proof that his stomach is weak and out of order, or else that he has already had enough to eat.

“Go to the ant,”¹ says the Holy Ghost, to the slothful and lazy, who lead idle, useless lives, and learn from them how to employ your time. We might say to those curious hearers of the Word of God, “go to the bees,” and learn from them how to extract profit and advantage for your souls from sermons. Consider how the bees fly about in the garden, or in the open field. What sort of flowers are they seeking so diligently? Roses? violets? tulips? ranunculus, and the like, which lend most beauty to the garden by their varied colors? By no means; those thrifty little creatures do not care much for flowers of that kind; they are not attracted either by their delicious perfume, or their beautiful colors; all they want is honey that is so useful and so pleasing to the taste. Therefore, it is no matter to them what a flower or herb looks like, whether it grows wild in the fields, or is carefully cultivated in the garden, whether it is red

They should learn from the bees how to extract profit from a sermon.

¹ Vade ad formicam.—Prov. vi. 6.

or white, blue or black, sweet or bitter; it is all one to them, as long as they can find the precious honey they are looking for; and when they have found that, they are satisfied, for they have attained the object of their desires. "Go to the bees," O Christians, and learn from them what you must seek, and pay special attention to, when you hear a sermon. Learn to seek not the outward pomp and magnificence of words, but the substantial truth that is explained for you, the cogency of the arguments and proofs that are adduced, the infallible authority of the Holy Scripture, and the maxims and sayings of the holy Doctors of the Church which confirm that truth. Whether the truth is sweet or bitter, terrible or consoling, should be a matter of indifference to you, if you are concerned about your soul's welfare. The honey that you have to extract from it, and to bring away with you, is the clear knowledge of your past sins and of the faults that have hitherto escaped you, the impulse to amend your life, zeal in the divine service, and your spiritual advantage. If you do not seek that, the sermon is of no good to you, and you are only wasting your time listening to it; you scatter the precious seed of the Word of God by the wayside, where it cannot grow nor take root, and you are playing into the hands of the devil, whose whole effort is to take the word away from you, "lest believing, you should be saved."

The third class consists of those who immediately forget the truths they have heard.

The third and last class of those who let the seed of the Word of God fall by the wayside, and be eaten by the birds, consists of those Christians who are lazy and slothful in the divine service. They listen to the sermon, and listen to it with great eagerness and attention; nor are they indifferent to the truths preached to them, which they understand very well, so that they can offer no objections against them; frequently, too, their understandings are enlightened and their wills impelled to change their lives and to amend their faults; they find consolation in difficulties, and encouragement to be zealous in the service of God; but it all lasts only till the end of the sermon; when the preacher leaves the pulpit, they forget all he has said; they are just as quick in forgetting, as they were in learning, so that, if they were asked on the same evening, or on the following day, whether they remembered anything of the sermon, or learned anything from it, they would have to answer that they knew nothing more about it. St. James, in his epistle, compares people of that kind to a man who looks at himself in a glass: for the Word of God is a glass in which the beauty of virtue, the deformity of vice, the gravity

of sin, and the actual state of the soul may be seen. Now, he who hears this word, and immediately forgets it, is, according to the Apostle, like a man who looks at himself in the glass, and presently goes away and forgets what he is like. "For," says the Apostle, "if a man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he shall be compared to a man beholding his own countenance in a glass. For he beheld himself and went his way, and presently forgot what manner of man he was."¹ St. Gregory compares the hearts of such people to a stomach which takes in food and drink with appetite, but rejects them with violence before the process of digestion begins: "The food of the soul," he says, "is the Word of God; but it is rejected, like food taken into a sick stomach, when it does not remain in the memory."² Just as it is a certain sign of a weak stomach to reject food and drink, so it is an almost infallible sign of a soul being injured by carelessness in the divine service, when it hears the Word of God, and at once forgets it. That forgetfulness is to be attributed to the fact that, when the sermon is over, those people at once occupy their minds with their usual worldly cares and occupations, and go into company, or engage in conversations which distract them, and prevent them from giving due consideration to the truths they have heard, so as to impress them on the memory. Thus, they profit as little by the sermon, as if they had never heard it.

The morning dew falls on the roses and lilies, but it does them no good; nay, it rather injures them and makes them fade and droop all the sooner. On the other hand, when it falls into the pearl-oyster, it produces a costly pearl. What is the reason of this difference? The dew falls off the flowers at once, or else it is quickly absorbed by the heat of the sun; but the oyster, as soon as it has received the dew-drop, closes its shell at once, and keeps it fast. In the same way, when the dew of the Word of God falls on a slothful, careless heart, it falls off at once, and so can produce no spiritual food of importance. A zealous soul, desirous of salvation, is not at all satisfied with merely hearing and receiving into itself the Word of God; no, it must produce a precious pearl from that word, and therefore it endeavors to retain in its memory, at least as far as their substance is concerned,

And derive
no profit
from them.

¹ Si quis auditor est verbi, et non factor, hic comparabitur viro consideranti vultum natiuitatis suae in speculo: consideravit enim se, et abiit, et statim oblitus est, qualis fuerit.—James i. 23-24.

² Cibus mentis est verbum Dei, et quasi receptus cibus stomacho languente rejicitur, quando auditus sermo in ventro memoriae non retinetur.—S. Greg. hom. 15. in Evang.

the truths it has heard. One who is thus disposed, even after the sermon is over, is still busied in his thoughts with what he has heard and learned; for days after he recalls it again to his memory, and renews every morning the resolutions he has made to derive spiritual profit from it. These are the hearers that Jesus Christ pronounces blessed: "Blessed are they who hear the Word of God, and keep it."¹ But the others are the people of whom our dear Saviour complains, because they scatter the seed of His divine word by the wayside, so that it is either trampled under foot, or devoured by the birds: "And they by the wayside, are they that hear: then the devil cometh, and taketh the word out of their hearts." To what end? Alas, "lest believing they should be saved."²

How to remember the truths one hears in sermons.

Ah, some pious souls will probably say with fear and trembling, if it is necessary to keep constantly in the memory what one has heard in sermons, then certainly, I am not one of those whom Jesus Christ has pronounced blessed! For, no matter how attentive and eager I am to hear and to retain what I have heard, I still forget it, and am never able to say what I have heard on the preceding Sunday. I have no difficulty in believing that you are speaking the truth, and that there are many who are in the same state as yourselves. But it is not necessary by any means to be always able to relate what you have heard in a sermon; I myself could not now tell you exactly what I said in my sermon last Sunday, although I knew it then word for word. It is enough for us that the thing itself, that is, the truth we have learned remains in the memory; it is not at all necessary for us to be always recalling it to our minds. It is, in fact, an utter impossibility for us to do that, because we have so many different things to think of during the day. But when an opportunity offers of doing or omitting anything according to the truth we have learned, we must then try to remember that truth, and to act according to the impulse we received when we were listening to it, although the words and style of the sermon, and the proofs and argument brought forward, have entirely escaped our recollection.

Explained in particular instances.

For instance, you have heard a sermon about Christian patience under trials, and you have learned that all crosses, no matter by what name they are called, or how they come to us,

¹ Beati qui audiunt verbum Dei, et custodiunt illud.—Luke xi. 28.

² Qui autem secus viam: Hi sunt, qui audiunt; deinde venit diabolus et tollit verbum de corde eorum, ne credentes salvi fiant.—Luke viii. 12.

are to be attributed to a most wise and just arrangement of the Providence of God, who with the best intentions and out of the fulness of His Fatherly love for us, sends us those crosses for our spiritual good, and is looking on while we are suffering pain and anguish, etc. Now you do not think of all this for some time after, and you would not be able to say if you were asked, what proofs, or texts of Scripture, or examples of the saints, the preacher brought forward to substantiate the truth he was explaining; nor is it necessary that you should be able to do so. But suppose that after an interval of six months, some calamity, or sickness, or trouble befalls you; at first you are quite disturbed and bewildered, and you get angry with the person whom you blame for the misfortune that has happened you; but, when you recollect yourself, the thought occurs to you: oh, I heard once in a sermon that all trials come from God, and must therefore be borne with patience and resignation. I acknowledged the truth of that, when I heard it, and I also made a resolution to resign myself patiently to the will of God in all troubles. Now I have a fine opportunity of carrying that resolution into effect; I must, then, and will be patient under this trial. You have heard a sermon about the necessity of avoiding the dangers and occasions of sin, because God withdraws His grace from him who, presumptuously and without necessity, ventures into them, and allows him to fall into sin. You forgot that sermon soon after you heard it; but after some time you were invited to an evening party in which many people of both sexes were to meet and spend the time in dancing and amusing themselves. All at once you remember having heard that such parties are dangerous and you make up your mind to refuse the invitation politely and to remain at home. You have heard a sermon about detraction, what a grievous sin it is, and how difficult to make proper reparation for; it escapes your memory for a time, until one day you happen to be in company in which people are speaking ill of their neighbor; the sermon occurs to your mind at once; I have heard, you say to yourself, that it is not right, that it is against charity, and against the right that my neighbor has to his good name, thus to speak ill of him behind his back; and that the loss he thus suffers in his honor must be made good. Why then should I join in this uncharitable conversation? I will hold my tongue and say nothing. You have heard a sermon about the gravity of the insult that is offered to God, in His very presence, by irreverence in church;

you acknowledged the truth of what you heard, and now if you continue to behave with reverence in church, you show that you have profited by it sufficiently. You have heard and acknowledged that it is very pleasing to God, as it is right and just, that one should consecrate the first of the day to Him by devout morning prayers; you have long ago forgotten what you heard; nevertheless, you still come every morning to praise God in the public devotions. You have heard and acknowledged that it is most useful and almost necessary, in order to keep in the state of grace, to receive the Sacraments often with due preparation; from that time you have been accustomed to go to Confession and Communion every fortnight, or at least every month; that is quite enough, even though you have forgotten every word of the sermon. And so on with regard to other truths. That is the right fruit and profit to derive from hearing the Word of God, that is the way to keep it constantly before one's mind.

Exhortation
to hear the
Word of God
frequently
and with
desire.

In a word, he who often hears sermons with a good intention, and with an eager desire to profit by them, will always derive some spiritual advantage from them, even though he can never clearly recall them to his memory. Ruffinus writes of a young hermit, who once complained to his abbot that his memory was so bad, that he could not retain a word of the sermons he heard, although he listened to them eagerly and with a great desire to profit by them, and therefore he was of the opinion that it was simply a loss of time for him to hear sermons. The abbot took two earthen vessels, and giving one to the young hermit, said: there, go and fill that with water and when you have washed it quite clean, throw the water out. The young man did so three or four times. Now, said the abbot, which of the two vessels is the cleaner! Of course the one I have washed so often, said the young man. It is just the same with the soul, ¹ rejoined the abbot, although the water is at once poured out of the vessel that is washed, still that vessel is cleaner each time. The Word of God is the water provided by Him, to cleanse souls with; if you hear it constantly and with eagerness, although you imagine that it all escapes your memory at once, and that you can retain none of it, still it always cleanses your soul more and more from the filth of sin, and makes it more beautiful with virtue and more pleasing to God. I conclude, my dear brethren, with the same advice, "Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it;" blessed are they who with attention and eagerness and a

¹ Sic est et anima.—Ruffinus, l. 3.

desire to know the truth, receive the seed of the Word of God and make it fructify in their hearts. Amen.

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

Text.

Quodcumque dixerit vobis, facite.—John. ii. 5.

“Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye.”

Certainly a salutary and holy exhortation, and one worthy to fall from the lips of the Most Blessed Virgin, who was specially enlightened by God, and whose will was never different from the will of God. “Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye;” if you are attentive to every word and sign of my Son, you cannot go wrong. My dear brethren, let us all take this exhortation to ourselves, just as if we heard from the lips of Mary, our dearest Mother, every time we hear a sermon “whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye”; be eagerly attentive to all that God is about to say to your hearts, so as to live in accordance with it. Oh, if that were always done, what great profit would accrue to souls! But unfortunately, how many Christians there are who despise the Word of God, and seldom go to sermons! What a bad and dangerous sign that is, I have explained last Sunday. Now I go on to speak of those who constantly hear sermons, amongst whom also there are many who profit as little by what they hear, as if they never came to a sermon at all. How so? This is no invention of my own, etc.—*continues as before.*

FORTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

ON THOSE WHO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD WITH HARD HEARTS.

Subject.

There are some who hear the Word of God in sermons without deriving any profit therefrom, and without amending their vicious lives, because the seed falls on a rock, that is, on a hard heart.—*Preached on the twelfth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Viso illo, praterivit.—Luke x. 31.

“And seeing him, passed by.”

Introduction.

Certainly that priest must have been hard-hearted, as he was not moved to compassion by the sight of misery and pain. He saw the poor robbed and wounded man lying half dead by the wayside, but "seeing him, passed by," and went on his way without a word of consolation for him. We find the same hardness of heart nowadays, my dear brethren, amongst many Christians who, not to speak of their refusing to help their poor and needy fellow-Christians, when they could easily do so, and of their want of pity and compassion for their suffering brethren, have within themselves a poor, sick and mortally wounded soul, and cannot be moved by any inspirations and exhortations to take pity on it, and to save it from eternal destruction. And to their number belong the second class of those who hear the Word of God, but do not profit by it, because the seed falls on the hard rock; of these I will speak to-day, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

There are some who hear the Word of God in sermons without deriving any profit therefrom, and without amending their vicious lives, because the seed falls on a rock, that is, on a hard heart. Such is the whole subject of this instruction.

O Almighty God, who holdest in Thy hands the hearts of men, soften those hard rocks, that they may be at last penetrated by Thy divine Word, and produce the wished-for fruit of eternal salvation! This we ask of Thee through the merits of Mary and our holy angels guardian.

Some sinners hear sermons with hard hearts.

There are some people even amongst Catholics, who are so sunk in depravity, that they have recourse to diabolical arts, and by the help of the devil, make themselves invulnerable, so that they may fearlessly engage in battle, or in whatever quarrel they have on hand. If the devil keeps his promise to those people, which he generally does not do, for he often shamefully deceives them, or else his black art is frustrated by the power of God and the holy angels; but if he does fulfil his promise, neither sword nor dagger, nor bullet will be able to hurt them; nothing can inflict a wound on them; the point of the dagger, the edge of the sword and the bullet can only make a blue mark on their bodies, but cannot penetrate the flesh, because it has been made so hard and firm. In the same way, amongst Christians, there are some whose hearts are so hard and flinty, that no matter how undeniable the

truths they hear in sermons are, they cannot be moved to repent of their sins, to change their unchristian habits, and to amend their wicked lives.

As we have seen already, the holy Apostle, St. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, calls the Word of God a sharp sword; "Take unto you the helmet of salvation; and the sword of the Spirit (which is the Word of God);"¹ and a sword which penetrates both soul and body. "For," he says writing to the Hebrews, "the Word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword; and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit, of the joints also and of the marrow."² There is no vice that cannot be slain and exterminated by the sword of the Word of God. If pride or vanity impels you to extol yourself above others, take that sword immediately: "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return."³ Remember who and what you are; you are but a handful of earth, and you will have to return to earth; "under thee shall the moth be strewed, and worms shall be thy covering;"⁴ why should you be proud of your beauty? It will one day be the food of worms. "Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled."⁵ "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."⁶ If impure passions and the desires of the flesh assail the soul; take at once the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God: "neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor the effeminate shall possess the kingdom of God."⁷ Impure and sensual souls, "which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"⁸ how will you bear the eternal fires that await your momentary pleasure? If you are tempted to avarice and the greed of temporal things, take the sword of the Spirit in your hand at once; "What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul."⁹ "Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee; and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"¹⁰ Why do you torment yourself, and grub in the earth like a mole?

Although the Word of God is powerful against all sins and vices.

¹ Galeam salutis assumite, et gladium spiritus (quod est verbum Dei).—Ephes. vi. 17.

² Vivus est enim sermo Dei, et efficax et penetrabilior omni gladioincipiti et pertingens usque ad divisionem animæ ac spiritus, compagum quoque ac medullarum.—Hebr. iv. 12.

³ Pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris.—Gen. iii. 19.

⁴ Subter te sternetur tinea, et operimentum tuum erunt vermes.—Isai. xiv. 11.

⁵ Qui se exaltat, humiliabitur.—Luke xiv. 11.

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

⁷ Neque fornicarii, neque adulteri, neque molles regnum Dei possidebunt.—I. Cor. vi. 9-10.

⁸ Quis habitavit ex vobis cum adoribus sempiternis?—Isai. xxxiii. 14.

⁹ Quid enim prodest homini, si mundum universum lucretur, animæ vero suæ detrimentum patiatur.—Matth. xvi. 26.

¹⁰ Stulte, hac nocte animam tuam repetunt a te: quæ autem parasti, cujus erunt?—Luke xii. 20.

Perhaps this very night your soul will be hurried into eternity. If the perverse world tries to lead you astray by its scandalous, and vain usages, take at once the sword of the Word of God: "Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world."¹ "Whosoever will be a friend of the world, becometh an enemy of God."² If the calamities and miseries of life assail you, disturb your heart and mind, and threaten to drive you into despair; arm yourself at once with the sword of the Word of God: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."³ "The world shall rejoice, and you shall be made sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy;"⁴ your sorrow will last but a short time, and will then be exchanged for eternal joy: "The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us."⁵ "Look up and lift up your heads; because your redemption is at hand;"⁶ and your tears will be turned into eternal gladness: after the short suffering of this life, you will have the everlasting joys of Heaven which no one will take from you, etc. In a word, there is no vice, nor temptation which the powerful Word of God cannot overcome, subdue and utterly exterminate.

Yet it is of no good to those hard-hearted people.

But all this is of no good to those hard-hearted people of whom we are speaking. The sword may strike where it wills; it cannot penetrate. They hear from the Word of God of the magnificent promises of an exceeding great reward for virtue, and threats of eternal punishment in hell that awaits sinners, of the uncertainty, and the speedy approach of an unforeseen and unprovided death, and of the strict judgment that will follow it; the bitter sufferings of Our Lord Jesus Christ are represented to them in the most moving manner; the most powerful motives are suggested to them for loving above all things God, who is infinitely beautiful, and infinitely amiable, etc. But nothing can touch their hearts; they are incapable of being softened; they go home from the sermon with the same hearts and minds that they brought to it. They are like a student who spends two, three, four or six years at school, and leaves it just as ignorant as when he entered it, because he was unable to learn on

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

² Quicumque voluerit amicus esse sæculi hujus, inimicus Dei constituitur.—James iv. 4.

³ Beati, qui lugent, quoniam ipsi saturabuntur.—Matth. v. 5.

⁴ Mundus gaudebit, vos autem contristabimini, sed tristitia vestra vertetur in gaudium.—John xvi. 20.

⁵ Non sunt condignæ passiones hujus temporis ad futuram gloriam, quæ revelabitur in nobis.—Rom. viii. 18.

⁶ Respicite et levate capita vestra, quoniam appropinquat redemptio vestra.—Luke xxi. 28.

account of the dulness of his understanding. In the same way, they hear in the school of Jesus Christ, many truths that are most useful and necessary to salvation, but they remain as before, addicted to the same pride and vanity, the same avarice and injustice, the same impurity and sensuality, the same gluttony and drunkenness, the same laziness and sloth in the service of God; they are now just as they have been for the last five, ten or more years; the sword of the Word of God does not touch their hearts. Why? Alas, habitual indulgence in sin and vice has made them hard and callous; the Word of God can make no impression on them. Father Kircher relates a wonderful circumstance that occurred in the province of Tungil in Africa; a large tract of country with all it contained, was one summer's night turned into hard stone, amidst terrible earthquakes and storms; the trees and crops in the fields, the plants and vegetables in the gardens, the wild beasts in the forests, domestic animals and fowls in their sheds, even human beings, men, women and children in their houses, were all turned to stone and each individual retained the posture he had when the catastrophe occurred.¹ One might have talked to those people for a long time, my dear brethren, without making any impression on them, for they were but stone; you might strike, beat or shoot at them without wounding them, they could not be wounded, neither would they run away afraid. Why? Because they were hard, lifeless stones. And there are men who are just as insensible to the otherwise powerful Word of God, as if, like those people in Africa, they were turned into stone. You may say to them what you will, strike at them a hundred times with the sword of the Word of God, it will not wound their hearts; they are turned into stone.

Such was the acknowledgment made by that old man, of whom Father Cataneus writes; he was on his death-bed, and the priest who was attending him was doing his best to excite him to repentance for his sins, and to persuade him to receive the last Sacraments to help him on the journey into eternity. He reminded him of the necessary articles of faith, of hope, of charity and confidence in God, of supernatural sorrow and repentance; he spoke to him of the infinite mercy of God, to whom one never appeals in vain for forgiveness, and of the strict, inexora-

Shown by
an example.

¹ Vicus Viedoblo in provincia Tungil in Africa mediterranea aestivo tempore nocte in-tempesta cum incolis, et animalibus, et arboribus et frumentis omnibus, adstreptibus in modum horrendum fragoribus, non sine frequenti soli concussione in saxa durissima briguit —Kircher, mund. subter. tom. 2, p. 53.

ble justice of God which, after this life, will condemn the impenitent sinner to hell, and of other things of the kind, as far as his charity and zeal for the conversion of the soul that was now so near the end, suggested to him. But the dying man, although still in his senses, gave not the least sign of being moved to repentance; he looked around him on all sides, and gave a sign to his wife and children, as if he wished to say the last good-bye to them; the priest continued exhorting him to look up to Heaven, for this earth was at an end for him: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, have mercy on me according to Thy great mercy!" At last the sick man grew impatient, and he said to the priest: Hold your tongue, Father, it is all of no use; "the bread is too hard, the knife cannot cut it;" meaning thereby that his heart was too hard for the priest's words to make any impression on it. Thereupon, he turned his face away from the priest and gave up his hardened soul, without the least sign of repentance.

How the heart grows hardened, shown by a simile.

"The bread is hard;" there you have, my dear brethren, a simile which shows clearly how the human heart grows callous in wickedness, until it is incapable of being moved to repentance by the Word of God. When bread is first put into the oven, it is soft dough, and will receive any impression or shape that one wishes to give it; but when it remains for a certain time in the oven, the heat forms around it a hard crust, which can, however, still be easily broken with the hand or cut with a knife; but if the bread is left in the oven for several days, or exposed a long time to the heat of the sun, it gets so dry and hard, that neither hand, nor tooth, nor knife can make any impression on it. So it is with the human heart. At first, while it is still innocent, it is, so to speak, a soft dough, which can be easily shaped and moulded into any form by the divine inspirations, by the teaching and instruction given by parents, and by the exhortations of preachers and confessors to virtue and piety. That is the proper time, too, for parents to fulfil the important duty and obligation that God has imposed on them under pain of eternal damnation, of keeping their children from all dangers and occasions of sin, and after the example of the elder Tobias, training them from their very childhood to fear God, to love Him, and to serve Him alone: "And from his infancy," says the Holy Scripture, he taught him to fear God, and to abstain from all sin."¹

¹ Quem ab infantia timere Deum docuit, et abstinere ab omni peccato.—Tob. i. 10.

But if one who is still innocent, learns to know evil through the carelessness or bad example of his parents, or through the influence of wicked companions, and falls into grievous sin; then, alas, the crust begins to form itself around the dough; the first tenderness of conscience, the modesty and the softness of the heart disappear. Still the heart may yet be moved without difficulty, and be brought on a better way. A single thought on the part of the uneasy, gnawing conscience, that cries out, as it generally does in one's earlier years: Unhappy man, what have you done? where are you going to? You have lost your soul, offended God, forfeited Heaven, and lost all! A single word on the part of his confessor, to show him the deformity and the grievous malice of sin, and the severe punishment that awaits it; a single sermon that speaks to him of God, and of divine truths, may be a sharp knife that cuts into his heart, and moves it to sorrow and repentance. But if he afterwards gets into other temptations and occasions of sin, so that he falls frequently; then the crust gets harder and harder; the former horror and dread of mortal sin disappear gradually, until at length the sin becomes habitual, the voice of conscience is hushed, and the sinner feels quite at ease in his miserable state. O wretched and miserable state indeed! The good inspirations of God and of his angel guardian find no hearing any longer, the exhortations and threats of parents, confessors and preachers cannot frighten him; the great truths of the certainty and uncertainty of death, of the strict judgments of God, of the eternal joys of Heaven, of the undying fires of hell, cannot reach his heart or soften it, because he has heard them often before. See, already "the bread is too hard to be cut with a knife." Not that the knife has lost its sharpness and power, for the Word of God is always a two-edged sword; but it cannot penetrate the hard and flinty heart. Therefore, with people of that kind the Word of God falls on a rock, and through want of moisture, dries up and produces no fruit.

It does not occur all at once, but gradually.

There is another class of hearers of the Word of God, who are not altogether hard and unimpressionable: they are like those wicked men who enter into a compact with the devil, in virtue of which only a part of their bodies becomes invulnerable, for instance, parts that are covered by their clothing; so that if a bullet or a sword strikes them on the breast, it cannot hurt them, while if it strikes the hand or face, it inflicts a wound. In the same way, I repeat, there are Catholics who hear the

Some have partially hardened hearts.

Word of God with eagerness and satisfaction, and who are even impressed by it, so that they are moved to do good and to avoid evil; but not every truth that is preached to them has that effect, in some things they are so hard and unimpressionable, that nothing can touch their hearts. For there are certain vices, certain abuses to which they are addicted, and which, as they have persuaded themselves are of no great harm, they do not intend to amend or renounce. With regard to those vices and abuses, the Word of God, and the Gospel truths are powerless; before the sermon has well commenced they have already hardened their hearts, and fully determined to take no notice of anything that is said against their pet failings; and when they hear anything of the kind, they at once distract their minds from the sermon by thinking of something else; or else they listen to it, but laugh at it in their hearts. You may say what you like, they think, you will not persuade me in this matter; I will believe you in other things, but as far as this is concerned, you may preach till to-morrow without making any impression on me, for I have fully made up my mind not to change, etc.

In some things they allow themselves to be moved to good, but in other things they are only embittered.

Therefore, they listen with pleasure to a sermon in praise of certain practices of devotion and virtue, which they are accustomed to perform, or against certain vices they are not much given to, such as cursing, swearing, blasphemy, detraction, drunkenness, injustice, adultery, and the like. Oh, excellent! they say, when they hear those vices sharply animadverted on; that sermon is very practical; it is a pity so and so is not here; those are really fundamental truths that the preacher is explaining, etc. But if their own bad and vicious habits are attacked; if the authority of the Holy Scriptures and the Christian law, and the testimony of the holy Fathers are appealed to against certain unlawful, and sinful customs of the world; for instance, against the deplorable carelessness of many parents who train up their sons and daughters to vanity and idleness, against extravagance and indecency in dress, against dangerous company, and evening parties in which both sexes meet, not only to squander away in an unchristian and wicked manner, in dancing, gambling, and folly, the precious time that was given them for the sole purpose of saving their souls, but who to sacrifice their hearts to the perverse world, the corrupt flesh, and, as a matter of course, to the devil too; if the preacher ventures to say that all outward works of piety, such as prayer, hearing Mass, visiting the churches, Confession and Communion

are of no good as long as one disobeys the precepts of God or of the Church, even in one particular, or as long as one is not ready always to follow the divine will when it is made known to him, and so on; oh, then it is a different matter altogether! The preacher might have held his tongue about that, they think; he is only making decent people ashamed, and disturbing consciences unnecessarily, and filling them with scruples; he is too coarse and blunt; he does not know how respectable people must live in the world; he cannot draw the line between them and the common herd, etc.

The only fruit they reap from the Word of God is anger, displeasure and bitterness against the preacher, a still greater hardness of heart, and a firmer determination not to amend their lives in spite of what they have heard. They resemble the high-priests, the Scribes and Pharisees, who, although Jesus Christ, the Teacher of all teachers, preached to them Himself in the most forcible manner, condemning their pride, deceitfulness and hypocrisy, yet derived no fruit from what they heard except to become still more embittered against Jesus Christ, who was so anxious for their spiritual welfare; so that they more than once took up stones to throw at Him; until at length they became so hardened and obdurate in wickedness, that they condemned the innocent Son of God to be nailed to the shameful Cross as a public malefactor. The only comfort to me and to other preachers under those circumstances, is this very example of Our Saviour Jesus Christ who, as the eternal Wisdom, foresaw with unerring certainty that His preaching would only make the Scribes and Pharisees more embittered and obdurate, nevertheless continued to preach to them, and to condemn severely their sins and vices.

Like the Pharisees when Christ preached to them.

Many of those people are not satisfied with being themselves so hard-hearted in certain things that they do not profit by sermons; they cannot even bear to see others profiting by such sermons; and therefore they try to have as many companions as possible in their unlawful customs and abuses, that they may indulge therein with all the more freedom. To this end they spare neither adverse comment nor ridicule against the preacher, when they are in company, so as to lessen his authority; they agree among themselves to adhere to their customs with all the greater pertinacity; they laugh at those who, having seen the truth, renounce and amend those abuses; they always speak of them as simple, unsophisticated

They even try to make others obdurate.

people who do not know how to live like the rest of the world. Thus they prevent from profiting by the Word of God many others for whom God had prepared graces that they were to receive in sermons; and thus too, they act the part of the bellish bird of prey who makes every effort to take the seed of the Word of God out of the hearts of men, "lest believing they should be saved." There we have again those flinty hearts, which cannot be moved, at least in certain things, by the Word of God. "The bread is too hard, and the knife cannot cut it."

Such people should hear the Word of God all the more constantly.

But, does it then follow that those people must absent themselves from sermons altogether, and think, oh what is the use of my going to a sermon; it will not do me the least good! Not by any means. On the contrary they should hear sermons constantly; because it may be that the reason of their obduracy with regard to certain vices, is the fact that they seldom, and with frequent interruptions, and only when their humor takes them, hear the Word of God; while they often put in an appearance long after the sermon has begun. Thus they hear a little about some truth or other; but they lose what is most necessary for them and what would be most likely to stir their hearts and convert them. There is not much good in people of that kind hearing the Word of God now and then; one or two sermons will not make any impression on them; nothing but emphatic and oft-repeated exhortation and instruction will enable them to overcome their bad habits. But no matter how hard a heart is, it must at last be softened and brought to a knowledge of the truth by being frequently touched by the Word of God. If you cannot cut a piece off a hard loaf the first, second, or third time, you will at all events succeed if you saw at it perseveringly. A strong fortress cannot be taken at the first, second, or third assault; but it can be taken after a long siege, when the garrison has been starved out.

And they will be softened by it at last.

The Abbot Pastor being once asked what was the best way to convert a hard-hearted sinner, replied: "Water is by nature soft, but stone hard;"¹ yet no stone is so hard that if water constantly drops on it from a height, it will not be eventually worn away and bored through; "so also the Word of God is soft and gentle, and our hearts are hard."² Consequently, if a man hears the Word of God frequently and constantly, it is hardly possible that his heart will not be at last softened and

¹ *Natura aquæ mollis est lapidis autem dura.*—Heribert Rosueid. L. 7.

² *Sic et verbum Dei dulce et molle est, cor autem nostrum durum.*

penetrated, so that he will fear God and love Him;¹ according to the promise of the Lord in the Book of Ezechiel: "And I will pour upon you clean water, and you shall be cleansed from all your filthiness, and I will cleanse you from all your idols."² What sort of water is that? "The water of the teaching of the Word of God;"³ answers the Glossa. And what else will follow? "And I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and will give you a heart of flesh; and I will cause you to walk in My commandments, and to keep My judgments, and do them."⁴

Was not the heart of Augustine as hard as a stone, and so habituated to pride and sensual indulgence, that, as he himself publicly acknowledges, he had so much difficulty in the beginning of his conversion, that it seemed to him an utter impossibility to abstain from vice! Yet by hearing frequently the Word of God in the sermons of St. Ambrose, that flinty heart became softened and impressed, so that it glowed with the love of God in a most remarkable manner; in consequence of which St. Augustine is often represented as holding a burning heart in his hand. When Father Jerome Lopez, of our Society, as we read in his Life, was giving a mission in a certain town, there was amongst those who came to hear his sermons a merchant who had amassed great wealth by usury and injustice, and who was so possessed by the greed of gold, that when he heard some sermons against that vice, he swore to himself that he would never give it up. Let the preacher, he said to himself, shout and cry out till he is hoarse, against making money unjustly; if a thousand demons were to come to carry off my soul, I will not amend in that respect. He continued in these bad dispositions, and heard all the sermons of the mission one after the other, without being in the least impressed by them. At last the close of the mission came, and Father Jerome drew a vivid picture of the wrath and anger of God against those who still refused to repent and amend their wicked lives, and what a wonder of the divine mercy! the hitherto hardened and obdurate man was at last overcome, and his heart completely softened; he

As was the case with many obdurate sinners.

¹ Homo ergo audiens frequenter verbum Dei, aperitur cor ejus ad timendum Deum.

² Et effundam super vos aquam mundam, et mundabimini ab omnibus inquinamentis vestris, et ab universis idolis vestris mundabo vos.—Ezech. xxxvi. 25.

³ Aqua doctrinæ sermonis Dei.

⁴ Et dabo vobis cor novum, et spiritum novum ponam in medio vestri, et auferam cor lapideum de carne vestra, et dabo vobis cor carneum; et faciam, ut in præceptis meis ambulatis, et judicia mea custodiatis et operemini.—Ezech. xxxvi. 26-27.

made a good confession of all his sins, and not only made full restitution of all his ill-gotten goods to the last farthing, but also distributed large sums of what belonged to him by right, to the poor and needy of the town. So that although it is useless for men to scatter good seed on a hard rock and expect to reap a crop from it; it is not always in vain that the Almighty scatters the seed of His divine word on the flinty hearts of men; and therefore we must never despair of the conversion of a sinner, as long as he continues to hear the Word of God in sermons regularly.

Conclusion
and exhortation
to hear the
Word of God
in sermons
constantly.

Therefore, if any of those here present is a hard-hearted sinner, which I hope and believe is not the case; to him I would say with all possible earnestness: ah, my dear Christian, whatever you do, no matter how deep you are sunk in vice, do not on any account absent yourself from sermons! Come regularly; and if you feel no inclination or desire to repent, at least beg of God in the beginning of the sermon, to give you a desire of repentance; offer to Him your obdurate heart, and beg of Him to soften it according to His will, and to give you the grace to know and repent of your sins; say with the Prophet David: "I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me."¹ "O my God, enlighten my darkness;"² and pierce my hard heart with the two-edged sword of Thy word, etc. I assure you that in the end your heart will be softened, and you will derive the greatest spiritual advantage from the sermon. That is what I humbly ask of Thee, O Almighty and merciful God, for myself and all poor sinners, in the words of the prayer of Thy Church, in which alone salvation is to be found: "graciously compel our rebellious wills to turn to Thee."³ Draw them to Thyself by Thy powerful word; send forth Thy holy angels and drive us against our wicked wills, to hear Thy word; leave our hearts neither rest nor ease until Thou hast fully conquered them, pierced them with true sorrow and repentance for sin, and attached them inseparably to Thy love and service; "that believing we may be saved;" that the seed of Thy word may produce abundant fruit in us, that we may believe in it, act according to it, and at length be eternally happy with Thee. Amen.

¹ Audiam, quid loquatur in me Dominus Deus.—Ps. lxxxiv. 9.

² Deus meus, illumina tenebras meas.—Ibid. xvii. 29.

³ Nostras rebelles ad te propitius compelle voluntates.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for the third
Sunday after Epiphany.*

Text.

Tantum dic verbo, et sanabitur puer meus.—Matth. viii. 8.

“But only say the word and my servant shall be healed.”

When Jesus heard the centurion say those words, “He marvelled,” as we read in the Gospel of to-day, “and said to them that followed him: Amen I say to you, I have not found so great faith in Israel.” Indeed the centurion’s faith in Our Lord was great, for he looked upon Him as the Almighty God, and instead of asking Him to come down to his house, as others did in similar circumstances; “Lord come down before that my son die;”¹ was the importunate prayer of the ruler whose son lay at the point of death; “Lord, my daughter is even now dead; but come, lay Thy hand upon her, and she shall live;”² said the ruler to Him, in the Gospel of St. Matthew; “Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died;”³ was the complaint that Mary made to Him, when her brother Lazarus died; instead I say, of the centurion desiring anything of the kind, he simply made known to Our Lord what he wanted; “Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, and is grievously tormented.” And when Our Lord said, “I will come and heal him,” the centurion answered: No, Lord, it is not necessary for Thee to take that trouble; “but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed;” a single word from Thee will suffice; for if I, a weak mortal, can command my subjects by a word, canst not Thou do what Thou wilt by thy almighty word? There is no doubt, my dear brethren, that, as the centurion said, nothing is impossible to the Word of God; yet there are Christians nowadays, whose hearts are so hardened, that not even the Almighty God, who has left man his liberty with regard to good and evil, can penetrate them with His word. And they belong to the second class of those who hear the Word of God, and in whom the seed falls on a rock, etc.—*continues as before.*

¹ Domine, descende priusquam moriatur filius meus.—John iv. 49.

² Domine, filia mea modo defuncta est, sed veni, impone manum tuam super eam, et vivet.—Matth. ix. 18.

³ Domine, si fuisses hic, non esset mortuus frater meus.—John xi. 32.

FORTY-NINTH SERMON.

ON THOSE WHO DO NOT PRACTISE WHAT THEY HEAR IN
SERMONS.

Subject.

Many hear the Word of God in sermons without any fruit or profit to their souls, because being engrossed with unnecessary cares, and with the pursuit of honors, riches and pleasures, they do not fulfil what they hear.—*Preached on the Feast of St. Bartholomew, Apostle.*

Text.

Qui venerant ut audirent eum, et sanarentur a languoribus suis.—Luke. vi. 18.

“Who were come to hear Him, and to be healed of their diseases.”

Introduction.

And they were quite right too; they found what they sought for. They came to hear the preaching of Jesus Christ, and to be healed of their infirmities; nor were they disappointed; for, “virtue went out from Him, and healed all.”¹ Would to God, my dear brethren, that such was the case too, with us Christians, nowadays! Alas, how many infirm souls come to sermons to hear the Word of God, and go back with the same infirmities! Why so? Has the Word of God perhaps lost its power? No; it is always a powerful medicine for spiritual maladies. The fault lies in ourselves, we do not use that medicine properly; we do not receive the seed of the Word of God as we should; with some, as I have shown in the first sermon on this subject, it falls by the wayside, and is trampled under foot, or devoured by the birds, and these are the idle, who hear sermons without proper attention, the curious, who listen to them only for pleasure, and take no notice of the truth explained so as to profit by it, and the careless, who hear a sermon only now and then, or who at once forget what they have heard. With others the seed falls on a rock and withers up; and these are the hard-hearted, who cannot be moved to good, either through long-continued habits of sin, or because they are specially attached to some vice which

¹ *Virtus de illo exibat, et sanabat omnes.*—Luke vi. 19.

they do not wish to give up. With the third class of hearers, of whom I mean to speak to-day, the seed falls amongst thorns and is choked. And who are those hearers? Christ describes them in that well-known parable in the Gospel of St. Luke: "And that which fell among thorns, are they who have heard, and going their way, are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and yield no fruit."¹ There we have the subject of this instruction; namely:

Plan of Discourse.

Many hear the Word of God in sermons without any fruit or profit to their souls, because, being engrossed with unnecessary cares, and with the pursuit of the honors, riches and pleasures of this life, they do not fulfil what they hear. Let us earnestly try to avoid this fault, and to live according to the truths that we learn from the Word of God. Such shall be the conclusion.

Help us thereto by Thy grace, O merciful God! we ask it of Thee through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

There are three reasons why the seed that falls among thorns cannot fructify; first, because the thorns cover the seed, and prevent it from benefiting by the warmth of the sun, which is so necessary to growth; secondly, because, even if the seed has taken root, the thorns rob it of the moisture necessary to its growth, so that it dries up and withers; thirdly, even if a plant comes from the seed, it is soon pierced by the sharp thorns, and prevented from growing higher and coming to maturity. There you have the three bad effects produced by unnecessary cares, and by the riches, honors and pleasures of this world, which prevent him whose heart is occupied by them, from deriving any profit, or at least, any great profit from the Word of God. In the first place, they close the entrance of the heart to the Sun of justice, and prevent God from approaching it with His light and His salutary inspirations in order to move it to good.

Unnecessary cares, like thorns, prevent the divine light from reaching the heart.

And here we must not forget, my dear brethren, that it is a certain truth, as I have proved elsewhere, that the words which the preacher speaks, have not of themselves the least power to deter the hearers from evil, or to invite them to good; they are only an empty sound that strikes the ear, and, like the report of

For all the good done by sermons from God.

¹ Quod autem in spinas cecidit: hi sunt, qui audierunt, et a sollicitudinibus, et divitiis et voluptatibus vitæ euntes suffocantur, et non referunt fructum.—Luke viii. 14.

a gun in which there is only powder and no bullet, they make a noise, but cannot inflict a wound. The bullet, that must accompany the sound of the preacher's voice, has to come from Heaven; it is God, and God alone, who by the powerful light of His grace can bring the hearers to acknowledge the truth explained, and move their wills to accept and act according to that truth. "All the teachers and preachers of the Church," says St. Augustine, "are heard externally," but besides them, there is another Preacher, "whose pulpit is in Heaven, and who speaks inwardly to the heart"¹ If He remains silent, and does not help with the light and impulse of His grace, all our talking and declaiming is but an empty beating of the air. That is the reason why, before the sermon begins, all the people pray and sing together, to implore the light of the Holy Ghost; and they may be assured that they will derive great profit from the sermon, who prepare their hearts for it by earnest and fervent prayer.

But He and His light are driven away from the hearts of those people.

Now, I maintain that the lights and inspirations of grace find no entrance into the hearts of those who are already pre-occupied by unnecessary temporal cares, by avarice and greed of gold, by the love of the perverse world, and by the impure desires of the flesh. For, on the one hand, the most Holy Spirit of God cannot abide in the same heart with the sinful spirit of the world and of the flesh; and on the other hand, a man who is thus pre-occupied, has fixed his heart, his thoughts, his desires, and his inclinations only on outward and perishable things, and therefore he is incapable of noticing what goes on within himself, and what he is told for the good of his soul; or else, if the voice of God makes itself heard in his heart, he rejects it, because his heart is already filled with other cares.

We have an example of this in the rich young man of the Gospel.

We have a clear example of this in that young man in the Gospel of St. Matthew, of whom I have often spoken to you before. Jesus Christ Himself spoke to his heart, in order to induce him to lead a more perfect and holy life: "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven; and come, follow me."² Who would have thought that this invitation on the part of an all-wise and Almighty God, who is the Lord of hearts, and who called His Apostles in much fewer words, would not have at once found

¹ Omnia Ecclesiæ magisteria forinsecus sonant; cathedram habet in cœlo qui intus docet.—S. Aug. Tract 3 in Ep. Joan.

² Si vis perfectus esse, vende, quæ habes, et da pauperibus, et habebis thesaurum in cœlo, et veni, sequere me.—Matth. xix. 21.

its way to the heart of that innocent and pious young man, who according to his own confession, had never transgressed one of the divine commands; "The young man saith to him: All these have I kept from my youth;"¹ and that young man who, through an earnest desire of saving his soul, went of his own accord to Jesus, and asked Him how he should live so as to gain eternal life: "good Master, what good shall I do, that I may have life everlasting?"² And after Our Lord had told him to keep all the commandments of God, and he answered that he had kept them all from his childhood, he added: "what is yet wanting to me?"³ What more have I to do, in order to be more sure of eternal life? Who, I ask again, would have thought that the inspiration and invitation of Jesus Christ would have been without effect in this case? Did He not win the hearts of His Apostles by the one word, "Follow me?" Did he not bring Zachaeus and other public sinners to repentance and amendment by a simple friendly look? And yet, who would have thought it? He cannot induce this otherwise pious and good young man, who was so anxious to save his soul, to act on divine inspiration and obey His call; for, as the Gospel says: "when the young man had heard this word, he went away sad."⁴ Why? What prevented him from following Our Lord's advice? The reason is stated clearly enough; "for he had great possessions;"⁵ and his heart was attached to them. And therefore Christ said to His Apostles: "Amen, I say to you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of Heaven;"⁶ "And again I say to you: it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven;"⁷ on account of the inordinate attachment and love that the heart generally has for temporal things.

What beautiful and salutary lessons the traitor Judas had received for three whole years from Our Lord, with whom he lived in constant companionship! What a great grace and favor, what a special love was shown to him, when Christ humbled Himself to earth, washed his feet, kissed them, and gave him Himself as his food and drink! In what a friendly manner He warned

In the traitor Judas.

¹ Dicit illi adolescens: Omnia haec custodivi a juventute mea.—Matth. xix. 20.

² Magister bone, quid boni faciam, ut habeam vitam aeternam?—Ibid. 16.

³ Quid adhuc mihi deest?—Ibid. 20.

⁴ Cum audisset autem adolescens verbum, abiit tristis.—Ibid. 22.

⁵ Erat enim habens multas possessiones.—Ibid. 22.

⁶ Amen dico vobis, quia dives difficile intrabit in regnum caelorum.—Ibid. 23.

⁷ Et iterum dico vobis: Facilius est camelum per foramen acus transire, quam divitem intrare in regnum caelorum.—Ibid. 24.

him, when He said, one of you is about to betray Me; “woe to that man by whom the Son of man shall be betrayed: it were better for him if that man had not been born.”¹ And when Judas asked Him, “Is it I Rabbi?”² Jesus answered: “Thou hast said it.”³ Mild words those were! They ought to have softened a heart of stone. And when the traitor accomplished his crime by the kiss in the Garden, did not Our Lord say to him: “Friend, whereto art thou come?”⁴ But all this could not pierce his obdurate heart; he was before, and he still remained a thief, an apostate, a traitor, a despairing wretch who afterwards hanged himself. How did a disciple of Jesus Christ come to be so hard-hearted and obdurate? Because his heart was filled with greed of gold, and therefore the friendly, yet impressive warnings of Jesus Christ could not reach it.

Much less does the Word of God make an impression on the impure heart.

Sensual pleasures, impure attachment to creatures, what shall I say of you, when you have once taken possession of the heart? Alas, there is very little hope for a heart of that kind! All-powerful must the graces be, wonderful the light sent from Heaven to touch and to move it! No; neither exhortation, nor preaching, nor blandishments, nor threats can do any good. Heaven has not joys enough, nor hell terrors enough, nor death bitterness enough, nor the judgments of God severity enough to make an impression on the heart of him who is given to the lusts of the flesh, and who indulges his impure passions, as I have shown already more at length, as experience proves, and as these voluptuaries themselves confess. Thus unnecessary cares, and the riches and pleasures of life hinder the salutary influence of the Sun of justice, and prevent its brilliant rays from reaching the hearts of those who hear the Word of God, so that they do not profit by that word.

Unnecessary cares prevent the seed of the Word of God from bearing fruit, even when it has been received.

Supposing even, that the hearts of people of this kind are touched by a ray of light in hearing a sermon, and that a salutary knowledge, and a desire to amend their lives actually takes root in them; there is still another disastrous effect of riches and pleasures, which chokes the seed, and prevents it from bearing fruit; for, like thorns, they rob the salutary knowledge and the good desire of the necessary moisture. That is to say, that knowledge and desire cannot be retained in the memory,

¹ Vae autem homini illi, per quem filius hominis tradetur: bonum erat ei, si natus non fuisset homo ille.—Matth. xxvi. 24.

² Numquid ego sum, Rabbi?—Ibid. 25.

³ Tu dixisti.—Ibid.

⁴ Amice, ad quid venisti? 1^o 50.

and be duly considered and nourished; because when those people return home after the sermon, their whole hearts are at once given to a hundred worldly cares and occupations, so that they never earnestly consider and ponder on what made the impression on them, while they were listening to the sermon.

King Nabuchodonosor had a remarkable, terrible, and at the same time a most mysterious dream, as we read in the Book of Daniel; but he forgot it so completely, that when he awoke, he remembered nothing of it. "Nabuchodonosor had a dream," says the Holy Scripture, "and his spirit was terrified with it, and his dream went out of his mind."¹ "I have dreamed a dream," he said to his diviners and magicians, "and am troubled in mind, and know not what I dreamed."² Rupertus asks here, what was the reason of this forgetfulness; because, generally speaking, if one tries to remember what he has dreamt he will recall part of it at least. And he answers, that, as Nabuchodonosor was a proud, avaricious and sensual man, distracted by a thousand questions relating to war and statecraft, and bent only on increasing his treasures, and enriching himself with the goods of others, and indulging his sensual passions, "how could he in the midst of so many distractions, remember the mystery that was represented to him in his sleep?"³ Nor is the case different with those people when they hear the Word of God. They learn from sermons many a divine truth, many a secret that was before unknown to them, they are even sometimes moved to entertain good desires, and make good resolutions; but it is all like a dream to them, for when they awaken to their usual cares and occupations, the good impressions vanish completely out of their hearts and memories.

Finally, although now and then a little plant may shoot up from the seed of the Word of God; that is, the hearts of those hearers may be moved to make a resolution to abstain from that vice, to give up that sinful attachment, to amend that abuse, to perform that work of piety, etc.; a resolution which is actually retained and nourished in the memory; yet the cares of the world, and the inordinate pleasures of life, like sharp thorns, very soon take the life out of that tender plant, and prevent it from coming to maturity. That is, on account of the great and insurmountable difficulty that men who are buried in business

Shown by a simile.

They prevent good resolutions from being carried into effect.

¹ Vidit Nabuchodonosor somnium, et conterritus est spiritus ejus: et somnium ejus fugit ab eo.—Dan. ii. 1.

² Vidit somnium; et mente confusus ignoro, quid viderim.—Ibid. ii. 3.

³ Quomodo anima discissa continere posset rem tanti sacramenti, quam viderat?

cares, find in acting according to the truths they have learned, their good resolutions are hardly ever carried into effect. "They believe for a time," says Our Lord of them, "and in time of temptation they fall away."¹ For a short time they mean very well; but when the first temptation comes they give way to it, and their good purposes come to naught. They are like King Herod, who used to listen with pleasure to the sermons and instructions of St. John the Baptist, and no doubt often made fine resolutions. "For Herod feared John,"² says the Holy Scripture, "knowing him to be a just and holy man; and when he heard him, did many things; and he heard him willingly."³ But how long did those good dispositions of Herod's last? Until he had seen the dancing girl: "And when the daughter of the same Herodias had come in, and had danced, and pleased Herod;"³ his heart was quite changed and perverted, so that to please her, he had the preacher he thought so much of beheaded: "Sending an executioner, he commanded that his head should be brought in a dish. And he beheaded him in the prison."⁴

Such hear-
ers are like
King Saul
when he
wept.

While the sermon is going on, those people occasionally heave deep sighs, because something they have heard has touched them, and bitter tears fall from their eyes. One would be almost sure that they are now on the right way at all events; but they are just as bad as before. We read in the First Book of Kings, that David, having to fly from the wrath of King Saul, concealed himself with his followers in a cave. Saul, not knowing that there was any one in the cave, entered it quite alone, thus giving David an excellent opportunity of ridding himself forever of the enemy who had been persecuting him so long, and of placing himself in safety. In fact some of David's followers advised him to avail himself of the opportunity thus offered, but David was satisfied with merely cutting off a small piece of the King's mantle, so quietly that the latter was not aware of it. When Saul returned to the camp, David followed him, and called out to him: "My Lord the King:" see how unjustly you persecute me; "why dost thou hear the words of men that say: David seeketh thy hurt? Behold this day thy eyes have

¹ Ad tempus credunt, et in tempore tentationis recedunt.—Luke viii. 13.

² Herodes enim metuebat Joannem, sciens eum virum justum et sanctum; et audito eo multa faciebat, et libenter eum audiebat.—Mark vi. 20.

³ Cumque introisset filia ipsius Herodiadis, et saltasset, et placuisset Herodi.—Ibid. 22.

⁴ Misso spiculatore præcepit afferri caput ejus in disco. Et decollavit eum in carcere.—Ibid. 27.

seen, that the Lord hath delivered thee into my hand in the cave; and I had a thought to kill thee, but my eye hath spared thee; for I said: I will not put out my hand against my lord, because he is the Lord's anointed. Moreover, O my father, reflect and see that there is no evil in my hand, nor iniquity, neither have I sinned against thee; but thou liest in wait for my life, to take it away." ¹ This appeal softened the hard heart of Saul, and he began to weep bitterly, to acknowledge his guilt, to praise the generosity of David, and to promise him his favor and friendship in future. Hear what he said, and how he spoke under the influence of this change: "Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice and wept; and he said to David: Thou art more just than I, for thou hast done good to me, and I have rewarded thee with evil." Now I see that the Lord has given me into thy hands, and thou hast not taken my life, "But the Lord reward thee for this good turn, for what thou hast done to me this day." ² What beautiful expressions these were of a heart that was moved to repentance for past misdeeds, and to meekness, respect and love towards David! But how long did those good dispositions last? "Only for an hour," says De Lyra; and then the former hatred, anger and persecution of the innocent David broke out as bad as ever. Saul renewed his repentance and again made an offer of his affection to David on a subsequent occasion, when the latter took away his goblet and spear, and calling to his army from afar, reproached them with guarding their king so badly. On this occasion too, Saul said to him: "I have sinned; return my son David, for I will no more do thee harm, because my life hath been precious in thy eyes this day; for it appeareth that I have done foolishly, and have been ignorant in very many things; blessed art thou, my son David." ³ And yet in spite of all, Saul never admitted David to his friendship; for the fear of

¹ Domine mi Rex. Quare audis verba hominum loquentium: David quaerit malum adversum te? Ecce hodie viderunt oculi tui, quod tradiderit te Dominus in manu mea in spelunca, et cogitavi, ut occiderem te, sed pepercit tibi oculus meus. Dixi enim: non extendam manum meam in dominum meum, quia christus Dominus est. Animadvertite, et vide, quoniam non est in manu mea malum, neque iniquitas, neque peccavi in te: tu autem insidialis animae meae, ut auferas eam.—I. Kings xxiv. 9-12.

² Numquid vox haec tua est, fili mi David? Et levavit Saul vocem suam, et flevit: dixitque ad David: Justior tu es, quam ego: tu enim tribuisti mihi bona: ego autem reddidi tibi mala. Dominus reddat tibi vicissitudinem hanc pro eo, quod hodie operatus es in me.—Ibid. 17, 18, 20.

³ Peccavi, revertere fili mi David, nequaquam enim ultra tibi malefaciam, eo quod pretiosa fuerit anima mea in oculis tuis hodie: apparet enim, quod stulte egerim, et ignoraverim multa nimis. Benedicis tu, fili mi David.—Ibid. xxvi. 21, 25.

losing his kingdom left him neither peace nor ease, and made it impossible for him to ratify his repeated promises, and to keep his good resolutions.

They often sigh and shed tears during sermons, but to no purpose.

In the same way do those people act who are engrossed with worldly cares, and with the search after riches and pleasures. If in a sermon an affecting picture is drawn for them of the wonderful goodness and patient mercy of God towards the greatest sinner, of the bitter Passion and Death of Our Saviour Jesus Christ, of the precious human soul purchased so dearly, of the eternal joys of Heaven, of the never ending pains of hell; oh, their hearts are stirred to the very depths; they sigh and cast down their eyes humbly to earth, and shed copious tears! One would think they were so many Peters or Magdalens! Their eyes are indeed the eyes of a Peter or a Magdalen; they weep through natural emotion; but their hearts are not those of a Peter or a Magdalen, which were inflamed with an ardent love for Jesus Christ, and filled with an unalterable determination to act according to His instructions; they retain their former inordinate love of creatures, just as before. Their tears are like summer showers, that fall in great drops on the thirsty ground, but because they pass so quickly, do not sink into the earth, and consequently have no effect beyond laying the dust, from which worms and other vermin afterwards come.

Like little children.

Their tears are like those of little children who weep when they see their parents suffering. If a child happens to be looking on while its mother is being bled, it sees the blood flowing out of her arm, and begins to cry at once; oh, it says, "my mother is dying!" But suppose the mother were to ask the child in that moment, while it is still crying out of pity for her to give her the apple or the cake it has in its hand: Oh no, the child does not love her enough for that! O dearest Saviour Jesus Christ, dost Thou not often see people shedding tears and hear their sighs when they are listening to an explanation of Thy mysteries? Does it not seem that they love Thee with their whole hearts? That they are filled with sorrow for having ever offended Thee? One could almost be sure that such is the case. But ask one of those people who sigh and weep, to give Thee the apple or cake he has, that is, his heart, which alone Thou desirest and wishest to fill entirely; ask him to give up that inordinate greed of temporal things, that impure attachment that has so long enslaved him, that sensuality and worldly vanity to which he is addicted, that ill-gotten property which he still has in his pos-

session; say to him, O dear Lord, with one of thy inspirations, "give me that!" Ah, there is little likelihood of thy getting it! His love and friendship for Thee do not go so far. He can weep through natural compassion, but he will not disengage his heart from those things which have taken possession of it. In a word, those people are just as bad as they were before. They hear, understand and learn many good things; but the seed they received is smothered by thorns, so that it cannot produce fruit, nor enable them to act according to the truth they have learned.

Now, my dear brethren, what are we to think and say of all those people of whom I have spoken? How will the hearing of the Word of God help them to Heaven, since they do not practise the truths they have learned, nor carry out their good resolutions? Certainly St. Paul gives them very poor consolation; "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified."¹ Not they who learn and understand much good in the sermons they hear, will go to Heaven; but they only who fulfil the will of God when they have learned and understood it. A peasant once went into the Academy at Paris, where many learned doctors were disputing about all sorts of subtile and intricate questions. He listened for a long time, and at last said: "Gentlemen, may I ask you a question? Which is the better and more profitable for a man; to do what he knows, or to puzzle his brains trying to find out what he does not know?" The doctors looked at him with astonishment, and seemed rather nonplussed by his question; but at last they all agreed in saying that, beyond all doubt, it was better for a man to do what he knows how to do, than to try to find out what he is ignorant of; and they confirmed their answer by the saying of St. Isidore: "It is a lesser evil to be ignorant of what you wish to know, than not to fulfil what you do know."² Oh, said the peasant, if that is the case, then you gentlemen must be a set of ignorant clowns, or else you have lost your wits altogether, since you make no use of your understanding but to dispute and argue with each other for the sole purpose of learning more and more; while you never make the least practical use of your knowledge. The doctors were thunderstruck at this; they looked at each other, not knowing what to say,

The hearing of the Word of God does not help vain people to Heaven.

¹ Non est audiores legis justí sunt apud Deum, sed factores legis justificabuntur.—Rom. ii. 13.

² Minus malum est nescire quod appetis, quam ea, quæ noveris, non adimplere.

and at last they had to acknowledge that the peasant had the best of it. My dear brethren, do not some of us perhaps deserve the same reproof? Sad indeed is it to have to say! but there are many who hear the Word of God in sermons, and learn many salutary truths therefrom, and yet we rarely see them practising what they have learned; they remain as they were before, subject to the same faults and defects, the same sins and vices, the same pride and vanity, the same avarice, the same anger, vindictiveness, ill-will, impurity, the same sloth and tepidity in the service of God; they are not a whit better than before. Now, I ask again, what is the use of sermons to such people?

But to a deeper damnation.

Not only does the seed of the Word of God thus remain without fruit; but it will be the reason why they will have to render a stricter account at the bar of divine justice for having made such a bad use of the means of salvation, and for having been, as the Scripture says, "rebellious to the light,"¹ which shone on them. Alas, said St. John Chrysostom, in one of his sermons, "if, in spite of all our trouble to keep you in the right way to Heaven, you still remain as you were before, you can easily imagine, how great our grief must be, and what a damnation is in store for you!"² For, as Our Lord says in the Gospel of St. Luke, "And that servant who knew the will of his lord, and prepared not himself, and did not according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes."³

Shown by a simile.

You know the parable in the Gospel of St. Matthew, of the man who distributed talents in different numbers to his servants, and went into a far country. Now one of his servants very carefully hid his talent in the ground, and when his master returned, gave it back to him. "I hid thy talent in the earth," said he, "behold here thou hast that which is thine."⁴ "How," said his master in anger; "wicked and slothful servant, is that all the use you made of the talent I intrusted to you? Thou oughtest therefore to have committed my money to the bankers, and at my coming I should have received my own with usury. . . . And the unprofitable servant cast ye out into the exterior darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."⁵

¹ Rebelles lumini.—Job xxiv. 13.

² Si nobis itaque omne studium exhibentibus, vos in iisdem permanebatis; quantus nobis dolor, quanta vobis damnatio.—S. Chrys. hom. 78.

³ Ille autem servus, qui cognovit voluntatem domini sui, et non præparavit, et non fecit secundum voluntatem ejus, vapulabit multis.—Luke xii. 47.

⁴ Abscondi talentum tuum in terra: ecce, habes quod tuum est.—Matth. xxv. 25.

⁵ Serve male et piger, . . . oportuit ergo te committere pecuniam meam numulariis, et veniens ego recepissem utique, quod meum est, cum usura. Inutilem servum eijcite in tenebras exteriores: illic erit fletus et stridor dentium.—Ibid. 26, 27, 30.

What is that talent? It is the Word of God, says St. Chrysostom; it is the wholesome doctrine that we explain to you in sermons, and that you listen to; it must not remain uselessly buried; it must bear a rich interest which God will demand of you on the day of reckoning; "the interest of the doctrine is nothing else than the performance of the work;"¹ namely, carrying out in practice what you have been taught. If this interest is wanting, the hearing of the Word of God will not profit us. Wicked and slothful servant, God will say to us; is it thus you allow the graces I offered you to remain idle and useless? Away with you, out of my sight! Come ye demons, and carry this unprofitable servant away into eternal darkness!

A well-known story is related by St. Antony. A religious who had to preach on a certain day, got sick, and could not appear in the pulpit. His brethren were much disconcerted thereby, as none of them was prepared to take his place. While they were in this difficulty, a stranger, clad in the habit of their order, appeared and asked them what was the matter. They told him. Oh, said he, if that is all, you need not be troubled; I am quite willing to take the preacher's place with the help of God. He ascended the pulpit and preached with such zeal and earnestness of the joys of Heaven, the pains of hell, and the grievous malice of mortal sin, that his hearers were moved to tears and went away after the sermon full of sorrow for their sins. A holy man, who happened to be in the church, knew by divine inspiration, that the preacher was no other than the devil, and when the sermon was over he went up to him. Wretched deceiver of man, said he, I know who you are. How dare you have the insolence to usurp the office of an apostle? I adjure you in the name of Jesus Christ to tell me why you are here. "And," said the devil, "did I not manage the business very well? You have heard how well I preached on the grievousness of sin, and on Heaven and hell; you have also seen how the people went away sighing and weeping. But I know the ways of those people very well; in a short time they will forget all I have said to them; they will not keep one of the good resolutions they have just made, and since they will be all the more inexcusable before the judgment-seat of God, their damnation for all eternity will be all the worse. That was my only object." Whereupon the evil spirit vanished.

Confirmed
by an exam-
ple.

Exhortation
to put in

Ah, my dear brethren, let us not give the envious demon the

¹ *Utsura autem doctrinæ nihil aliud est, quam operum exhibitio.*

practice
what one
hears in ser-
mons.

satisfaction of seeing that we pervert the means of salvation, that God has given us to enlighten our souls and bring us to Heaven, into a means of bringing eternal ruin and a deeper damnation on ourselves! "Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it;"¹ that is, who practise, and live according to what they have heard. Joannes Junior writes of a young student who went to Paris to the university, and who, having heard in one of the lectures the words, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, etc.," immediately got up and went away. The other students asked him what was the matter that he left in such a hurry. "Nothing," said he, "but I must fulfil what I have heard, before I hear any more."² Having given this answer, he went straight to the first convent he could find, bade adieu to the world and entered the holy state of religion in order to love God therein with all his heart, during the remainder of his life. Let us try to remember this, Christians, when we are going home after a sermon; let us say to ourselves: now I will begin to put in practice what I have heard and learned. Oh, if we always did that! if we only tried during the week to fulfil a single point that was explained to us in the sermon of the preceding Sunday or holy-day, and continued doing so from one week to another, how many good works we should perform to the honor and glory of God and the salvation of our souls! what great perfection and holiness of life we should eventually attain! Blessed are they, and eternally blessed, who constantly hear the Word of God, and thus keep it in their hearts? May we all do so. Amen.

FIFTIETH SERMON.

ON THE SMALL NUMBER OF THOSE WHO HEAR SERMONS PROPERLY.

Subject.

How good hearers of the Word of God may be recognized; what abundant fruit they derive from sermons; how small their number.—*Preached on the thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

¹ Beati, qui audiunt verbum Dei, et custodiant illud.—Luke xi. 28.

² Nihil, sed antequam plus audiam illud volo opere complere.—Joan. Jun. Scala codi.

Text.

Et factum est, dum irent, mundati sunt.—Luke xvii. 14.

“And it came to pass as they went, they were made clean.”

Introduction.

By those few words of Our Lord, “go, show yourselves to the priests,” which the ten lepers at once obeyed, they were immediately made clean; “And it came to pass, as they went, they were made clean.” Such is the wonderful power of the Word of Christ; such is the wonderful effect and fruit it produces when one willingly obeys it. We have hitherto, my dear brethren, treated of three different kinds of hearers who derive little or no profit for their souls from the Word of God in sermons, because the seed falls either on the public wayside, or on a hard rock, or amongst thorns. Now we come to the fourth and select class of really good hearers with whom the seed falls on good ground and brings forth fruit a hundredfold, with whom Christ concludes His parable, and I make an end of this subject. “But that on the good ground are they who in a good and very good heart, hearing the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit in patience.”¹

Plan of Discourse.

How those good hearers of the Word of God may be recognized, and what abundant fruit they derive from sermons; but how small their number; such is the subject of this instruction.

I hope that all here present will be of that number. O God of goodness, give us all Thy powerful grace, that we may for the time to come at least, endeavor to be amongst the number of the good hearers of Thy Word. This we ask of thee through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

Who are they that hear the Word of God in sermons with a good, very good heart, and bring forth fruit in patience? We can recognize and distinguish them from other hearers of the Word of God, in the same way in which King Solomon distinguished natural flowers from artificial. The Queen of Saba, as Basilensis writes, wishing to test Solomon’s knowledge, proposed to him different riddles and difficult questions, one of which was to decide which of two bouquets of flowers that she presented to him, was natural and which artificial; the artificial one she had

How to distinguish between good and bad hearers of the Word of God.

¹ Quod autem in bonam terram: Hi sunt, qui in corde bono et optimo audientes verbum retinent, et fructum afferunt in patientia.—Luke viii. 15.

caused to be made with such consummate skill, that it could not be distinguished from a natural bouquet by sight, touch or smell. What did Solomon do? He caused a number of bees and flies to be brought into the room, and then looked carefully to see on which bouquet they would settle down; for he knew that the bees would alight on the natural flowers, and the flies on the artificial. In the same way in a congregation of Christians assembled to hear a sermon, there are different hearers of the Word of God; some are earnest and sincere, others are false and hypocritical hearers, and these latter derive no profit from the sermon, except that they have merely heard what the preacher said. Outwardly these two classes of hearers resemble each other, and one can hardly distinguish between them. But he who wishes to know to which class he belongs, must look carefully at his own heart in order to see whether it retains the wholesome doctrine and the Gospel truths he has heard, which, like bees, settle on it, to suck from it the precious honey of good works; or whether the devil, whose imps like flies are continually buzzing about, takes away the word from the heart, as Christ says, so that it produces no fruit. If he finds the latter to be the case, he can conclude with certainty that he belongs to the number of those false hearers of the Word of God, of whom, as we have seen, there are three kinds; of the former, he may congratulate himself on being in the number of the good, sincere and select hearers, who receive the Word of God in a good, very good heart and bring forth abundant spiritual fruit. St. Bernard, writing on the Canticle of canticles, gives still clearer signs by which to distinguish good hearers of the Word of God, by their fruit. "A good soul," he says, "seeks the word that she may use it for her own correction and amendment, that she may be enlightened with knowledge, that she may be strengthened to practise virtue, that she may conform to it so as to beautify herself, that she may enjoy it as her consolation;" fruits that a soul desirous of salvation produces by hearing the Word of God! Let us consider them briefly one after another.

The good
hear it with
a desire to
be corrected
and amend-
ed thereby.

First then, a soul of that kind seeks and hears the Word of God for her own correction and amendment. That is, she comes to the sermon with an honest, sincere desire to discover her hidden faults and failings, and to be moved to repentance for her known faults, and to a lasting amendment of them. Thus she is far from resembling those who avoid going to those sermons in which they know by experience that the truth will be told

them very plainly in order to induce them to amend their lives, so great is their fear of hearing their faults and secret vices condemned; or who, when they go to sermons and feel their consciences disturbed, go away filled with anger and bitterness towards the preacher, and vilify and abuse him, like a dog barking at a person who throws a stone at him. No; quite different are the dispositions of a good soul desirous of salvation. She is quite anxious and willing to hear her faults; she earnestly desires to amend them, and therefore she listens with pleasure and inward satisfaction to the earnest reproof, the sharp threat, the just anger and displeasure at sin and vice that the preacher gives expression to. Good! she thinks, when going home after the sermon, that suits me exactly; the preacher has certainly told me the plain truth; now I know where I was wrong. Thanks be to God and to the good angel who placed in the preacher's mouth the words that stirred up my conscience, disclosed my faults to me, and reminded me of my obligation to amend and avoid them in future. "Thy words have I hid in my heart," she says with David; "that I may not sin against thee."¹ I will keep Thy warnings, O Lord, deep in my heart, and they will prevent me from ever again offending Thee by a deliberate sin, and from continuing to live as I have hitherto done, through want of recollection and instruction.

That was the way in which Francis Sforza, Duke of Milan, acted. A zealous preacher once commented so sharply in presence of Francis and his whole court, on a certain vice, that all present knew at once that what he said was meant for the Duke. The courtiers and officials began to murmur against what they looked upon as a grave want of courtesy in the preacher, who did not hesitate thus to put their master to shame before the whole congregation; and they urged the Duke to have satisfaction for the insult. But the latter, who was otherwise a sensible man and a good Christian, told them with great modesty of manner, that the preacher had only done his duty and discharged the office entrusted to him by God; "and, would to God," he added, "that you and I were always just as anxious to do our duty! Not one of you had the courage or candor to tell me the truth, although you were bound to do so; you have no reason then to be displeased with him who has made up for your deficiencies. I am very grateful to the preacher for having warned me of my fault; now I know how I have been in the wrong, and what I

After the
example
of pious
Christians.

¹ In corde meo abscondi eloquia tua, ut non peccem tibi.—Ps. cxviii. 11.

must do to amend my conduct in future." That is the way to hear the Word of God in sermons, and to use it to correct and amend one's faults.

Knowledge of divine things is rare amongst men.

"A good soul seeks the Word of God that she may be enlightened with knowledge." This is the second fruit she derives from sermons. How rare the knowledge of divine things is amongst the greater number of men! In spite of its usefulness and necessity, there are few who trouble themselves about it. They take great interest in all other kinds of knowledge and science, and devote themselves to their pursuits with unwearied diligence. Thus the tradesman tries to learn all he can about his handicraft, that he may be able to support himself and his family; the man of business attends to everything that will help him to make some temporal gain; the lawyer labors to acquire skill in his profession, that he may conduct the cases entrusted to him to a successful issue; the master and mistress of a household know how to look after their property, so that the servants may not spoil or steal anything; men of the world try to be well acquainted with different languages and to follow the fashions in dress, manner, behavior, conversation, eating and drinking, etc. It is by knowledge of this kind that one gets the reputation of being clever and well-informed in the eyes of the world; to this children are brought up, in it they are trained and practised daily almost from their cradles, and he who is well versed in this knowledge, is said "to know how to live," as the phrase goes. But with regard to things that concern our last end, which is the sole reason of our being on this earth, and to which all other knowledge and science should be directed; namely, to know our great God, to love and honor Him above all things, with all our strength, to find out and enter on the narrow way of penance and the Cross that leads to Heaven, to make sure of our eternal salvation, in a word, to live a holy life according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to die a happy death; O what ignorance there is on these points, even among the most clever and most learned men, some of whom do not know even the rudiments, the very A B C of this science!

Many have this knowledge but do not live according to it.

There are many indeed who have a sort of speculative knowledge of these things; but in practice, in their lives and actions, they show that they understand little or nothing about them. Heaven should be preferred to earth, eternal things to temporal and transitory, the precious soul to the corruptible body, the divine law to the usages and maxims of the vain world, and God

to every one and every thing. That they all know and make open profession of; but meanwhile they live in such forgetfulness of God, neglect of their souls, disregard of Heaven and heavenly things, as if they were to live on this earth forever. They transgress daily the divine commands and heap up sin on sin with as little concern as if the Almighty God, who is present everywhere and sees even our most secret thoughts, who is most just and perfect and worthy of all love and honor, were a mere poetic fiction, a fable! Alas, says St. Augustine in his "Confessions," "unhappy the man who knows all created things; but does not know Thee, O God: and happy he who is ignorant of all the rest, as long as he knows Thee."¹

It is for the sake of this knowledge, and to make a practical use of it, that a soul who is really desirous of salvation hears the Word of God in sermons constantly and with attention. She knows well that this is not the work of one or two days, of one or two instructions such as are given in sermons, and therefore she comes to this divine school as regularly and frequently as possible, so as not to miss a single lesson. She is far different from those who come only now and then, and who are like scholars that go to school one day and stay at home four, and who know nothing at the end of the year, and have not the least chance of carrying off a prize. No; he who is desirous of saving his soul will come constantly to sermons. For it is thus that he can learn what he has to value, and what to despise, what to hate and avoid, what to seek and to love. Thus he will learn to prize heavenly and eternal things and to despise the perishable things of earth; to fear and hate sin alone above every other evil; to love and honor God alone above every other good; to avoid and shun the least shadow of an occasion of sin; to desire and seek his eternal salvation with the greatest care. Thus his memory and understanding will be deeply impressed with oft-repeated exhortations to fear God on account of His strict justice, to love Him for His infinite goodness and mercy, to adore Him with the greatest reverence on account of His omnipresence, to serve Him with all possible zeal and fidelity on account of His infinite power, to have a childlike confidence in Him and the greatest resignation to His will under all circumstances, on account of the wonderful and all-wise arrangements of His Providence, etc. "Happy he who is ignorant of all the rest, as long

Such is the knowledge that good hearers seek in sermons.

¹ Infelix homo qui scit omnia creata; te autem, Deus nescit; beatus qui te scit, etiam nesciat illa.

as he knows Thee!" Happy indeed he who thus learns to know Thee alone, O Sovereign God, and more than learned enough, if he has this knowledge alive, even if he were quite ignorant of all other things in the world!

Great is the weakness of man, and his inconstancy in good.

"A good soul seeks the Word of God, that she may be strengthened to practise virtue;" and that is the third fruit she derives from sermons. No matter what supernatural and divine light a man receives; no matter how great his knowledge of heavenly things, and how strong his resolution to avoid even the least sin, and to be always zealous in the love and service of God; he is still liable to experience the effects of the weakness and inconstancy he has inherited from our forefather Adam, on account of which he is always in need of something to renew his courage and strength; like a little boy who is apt to neglect his lessons, unless his teacher constantly urges him on to study by repeated exhortations and threats. Self-love is liable to get fatigued and disgusted with the difficulties that are to be met with in the way of virtue, and consequently to oppose the good resolutions that are made by the will; the evil inclinations and desires of the flesh rise up in violent rebellion against reason and the knowledge that the understanding has; the devil is unceasingly at work with his evil inspirations and temptations; the world with its deceitful and treacherous maxims, with its flatteries and its ridicule, is capable of perverting even the most pious man, and leading him away from the path of virtue; men even, when they meet together, are a source of temptation and an occasion of sin to one another. I am attacked on all sides, says David, that most holy king, with fear and trembling; "Being pushed I was overturned that I might fall."¹ And he would really have fallen often, but that the Almighty God supported him; "but the Lord supported me. The Lord is my strength and my praise, and He is become my salvation."² "Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths."³ "Strengthen thou me in Thy words."⁴

Therefore good hearers of the Word of God seek to be strengthened in virtue.

The constant and attentive hearing of the Word of God in sermons is the very thing that gives to the heart that strength which enables one who is desirous of salvation to persevere in the way of virtue and in his good resolutions, in spite of his natural weakness and inconstancy, and the attacks and wiles of all the

¹ Impulsus eversus sum, ut caderem.—Ps. cxvii. 13.

² Et Dominus suscepit me. Fortitudo mea, et laus mea Dominus, et factus est mihi in salutem.—Ibid. 14.

³ Lucerna pedibus meis verbum tuum, et lumen semitis meis.—Ibid. cxviii. 105.

⁴ Confirma me in verbis tuis.—Ibid. 98.

enemies of virtue. For it encourages him to fulfil his good resolutions with renewed fervor; it gives him fresh strength against all kinds of temptations and seductions, it reminds him again of the necessity of avoiding all dangerous occasions of sin with the utmost caution; it gives him a fresh impulse to continue in the practice of Christian humility, modesty, meekness, temperance, mortification, watchfulness over the senses, purity, tender devotion to God and the saints, the works of mercy and charity, the frequent reception of the sacraments, and other virtues, in spite of what vain worldlings may say or do to prevent him, or to turn him into ridicule. In that way the hearers, that is, souls that are eagerly desirous of Heaven, will be strengthened and encouraged in the practice of the Christian virtues, by the frequent hearing of the Word of God in sermons, as the Prophet David says: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were established; and all the power of them by the spirit of His mouth."¹

"A good soul seeks the Word of God in order to conform to it so as to beautify herself;" this is the fourth fruit that is derived from hearing sermons properly. A good man who sincerely desires to serve God, is not at all satisfied with merely avoiding all mortal sin, which destroys completely the bond of friendship between the soul and God; but he cannot bear the least fault or defect that is displeasing to God whom he loves above all things. Nor is he satisfied with being free from all deliberate venial sin; he endeavors as far as possible to become like to Jesus Christ, the Saint of saints, and His pattern and example, and to imitate His life; for he is well acquainted with the words of St. Paul to the Romans: "For whom He foreknew, he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son; that He might be the first-born amongst many brethren."² A twofold beauty is caused in the soul by the Word of God, when it is heard with a good and a very good heart. "Now you are clean by reason of the word which I have spoken to you."³ That is to say, he who constantly hears the Word of God in sermons with sincere desire to profit by it, acquires as a general rule, in virtue of such oft-repeated exhortations and graces, such a horror, disgust and fear of offending God, that he would almost be as unwilling to commit a deliberate venial sin, as a careless Christian or a worldling would to forfeit the friendship of God

And also to be purified, that they may be more like Our Lord.

¹ Verbo Domini cœli firmati sunt, et spiritu oris ejus omnis virtus eorum.—Ps. xxxii. 6.

² Nam quos præscivit et prædestinavit conformes fieri imaginis Filii sui, ut sit ipse primogenitus in multis fratribus.—Rom. viii. 29.

³ Jam vos mundi estis propter sermonem, quem locutus sum vobis.—John xv. 3.

by a mortal sin. And this is proved by experience. If a pious Christian of this kind happens, through sudden surprise of passion, to offend against what he knows to be a Gospel truth, and to transgress the law of Christian charity by angry or abusive words, a fault like this, which is otherwise one that weak nature is liable to commit, is enough, when he recollects himself, to fill him with such fear, trouble and perturbation, that he has neither rest nor peace until he has got rid of the guilt of this sin, which to his conscience is intolerable, by the Sacrament of Penance, and has again made his peace with God. St. Thomas, the Angelic Doctor, says that “by hearing the Word of God a man receives a certain share of the divine virtue and purity.”¹ That was what the Apostle alluded to when he wrote to the Galatians: “My little children of whom I am in labor again, until Christ be formed in you.”²

Finally, that she may receive divine consolation.

Finally, a good soul seeks the Word of God, “that she may enjoy it as her consolation.” Nothing is sweeter or more agreeable to one who loves, than to converse with the object of his affection, and the longer this lasts, and the oftener it takes place, the better he is pleased. In the same way, he who has proved and experienced how sweet the Lord is, finds special comfort and consolation in speaking with God, and in frequently hearing His word, as St. John Chrysostom says, so that he is never tired of hearing it. “They who hear the Word of God with great desire, will never grow tired of it.”³ The sermon never seems too long, but nearly always too short to them; nor do they notice that they are tired standing until it is over. They go to hear it with far greater desire than the vain children of the world have for their balls and parties; and often they would prefer going without their meals to losing a sermon. In fact, they almost live on the Word of God, according to what Our Lord says, “Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God.”⁴ This was the better part that Magdalen chose when she left all household cares to seat herself at the feet of Jesus her divine Teacher, and to hear what He had to say to her. This is that heavenly sweetness in comparison with which all the joys and pleasures of the vain world are but bitterness, and of which David says: “How

¹ Ex sermone Dei homo aliquam participationem divinæ virtutis et puritatis consequitur.

² Filii mei, quos iterum parturio, donec formetur Christus in vobis.—Gal. iv. 19.

³ Qui divinos sermones audiunt si sitientes acceperint, nunquam fatigabuntur.—S. Chrysos. hom. 50. in Evang. Joan.

⁴ Non in solo pane vivit homo, sed in omni verbo, quod procedit de ore Dei.—Matth. iv. 4.

sweet are Thy words to my palate, more than honey to my mouth.”¹ Thy divine word is to assuage the torments, to comfort me in the trials and to give me joy in the troubles of my soul. See, my dear brethren, there we have at last the good soil which produces a hundredfold from the seed of the Word of God; these are the good hearers, “these are they who in a good and very good heart, hearing the word, keep it.”

Let us now reflect a little on what we have hitherto learned of this subject. The first thought that occurs to me is this: if we take out of the whole population of this city those alone who are regular in hearing the Word of God in the sermons which they know to be most profitable to their souls (for it would be impossible for them to be present at all the sermons that are preached everywhere), how many would there be? Certainly a very small number in comparison to the remaining inhabitants of the city. Is not that so? Yes; we know by experience that there is no doubt of it. Now if we divide this latter and smaller number into four parts, we shall find that only one part will hear the Word of God in a good and very good heart so as to derive spiritual profit from it; but the remaining three parts will not profit by it at all, because the seed will fall either by the wayside, where it will be trodden under foot or be eaten by the birds; or on a rock, where it will dry up for want of moisture; or among thorns which will choke it. Is not that also true? Yes, and we have the infallible word of Jesus Christ to confirm it. Therefore, if they who are of God hear His word, as Our Lord says; and if they alone who hear it with profit to their souls can be counted among the sheep of the fold of Christ, who hear His voice; then all the others must be among the reprobate, since the devil takes the word out of their hearts, “lest believing they should be saved,” as Christ assures us. Alas, what a terrible consequence follows! For, “Many are called, but few chosen.”² Alas, we cannot but acknowledge that such must be the case!

Again, I must ask, if among the small number of those who hear the Word of God constantly, three-fourths derive no profit from it; what spiritual profit can one expect those tepid Christians to make, who seldom or never come to sermons, although they have time and opportunity enough to do so? And what will become of those who avoid the sermons in which they know

From this we may see how small is the number of good hearers and consequently of the elect.

How wicked the conduct of those who prevent others from hearing sermons.

¹ Quam dulcia faucibus meis eloquia tua, super mel ori meo!—Ps. cxviii. 103.

² Multi enim sunt vocati, pauci vero electi.—Matth. xx. 16.

the truth will be told them, and avoid them solely that they may be able to continue in sin without having their consciences disturbed? And what of those who are not satisfied with losing the Word of God themselves, but try to keep others also from hearing it? What of those masters and mistresses who prevent their servants from going to sermons, although the latter are willing to go? What of those husbands who prevent their wives from going, lest they should become scrupulous, as they pretend? What of those parents who hinder their sons and daughters from often hearing the Word of God, although the latter are anxious to hear it, and that with the hellish intention of preventing their children from being too pious? Ah, my Lord and my God, I would not willingly take the place of those people at Thy judgment-seat, and answer for them! At all events, if you are determined not to learn good yourselves, nor to do it, nor to go to Heaven, you should not close the way to others who wish to save their souls.

Shown by
an example.

God was once pleased to show this to a certain married man in a miraculous manner. As Surius relates in the life of St. Antony of Padua, that Saint was compelled to preach in the open field, on account of the number of people who flocked to hear him. In the town there was a pious lady who was anxious to hear the holy man; but her husband would not allow her, so that the only consolation she had was to ascend to the top of the house, that she might at least see the congregation, and thus give her eyes the satisfaction that was denied her ears. But, wonderful to relate, although the field in which St. Antony was preaching, was two miles distant from the house, she heard every word he said, just as well as if she had been amongst the people. Her husband, wondering what she was doing up there, called to her to come down. I am listening to the sermon, said she. What sermon? asked the other in a rage, and he ran up to where she was. There, to his surprise, he found that he, too, could hear distinctly every word the Saint was saying. He then knew what a great fault he was guilty of, and, from that day forward, he never missed going to the sermon with his wife whenever he had the opportunity.

Conclusion.

The third and last conclusion each one of you must draw for himself. You must ask yourselves, To what class do I belong? Am I of the number of those who seldom or never hear the Word of God? Alas, if that is the case, I am not among the chosen sheep of Jesus Christ, who hear his voice, and obey it; and the

terrible words of Christ may be applied to me, "Therefore, you hear them not: because you are not of God."¹ I must then amend my conduct in this respect and from this day forward hear the Word of God as regularly as my circumstances will allow. If I belong to one of the three classes of men who indeed hear sermons regularly, but derive no profit from them, because the seed falls by the wayside, or on the hard rock, or among sharp thorns, and therefore cannot produce fruit; I have just as little reason to expect that things will go well with me; for I shall have to render to God a strict account of the graces and inspirations that I have neglected, and of the many times that I knowingly disobeyed the divine will; therefore, I must and will do better in future; I must hear the Word of God with engerness and attention, and always make a practical use of the truths that I shall learn. Have I been hitherto diligent in this respect? Do I belong to the fourth class, to the number of those who hear the Word of God in sermons with a good and very good heart, so that they are encouraged to correct their faults and sins, are enlightened in heavenly things, are strengthened against temptations, and have their souls purified? In a word, can I say with truth that I have hitherto heard sermons constantly with an earnest desire to learn something good from them, and that having learned it I have tried to practise it? Oh, if that is the case, I can rejoice with all my heart, and comfort myself with the thought that I have one of the surest proofs of being elected to eternal happiness, according to the words of Jesus Christ, my Saviour: "Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it;" and therefore, full of spiritual consolation, I can cry out with St. Bernard: "I am in the number of the elect, of the predestined, of the children of God."² And this my certain hope is founded on the words of Eternal Truth: "He that is of God, heareth the words of God." Therefore, as long as God gives me health and opportunity, I will be constant in hearing His word with a good and very good heart. Strengthen us all in this resolution O God, by Thy grace! Amen.

¹ Propterea vos non auditis, quia ex Deo non estis.—John viii. 47.

² Ego de electis sum, ego de predestinatis ad vitam, ego de numero filiorum Dei.—S Bern. serm. 1 de Septuag.

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

Text.

Homines mirati sunt, dicentes: Qualis est hic, quia venti et mare obediunt ei?—Matth. viii. 27.

“But the men wondered, saying: What manner of man is this, for the winds and the sea obey him?”

Such power and efficacy has the Word of Jesus Christ, that it not only induces people from all parts to follow Him, as we read in to-day’s Gospel, “His disciples followed Him;” and not only excites their astonishment and admiration: “The men wondered;” but it is able even to restrain the fury of the winds and waves: “Rising up he commanded the winds and the sea, and there came a great calm.” “What manner of man is this, for the winds and the sea obey him?” Hitherto, my dear brethren, we have treated of three kinds of people, etc.—*continues as before.*

On how to act before and after hearing a sermon, see the preceding First Part. On the necessity sinners are under of hearing the Word of God, see the following Third Part.

On the same necessity for the innocent and the just, see the Fourth Part. On the hearing the Word of God as a sign of election to eternal happiness, see the Fifth Part.

ON DISGRACING THE SEASON OF SHROVE-TIDE.

FIFTY-FIRST SERMON.

HOW UNJUSTLY THEY ACT WHO DISGRACE THE SEASON
OF SHROVE-TIDE.

Subject.

1. The days of Shrove-tide belong to God as well as the other days of the year; therefore it is as unlawful to sin on those as on other days. 2. The days of Shrove-tide should be by right kept more holily than other days; therefore it is even more unbecoming to sin on them.—*Preached on Septuagesima Sunday.*

Text.

Quid hic statis tota die otiosi?—Matth. xx. 6.

“Why stand you here all the day idle?”

Introduction.

If there are any days in the year on which most men lead an idle, or rather an unchristian and sinful life, it is on these days of Shrove-tide. For there are now many Christians who might be asked, with holy anger, the question: “Why stand you here all the day idle?” Why do you spend the day and the night in such a licentious and unchristian manner? What season are we in now, my dear brethren? In the season of Shrove-tide; that is to say, the time that immediately precedes the Lenten fast; a time that, according to the vicious custom of the world, is supposed to begin almost on Christmas day, as far as revelry and dissipation are concerned. It is Shrove-tide then. In some towns, there is a custom of giving thieves and robbers free license on yearly fair-days, so that they may enter the town without let or hinderance.

In the same way, it seems that there are many who imagine that this season is like one of those fairs, and that the Christian law is abrogated for the time being, so that dissipation, wantonness, and all kinds of vices may be indulged in freely. If a sin is committed during this season, people say that it does not matter; it is Shrove-tide now; we must enjoy ourselves, etc. To show how false, erroneous and unchristian this view is, is my object to-day; and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

The days of Shrove-tide belong to God as well as the other days of the year; therefore it is as unlawful to sin on those as on other days. That I shall prove in the first part. The days of Shrove-tide should by right be kept more holily than other days; therefore it is even more unbecoming to sin on them, as I shall prove in the second part. The first part shall be in the form of an argument against the devil and his followers. The second shall serve as an encouragement to the children of God.

O dear Lord, if I could prevent even one sin, would not my labor be amply recompensed? But all that I can say is not powerful enough to do that! Thou canst do it, O Almighty Master of hearts, and therefore I humbly beg of Thee to help me by Thy grace, through the merits of Thy Mother Mary and the holy angels guardian.

There is no doubt that in heathen times the season of Shrove-tide was given to the service of the devil.

Why do you wish to give to another what belongs to me alone? Why do you try to take away the season of Shrove-tide from me? So it seems to me that I hear the devil, the chief of sinners, crying out to me. Father of lies, if you can only tell me the truth on this occasion, let me hear what pretensions you have to claim those days as yours? From time immemorial I have been in peaceable possession of them; so that during those days, in all parts of the world, reason was laid aside, and full liberty was given to eyes, ears, tongue, hands and all the senses, while gluttony and drunkenness, impurity and wantonness, and all kinds of sinful pleasures were openly led in triumph. What? Do you mean to persuade me of that? Yes; read Livy, Plutarch and other historians on the subject; or if you look on them as untrustworthy witnesses, because they belong to my side, read St. Augustine in his seventh Book of the City of God, and you will find the time of the Bacchanalian festival, which is now called Shrove-tide, written down as red-letter days in my calendar. Rome, the mistress of the world, in her first beginning under Romulus, as well

as under her consuls, and under the rule of foreign emperors, always observed this season according to my wish and desire. In that city the signal for general revelry was usually given by an old drunken or foolish woman. The grave senators and rulers of the world were then amongst the first to lay aside all decency and self-respect, and to go about, masked and disguised, like fools or madmen, with green branches in their hands, through the streets and lanes of the city, announcing unrestrained license to all. They were followed by crowds of people, young and old, great and small, men and women, crying and shouting at the top of their voices; and even the gravest individual would have been ashamed not to make a fool of himself on such an occasion with the others. After that the people amused themselves with impure plays and comedies, with drinking and dancing, and all kinds of sin and vice. In like manner those days were devoted to my service by the Greeks, Egyptians, and all nations under the Roman dominion. Now if the right to a thing must be accorded to him who has been in possession of it so long, unless a clear proof is brought forward to disprove that right, according to the rules and maxims of jurists; if even the peaceable possession of only a few years is sufficient to establish a valid prescription; who can or will dare to dispute the possession of these days with me, since the most enlightened nations of the world have unanimously given them to me for centuries?

Be silent, unhappy spirit, treacherous deceiver of souls! Why do you bring forward your heathen follies here? Do you think you will find among us the rights that were given you by your idolatrous servants and slaves? You must know that we are Christians, members and brethren of Jesus Christ, and adopted children of God, who acknowledge and adore only the one, true, living God; and we must keep these days holy to our God, for the very reason that they were formerly devoted to your service by heathens, with whose laws and idolatrous customs we have not the least sympathy. In those times you could boast of being a prince of the world, as the Apostle Paul says of you and the other infernal spirits: "Principalities and powers, the rulers of the world."¹ But now your rule is at an end, for He has come whose object was, as St. John says in his first Epistle, "That he might destroy the works of the devil;"² and to deliver us from the power of darkness,³ as St. Paul says. So that these are

For that reason Christians should spend it in a different manner.

¹ Principes et potestates, mundi rectores.—Ephes. vi. 12.

² Ut dissolvat opera diaboli.—I. John iii. 8.

³ Qui eripuit nos de potestate tenebrarum.—Colos. 1. 13.

the happy times of which our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, has said: "Now is the judgment of the world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself."¹ Therefore you are expelled from this world.

The Catholic Church seeks to abolish all the relics of heathenism.

Our holy mother, the Catholic Church, from the very beginning, never showed greater zeal than in the utter extirpation of all the remnants and abuses of heathenism. When a city or country was converted to Christianity, the first question was, what are those idolatrous temples doing here? Away with them! But what harm is in them? They are mere buildings which have cost a great deal of labor and trouble to erect. Would it not be better to allow them to remain, and after having destroyed the images of the false gods, to devote them to the worship of the one true God? No; they are relics of heathenism and must not be tolerated; they must be burnt to ashes, so that not a vestige of them remains. That was what the early Christians did in the reign of the great emperor Constantine: "Constantine destroyed everywhere the most beautiful temples of the gods;"² and St. Augustine testifies that throughout the whole of Africa the images of the gods were broken in pieces, and trampled under foot, and the very stones of their temples were held in such abomination, that no one would use them for building purposes. In the reign of Julian the Apostate, the flesh of the animals that had been sacrificed to the idols was offered publicly for sale at a very low price, but not one Christian could be persuaded or forced to purchase or touch a bit of it. But why not? That meat was as good as any other; it did not matter whether it was offered to an idol or not. No, no, said the Christians of those times; such is not the case; God forbid that we should touch anything that comes from heathens! We would rather die of hunger, than eat the least thing that has been offered to idols. Away with the meat; we will not touch it!

Therefore she cannot tolerate the dissipation of Shrove-tide.

Now if the Christian religion shows such zeal in extirpating and abolishing the dead relics of heathenism, is it likely that it will tolerate its living abuses and scandals, I mean the dissipations of Shrove-tide? No, says St. Cyprian, "the Catholic Church condemned all kinds of plays, dances and other abuses when she abolished idolatry."³ Certainly there were

¹ Nunc judicium est mundi: nunc princeps hujus mundi ejicietur foras. Et ego, si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad meipsum.—John xii. 31-32.

² Constantinus fana toto orbe celeberrima funditus destruxit.

³ Omnia ista spectaculorum genera damnavit, quando idololatriam sustulit.

Christians in former times, and perhaps there are many nowadays, too, who imitate the blind heathens in those abuses; but the holy fathers always reprov'd their conduct with the greatest zeal. St. Ambrose seeing those customs carried on in Milan, ascended the pulpit in his episcopal vestments, and began to complain most bitterly as follows: "I have a great complaint to make of many of you; namely, that you keep the festivals of the heathens."¹ What a crime that is? Are we Christians? If we are the living temples of God, why do we keep the feasts of false gods in the temple of the true God? Souls consecrated to God, where is your faith? Do those heathenish customs suit the religion you profess? St. Augustine also writes against the dissipations of Shrove-tide. When the plague has left the town, he says, the inhabitants burn all their clothing, no matter how costly it is, so as to destroy every germ of the pestilence. In the same way the Church of God acts; she cries down the poisonous remnants of heathenism, and warns her children against them in their public assemblies, by the pens of her teachers, the voices of her preachers, and the zeal of all true Christians. Water, water, she cries out; bring some water to throw on the smouldering ashes of this hellish fire! See now, you lying spirit, if you can say with truth that you have ever during Christian times been in peaceable possession of the season of Shrove-tide, so that you can claim it as belonging to you and to sin! No; good Christians have never given, and never will give you any such right. The days of this season belong to God, as well as the other days of the year, and must be kept sacred to Him alone.

But the arch-deceiver will answer, can you then make no distinction between one time and another? There is a time to pray and a time to enjoy one's self. Even the holiest hermits in the desert, Antony, Arsenius and others laid aside their hair-shirts on certain days in the year, and cooked their vegetables and herbs with oil and salt to give them a better flavor than usual. I will not dispute with God the other seasons of the year; Advent, Lent, Easter and Pentecost I freely give up to Him; He may keep them for Himself and His service; during those seasons people can go to church, work most earnestly to save their souls, confess, communicate as often as they will, and centre all their thoughts and desires on Heaven. I have nothing against

It is never
lawful to do
evil.

¹ Est mihi adversus plerosque de vestris querela non modica, gentiliū se feriis dederunt.
—S. Ambr. serm. 17 Querap. de Calend. Jan.

that. But I must have a few days in the year on which people can get rid of their melancholy thoughts and enjoy themselves a little in my service. You must make some allowance for young people. Poor boys, poor girls, why should you spend your youth in perpetual gloom, and never have an opportunity of enjoying yourselves together? Mark this, my dear brethren; see how the devil builds a chapel where God has a church. The vain children of the world talk exactly in that way nowadays; Shrove-tide comes only once a year, they say, and we must have a little pleasure; as if they could not enjoy themselves without indulging in sinful, impure, forbidden, unchristian and heathenish pleasures! No; I repeat, there is no day in the year on which such things are lawful. I read in the Holy Scriptures that there is a time for every human occupation: "All things have their season," says the wise Ecclesiastes, "and in their times all things pass under Heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted. A time to weep, and a time to laugh. A time to keep silence, and a time to speak."¹ And he goes on to give a list of twenty-eight different times; but the words, "a time to sin," a time to behave in an unchristian manner, a time to imitate heathenish abuses I cannot find any mention of. When there is question of keeping the commandments of God, all the times in the year are alike, Christmas-tide and Quarter-tense, Shrove-tide and Holy Week.

That is also
true of
Shrove-tide.

The earth has gone around the sun a great many times, yet it has never brought with it a single day or hour in which sin might be lawfully committed. Even during Shrove-tide sin is forbidden under pain of eternal damnation. Even during Shrove-tide impurity and drunkenness are brutal vices, immodest conversation and behavior have a flavor of hell about them, and masquerading and nightly revelries of both sexes, no matter what regard people may pretend to have for decency in them, must necessarily be a proximate occasion of many sins and abuses, and therefore can never be allowed. Shrove-tide, or not, black remains black, and sin is always sin and offensive to God. Among the Babylonians, as Berosius writes, there was a custom that from the seventeenth of August to the twentieth, the servants should take the place of the masters, and the masters

¹ Omnia tempus habent, et suis spatils transeunt universa sub cœlo. Tempus nascendi, et tempus moriendi; tempus plantandi, et tempus evellendi quod plantatum est; tempus flendi, et tempus ridendi; tempus tacendi, et tempus loquendi.—Ecl. iii. 1, 2, 4, 7.

that of the servants. Is it likely that the Almighty God will consent to come to such an arrangement as that with us, and lay aside His authority during Shrove-tide, so that we can do whatever we like, and gratify our unruly passions as we please? Is that likely? Oh no; we must always remain as we are, most obedient servants, who can never withdraw ourselves from the obligation of obedience; and God must always remain as He is now, that is, the Ruler and Master of everything in Heaven and on earth; whom it is never lawful to offend under pretext of enjoying ourselves. What would you think, married men, if one of you were to find out that his wife had been unfaithful to him, and if she said in excuse of her crime, oh it is Shrove-tide, it does not matter; I was only amusing myself; it will be all right again when Lent begins? What? the justly enraged husband would say, you faithless wretch, did you not promise to be true to me till death? How can you excuse yourself by saying that it is Shrove-tide? And why should I tolerate now what can never be lawful? In the same way, let a thief try to excuse himself to the judge; I have robbed and stolen, it is true; but it is now Shrove-tide, and we can venture to infringe the law a little. Shrove-tide, indeed, the judge would say; to the wheel or the gallows with you, and keep Shrove-tide there! Now if men do not allow any difference to be made between this and other seasons of the year, as far as unlawful things are concerned, how could the God of infinite justice and sanctity tolerate such a difference? "Jesus Christ," says the Apostle, "yesterday and to-day and the same forever."¹ What He was yesterday, he is to-day; what he forbade yesterday under pain of hell, He forbids to-day under the same penalty, and will forbid it at all times.

So that the saying of the Wise Man remains true: "A fool will laugh at sin, but among the just grace shall abide."² Foolish, indeed, is he who, at any time, dares to think lightly of offending God, and to say to himself, now I may commit sin; it is Shrove-tide, and we can enjoy ourselves now with greater freedom. Thus the hellish foe, and all his followers are convicted of a lie and an evident injustice in claiming these days for themselves. Still I am ready to make a compromise with him, if he will only consent and promise to observe two conditions. Hear, then, unhappy spirit! Can you assure us all

Therefore they act unjustly who dishonor this season.

¹ Jesus Christus, heri et hodie, et in sæcula.—Hebr. xiii. 8.
² Stultus illudet peccatum, et inter justos morabitur gratia.—Prov. xiv. 9.

that no one will die and leave this world during this season? or if any one dies without repentance, that he will not be condemned to hell with you? That is one condition. Again, can you assure us that God will not see the sins that are committed now, or if He sees them, that He will not be offended at them, nor write them down in His Book that He may hereafter demand payment for them to the last farthing? Answer me; can you make us that promise so that we can depend on you? If so, perhaps you might be allowed to claim this season as your own; but since you cannot, away with you! These days belong to the service of God and to working out our salvation, as well as all other days in the year, and no good Christian will give you a single moment of them. But alas, I have reckoned without the host! The evil spirit will trouble himself little about my arguments, for in spite of all that can be said against him, he will find followers enough to devote these days to him by sin, whether they belong to the service of God, or not. Even among Catholics, there are many, as St. Peter Damian says, who are Catholic in faith, but heathen in practice.¹ Alas, that such should be the case, that people should be guilty of such deplorable wickedness! Therefore, I now turn to you, pious Christians, and seek your help and assistance in the lost cause of God, so to speak. You have good reason to be all the more zealous in sanctifying these days to your Lord and your God, and to be more careful than ever in avoiding even the least sin. The reason of that you will hear in the

Second Part.

True love
and friend-
ship are
proved in
time of
necessity.

A truly affectionate friend has no better opportunity of showing his love and fidelity, than when his friend is in difficulties and wants consolation. "If thou wouldst get a friend," says the wise Ecclesiasticus, "try him before thou takest him: for there is a friend for his own occasion, and he will not abide in the day of thy trouble."² For there are friends who remain faithful for a time, that is, as long as things go well with their friend; but when the day of trial and calamity comes they turn the cold shoulder to him. Never should a son show more filial love, than when his father or mother is in affliction; if he were to abandon his parents under such circumstances, he would

¹ Est qui catholice credat, et gentiliter vivat.

² Si possides amicum, in tentatione posside eum, est enim amicus secundum tempus suum, et non permanebit in die tribulationis.—Eccles. vi. 7. 8.

afflict a twofold pang on them. Amongst the dying injunctions that David gave his son Solomon, there was the following, as we read in the Third Book of Kings: "But show kindness to the sons of Berzellai the Galaadite, and let them eat at thy table;"¹ this is the last request I, thy father, make of thee my son. Why did David remember those children in such a special manner? There were other servants of his who seem to me to have better deserved being recommended to Solomon's care; for there were the heroes who fought for David and conquered his enemies, and brought whole countries under his sway and risked their lives and shed their blood in his service; yet he does not mention them. What great benefit then did he receive from the children of Berzellai, that he remembers them even on his death-bed? "For they met me," he says, "when I fled from the face of Absalom thy brother."² When my greatest friends abandoned me, they came to my assistance; when the major part of my subjects revolted against me, they remained faithful and proved their fidelity to me in the time of need; therefore I now commend them to your favor and protection; let them eat at your table like your own children. So highly is true friendship and affection prized in time of difficulty and trial; while the friendship of words alone, that is shown merely in prosperity, is thought nothing of; therefore the Wise Ecclesiasticus says: "And there is a friend, a companion at the table, and he will not abide in the day of distress."

My dear brethren, if what St. Paul writes to the Hebrews is true: "Crucifying to themselves again the Son of God, and making Him a mockery,"³ I say, if it is true that they who commit a mortal sin, crucify anew their Saviour Jesus Christ, and make Him a mockery as far as they can; then it is quite certain, as I remarked in the introduction, that of all the seasons in the year, the present is that in which Jesus Christ endures the greatest trouble and distress, and He would really feel it if, in His glory, He were capable of suffering; and that too, not only from heathens and infidels (in which there would be nothing astonishing) but from His own adopted brethren and children, from those who are co-heirs to Heaven with Him. Are there not, in fact, many Christians, who carefully avoid mortal sin during the rest of the year, but at this season, under the pretext of enjoying

During this season Christ is in great distress.

¹ Sed et filiis Berzellai Galaaditis reddes gratiam, eruntque comedentes in mensa tua.—III. Kings ii. 7.

² Occurrerunt enim mihi, quando fugiebam a facie Absalom fratris tui.—Ibid.

³ Rursum crucifigentes sibi metipsos Filium Dei, et ostentui habentes.—Hebr. vi. 6.

themselves, abandon the path of virtue, and offend the good God who is worthy of all love, by the most shameful transgressions? At this time there is not merely one, but there are thousands of ill-conditioned Absaloms, who afflict their loving heavenly Father by all sorts of sin; these are the days to which we might justly apply the words of St. Paul: "See therefore, brethren, how you walk circumspectly, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil."¹ These are the days of which the Lord Himself complains by the Psalmist: "As in the provocation, according to the day of temptation in the wilderness; where your fathers tempted me;"² that is your ancestors, the heathens of old, from whom these Shrove-tide revelries have come down to us. Now is the time when the devil tries to develop human wickedness to its greatest extent: and as Holy Week terminates Our Lord's sufferings, that evil spirit begins now even before Lent, with his followers, bad Christians, to torment the Son of Man, and to fulfil all that was foretold of Him by the prophets: "All things shall be accomplished which were written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man." And what did they say about Him? "For he shall be delivered to the gentiles, and shall be mocked, and scourged, and spit upon; and after they have scourged Him, they will put Him to death."³

All the mysteries of His bitter Passion are then renewed.

Now, does not this take place during these days of Shrove-tide, I will not say here in Treves (and I hope I have reason to make this exception,) but here and there throughout the world even in Catholic cities? Is not Christ again given over to the gentiles, since heathen practices are again indulged in? Is He not mocked in nightly assemblies, in dancing-houses and in impure plays? Is He not blindfolded by indecent masquerading in which men appear disguised as women, and women as men? If such disguises are adopted without necessity, a sin is committed, according to the teaching of theologians; a mortal sin, if the disguise is intended for a wicked purpose, a venial sin, if it is adopted merely for amusement. Is not Our Lord scourged and crowned with thorns by deliberate drunkenness, by uncharitable and impure talk, and by indecent liberties? And finally, is He not nailed again to the Cross as far as may be, by the

¹ Videte itaque, fratres, quomodo caute ambuletis: non quasi insipientes, sed ut sapientes; redimentes tempus, quoniam dies mali sunt.—Eph. v. 15, 16.

² Sicut in irratione secundum diem tentationis in deserto: ubi tentaverunt me patres vestri. Ps. xciv. 9.

³ Consummabuntur omnia, quæ scripta sunt per Prophetas de Filio hominis. Tradetur enim gentibus, et illudetur, et flagellabitur, et conspuetur: et postquam flagellaverint occident eum.—Luke xviii. 31, 32, 33.

many sins which arise from dangerous company, and nightly carousing? “Crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and making Him a mockery.”

Children of God, can you see all this without being moved with compassion for your heavenly Father, if you have a spark of love for Him? Friends of God, can you bear to see such treatment offered to your best Friend, who shed His blood and gave His life for you? And would any of you be so heartless as to associate with the impious rabble who desecrate this season, and thus offer another insult to your persecuted Lord? “And you too Brutus,” said the dying Julius Caesar, when he saw his dear friend Brutus amongst his assassins. Are you also one of my murderers? Must I then die by your hand? In the same way, pious Christian, might Christ address you, if He saw you taking part in the dissipations of this season. And you, my dear child, are you too among those who crucify Me again? My dear brethren, I do not imagine that any of you will be guilty of such a crime; but you should try to sanctify these days to your Lord and your God in a special manner, to be more faithful to Him than ever, now that He is so much offended, and to show more zeal and earnestness than usual in your works of devotion and piety. Where fire is spreading devastation I should bring, not wood to feed the flames, but water to quench them; when my Lord and my God is so wantonly offended in so many places throughout the world during this time, should I not pray and sigh, and weep tears of contrition in order to appease the divine anger, instead of helping to increase the number of sins committed?

You have doubtless heard the story of Jonas, the jester of the Roman Emperor, Ferdinand II. Jonas was always expected to make his appearance at the Emperor's table; but during Shrove-tide he was not to be seen. They sought him for a long time, and at last found him in the church of St. Stephen at Vienna. Being brought before the Emperor, and asked why he absented himself in such an unusual manner, he answered: During the whole year the Almighty God is busy giving audiences to great lords, and to the common people, and we poor jesters can hardly have a chance of appearing before Him; but in these days, when others make fools of themselves, we can afford to be wise, and to do homage to God, who is really present in the Blessed Sacrament, and who is now abandoned by the greater number of His friends. Truly, that was not a foolish

Therefore
pious
Christian
must not
associate
with the
wicked.

Proved by
an example.

answer, and the example of this jester might well be followed by all Christians who deserve the name; and since the majority of people lay their reason aside, and abandon their God during this season, those who wish to remain faithful to Him should redouble their zeal in His service. That is the reason why during the three last days of Shrove-tide the forty hours adoration is established, for assisting at which a plenary indulgence may be gained. The object of this devotion is, by adoring the Blessed Sacrament publicly exposed, and by frequent Confession and Communion, to atone, to some extent at least, for the injuries and insults that are offered to Our Lord Jesus Christ (for what He had to suffer long ago in Jerusalem is now re-inflicted on Him afresh by the wickedness of bad Christians), and to redeem part of the time at all events, which is now so unjustly stolen from His service by the devil. Thus the pious servants of God endeavor to practise the advice of St. Paul by “redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

Exhortation
to the just
to be more
zealous in
showing
their love of
God during
this season.

It is to you then, pious Christians, that our forsaken Lord flies for refuge in His distress, according to what He Himself said to St. Gertrude, when He appeared to her on the Saturday before Quinquagesima Sunday: “Do you, My beloved, be My protectress; now that I am driven away by others, I fly to you for protection.”¹ To you, says St. Cyprian, does the Church of God stretch forth her hands, “that by your fidelity you may dry up her tears, and console her in some degree for the deplorable fall of so many of her children.”² Courage, then, my dear brethren, be firm, and show that you are faithful friends and loving children of God, and that you will never break faith with your beloved Father at any time, but rather serve Him with all the more zeal, the more He is offended by others! There is not much in being pious when every one is so; but to be pious and faithful to God in the midst of the wicked, as Tobias was in Ninive, Daniel in Babylon, Joseph in the court of King Pharaoh, and Abraham among the Chaldeans, that is a certain sign of a real, sincere love of God. And so one day Jesus Christ will be able to say of you, as He did formerly of His Apostles: “You are they who have continued with Me in My temptations;”³ you are the faithful friends who have remained true to

¹ *Sis tu mihi dilecta in protectricem; nunc a cæteris fugatus ad te confugi.*—L. 4, vitue c. 12.

² *Ut lacrymas Matris Ecclesiæ quæ plangit ruinas et funera plurimorum, vos vestra lætitia teratis.*

³ *Vos autem estis, qui permansistis mecum in tentationibus meis.*—Luke xxii. 28.

Me in the time of trial. And if King David was so grateful to the children of Bezellai, who helped him in his distress, that he recommended them specially to his son Solomon; what will not the most generous Jesus do to prove His gratitude to those who stood by Him when others abandoned Him? See, he will say to His heavenly Father, these are they who served Me truly, while others deserted Me. While the majority of men were indulging in heathenish pleasures, in impurity, in gluttony and drunkenness, in dancing and revelry, these spent their time in the church in humble prayer, in order to please Me. I will never forget their fidelity for all eternity: "And I dispose to you," He will say to them, "as My Father hath disposed to Me a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom;"¹ there you will be treated as I am Myself, and while the others are weeping and gnashing their teeth, you will possess eternal joys with Me.

Yes, O Lord, so it shall be! We will be true to Thee and serve Thee alone in these evil days! We will cry out with Thy servant Mathathias: "Although all nations obey King Antiochus, so as to depart every man from the service of the law of his fathers, and consent to his commandments; I and my sons, and my brethren will obey the law of our fathers. God be merciful unto us; it is not profitable for us to forsake the law, and the justices of God. We will not hearken to the words of King Antiochus, neither will we sacrifice, and transgress the commandments of our law, to go another way."² So also, O God, do I now say, that if all the nations on earth were to devote themselves these days to the service of the devil and the flesh, after the manner of the perverse world, yet I and my children, and these my brethren and sisters who are here present, will remain true to Thy holy Christian law; and although all the others cry out, like the Jews, that we should conform to the customs of the heathens, yet we will say with all the more devotion, like the blind man in the Gospel: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."³ Although they all are more daring now in committing sin, yet will we be still more careful not to offend Thee by the least sin. And with regard

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion.

¹ Et ego dispono vobis, sicut disposuit mihi Pater meus regnum, ut edatis, et bibatis super mensam meam in regno meo.—Luke xxii. 29, 30.

² Et si omnes gentes regi Antiocho obediunt, ut discedat unusquisque a servitute legis patrum suorum, et consentiat mandatis ejus: ego et filii mei, et fratres mei obediemus legi patrum nostrorum. Propitius sit nobis Deus; non est nobis utile relinquere legem et iustitias Dei. Non audiemus verba regis Antiochi, nec sacrificabimus transgredientes legis nostræ mandata, ut eamus altera via.—I. Mach. ii. 19-22.

³ Jesu, filii David, miserere mei.—Mark x. 47.

to the wicked, although we cannot and do not wish to associate with them, yet, O gracious Saviour, we pray for them as for our fellow-creatures, and we beg Thee to show them Thy mercy and patience, in the same words in which Thou didst pray on the Cross for Thy murderers: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"¹ They are blind and foolish; they do not know or see what great wickedness it is to despise their God and their Lord; nor what a misfortune it is to lose Thee, their highest Good, even during Shrove-tide. Lord and Master of hearts, do not allow innocent souls to be led astray! Holy angels, take special care of the souls entrusted to you in these dangerous times, (for many parents are now neglectful of their children;) be with them always, speak to them, make their consciences uneasy, that they may not go into any place or company where their innocence might be exposed to danger; but that they, like us, may resolve to serve faithfully God, who, even during Shrove-tide, deserves to be constantly loved and praised by all men above all things. Amen.

FIFTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON THOSE WHO, DURING SHROVE-TIDE, PREFER TO FOLLOW THE DEVIL, RATHER THAN CHRIST.

Subject.

During these days especially, each one has to choose between following the devil with the children of the world, and following Jesus Christ with the children of God; therefore each one should make up his mind as to which he will follow.—*Preached on Quinquagesima Sunday.*

Text.

Ecce ascendimus Jerosolymam, et consummabuntur omnia, quæ scripta sunt per prophetas de Filio hominis.—Luke xviii. 31.

"Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all things shall be accomplished which were written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man."

Introduction.

How do those two things harmonize, the gospel of to-day,

¹ Pater, dimitte illis: non enim sciunt, quid faciunt.—I-uke xxiii. 34.

and the present season? The change in the ceremonies of the Church, and the change in the manners of the world during these days? Jesus, as we read in the Gospel, goes up to Jerusalem, and speaks of nothing but the bitter torments and death that await him, "For He shall be delivered to the gentiles, and shall be mocked, and scourged and spit upon; and after they have scourged Him they will put Him to death;" but the perverse world speaks of nothing but the amusements of Shrove-tide. A fortnight ago the Catholic Church showed her grief by suspending the recitation of the joyful *Te Deum*, and the *Alleluia*; but the world now, more than ever, indulges in dissipation and revelry. How do these things harmonize, I ask again. Does not the Holy Ghost say by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "A tale out of time is like music in mourning."¹ Singing and music on one side, silence and weeping on the other; there is surely little harmony there. My dear brethren, not without reason does the Catholic Church in her sorrowful silence, and omitting the usual signs of joy, appoint for this day the gospel that I have read for you; for her object is, partly to show the sorrow that afflicts her motherly heart at seeing so many of her children following the customs of the vain world, nay, the abuses of the godless heathens, and thus taking sides with the devil during these days, and partly to exhort and encourage her faithful children to remain true to their crucified Redeemer during these days, by living in a pious and holy manner. Such, too, is the object I aim at to-day, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

During these days especially each one has to choose between following the devil with the children of the world, and following Jesus Christ with the children of God. Christians, consider well what choice you intend making! Such is the subject of this exhortation. Sincere Christians, are we not determined to remain faithful to Jesus Christ? Such shall be the conclusion.

And do Thou, O God, give us grace to practise it; we ask this of Thee through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

Our holy Father, St. Ignatius, in his golden book of the "Spiritual Exercises," a book which owes its origin more to God Himself than to human understanding, and which has hitherto had such wonderful effect and influence on numbers of souls,

At all times Christ and the devil are opposed to each other.

¹ *Musica in luctu importuna narratio.*—Eccles. xxii. 6.

(would to God that all Christians made a habit of using this powerful means of salvation once a year, and, laying aside all other concerns, spent three days or a week in silence, meditating on divine things and attending solely to their eternal salvation. Oh how many souls would then be rescued from the infernal serpent! How the number of the elect would then be increased!) in this book, I say, there is one meditation in which St. Ignatius represents on the one side the standard of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and on the other, that of Lucifer, the prince of darkness. Lucifer is represented as sitting on a high throne in a large plain near Babylon, with a terrible countenance and eyes darting fire, and surrounded by smoke and flames and great numbers of devils and human beings, holding in his hands a standard, on which are painted the vain pomps of the world, the lusts of the flesh, the greed of riches and the pride of life. Jesus Christ is represented as standing modestly and humbly on the ground, in a large plain near Jerusalem, with a mild and friendly countenance, holding the standard of the Cross and accompanied by His angels, Apostles and those who work for the salvation of souls. Mark the different circumstances here, my dear brethren. Lucifer is near Babylon, a word which signifies confusion; Jesus Christ is near Jerusalem, the city of peace and rest; thus showing how the wicked, who take sides with the devil, are full of uneasiness and trouble, while the just, who follow the example of Christ, enjoy eternal peace and consolation. Lucifer appears with a terrible, Christ with a friendly countenance, in order to distinguish between the cruel slavery of the devil, and the sweet yoke of Christ. Lucifer sits on a lofty throne as a sign of pride; Jesus stands on the ground as a sign of humility.

Both invite
men to fol-
low them.

Then the Saint goes on to consider how those two opposing generals invite men to join them. "Come to me all you that labor and are burdened," says Christ in winning accents, "and I will refresh you. Take up my yoke upon you, and learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart; and you shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is sweet and my burden light."¹ Go, my Apostles and servants, throughout the world; try to win over souls to My side; persuade them to enlist under my standard, to obey My law, and to imitate Me; preach to them contempt of the world and of all temporal and perishable things,

¹ Venite ad me omnes, qui laboratis, et onerati estis, et ego reficiam vos. Tollite jugum meum super vos, et discite a me, quia mitis sum et humilis corde, et invenietis requiem animabus vestris. Jugum enim meum suave est, et onus meum leve.—Matth. xi. 28-30.

and impress on them the necessity of meekness and humility, of temperance and sobriety, of mortification of the flesh and its desires. The daily pay that I will give in this life to those who serve Me truly, will be spiritual consolation and a sweet joy of conscience; and if they are faithful to Me for a short time, their reward will be eternal joys with Me in the kingdom of Heaven. Go, ye devils, cries out Lucifer, in a terrible voice, go through the world and compel souls to enter my service, to enroll themselves under my banner; leave them neither rest nor peace by day or night, until they yield to you; attack them by your evil suggestions and temptations; make use of wicked men to help you to corrupt and lead the innocent into sin by their bad teaching and example; inspire them with the love of worldly honors, of money and riches and of sensual pleasures, promise them, in my name, if they serve me truly, a comfortable, luxurious, pleasant and happy life; but when I have once got them safely under my yoke, I will make them pay dearly enough for the little pleasure I will give them; say nothing to them of that, however, and after they have thus enjoyed themselves for a short time, they will receive their reward from me in the eternal flames of hell; but this latter you must drive out of their thoughts for the present, and persuade them to look on it as a mere fable that is not worth a moment's serious consideration.

Having thus proposed the two points of the meditation, St. Ignatius represents the human soul placed between those two antagonists, and considering which of them it will join, under which of the two standards it will fight. And finally he bewails the madness and folly of most men in allowing themselves to be deceived by the devil and to be led astray by him, for the sake of an imaginary breath of honor, a worthless piece of money, or a brutish passion, so that they crowd after him and are hurried into hell; while only a very small number prefer to enlist under the standard of Jesus Christ, and to take on themselves His sweet yoke. Alas, when we think of this, how can we help weeping hot tears, like St. Bernard when he cried out, "Christ, who gives life, loses, while the devil, who betrays, gains."¹ Reason enough has the hellish serpent to defy his Lord and his God, and to cry out boastingly to Jesus Christ: See how many follow me, and how willingly they do so; nearly all are on my side; I can promise no reward but eternal torments, and yet the whole world is with me; while you can hardly find a single follower,

At all times
most men
take sides
with the
devil.

¹ Christus reficiens, deficit: diabolus decipiens, proficit.

although you have given your life for men, and promised them eternal joys in Heaven! Such, my dear brethren, has always been the way of the world, that most people, by transgressing the divine commands, take sides with the devil.

But especially during Shrove-tide.

But at no period is this deplorable folly more evident than during the present season of Shrove-tide. At other times we might compare the devil to a dog, tied up with a strong chain, who can bark, but cannot bite any, unless those who, of their own accord, approach too near him. But in these days it seems as if he had broken his chain, and is running raging through the world, attacking every one, without distinction of age, sex, or condition, so that he drags away from the side of Jesus Christ, and over to his own, by sin, many who were before pious innocent souls, who loved God with all their hearts. Is it not so, my dear brethren? Do not many, far too many, live during these days as if they knew neither God, nor Heaven, nor hell, nor Christ crucified, nor Gospel law? As if there was full and free permission for them to commit what sins they please? If we consider the state of many, even Catholic, cities, would we not have reason to be horrified at the dissipation and debauchery carried on in them, were it not that the wicked customs of the world find an excuse for those excesses, and palliate them to such an extent as to make them appear respectable?

A we see in the public streets.

If we go through the public streets, what do we see? All sorts of foolish conduct, ridiculous disguises, and masquerading pleasure-seekers, who try to rival each other in indecent and unbecoming buffoonery; men disguised as women and women as men, who, having thus put off their natural modesty, can indulge all the more freely in licentious excesses. What are we to think of this, Christians? And Thou, O all-seeing God, dost Thou still recognize Thy image in the soul of one who degrades himself by such unmeaning buffoonery? Ah, canst Thou not cry out now, as Thou didst long ago to our forefather Adam, when he hid himself from Thee, after having fallen into sin, Adam where art thou? Human soul, where art thou? Where are the marks of my beauty in thee? Where is the reason I gave that young man? Where is the modesty that that young girl received as a natural gift.

In private houses.

And if we go from the streets into many of the houses, what do we see? The tradesman gives up his work, the shopkeeper his business, and the lawyer his studies, the master and mistress their usual domestic cares; everybody seems to keep holiday. And in

whose honor? God's? Yes truly, in honor of a certain god; of that god of whom the Scripture speaks: "Whose god is their belly;"¹ of that god to whom the blind heathens in former times consecrated their feast days, and whom they called Bacchus; and of the goddess of impure love, whom they called Venus! Heathenish pleasures, dangerous intercourse, immoderate eating and drinking, drunkenness, immodesty and other sinful pastimes are indulged in during these days without the least shame. There is no use in speaking or preaching against them; the one all-sufficient excuse is always ready; it is Shrove-tide. Thus thousands of souls run, without being asked, to enlist themselves under the standard of the devil; the gain is all on the side of the arch-enemy, who betrays souls to destruction. Jesus Christ, exposed on the altar under the sacramental veils, cries out to His children: "Come to Me all you, and I will refresh you;" remain with Me, keep the faith you so solemnly swore to Me in baptism, and I will reward you eternally! But in vain; the loss is all on the side of Christ, who gives life. Most people refuse to listen to Him during these days; many who have laid aside the burden of their sins in the Sacrament of Penance during the morning, and entered into a fresh compact with their God and Saviour by receiving Him in the Holy Communion, banish Him again from their hearts during the afternoon with the greatest ingratitude, by going into dangerous company and into the occasion of sin, and thus burden their consciences anew with sins which they will have to repent of again and to confess during Lent. But the true children and followers of Christ, who are unfortunately very few in number, are all the more faithful in their attachment to the standard of the Cross during these days, and all the more careful to avoid doing even the least thing to offend their dear Saviour, the more they see that others shamefully abandon Him.

Such is the state of the case, my dear brethren. And what are you now going to do? "If it seem evil to you to serve the Lord," I say to you in the words in which the heroic Josue addressed the Israelites just before his death, when he was exhorting them to persevere in the service of the true God, "If it seem evil to serve the Lord, you have your choice; choose this day that which pleaseth you, whom you would rather serve, whether the gods which your fathers served in Mesopotamia, or the gods of the Amorrhites in whose land you dwell;" you can do as you please,

Each one
can now
choose
which side
he will take

¹ Quorum Deus venter est.—Philip. iii. 19.

but you must know that; "as for me and my house we will serve the Lord."¹ In the same way, Christians, I say to you, "you have your choice;" take whichever side you please; make up your minds as to whether you will join the rabble who are following the devil, and serve the false gods of the vain worldlings among whom you are living; or whether with your holy ancestors, who so bravely shed their blood for Jesus Christ, you will remain faithful to the true God. But consider first which of the two has the greater claim on your love and service. You are quite free; make what choice you please.

Pious
Christians
should not
hesitate in
choosing.

Alas, perverse and wicked world, why do you compel me to propose such a choice? Christians, can one of you hesitate for a moment, as to which side he should join, Christ's or the devil's? How, my soul! Do you then require such a long time to determine whether you will serve God, or the devil? Your God, who has given you all that you have, or that wicked spirit from whom you cannot expect anything that is good? Your God who, through excess of love gave up His life for you, to save you from eternal death, or the devil, who, if God allowed him, would at once hurry you into hell as a reward for having served him? Your God, who gives Himself to you as your food and drink, that you may have eternal life, or the devil who tries to give you a poison that will cause your eternal death? Your God in whose service you now enjoy the sweetest repose, the greatest interior consolation and comfort, or the cruel demon, in whose slavery your wretched conscience will be unceasingly tortured and afflicted? Your God, who has promised you the eternal joys of Heaven as a recompense, or the devil, who is already fanning the flames of hell, that he may torture you therein for serving him faithfully? Think well before you decide!

But remain
faithful to
God.

Vain children of the world, I say with Josue, do as you please; "as for me and my house we will serve the Lord," and serve Him alone. My dear brethren, I am sure that you too will make the same determined answer that the Israelites made to Josue; "and the people answered and said: God forbid we should leave the Lord, and serve strange gods. The Lord, our God, He brought us and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; and did very great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the ways by which we journeyed, etc.

¹ Sin autem malum vobis videtur ut Domino serviat, optio vobis datur: Eligite hodie, quod placet, cui servire potissimum debeatis, utrum diis, quibus servierunt patres vestri in Mesopotamia, an diis Amorrhæorum, in quorum terra habitatis; ego autem et domus mea serviemus Domino.—Josue xxiv. 15.

Therefore we will serve the Lord, for He is our God.”¹ Yes, answered Josue, but I foresee that the Amorrhites, among whom you live, will lead you astray after a time, so that you will serve their false gods. “You will not be able to serve the Lord,” that is, according to commentators, you will not be able to serve God, and at the same time remain amongst idols, “for He is a holy God, and mighty and jealous,”² who cannot brook a rival in His service. Ah my dear Christians, I too am afraid that the servants of the world and the wicked followers of Satan, in whose company you will perhaps be during these dangerous days, may lead some of you astray by their seductive and bad example, so that you will become like themselves and abandon the way of the children of God. Will you do so? No, cried out the people of Israel unanimously to Josue; “No, it shall not be so as thou sayest, but we will serve the Lord.”³ So, too, must you think and say, my dear brethren. No, what you are afraid of will never come to pass; we will serve the Lord our God, and remain faithful to the standard of Jesus Christ.

But our companions will object, and will say, it is Shrove-tide. And what if it is? Must we therefore leave our God and serve the devil? O great God, must I now, because it is Shrove-tide, banish Thee from my heart and from my mind, in order to make room for Thy sworn enemies, the wicked world, the corrupt flesh, the treacherous Father of Lies, until this season is past? That seems to me to be like the way in which they manage in some places where Catholics and heretics live together. In some small towns there is only one church, which Lutherans or Calvinists and Catholics have in common; this unfortunate church has to change its appearance every Sunday in such a manner as to appear to laugh sometimes and at other times to weep. How so? In the morning the Catholics have their hours appointed for the true service of God, and then the altar is, as the expression goes, “decked out in grand gala;” the pictures of the saints are hung on the walls, the Cross is in a place of honor, the Tabernacle is opened and the Blessed Sacrament exposed to the adoration of the people, the holy Mass is said and heard, the Word of God is preached from the pulpit

How disgraceful to be unfaithful during Shrove-tide. Shown by a simile.

¹ Responditque populus, et ait: Absit a nobis, ut relinquamus Dominum et serviamus diis alienis. Dominus Deus noster ipse eduxit nos et patres nostros de terra Ægypti, de domo servitutis: fecitque videntibus nobis signa ingentia, et custodivit nos in omni via, per quam ambulavimus. Serviemus igitur Domino, quia ipse est Deus noster.—Josue xxiv. 13-18.

² Non poteritis servire Domino: Deus enim sanctus, et fortis æmulator est.—Ibid. 19.

³ Nequaquam ita ut loqueris, erit, sed Domino serviemus.—Ibid. 21.

and the souls of the faithful are fed with the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ in the Holy Communion. Oh certainly a joyous sight for God and His angels! But wait a while and see what a change takes place. When the time appointed for the Catholics is over, the church hardly looks like a church any more. And why? The images of the saints are removed, the Cross is brought into the sacristy, the tabernacle closed, and the altar covered with a curtain; the Catholics go out, and the heretics come in and take their place; the preacher ascends the pulpit, opens a falsified Bible, and gives out a long winded harangue advocating a false doctrine that is opposed to the gospel of Christ. Poor church, it seems as if your walls and pillars must complain of the bitter necessity to which they are reduced by the pressure of troublous times, since they must now serve two masters, Christ, their legitimate Master, and the apostates Luther and Calvin! In the same way, I repeat, these days seem to change people very much. During the rest of the year every good Catholic at least knows that the first and chief command must be exactly observed: "Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God with thy whole heart," etc., and with all thy strength and above all things; that the exhortation of St. Peter must be observed: "Be sober and watch; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist ye strong in faith;"¹ that the exhortation of St. John must be exactly fulfilled: "Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world,"² much less the abuses introduced by the world; that the law of Christ must be obeyed to the letter: "If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee;"³ if it is an occasion of sin to thee, away with it at once; for it is expedient for thee to go into Heaven with one eye, rather than to go to hell with two eyes. Then good Catholics can keep their feast-days by a true service of God. Oh, let me say it again, what a joyful sight that is for God and His angels! But it is Shrove-tide now; away then with all those pious ornaments; the holy altar must be covered; the humble, crucified Jesus must be banished from the heart and mind; heretics, (that is not saying half enough!) heathens and idolaters must now have their turn in the temple; the dangers of the soul are dangers no longer; the perverse customs of the world have to replace the law of Christ;

¹ Sobrii estote et vigilate, quia adversarius vester diabolus tamquam leo rugiens circuit, quærens quem devoret: cui resistite fortes in fide.—I. Pet. v. 8-9.

² Nolite diligere mundum, neque ea, quæ in mundo sunt.—I. John ii. 15.

³ Si oculus tuus dexter scandalizat te, erue eum, et projice abs te.—Matth. v. 29.

drunkenness, intemperance, wantonness must have full freedom; Bacchus and Venus must be raised on the altars and adored. Away with you, says the devil to Christ, the days and hours appointed for your service are over; my feast-days have now begun, and they must belong to me alone!

Ah, my God, shall I consent to this? No, O Lord, worthy of all love, my soul has been once for all consecrated as Thy temple; never, not even during Shrove-tide, shall sacrifice be offered therein to any one but Thee! No, my God, Thou art absolute Lord of all time; not a single moment should be employed for anything but Thy honor and glory! No, Thou omnipresent God, whose eye sees me wherever I am; in no place should I ever do, think, or say the least thing that is displeasing in Thy sight! No, Almighty God, without whom I can move neither hand nor foot; never should I do anything, or take the least step against Thy holy will! No, O God of justice, who in any place, at any time, even during these days, canst hurl me into hell on account of my sins; no worldly custom should ever lead me astray, or place me in the least danger or occasion of offending Thee! No, O God of infinite goodness, on whose grace and favor I, like a poor beggar, must always depend, even during Shrove-tide; not in the least thing should I make Thee an evil return for the countless benefits Thou hast bestowed on me! "God forbid we should leave the Lord and serve strange gods." I and all true Christians are determined now to serve Thee alone Our Lord, because Thou art our only God worthy of all love.

Therefore no pious Christian should forget his allegiance to God.

But it is Shrove-tide, say the vain children of the world and the partisans of the devil. And what then? Oh, one must enjoy one's self! And so you can enjoy yourselves; but in a manner befitting Christians and children of God; that is, you can rejoice in the Lord, as St. Paul says: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice. Let your modesty be known to all men."¹ But is it rejoicing in the Lord and acting as becomes the children of God to go into places and company in which Christian modesty and humility, as well as the purity of the heart, if not of the body, are exposed to certain danger? And here I allude not only to those nightly meetings in dancing-houses, but also to all assemblages in which persons of both sexes spend the night amusing themselves. Is it rejoicing in the Lord like children of God, to mask and disguise one's self in such a way as to provoke

He can rejoice in the Lord; but generally speaking, the pleasures of Shrove-tide are against the Lord.

¹ Gaudete in Domino semper: iterum dico: Gaudete. Modestia vestra nota sit omnibus hominibus.—Philip. iv. 4-5.

the Almighty to disgust? Hear what He says in the Book of Deuteronomy: "A woman shall not be clothed with man's apparel, neither shall a man use woman's apparel; for he that doth these things is abominable before God."¹ Is it rejoicing in the Lord like children of God, to rob one's self deliberately of reason by excessive drinking, and, as is the custom in these days, to indulge in all sorts of immodest buffooneries and liberties? Is it rejoicing in the Lord like children of God, to do things which will afterwards make the conscience uneasy, because there is a reasonable doubt as to whether a mortal sin has been committed or not, or because there is no doubt of the obligation of confessing and repenting of a sin that has been certainly committed? If you wish to know, my dear brethren, whether the pleasure you intend indulging in is an innocent and Christian one, before you begin, make the good intention, as I have elsewhere explained and see how it suits what you intend doing. For everything that is in itself neither good nor bad, can and must be made meritorious and deserving of Heaven by virtue of a supernatural intention, when it is performed in the state of sanctifying grace: and everything that cannot reasonably be directed to that supernatural end is, beyond all doubt, not innocent, but unlawful. Think therefore, I will go to that place, to that company, I will do this or that, or act in such and such a manner to Thy greater honor and glory, O God, and because it is pleasing to Thy holy will, that I may thereby be strengthened to serve Thee better; I unite this intention with the infinite merits and bitter Passion of Jesus Christ, my Lord, that Thou mayest have a greater pleasure in it, and that it may be more advantageous to my eternal salvation. Then see how the pleasure you intend enjoying suits that intention; if it is unsuited to it, then I say again, and you can look on it as a certain general rule in similar cases, that the pleasure is not an innocent one, and that it is unlawful.

For they
are never
lawful.

Therefore it still remains true that, if I wish to act as a true Christian and child of God, I will have nothing to do with such pleasures. I will enjoy myself, but "in the Lord." Others may act as they please, I will remain true to my God and my Lord; the whole world may side with the devil, I will never desert the standard of Jesus Christ, even during Shrove-tide. The soldier is always bound to perform his military duties; there is no

¹ Non induetur mulier veste virili, nec vir utetur veste feminea; abominabilis enim apud Deum est, qui facit hæc.—Deut. xxii. 5.

Shrove-tide in which it is lawful for him to desert his post, or to rebel against his officer; if he is caught in the act of committing any such transgressions even during Shrove-tide, he is punished at once. The civil and criminal laws are always binding on subjects, and no Shrove-tide can excuse from punishment those who are guilty of robbery, murder, coining false money, and rebelling against their lawful sovereign. And therefore no thief dares to steal openly; if he were to do so, the fact of its being Shrove-tide would not excuse him from being brought before the judge. The law of holy matrimony is always to be strictly observed, and no husband or wife is allowed during Shrove-tide to be guilty of conjugal infidelity. Now the Christian law is a military law; I am a soldier who in holy baptism have publicly sworn fidelity to the standard of Jesus Christ, and thus I have renounced for ever the devil, the world and the flesh. I have renewed my oath in the sacrament of confirmation, and I have again sworn to fight bravely for God and the true faith, even to the shedding of my blood. The Christian law is a just one; I am a subject and owe homage to God as my only sovereign Lord, and to Him I have promised obedience. The Christian law is one of spiritual matrimony; my soul is the bride, God the Holy Ghost is the bridegroom, and to Him I have promised perpetual love and fidelity. Did I perhaps as a soldier, when promising to be true to the standard of Christ, make an exception in favor of Shrove-tide, so that I could then desert my post without incurring blame? When I, as a subject, offered homage to my God, did I reserve to myself Shrove-tide as a time during which I could with impunity rebel against Him? When I was espoused to the Holy Ghost by sanctifying grace, did I look on Shrove-tide as a time during which I might commit spiritual adultery with the devil? No; every agreement I made is made for all time; all these laws are binding on me forever.

Therefore I renew my resolution; and do you, good Christians, keep yours faithfully. Far be it from us to desert the Lord, even during these days of Shrove-tide, and to serve strange gods. If I see people running off in crowds to join the side of the devil, I will think of the exhortation that Jeremias gave the Jews, when he forewarned them in an epistle that they should dwell among the Babylonians, and should see people adoring gods of gold, and silver, and stone: "Beware therefore that you imitate not the doings of others. But when you see the multitude behind and before adoring them, say you in your hearts: Thou

Conclusion
and resolution
to be
faithful to
Christ.

oughtest to be adored O Lord.”¹ Thou alone art the true God whom I must fear, honor and love. If others try, by ridicule or invective, to induce me to join them and so run into the danger of sin, I will at once remember the fidelity I owe the standard of Jesus Christ, and I will act as Catulus the Roman general did in former times. Catulus was once engaged in battle when the tide of success seemed turned against him, and he was on the point of being deserted by his soldiers, when he suddenly seized the standard, held it up on high, and cried out in a loud voice, “see what you are fighting under;”² remember the oath you have sworn under this standard. These few words re-animated the drooping courage of his soldiers, so that they returned boldly to the attack, and fought with the greatest bravery, until they put the enemy to flight. If during these days I find it hard to pray while others are dancing and amusing themselves, hard to appear at the Table of the Lord while others are indulging in gluttony and drunkenness, hard to remain in solitude at home while others are enjoying themselves with heathenish pleasures; or if I perhaps go into company which is dangerous to Christian modesty and purity, I will at once take courage and ask myself, under whom am I fighting? and I will answer with St. John Chrysostom; “I have sworn an oath of fidelity to Christ; how then can I desert to the army of the devil?”³ No; away with the thought. Avaunt Satan! Away with your temptations, O corrupt flesh! Away with your foolish abuses, O perverse world! I am Thine, O my sovereign Lord and God! I am Thine altogether and at all times even during Shrove-tide! And I am now determined to show more than ever, by redoubling my works of piety, that I am thoroughly devoted to Thee alone and to Thy service, the more others appear to put Thy holy, humble and pure law publicly to shame. Thine will I be for all eternity, in spite of all the partisans of Thy antagonist! Amen.

¹ Videte, ergo, ne et vos similes efficiamini factis alienis. Visa itaque turba de retro et ab ante, adorantes, dicite in cordibus vestris: Te oportet adorari, Domine.—Bar. vi, 4-5.

² Ecce sub quo militatis!

³ Sacramentum Christo dixi, et quomodo ergo ad diaboli castra transfugiam?—St. Chrysost. Hom. 54 ad pop.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Feast of St. Matthias the Apostle, when it occurs before Ash-Wednesday.

Text.

Cecidit sors super Matthiam, et annumeratus est cum undecim Apostolis.—Act. i. 26.

“And the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven Apostles.”

How different in this case the lot of two men of the same class. How unhappy that of one, how fortunate that of the other. Matthias was numbered among the Apostles of Jesus Christ; Judas, whose place he took, was numbered among the demons in hell. My dear brethren, to which side do we wish to belong? I can no longer conceal my displeasure and at the same time my compassion; to which side, I ask again, do we wish to belong during these days of Shrove-tide? With whom do we wish to be numbered? With the Apostles and disciples of Christ, or with the friends and partisans of the devil? If there is any time during the year at which there is reason for asking such a question, it is the present. I repeat it, etc.—*continues as before.*

FIFTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON THE INDECENCY AND THE BITTERNESS OF THE PLEASURES
OF SHROVE-TIDE.

Subject.

1. The pleasures of the season of Shrove-tide are, generally speaking, unbecoming, and therefore unsuited to a Christian. 2. They are not really joyful pleasures, and therefore no sensible man would indulge in them.—*Preached on Quinquagesima Sunday.*

Text.

- *Cæcus quidam sedebat secus viam.*—Luke xviii. 35.
“A certain blind man sat by the wayside.”

Introduction.

O dearest Saviour, come down on earth again. Not one, but countless blind mortals wilt Thou find in the streets and houses, who will not cry out to Thee, as the blind man in the Gospel

did, "Jesus Son of David, have mercy on me;" but who make merry and amuse themselves in spite of their blindness! And such Thou wilt find to be the case especially in this season of Shrove-tide. He who is blind wanders about and knows not where he is, nor whither he goes; he gropes about with his hands, but cannot tell whether what he touches is black or white. And so it is in these days with the blind world and its deluded children. They all seek enjoyment; but like the blind man, where they think they have a real pleasure, they have only found a false one, in which there is neither honor nor true enjoyment, and which therefore is quite unsuited to the name of Christian, nay, even to sound reason. To-day I will prove this to be true, and show what this blindness is, that I may warn all good and sensible Christians against it.

Plan of Discourse.

The pleasures of the season of Shrove-tide are, generally speaking, unbecoming, and are therefore unsuited to a Christian. That I shall show in the first and longer part. They are not really joyful pleasures, and therefore no sensible man would indulge in them. That I shall show in the second part. Rejoice in the Lord and be glad ye just; such shall be the conclusion.

To this effect, let us cry out with the blind man in the Gospel, "Jesus Son of David have mercy on us," and give us all the grace Thou gavest the blind man, that we may faithfully imitate, love and praise Thee during these days. This grace we beg of Thee through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary, and our holy angels guardian.

Whether an amusement is becoming or not, depends on the circumstances of the person.

The decency and suitability of an action depend on the circumstances and qualities of the person who undertakes to perform it; for that person has to consider whether such an action is, in the general estimation of men, one that becomes his or her birth, condition, age, and sex. This rule is acknowledged and observed even by the perverse world. Thus, for instance, it is a becoming and suitable thing for a poor peasant, who is bringing a load of wood to a house, to sit down on a stone in the street to rest himself, and to eat a piece of bread and cheese out of his hand; but such conduct would not be at all becoming in a senator or a courtier. It is a becoming and decent thing in a house-maid to take a broom in her hand and sweep away the dust from the door step, but not in a lady. A venerable old man cannot now with decency engage in the sports with which he

often passed the time with his companions in his young days; those things suited him in his youth, but they would be unbecoming in him now, that he is advanced in life. And why so? Why should things that are becoming in themselves, be suited to one person, and not to another? And why should they not be as suitable at one time, as at another? Reason itself suggests the answer to this question. And therefore the same rule must hold good with regard to the amusements that are in vogue now, during the season of Shrove-tide. To judge whether these amusements are becoming or not, we must consider who the persons are that engage in them; for there is no doubt that not every amusement is becoming to every one, even at Shrove-tide.

I will try to make the matter clearer by an imaginary example, on which I will pronounce judgment. There is a poor religious who has for many years led a poor, mortified and penitential life, living from one year's end to the other on bread given him in charity, sleeping on a hard bed, and chastising his flesh by frequent vigils, by fasting, prayer, and other works of penance. He is told it is now Shrove-tide, and he wishes to enjoy himself a little. Would you think it wrong of him to do so? Would you grudge the poor man a little amusement? By no means, you would all cry out; why should he not have some pleasure too? The bow cannot be kept always bent, as the saying is; one must have a little relaxation now and then, so as to refresh the mind, and gain new vigor. You hear this, my dear brother? You can enjoy yourself now. Change your habit at once for another dress; put a wig on your head; stick a feather in your hat; put a sword at your side, and be off with you at once to the ale-house; there you will find a lot of merry companions, and you can enjoy yourself to your heart's content during these three days, in singing and playing, and eating and drinking! No, no, you say, we do not mean that. That would be a most scandalous proceeding! But why so? It is Shrove-tide and he has a right to enjoy himself! Let him enjoy himself, you answer, but he must not go beyond the bounds of his holy profession; those amusements are not for a religious; if he wishes to indulge in them, it would have been better for him to have remained in the world; then they would have suited him well enough.

I must ask your opinion of another case, my dear brethren. There in a convent is a pious nun, who was born of rich and noble parents, and brought up from her childhood in comfort and luxury; but through love of Jesus Christ, whom she has

Shown by a simile.

Confirmed by another.

chosen as her Spouse, and in order to make surer of gaining the kingdom of Heaven, she has hidden herself between the four walls of a cell, in which for some years she has seen and heard nothing of the world. She frequently wears a hair-shirt under her habit, and interrupts her night's rest even in the depth of winter, in order to sing the praises of God in choir. She too wishes to enjoy herself a little at Shrove-tide; may she not do so? By all means, you say, let her enjoy herself; but how? I will tell you. She must take off her veil, curl her hair, paint her face, and put on an immense hooped dress, and then she can go in for a drinking frolic; but of course everything will be conducted with the greatest propriety. Oh, nonsense, you say, the thing is impossible! It would be a fearful scandal, and such an amusement would be most unbecoming such a person! But why? It is decent and becoming enough in the opinion of most of you, and it is the way in which people amuse themselves at this season. Oh, you say, it is not at all proper for a nun. Yet nuns are human beings as well as you, and they have just as much, if not more right to enjoy themselves. Yes, you answer, that is right enough, but they must enjoy themselves in a manner suited to their position. Your judgment is rather severe, but it is quite correct. Thus you yourselves acknowledge (I will not say anything now as to whether the dress I have mentioned is becoming even for lay-people) that not every kind of amusement, even if it be not unlawful in itself, is suited to every person, but that the circumstances of the individual must be taken into consideration, even during Shrove-tide.

We are
Christians,
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us.

But now seriously to our subject. No matter what state, condition, or profession we are of, whether lay or clerical, we are at all events Catholics. More than that I need not say. We are Catholics, that is believing Christians; and therefore we should have nothing to do with the abuses bequeathed to us by the blind heathens. We are Catholics, that is children of light; and therefore we must fly the works of darkness. We are Catholics, that is soldiers of Jesus Christ, or, as the holy Fathers say, as I have often reminded you already, we have publicly professed and sworn in baptism to obey the law and the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to renounce forever the devil and his works, the flesh and its desires, the world and its pomps; everything, then, that does not agree with this profession of ours, is unbecoming to us. We are Catholic Christians, that is, according to St. Paul, members and followers of Jesus Christ, who must put on Christ, and endeavor

as far as possible to imitate the life of our humble and thorn-crowned Head; we are relatives and friends of Jesus Christ, who often feeds us with His sacred flesh and blood, so that, as He expressly says, He may abide in us, and we in Him; therefore nothing which is not in harmony with that life, with that dignity, can be becoming in us. Therefore, if we wish to enjoy ourselves during Shrove-tide in a becoming manner, our enjoyments must be such that every one can say of them: Yes, that is the way in which one should enjoy himself, who is enlightened with the grace of faith, a child of supernatural light, one who makes profession of the gospel of Christ, a sworn enemy of the devil, the flesh, and the vain world, a member, a follower, a relative and friend of the humble, crucified Jesus.

Now you may decide for yourselves. Go and consider the nature of the amusements that are commonly indulged in by many Christians during Shrove-tide, and see how they harmonize with the dignities and obligations of a Christian. Spending hours before the glass decking one's self out in the height of fashion, in order to appear in mixed assemblies, to glut one's own dangerous curiosity and to serve as a snare to others; men disguising themselves as women and women as men, in all kinds of ridiculous manners, so that all modesty is laid aside; appearing in the streets masked and dressed as mountebanks, shouting and roaring and acting like fools, even on Sundays and holy days consecrated to the service of God; (but, thank God, I have heard on good authority, that this latter excess is now forbidden; and may God grant that the prohibition be extended throughout the Catholic world!) spending whole nights in dancing and in unlawful and dangerous amusements, in eating to excess and drinking until perfect ebriety ensues, offending against virginal and conjugal purity by desires, words and acts, which during these days are hardly considered sinful; can these and similar excesses be looked on as amusements befitting one who professes to be a Christian? Are they suited to one who has to imitate the life of Jesus Christ? If so, what then are we to consider as worldly, as carnal, as heathenish, nay, as devilish?

Heathens, Turks, Jews, heretics, do you find any great difference between these amusements of ours, and your festivities in honor of Bacchus? Nay, could you with truth be accused of the same dissipations that many Christians indulge in during these days? There is of course no doubt that the abuse derives its origin from heathen times, as I have already explained, and that therefore the

Such are the amusements generally indulged in at Shrove-tide.

Heathens, Turks, and Jews are not worse than modern Christians in this respect.

devil lays claim to these days, as if they belonged to him by right, and should be devoted to his service. But, I ask again, is it right for a Christian practically to acknowledge that claim? We laugh at the Jews because they act in such a ridiculous manner in their synagogues, shouting out their prayers at the top of their voices, sometimes springing up in the air, and again throwing themselves flat on the ground. What foolish people they are, we say! And yet they profess by those ceremonies to honor and adore their God in a manner prescribed by Him in the Old Law. We consider the Turks as foolish, when we hear or read how they pray in their mosques with outstretched arms, or twirling themselves round with their heads thrown backwards, until they fall down exhausted and foaming at the mouth. Are they not madmen? we say. But what would Turks and Jews think of us, if they were to see how we go on during Shrove-tide? If they were told that we act like that in honor of God and for His sake, as Jews and Turks maintain that their antics are religious ceremonies; what would they think? If a confessor were to order his penitent to put on a fool's dress, and to jump and caper about the streets, and spend the night in drinking and carousing in honor of God, and as satisfaction for his sins, would not that priest be looked on as out of his mind? And yet, so foolish and inconsistent are we, that we deliberately commit those follies without being at all forced to do so! Is that an amusement befitting a true Christian and imitator of Jesus Christ?

Who scandalize and put our holy religion to shame.

O first born children of the Catholic Church, how far different it was in your days! The heathens could not find anything more grievous to reproach you with, than that you refused to assist at their public shows and dances, that you abhorred all revelry, and that you observed the greatest humility, modesty and temperance at your meals. These were the vices they had to reproach you with. It was this modesty and self-restraint which excited the admiration of so many heathens, and brought them to the knowledge of the true faith, so that they abjured idolatry, and, following your edifying example, made public profession of the gospel of Jesus Christ, being compelled to acknowledge that it was not at all likely that the darkness of error could have any influence where so much modesty and humility were displayed. O Christians, what have we come to? With our Shrove-tide buffooneries, we are a source of scandal to heathens, Turks, Jews, and heretics, who can point to our excesses as an excuse for not belonging to the true Church, in as much as, with some show of reason, they

can maintain that they are utterly incompatible with a knowledge of the truth. How many heretics there are who have been confirmed in error by consideration of the excesses of Catholics, and have perhaps thanked God that they had not the misfortune of being born in such a degraded system of Christianity! To Turks and Mahomedans we are a laughing-stock and a mockery; and many of them, who had an opportunity of witnessing our Shrove-tide festivities, were firmly convinced that all Christians are fools. What sort of law-givers, they thought, must these people have, what kind of a God do they adore, since such conduct is either prescribed, or allowed to them? And this thought they actually gave expression to. You see then, how not only the Christian law, but Jesus Christ Himself, our Legislator and Master, is exposed to the laughter and ridicule of heathens and Jews; so that He has just reason to complain now, as the Patriarch Jacob did formerly, when his sons Simeon and Levi cruelly slaughtered the Schemites: "You have troubled me, and made me hateful to the Chanaanites and Pherezites, the inhabitants of this land."¹ St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians of the early Christians, says: "We are the good odor of Christ unto God;"² that is, by our modest and edifying lives, we make all nations and peoples think highly of Christ and the Christian name, so that many of them are induced to submit to His law. But nowadays all pious Christians may cry out against the excesses of Shrove-tide, in the same terms in which the Hebrews complained of Moses and Aaron in Egypt: "The Lord see and judge, because you have made our savor to stink before Pharaoh and his servants."³ You, by your dissipations, are the cause why so many infidels and apostate heretics turn away in disgust from a religion in which such abuses are practised. And there is just reason for that complaint, my dear brethren. Can you, then, still maintain that such amusements are becoming the children and imitators of Jesus Christ?

Finally, if there is nothing to be said against the festivities of Shrove-tide, if they are in no way unbecoming a Christian; then, of course, you need never accuse yourselves of them in confession, even before receiving Holy Communion, nay, not even on your death-bed, when the priest is repeating over you the words, "Depart Christian soul," etc. For a harmless amusement is not

An evident proof that those amusements are unlawful.

¹ Turbastis me, et odiosum fecistis me Chananæis, et Pherezæis habitatoribus terræ hujus.—Gen. xxxiv. 30.

² Christi bonus odor sumus Deo.—II. Cor. ii. 15.

³ Videat Dominus et judicet, quoniam foetere fecistis odorem nostrum coram Pharaone et servis ejus.—Exod. v. 21.

matter for confession and absolution. Will you all be satisfied to leave it at that? Still more; every good work of a just man, that is performed with a good intention, is a meritorious and holy work, which deserves Heaven as its reward, as I have often told you before; and therefore the Apostle warns us: "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do; do all to the glory of God."¹ If then these amusements are lawful, you can enjoy them in the Lord, and thank Him for allowing you to do so. And you, O holy angels, write them down in the book of merits and good works! Write down all the movements of hands and feet that are made in dancing-houses, all the gestures and glances of the eye that are made in mixed companies, all the thoughts and desires of the heart that are thereby aroused! Write down all the improper language that is heard in the drinking-houses, all the drunkenness that is indulged in! Write down all the impure touches and other misdeeds that are committed; unite them with the prayers and merits of the saints, and offer them to God as a sweet-smelling incense! They are all good works, and of course it will be a great consolation to you to remember them on your death-bed! What do you think would become of you, if you were to die, while actually indulging in such amusements? You certainly would not be the first who died suddenly during a Shrove-tide masquerade. There are cases on record of people dying a sudden death on Ash Wednesday, after having spent the whole of the preceding night in dancing; so that they were hurried from the dancing-house into their coffins, and, if I may thus express myself, had to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ in the garb of a Shrove-tide buffoon. O my God, you say with horror, what a fearful death for a Christian to die! But why? Is it not a beautiful, precious and holy death, to die in the very act of performing a good and meritorious work that one can take with him into eternity? For cannot such a soul say to its Judge: there is the work that I have just been engaged in for your honor and glory; if you ask me what good I have done, I will point to that, and say, I have spent the night dancing, and running about the streets dressed like a fool; I have publicly associated and taken liberties with a person of the opposite sex; I have drunk to excess; in a word, I have kept Shrove-tide in a Christian manner and according to the precepts of the gospel, and the example of

¹ Sive ergo manducatis, sive bibitis, sive aliud quid facitis, omnia in gloriam Dei facite. —I. Cor. x. 31.

your holy and humble life. Give me therefore the eternal reward you have promised me in Heaven. What do you say to that, my dear brethren? Would you venture to speak in that way to your Judge? Do you think you would be likely thus to save yourselves from hell, or to gain a higher place in Heaven? Yet you might easily do so, if your Shrove-tide amusements are really such as become Christians, and you are otherwise free from sin. Ah, my dear brethren, "God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap."¹ I do not believe that any of you would be so blind as to consider such amusements lawful; and therefore you must acknowledge that you cannot have a good intention when indulging in them, that they are unchristian, and utterly unbecoming you.

Therefore we should be ashamed to do what is indecent and unbecoming. Many a time, when we are urged to keep the commandments of God exactly, to forgive our enemies from our hearts, not to seek revenge for injuries, to return good for evil, and so on, we try to excuse ourselves by saying that our honor will suffer if we do not avenge that insult, etc. Why do we not now show the same determination when there is question of the glory of God and of the dignity and honor of our holy religion? "Let us cast off the works of darkness," as St. Paul exhorts us, "and put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."² Imitate in your actions and behavior Jesus Christ, who has taught you none of these excesses. Let us enjoy ourselves, but in a manner becoming a child of God, a member, brother, follower, relative and bosom-friend of Christ; and that is what we cannot do by indulging in the pleasures of Shrove-tide. Yet, why do I say pleasures? They are not even deserving of that name; for there is no real enjoyment in them, and therefore we are blind and ignorant when we indulge in such pleasures; as I shall briefly show in the

Therefore we should have nothing to do with them.

Second Part.

"A tale out of time is like music in mourning,"³ says the wise Ecclesiasticus. And therefore sorrow during music is a

The pleasures of

¹ Deus non irridetur. Quæ enim seminaverit homo, hæc et metet.—Galat. vi. 7-8.

² Abjiciamus opera tenebrarum, et induamur arma lucis. Sicut in die honeste ambulemus, non in comessationibus et ebrietatibus, non in cubilibus et impudiciis; sed induamini Dominum Jesum Christum.—Rom. xiii. 12-14.

³ Musica in luctu importuna narratio.—Eccles. xxii. 6.

Shrove-tide are spoiled by the uneasiness they cause.

spoiled pleasure. No matter how fine the music may be, if a child happens to cry, or a dog to bark, or a single note to sound discordantly, it becomes a torture for delicate ears. Such, O dissipated worldlings, are the pleasures you indulge in during Shrove-tide! They are a music that is spoiled by discordant voices and howling dogs; a pleasure that is so merely in outward appearance, while inwardly it fills the heart with bitterness, and tortures the conscience by the unavoidable stings of remorse, like the howling of a dog. For these pleasures are either actually sinful and displeasing to God, or else they are the occasion, a danger, or a temptation to sin; and in neither case is real enjoyment possible.

On account of the danger of sin which troubles the conscience.

And as far as dangerous pleasures are concerned, I will explain my meaning by the aid of a simile. What properties are most frequently the occasion of lawsuits, of disturbing peace, and of creating strife? Generally speaking, they are properties that border on each other. For instance, that garden, or field, or vineyard borders on yours; that house is next door to you; there you have a fruitful cause of strife and quarreling. Your neighbor insists on your having your window higher, as you can see everything he does in his house or garden; another complains that your roof throws off all the rain-water that falls on it, into his yard; a third says that your wall shuts him out from the light; your vine, says a fourth, has its roots in my ground, and therefore it belongs to me; you have extended the bounds of your field too far into mine. And so it goes on. The mere fact of two pieces of property touching each other can be a fruitful source of litigation and disputes. It is not at all likely that quarrels should arise between people whose properties are situated at a distance from each other. Now, do you know what I mean by this, my dear brethren? What is it that causes the greatest doubts and difficulties to the soul, and fills it with uneasiness, scruples and anxieties, so that its peace and contentment are interfered with and disturbed? It is the neighborhood, the occasion, the danger of sin.

As all the circumstances of those amusements prove.

For instance, in that company, that Shrove tide amusement, young people of both sexes take certain liberties with each other; they are on the borders of sin, and either immediately or in a very short time, when the pleasure is past, the strife begins in the uneasy conscience, and it begins to ask, what did I mean by that touch? Was there nothing sinful in it? Perhaps it may have been an occasion of sin to others. The eyes are

allowed to roam at will on persons of the opposite sex; there again is the neighborhood of sin, and the strife of conscience must be the consequence of it. Were those looks, was that pleasure mere idle curiosity, or carnal lust, of which the Gospel says: "Whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart."¹ All kinds of conversation is carried on; the good name of others is not spared, and certain expressions with a double-meaning are used; every one takes part in such conversation, or laughs at it; it is the neighborhood and occasion of sin, and at the same time of great anxiety to the conscience. Have I inflicted a grievous injury on my neighbor's honor? Have I spoken of impure things with secret pleasure and morose delectation? Such are the questions that naturally suggest themselves on such occasions. Friendly looks, expressions and actions are freely indulged in, and all sorts of thoughts and desires occur to the mind; there you have again the border-land of sin, the source of uneasiness to the conscience. How was I disposed when those thoughts occurred to me? Did I dwell on them too long? Did I deliberately entertain that desire? Did I think of it afterwards wilfully? Perhaps the friendliness of my manner was only a means of exciting an unlawful affection in others? Perhaps, and perhaps not! In any case, there is matter enough to keep the conscience on the rack, until the whole thing is explained in confession, and even then one cannot get beyond the *perhaps*. In such a case, a tender conscience is hardly ever satisfied after confession; for it has reason enough to suspect that sin has been committed; since on the one hand the danger of sin that would have been far better avoided, was wilfully incurred; and on the other, God Himself has said, "He that loveth danger shall perish in it;"² so that He generally abandons those who are guilty of such rashness, and leaves them without the special help of His grace. See now, what discord there is in the music. What trouble and uneasiness of conscience in, or at all events immediately after, such pleasures. Therefore, if you wish to preserve your peace and contentment, fly the occasions and dangers of sin; if you wish to remain true to God, avoid the border-land of evil. "Give not place to the devil,"³ if you wish to enjoy real pleasure and to spend a happy Shrove-tide.

¹ Quia omnis, qui viderit mulierem ad concupiscendum eam, jam moechatus est eam in corde suo. — Matth. v. 28.

² Qui amat periculum, in illo peribit. — Eccles. iii. 27.

³ Nolite locum dare diabolo. — Ephes. iv. 27

On account
of the sins
committed
in them,
they torture
the con-
science
still more.

But if the mere neighborhood and danger of sin can occasion such anxiety and uneasiness to the conscience, what a fearful tempest will be excited therein by sin itself, when one is certain of having committed it, and of having offended God grievously during the dissipations of Shrove-tide; and indeed humanly speaking, one can hardly avoid doing so? Alas, unhappy mortal that you are! Not all the pleasures and delights on earth could induce me to share in the wretchedness that Shrove-tide will cause you! “Do thou also bear thy confusion;”¹ the Lord says to you by the Prophet Ezechiel; or as the Septuagint has it, “Do thou also bear thy torment;” you have managed matters so well that you must now bear the shame and the torment that you have brought on yourself, as a just punishment for the sin you have so wantonly committed. This sin, unless you are quite callous, will torment you day and night like a fury, and will make you pay dearly for the short and miserable pleasure you enjoyed. Go and bear the torment you have brought on yourself; take it with you to the dancing-house, the ale-house, the nightly-meeting; it will accompany you as you walk about the streets; you will take it to bed with you; it will be the first thing that occurs to you in the morning, nor will you be freed from it until you have got rid of the guilt of your sin. Even in the midst of your pleasures it will poison them for you, because your conscience will keep on crying out to you: Unhappy wretch, what are you doing here? You are offending God, selling your soul, and forfeiting the eternal joys of Heaven! The night after it will commence again: Unfortunate man, the pleasure is at an end, and what has it left you? You are a slave of the devil, a child of eternal death! If you were to die now, what would become of you? You would be amongst the demons in hell! And when Shrove-tide is over the torment will be just as bad; what have I gained, you will think; I must go to confession now, and make known my shame; I must detest and abhor from my heart what I have done, and do penance for it; otherwise I am lost forever. Can that be called a pleasure, which fills the heart with bitterness in the very moment of enjoyment?

No; away with those Shrove-tide amusements! I am not so foolish as to pay so dearly for a momentary enjoyment. I will keep Shrove-tide, and enjoy myself, but in the Lord; I will make merry, but in a manner becoming a Christian, a child of

Conclusion
and reso-
lution to
rejoice in
the Lord
with the
just.

¹ Et tu porta confusionem tuam.—Ezech. xvi. 53.

God, a brother of Jesus Christ; my amusements shall be to the honor of God, and such as can give me real joy without making my conscience uneasy, so that hereafter I shall be able to present them to my Judge without hesitation, and demand a reward for them. Make that resolution now with me, pious Christians; think and say with the Prophet David: "But it is good for me to stick close to my God,"¹ even during Shrove-tide; far better are the joys that come from God and from a pure conscience, than all the pleasures that the foolish world can give. "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice ye just, and glory all ye right of heart."² Let the worldly-minded run after their deeds of darkness; as for us, we shall walk, "as children of the light"³ who have nothing to do with the darkness of heathenism. Let them make of the present time a time of wickedness and vanity; we will make of it, as we ought, a time of modesty and devotion, during which we will visit our God more frequently than usual, praise Him better, and love Him more heartily. And thus we shall have real pleasure during Shrove-tide, while the others will have only a false and deceitful one; and during Lent, while they are full of the bitterness of sorrow and have to do penance for their misdeeds, we shall be able to rejoice in the Lord. Such is our resolution. Amen.

For another sermon, on the same subject, see the foregoing First Part.

FIFTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON NIGHTLY PROMISCUOUS GATHERINGS OF YOUNG PEOPLE.

Subject.

Nightly promiscuous gatherings are very dangerous occasions of sin; therefore all who wish to save their souls must avoid them.—*Preached on the first Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Venit Jesus et stetit in medio.—John xx. 19.

"Jesus came and stood in the midst."

¹ *Mihi autem adhærere Deo bonum est.*—Ps. lxxii. 28.

² *Lætamini in Domino, et exultate justi, et gloriamini omnes recti corde.*—Ps. xxxi. 11.

³ *Ut filii lucis ambulate.*—Ephes. v. 8.

Introduction.

When and where did Jesus stand in the midst of His Apostles? In Jerusalem, in the room in which they had shut themselves up for fear of the Jews, and in which they were talking of Christ, "Jesus came and stood in the midst." For Jesus is seldom to be found in the company of those who, without fear or shame, place themselves in the danger of sin; because he who without necessity runs into such danger, will not long preserve the grace of God, partly on account of the weakness and frailty of our nature, which are increased on occasions of the kind, and partly on account of the withdrawal of the special help of God, which we deserve as a punishment of our imprudence and presumption. I allude to-day particularly, my dear brethren, to a certain kind of company that seems to many not at all dangerous, although in my opinion it is amongst the most dangerous of all. And what sort of company is that? One in which young people of both sexes meet at night to amuse themselves; call it what you please, ball or party, or anything else; I call it, in plain language, a nightly promiscuous gathering of young people for the purpose of amusement. If what I have to say offends any of you, I hope you will forgive me; the danger that threatens your precious souls, which fills me with anxiety, the fear of drawing down the divine anger, and the duty of my office force me to speak of this matter in order to satisfy my conscience. I mean no harm, nor do I envy or grudge you your enjoyments; but rather wish you from my heart all kinds of joy in abundance, provided there is no danger to your souls. Nor do I now address myself particularly to those who are little concerned about their eternal salvation, and who try to live in all things according to the vain usages of the world; for, instead of doing them any good, I could only expect to embitter them still more. In any case, such people are not in the habit of going to sermons in which their consciences are likely to be touched. I speak to those who mean well towards God, and who wish to be instructed in divine truths; to those who, through innocence and inexperience, allow themselves to be brought into such company, and that, I think, is the case with most; to those who have never yet gone to those gatherings, that they may carefully avoid them; but especially do I speak to pious parents, that, if they are really concerned for their children's salvation and desire to do their duty to them, they may keep

them away from such dangerous occasions. And, to present the matter in as mild a light as possible; I say:

Plan of Discourse.

These nightly gatherings are very dangerous occasions of sin; therefore all who wish to save their souls must avoid them. Such is the whole subject.

May the good God, through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels, enlighten our understanding, that we may see the danger, and avoid it with all possible care! Those of you who are not included in any of the classes of persons to whom this sermon is specially addressed, may apply what you will hear to every occasion which experience has taught you to be likely to lead you into sin.

“To present the matter in as mild a light as possible,” I said in the Introduction; for there are many who would accuse me of dealing far too roughly with consciences, if I were to quote the opinions of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church about these nightly gatherings. Tertullian and St. Cyprian, who lived near the time of the Apostles, have written whole books on the subject, in which they condemn these gatherings as unchristian and heathenish. St. John Chrysostom, having once heard that some of his hearers frequented them, began his sermon by declaring that if he knew who they were, he would turn them out of the Church, and would not allow them to assist at the holy sacrifice of the Mass. St. Augustine’s language is quite as vehement; he says that it is a far less grievous sin to work on a Sunday or holy day until one is tired than to be present at a dance. I dare not quote what St. Ambrose, writing of the death of St. John the Baptist, calls the young woman who goes to a dance. St. Charles Borromeo shows clearly how such gatherings are condemned as unlawful by the Holy Scripture, the Councils of the Church, and the teaching of the holy Fathers, and that many things which take place therein are mortal sins. Gerson says that “all sins and vices are to be found in dancing.”¹ I venerate most humbly the opinions of those great and holy men, who received special lights from God, and therefore knew better than others what was lawful for a Christian or not; for they were appointed by God Himself to interpret and explain His law, and to teach Christian morality.

The holy Fathers condemn those parties as sinful abuses.

¹ *Omnia peccata chorizant in chorea.*

All the circumstances of them show that they are very dangerous.

Still for the present I adhere to what I said in the beginning, and I maintain that such gatherings are at least very dangerous and should be most carefully avoided; nor can any one dispute this proposition with me; for, if I wished to refer to the authority of the Fathers, I could use far stronger language, that no one could reasonably find fault with. But in what does the danger to souls consist? There is nothing sinful done in those gatherings, and only respectable people are admitted to them, so that the strictest decorum has to be observed. Such is the general excuse brought forward. How? Nothing sinful in them? If there was nothing else but the wasting of the precious time that God has given us to save our souls; nothing else but the profanation of Sundays and holy days; nothing else but the useless expenditure thereby entailed, of which the tenth or twentieth part could relieve many a poor man, who, with his starving children, cries out with the Prodigal Son: "I here perish with hunger," while there they are enjoying themselves, and spending hundreds on a single night's amusement; if there was nothing else in them but the scandal they give to the weak and the little ones, would not that be evil enough?

Their apparent respectability is very dangerous.

You say there are none but respectable people admitted, and that decorum is strictly observed. I quite believe it; nor do I imagine for a moment that those gatherings are composed simply of vulgar boors, who meet together to carouse and indulge in all sorts of improper conduct. So far then, you are right; but I am not quite certain that your parties are not all the more dangerous, precisely because they have an external air of propriety; and that they do not do even more harm than a mere vulgar carouse. Why so? Because if there was a manifest breach of the laws of decorum committed, all good, conscientious, and sensible people would have nothing to do with such parties; ecclesiastical and civil authority would have to condemn them as scandalous, and prohibit them altogether; and so there would soon be an end of the evil. But since no evil can be proved where there is the outward appearance of decency and decorum, these parties are tolerated, approved; and frequented by numbers of people without the least scruple; and meanwhile, as Tertullian says, the poison thus concealed as it were in a sweet wine, is taken unawares into the soul.

And this is the snare that the evil spirit makes use of to deceive souls, and lead them astray. He acts like the Roman General Pompey, who once came with his army before the walls of a

Because it enables the devil to deceive souls.

town that he was desirous to take with as little expense as possible; to this end he asked the commandant to allow him to march through the town with his troops, pretending that he wished to go elsewhere; and when this request was refused, he begged that at least some sick soldiers, from whom there was nothing to fear, might be allowed to take up their quarters in the town, until their recovery. This latter request was granted; but as no one paid any attention to the sick soldiers, they were enabled to overpower the guard, and to open the gates to Pompey, who at once entered with his army and took possession of the town. That is the way in which the devil acts; he comes openly with his temptations, as with an army, before the gates of the soul; but if the latter resists him, and is firmly resolved never, on any account, to offend God by mortal sin, he is satisfied then if only a little dangerous pleasure is admitted. It is not a sin, he suggests, to go here or there. What harm is there in going to that party? There is nothing to fear; there are none but respectable people there, and there is no danger of any impropriety being committed. But trust him not, Christian soul; these parties are like the sick soldiers of Pompey; fear them; for there is no enemy, no matter how harmless he seems, whom you can afford to despise in the warfare of virtue. If you are careless of those sick soldiers, they will soon get strong through enjoyment, and their strength will increase by evil desires, until at last they will overpower you by making you consent to sin.

You say there is no harm in those parties. But what do you mean by that? Do you think there is no harm done, unless some sinful act or dissipation is outwardly indulged in? You are right in saying that nothing of the kind occurs during those parties; but what are we to think of what occurs after them? However, I will not speak of that now. In any case, you cannot say there is no harm in dangerous imaginations, thoughts, desires and pleasures. Does not Our Lord Himself expressly tell us: "But I say to you, that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart."¹ Now, is it possible, humanly speaking, for every one who frequents such gatherings, to avoid all sinful thoughts and desires? The Holy Scripture, whose words we dare not doubt, for they are the words of God Himself, admonishes us over and

And at least
excites bad
thoughts
and desires.

¹ Ego autem dico vobis: Quia omnis, qui viderit mulierem ad concupiscendum eam, jam mœchatus est eam in corde suo.—Matth. v. 28.

over again to turn away our eyes from persons of the opposite sex, that we may not sully our minds. "Gaze not upon a maiden," says the wise Ecclesiasticus, "lest her beauty be a stumbling block to Thee."¹ "Turn away thy face from a woman dressed up, and gaze not about upon another's beauty; for hereby lust is enkindled as a fire."² Job teaches us the same by his example: "I made a covenant with my eyes, that I would not so much as think upon a virgin."³ David prays to God: "Turn away my eyes that they may not behold vanity."⁴ The Prophet Jeremias complains bitterly: "My eye hath wasted my soul because of all the daughters of my city."⁵ All the holy Fathers say that the best and most necessary means of preserving purity of heart, is to turn away the eyes from dangerous objects. Many have experienced in the past, and many experience nowadays, that their eyes are the windows by which death enters into their souls, as Jeremias says: "Death is come up through our windows."⁶ How then can you possibly keep your hearts and minds pure and your thoughts unsullied in the midst of the most dangerous familiarities, where young people see each other not merely by chance and for a moment, but, since it is not expected that they should keep their eyes closed all the time, for six, seven, or eight hours at a time, which they spend in talking, laughing, dancing, and amusing themselves? Where not only the eyes, but all the senses find something to delight and captivate them, and where all the surroundings are such as to foster sensual thoughts and desires?

The circumstances of time and persons help to this.

Let us consider those surroundings. The time chosen is the night, when the artificial light cast on surrounding objects makes them appear more beautiful than they really are, and thus excites the imagination. Those who are invited are people who by their amiable manners can contribute to the general amusement; for individuals of a melancholy temperament are not welcome guests on such occasions. Those who come to such gatherings do all they can to appear beautiful in the eyes of others; half the day is spent in dressing and adorning themselves, as if they were preparing to take a part in a theatrical

¹ Virginem ne conspicias, ne forte scandalizeris in decore illius.—Eccles. ix. 5.

² Averte faciem tuam a muliere compta, et ne circumspicias speciem alienam; ex hoc concupiscentia quasi ignis exardescit.—Ibid. 8-9.

³ Pigi fœdus cum oculis meis, ut ne cogitarem quidem de virgine.—Job. xxxi. 1.

⁴ Averte oculos meos, ne videant vanitatem.—Ps. cxviii. 37.

⁵ Oculus meus deprædatus est animam meam in cunctis filiabus urbis meæ.—Lament. iii. 51.

⁶ Ascendit mors per fenestras nostras.—Jer. ix. 21.

representation. Their talk and conversation are full of honied words and winning flatteries; they assume a gay and cheerful expression of countenance; their very gestures and the postures they take express their willingness to be of service to one another. And the reason of all this is that they are bent on amusement. But if, according to the word of God, even a single look is dangerous, how can it be reasonably supposed that the devil does not make use of such occasions to lay many a snare? If the passions of young people are so easily excited, what can be expected when there are so many things tending to flatter the passions? What vain complacency in their own appearance and in that of others those young hearts must feel! What dangerous joy, hope, desire, and pride must be awakened in those who find that they are most admired and praised. What envy, fear and suspicion in those who think they are neglected or slighted! What thoughts and imaginations that remain even till the following day! What wishes and longings to see the person whom one is especially anxious to please! These and similar things, which it does not become me to mention here, are the evils that those gatherings give rise to, almost as a matter of necessity. If there is only one soul which has consented to an unlawful thought or desire (and such consent can hardly be wanting, on account of the presumption of which one is guilty in thus going into the occasion of sin, and forfeiting all right to the special help of God's grace,) that sin has been occasioned by those who have given the party, by parents who send their children to it, and by all who are present at it. "O my God," cries out St. Ambrose, "see how many are thus made partakers in the guilt of a single sin!"

But, some will say, you are talking to us now of things we never heard of before. We never experienced any of those effects you speak of; we amuse and divert ourselves at those gatherings with the greatest peace of soul and conscience; nor are we troubled by the least bad thought. Is that really the case? Then God be praised and thanked, that in one part of the world at all events, there are souls of a hitherto unexampled holiness and perfection! We must treat you then, not as mortals imprisoned in a corruptible body, but as pure angels who are above all the attacks of sensuality. Hear this, O holy St. Simeon, who here in Treves caused yourself to be walled in, so that you might be cut off from all communication with others, and thus avoid the danger of being led into sin by them! Hear it, O holy hermits,

The caution and fear of the saints in this respect, show us the danger of those gatherings.

who through the same fear fled into the desert, and hid yourselves in caverns and holes in the rocks; and in spite of all your fasting, watching and praying, complained that you could not save yourselves from the temptations and suggestions of the flesh! Ah! ye poor mortals, you have plagued yourselves to no purpose, or you have not known what you were about, or else you must have had a very perverse nature! In our days people are far better; they can allow their senses all kinds of liberty, and spend whole nights together dancing, laughing and amusing themselves, without being troubled even with a bad thought! If you had been as wise as they, might you not have had an easier time of it? Hear this too, you religious, who bury yourselves in convents, and lead such austere lives, that you become your own most cruel torturers, in your efforts to resist the temptations and desires of the flesh! What is the good of all your austerities? Leave off treating your bodies so harshly; go back from your lonesome cells into the world; frequent the society of men; go to dances and nightly gatherings, for that is the best way to keep yourselves free from all temptations to impurity; thus you will best preserve your innocence and virtue and your fear of the Lord, and will be most secure from the danger of consenting to an evil thought. Is it not the greatest folly to seek with so much trouble, what one can find so easily? Come on then boldly and join in those parties, and you will preserve far better than in your solitudes that purity which is so violently assailed in the midst of your austerities. But these servants of God only laugh at this fancied security, and at the same time they deplore the blindness and presumption of the children of the world, who expose their purity and their eternal salvation to the worst of dangers.

Especially
St. August-
tine and St.
Jerome.

I am terrified when I read that the great St. Augustine, after his conversion, was so careful in this respect, that he was afraid even when speaking to his own sister, and never did speak to her alone and without witnesses. I tremble, and have a sincere compassion for St. Jerome, a man of such great learning, who spent a great part of his life among wild beasts and used to beat his breast with a stone; who had reduced himself to mere skin and bone by continual fasting, so that he almost lost the appearance of a human being, and who yet complains bitterly of all he had to suffer from impure temptations in spite of his austere life, so that in one ear he heard the angel's trumpet sounding for judgment, and in the other the sound of music and dancing,

which he had seen during his youth in Rome, and which came before his imagination in such lively forms that he felt impure desires arising in his mind. When Vigilantius asked him why he did not live amongst men like a human being, and why he spent his life in the desert; "I am afraid," he said. And what, O great Saint, wert thou afraid of? "I am afraid that my eyes may behold some object that may cause me to lose my soul."¹ But, answered Vigilantius, it is a shame for such a celebrated man as you to be so afraid. "I acknowledge my weakness," answered the Saint, "and my fear of losing the victory."²

Vain children of the world, that learned and holy man, St. Jerome, was afraid of losing his soul through an incautious glance at a person of the opposite sex; and you, in the fire of youth and in the midst of attractions and seductions, maintain that you have nothing of the kind to fear, that you are free from all temptations, and that you are not troubled even with an impure thought! Is your nature then different from that of other men? Is your flesh better tamed and brought under subjection by fasting and other penitential works, than that of a St. Jerome, or of so many other holy hermits, who were afraid of dangers that were far less to be dreaded than those you expose yourselves to, without, as you say, being in the least afraid? What are we to think then, of you, O holy Fathers, who deery dances and promiscuous gatherings as dangerous, and condemn them as sinful and scandalous? You must know that there is no longer any danger in them; the times have changed, and human nature with them. The latter is not so weak and frail as it was in your days. If you experienced the assaults of temptation, it must have been on account of your weakness; we are much stronger and better than you were. In vain do you warn us, O holy prophets, apostles and evangelists, to avoid looking wantonly at persons of the opposite sex! Your warning is no longer necessary. It is true that he that loveth the danger shall perish therein; but there is no danger for us! You declare on the authority of God Himself that such gatherings are very dangerous to the soul; but you are mistaken, as far as we are concerned. They may have been dangerous to young people in your time; but they are not so now, for the young people of our time know by experience that such gatherings do not even occasion them a bad thought.

To no purpose do worldlings maintain that they experience no temptations in such gatherings.

¹ Timeo ne me capiat oculus meretricis, etc. —S. Hieron. l. adversus Vigilant.

² Fateor imbecillitatem, ne perdam aliquando victoriam.—Ibid.

For that
cannot be
true.

For my part, I must confess that I do not understand this at all; it is quite beyond me. I am lost in admiration of your angelical purity, and I can only wish that I were half as perfect as you are. Still, you may say as often as you will, and confirm it with an oath too, that you never experience even a bad thought on those occasions; and if you find any one to believe you, well and good. I am certain you do not believe it yourselves, at least if you wish to judge of the matter according to your own consciences. And even if one or other of you is not aware of any bad thoughts in such gatherings, you have still reason to fear that the dissipation of mind, which distracts your thoughts to all kinds of different objects, and prevents you from keeping the necessary guard over them, or your own self-love, may blind you to the fact that you really have entertained such thoughts, so that you do not confess them afterwards. And granting that there is absolutely no danger for you, can you say as much for others? Can you see their hearts? Can you be sure that they are free from impure temptations, and that they have not consented to them? But is it right for you wilfully to give occasion to, and to participate in the sin of another? Nay, granting that no one experiences the least temptation in those gatherings (what am I saying now? Temptation? In ten or more years' time, when those young people are settled in life, and when they set about examining their consciences in earnest, they will find that there was a good deal more besides temptation!) are they not at least very dangerous? But is it lawful thus to drag temptation on ourselves, as it were by the hair of the head, and deliberately give occasion to it?

Refutation
of the com-
mon objec-
tion: we
are not
monks or
nuns.

But, they object again, we are not monks or nuns, that we should be found fault with for attending such gatherings. We lay people must be allowed a little liberty in this particular; otherwise how are we to amuse ourselves? Quite right; you are not monks or nuns; and if you were it would ill become you to appear at such parties. But do you know what I should conclude from that? In the first place, that you yourselves must look upon those parties, to which you dare not invite the clergy or religious, and at which they could not appear without giving scandal and disgracing themselves in the eyes of all decent people,—that you yourselves must look on such parties as neither edifying, nor Christian, nor holy, since Jesus Christ with His grace cannot be expected to be present thereat.

Therefore
they must

Again, if you are not monks or nuns, you have all the more

reason to abstain from such gatherings. Nor must you be astonished at this. For, if you were really in the religious state, these parties would not be so dangerous to you. Religious, as you know, are shut up in a convent, and are far more removed from temptations and occasions of sin than if they were in the world; yet they spend their time in prayer, in meditating on the divine mysteries, and in considering the eternal truths, that they may thus better arm themselves against temptation, be more able to guard their senses, more courageous in mortifying the flesh as if it were a disobedient servant, and be constant in the use of other salutary means of avoiding sin. If you, I say, were thus armed for the spiritual combat, I should not be so anxious to keep you away from those gatherings. But religious, in spite of their austere lives and constant union with God, would be afraid to go to such parties, so well are they acquainted with human weakness; and if obedience or charity sometimes requires them to speak with persons of an opposite sex, although they have good reason to be assured of a special help from God in such circumstances, yet they never undertake a duty of that kind unless in presence of witnesses, and they are secretly afraid all the time that they may commit some fault or other. But you who live in the world, in the midst of daily recurring temptations and dangers of all kinds, both at home and abroad, and who moreover are not very careful or diligent in combating them, you have still less reason to thrust yourselves wantonly into such dangers. On the contrary, if you really wish to preserve the grace and friendship of God, you must be exceedingly careful in avoiding every occasion of sin. Every sensible person will acknowledge the truth of this.

all the more
carefully a-
void such
gatherings.

But, you say, we must live according to the general custom of people in the world. If I were always to refuse to go to those parties, what would people think of me? They would look on me as a hypocrite. Eh? What custom are you talking about? You are laboring under a great mistake! There are many large and wealthy cities where such a custom is unknown; and everywhere you will find many people of respectability and common sense, who refuse to have anything to do with those parties, and who prevent those under their charge from going to them. Why do you not follow the custom of those people? Why should bad customs have more influence over you, than good ones? If you were invited to go to early morning devotions, to hear the Word of God, or to go to Confession and Communion

We must
conform to
the general
custom.

every week, which are all good and pious Christian customs, O dear me, you would say, I cannot manage it; it is too early; I should not have time to dress, etc. But you can spend whole nights together at those parties dancing and amusing yourselves, without ever complaining that it is too early or too late; and the day before you always manage to find time enough to do your work. This is an evident sign of a vain mind, that is not influenced or directed by the spirit of God.

The custom
is not good.

It is the custom, you insist. So much the worse! There are many customs in the world, that are not good; and if you wish to go to Heaven, you must not live according to them. Not without reason does Our Lord warn us by His Apostles not to live according to the customs of the world. "Love not the world" says St. John, "nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him."¹ "Be not conformed to this world,"² says St. Paul. "Know you not," asks St. James, "that the friendship of this world is the enemy of God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of this world, becometh an enemy of God."³ If then you think that because such parties are in vogue nearly everywhere, you must have your share in them too; why do you not also think that you must go to hell, since it is the fashion in every town in the world for many people to go there? One conclusion is just as good as the other. God tells us that, "We must not be conformed to this world," and you maintain that we must live according to the customs of the world. Who is right? God, or you? You yourselves have renounced the world in Baptism; why should you live according to it now? Who introduced those abuses among Christians? St. Ephraim, speaking of those gatherings, asks us: "Who taught such things to us Christians?" Certainly, no holy man enlightened by the spirit of God; "but the old hellish serpent taught us them out of his books."⁴ Oh, holy city of Treves, as we read in golden letters on thy gate; "Sancta Trevis;" and holy thou art in truth! If thou too must participate in those abuses, dost thou think thou canst long preserve thy holy name and thy purity of morals? Dost thou look on such abuses as be-

¹ Nolite diligere mundum, neque ea, quæ in mundo sunt. Si quis diligit mundum, non est caritas Patris in eo.—1. John ii. 15.

² Nolite confirmari huic sæculo.—Rom. xii. 2.

³ Nesettis, quia amicitia hujus mundi inimica est Dei? Quicumque ergo voluerit amicus esse sæculi hujus, inimicus Dei constituitur.—James iv. 4.

⁴ Quis tanta nos Christianos docuit? Verum ille draco antiquus suis voluminibus edocuit.

fitting the descendants of the holy martyrs who shed their blood on this very ground in testimony to their faith and religion? What would the bones of those champions of the faith say, if they could come out of their graves and speak? Is that the way, they would ask, to secure thy prosperity after the troublous times thou hast passed through? Art thou not rather placing the rod in the hands of the Almighty, and compelling Him to punish thee and the whole land still more severely? If you do not believe me, my dear brethren, go and ask any experienced and prudent confessor, whether, if you were suddenly called out of the world while assisting at one of those parties, he would wish to be your companion during eternity. Ask theologians, who have to study cases of conscience, what they think of those gatherings. Many would condemn them as mortally sinful, on account of their evident danger; most of them would maintain that they are not to be tolerated, because at all events they are frequently the cause of sin; and all without exception, if they wished to give an impartial opinion of the matter, would say that those parties are exceedingly dangerous, and therefore that one can hardly be present at them without sin. And if that is not the case, then the Fathers and Doctors of the Church were mistaken, and they have misled us too by the books and treatises they wrote against such gatherings; and in fact if it is not the case, we cannot any longer believe even the words of Holy Scripture, which warns us against far lesser dangers. Now, what do you think, my dear brethren, will be the result of all that I have said? No doubt this, that many will go to balls and parties precisely because a sermon has been preached against them. I am sorry for that, and it is not at all what I intend; but what can I do to prevent it? I would only ask those people to consider that what they do amounts to this in reality, they go to balls and parties precisely because God exhorts and warns them not to go. Let them disprove that if they can.

I turn now to you, Christian parents, whose duty it is to look after your children, especially in what concerns their souls. Consider, I beg of you for God's sake, the great and important obligation that binds you to bring them up for Heaven, and not for vanity. Consider what it is for an immortal soul, and that too, the soul of your dear child, which must be either in Heaven or hell forever, consider what it is for that soul to be robbed of Heaven, and to be condemned to hell. Consider what even one sin is, if committed only in thought, and if you have to share

Conclusion
and exhortation
to
parents.

in the guilt of it. Therefore do all you can to keep your children out of dangerous company. They may complain that you are too strict with them; but that is nothing; one day they will be grateful to you for that strictness. If they beg and entreat you to allow them to go to those parties, tell them that God has given you charge of their souls, which are far more precious than their bodies, that you will one day have to give a strict account of how you have fulfilled this charge, and that if you allow them to go into the danger of sin, the guilt of that sin will be attributed to you more than to any one else. At least, as St. John Chrysostom says, be as careful of the souls of your children, as you are of your houses and properties; if you see a servant-maid going about at night with a lighted candle, how often and how impressively do you not warn her to be careful with it, and not to go into any place where there is straw, lest the least spark should set fire to the house. The same, nay, much greater care you are bound to take of the precious souls of your children, so that you must keep them away from all places, companies and occasions, in which the least spark, the slightest glance might be the cause of a great fire, and of irreparable injury to their still tender minds.

To children.

Finally, I beg of you, Christian children, and all others here present, to fly the occasion of sin. You have but one soul, and if you lose that, it will not hurt nor benefit me. You have but one soul, and if you lose it, you have lost everything for all eternity. What good will the pleasure of half a day, or a night be to you, nay, what good would the whole world be to you with all its pleasures, if your soul suffers the least harm? If you wish to enjoy yourselves, do so in God's name; but do not risk your soul for the sake of enjoyment. Parents, assemble your children and friends during the day time, and make merry in a manner becoming pious Christians. Do not follow the teachings of the perverse world; but strive to imitate the example that Jesus Christ our dear Saviour, gives you in the parable of the good shepherd seeking his lost sheep, and in that of the woman who lost the groat and having found it, called together her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her. Mark the words of Our Lord, my dear brethren. He says of the shepherd: "He calls together his friends and neighbors;"¹ and of the woman: "She calls together her friends and neighbors."² In neither case, according

¹ Convocat amicos et vicinos.—Luke xv. 6.

² Convocat amicas et vicinas.—Ibid. 9.

to the meaning of the original text, are persons of the opposite sex invited. That is the example you ought to follow, unless courtesy or necessity compel you sometimes to do the contrary. And if the pleasure or enjoyment is not so great, then remember that we are here in a vale of tears, in a place where we have to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. "Blessed are they that mourn," says Our Lord, "for they shall be comforted;"¹ "Woe to you that now laugh; for you shall mourn;"² "The kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence."³ "Strive to enter by the narrow gate;"⁴ "For many are called but few chosen."⁵ Heaven is the place for enjoyment; there the Lord invites you to a feast which will last forever amid unspeakable joys, which you will share with the holy angels. Ah, do not act so as to be excluded from that gathering, or so that you will go unprepared into eternity, that you may not meet with the fate of the foolish virgins, to whom the Bridegroom said, "I know you not."⁶ Prepare your souls now for this heavenly Bridegroom, and endeavor to please Him alone, so that you may merit to be invited to the nuptials of the spotless Lamb. That joy I wish to you, and to myself with all my heart. Amen.

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

Text.

Vocatus est autem et Jesus et discipuli ejus ad nuptias.—John ii. 2.

"And Jesus also was invited and His disciples to the marriage."

Marriage-feasts, parties and festivities of modern times, are you always such that Jesus, His Mother, His Apostles and disciples need not hesitate to take part? Ah, I am afraid not! How many festivities there are at certain seasons, such as those which after the manner of the blind heathens, disgrace the season of Shrove-tide, in which God and His grace are driven out of the conscience! But why do I speak of these things now? It is not yet Shrove-tide, and there is no talk yet of Shrove-tide amusements. In this respect, my dear brethren, I am like careful parents who are troubled and alarmed, not only when their children

¹ Beati, qui lugent, quoniam ipsi consolabuntur.—Matth. v. 5.

² Væ qui ridetis nunc, quia lugebitis.—Luke vi. 25.

³ Regnum cœlorum vim patitur.—Matth. xi. 12.

⁴ Contendite intrare per angustam portam.—Luke xiii. 24.

⁵ Multi enim sunt vocati, pauci vero electi. Matth. xx. 16.

⁶ Nescio vos.—Ibid. xxv. 12.

are actually in danger, but when they foresee that some danger is likely to befall them. As the saying goes, it is too late to shut the stable door, when the steed is stolen. It is too late to warn souls of their danger during the days of Shrove-tide, when they are actually in the midst of it and have probably committed sin already. Therefore I wish to anticipate the dangerous time, in the hope that I may thus, by God's help, be the means of saving even one soul from harm. What do I mean then by parties and festivities? Those gatherings in which young persons of both sexes, etc.—*continues as before.*

On avoiding the proximate and dangerous occasion of sin, as well as dangerous company, see different sermons in the following Third Part.

ON HUMAN RESPECT.

FIFTY-FIFTH SERMON.

ON THE DEFORMITY OF HUMAN RESPECT.

Subject.

To do evil, or to refrain from doing good through human respect, is an exceedingly shameful and disgraceful thing; therefore he who wishes to act honorably must steadfastly contemn human respect.—*Preached on the twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Non enim respicis personam hominum.—Matth. xxii. 16.

“For thou dost not regard the person of men.”

Introduction.

Certainly that was a beautiful encomium that the Scribes and Pharisees passed on Our Lord, although their motive in doing so was a crafty and treacherous one; for, as St. John Chrysostom remarks, speaking of to-day's Gospel, they thought they would be able to lead Our Lord astray, so that to please them He would say that taxes should not be paid to the emperor, and then they could have cried Him down as a disturber of the people and a rebel. That was their object in flattering Him; “Master,” they said, “we know that Thou art a true speaker, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest Thou for any man;” Thou fearest neither the enmity of Herod, nor the power of the emperor; “for Thou dost not regard the person of men.” The poor man in Thy eyes is as good as the rich man; the peasant as good as the king. Respect for persons will never prevent Thee from speaking and acting according to truth and justice. Therefore we are certain that fear of the emperor's authority will not pre-

vent Thee from deciding in favor of the Jews, God's favored people, and absolving them from the obligation of paying taxes to Cæsar. But with all their cunning they did not succeed, and they had to retire in confusion. Would to God, my dear brethren, that this praise, which undeniably belongs to our divine Lord, could be given with truth to all men nowadays; so that we could say of every one, "thou dost not regard the person of men!" How many sins that are now committed would then be banished from the world! How much good would be done, that is now omitted! What great evils arise merely from the fact that too much regard is had for the person of men! How often is not God neglected for the purpose of pleasing men; how often are not virtue and piety laid aside, and the soul and its happiness sacrificed through human love, or fear, or respect! In this and the following sermon I mean to attack this human respect, which is so disgraceful in man, so unjust to God, and so injurious to the soul. And to-day I shall take only the first of these heads, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

To do evil, or to refrain from doing good through human respect is an exceedingly shameful and disgraceful thing; therefore let us act honorably and steadfastly condemn human respect. Such is the whole subject of this discourse.

O bounteous Saviour, who dost not regard the person of men, but teachest the way to Heaven in truth, we beg of Thee, through the merits of Thy dearest Mother Mary and the intercession of the holy angels guardian, to teach me and all here present this truth, that we may never in future allow any love, fear, or respect of creatures to keep us from serving Thee zealously as we ought.

An honor-
able man
looks on
every as a
disgrace.

What greater affliction and disgrace could there be for a brave and honorable man, than to lose his freedom and be reduced to slavery, so that he can no longer do as he himself wishes, but is bound to obey the behests of another? For freedom is always looked on as the best and most excellent of all the temporal goods we can possess in this life; and even wild beasts will not part with their freedom unless they are compelled to do so. Place the best of food and drink before a caged bird, whistle and chirp to it as coaxingly as you please, but if you open the door only for a moment, it will fly away at once, and regain its liberty even at the expense of suffering hunger and thirst. How many men are

there not nowadays, and they too the bravest and most honorable, who would rather suffer a painful death, than be reduced to slavery? So intolerable is it, I repeat, to an honorable man to have to live and to act according to another's good will and pleasure.

And yet, O freedom, precious as thou art, there are many who forfeit thee most wretchedly! O slavery, how hated thou art, and yet there are many who deliberately seek thee! It is of you I am speaking, vain children of the world, who live according to the fashions, the manners and the usages of the world, and who do evil or omit doing good through human love, or fear, or respect. You, I say, although you could not and should not be compelled thereto by any power on earth, deliberately barter away your most precious freedom, and deliver yourselves up to a shameful slavery; for you reduce yourselves to such a state, that you have to depend on the good will and pleasure of others for the manner in which you have to do your duty to God and to look after the all-important business of the soul. Thus you must interpret the divine commands, not according to right reason, or to conscience, but according to the will of another, and even against your own judgment, while you have to keep those commandments as others keep them, and to transgress as others transgress them, or according to their advice, or command, or example; you have to choose that wrong and circuitous road to eternity which men will point out to you, and to abandon the right road marked out for you by God; you must live a pious or a wicked life, as others prescribe; in a word, you dare not be a Christian, a Catholic, or be looked on as such, unless by permission of others. Is not that making a vile servant and slave of one's self? Is not that deliberately reducing one's self to a bondage which all men must look on as the most pitiful and degrading?

There are circumstances, says St. Augustine, in which slavery cannot be avoided; some men become slaves through sheer misfortune, such as is the case with those Christians who are carried off into captivity by the Turks and Saracens, and they who are thus enslaved deserve the greatest pity and commiseration. Many are compelled, through poverty and lowly birth, to wait upon others as domestic servants; a servitude of this kind is reasonable enough, and is not disgraceful in the sight of men; nay it is in accordance with the all-wise arrangement of divine Providence for the common good. Others again are servants of emperors, kings, and princes, a servitude which the world looks on as

He who does evil or omits to do good through human respect, deliberately makes himself a slave.

And a slave of the most degraded kind.

honorable and glorious. But to make servants and slaves of ourselves to others, and to do their bidding in things in which we most of all require freedom, namely in leading a Christian life, in practising supernatural virtues, in attending to the most necessary business of our souls, and in working for our eternal salvation; to give up our freedom in things of that kind, is an unnecessary and voluntary degradation which does not deserve pity, and can bring nothing but disgrace and execration on us, since it offends God, injures the soul, and is directly opposed to the dictates of conscience, nay to those of right reason. St. Augustine, speaking of the philosophers of old, pities heartily their miserable condition, because, although they knew by the sole light of reason that there could be only one true God, yet they were compelled to conform to the general custom of their time, and adore false gods; “They honored,” says the Saint, “what they condemned; they adored what they knew to be false.”¹ And this they did because they were afraid of being singular, and of exciting the hatred and displeasure of others; so that, wise and learned as they were, they were only blind and miserable idolaters. Ah, far more deserving of pity are we who, illumined as we are by the unerring light of the true faith, yet, for the sake of pleasing others, often reverence, venerate, and love what our consciences tell us to be unlawful and reprehensible; while we omit and neglect what we know and must acknowledge to be good, praiseworthy, and even obligatory in us; for which perversity we are far more inexcusable than the blind heathens, because they honored their false gods only in outward show, whereas our wickedness is not merely outward, but inward also.

And who are we, who thus make servants and slaves of ourselves through human respect? We are Christians purchased by the precious blood of the Son of God, who in Baptism are made children of God, brethren of Jesus Christ, temples of the Holy Ghost and heirs of the kingdom of Heaven, who have publicly sworn to devote ourselves to the service of the divine Majesty, and who have thus acquired that freedom of which St. Paul writes to the Romans: “Because the creature also itself shall be delivered from the servitude of corruption, into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.”² And although God is the Lord of Heaven and earth, and has reserved to Himself the sovereignty

¹ Colebant quod reprehendebant; quod culpabant, adorabant.

² Quia et ipsa creatura liberabitur a servitute corruptionis in libertatem gloriæ filiorum Dei.—Rom. viii. 21.

For, endowed as he is with the liberty of the children of God, he subjects himself to some perverse mortal

over all things, so that he can dispose of them as He pleases; yet, as far as the freedom of our will is concerned, He does not interfere with it in the least, but even allows us to use it against Himself. We are bound to serve Him; but we are free to do so or not; we can offend Him when and as often as we please; we may gain the eternal joys of Heaven, if we wish; we can condemn ourselves forever to hell, if such is our choice. And this freedom, which God Himself respects, we—shame that I should have to say it!—barter so miserably. And to whom? To some wretched mortal like ourselves; to some one for whom we care little, and for whom we have even a natural dislike; to some one whose advice in other things we would not follow, nor even ask; to some one for whom we would not wish to make the least sacrifice, whose inconstancy and wickedness are well known to us, who looks on good as bad, and bad as good, who follows no rule in his actions but his own inordinate appetites, and whose displeasure would be excited by our efforts to practise virtue, as the Wise Man says: “The wicked loathe them that are in the right way.”¹ Such is the person for whose sake we almost do violence to ourselves, and act against our consciences, and to whose yoke we blindly submit in matters that concern the most important business of our eternal salvation.

And why do we do so? Because we are weak and silly, and afraid of ridicule, and cowardly, so that we often openly confess that we lack courage to do anything to displease another; or else we have a vain fear of giving pain, or a groundless hope of deriving some benefit from the person whom we are unwilling to offend; or otherwise we are influenced by a childish dread of incurring dislike, or by a foolish desire to gain the esteem of others, or to avoid being laughed at, or spoken to in a harsh tone. For some such reason we do what we should not do, and omit what we are in conscience bound to do; we do not serve our sovereign God as we ought; we cease leading a pious and Christian life; we offend God, lose our souls, forfeit Heaven, and incur the eternal pains of hell. Oh what a vain fear! Or rather, what a foolish cowardice!

A mother sends her child on a message; while the child is running down the street, a little dog comes out and barks at it. The child is frightened and runs back home, crying. “What is the matter with you,” asks the mother; “did you go where I sent you?” “Oh no,” answers the child, “I was afraid; there

And that
through
sheer cow-
ardice.

What a
disgrace!
Shown by a
simile.

¹ Abominantur impij eos, qui in recta sunt via.—Prov. xxix. 27.

was a dog in the street that tried to bite me." Or else, when the child goes on a message, it meets some of its playmates and joins them in a game, forgets all about what it was sent for, and gets beaten when it comes home. "The same foolish fear," says St. Vincent Ferrer, "is shown by many Christians, who otherwise wish to be looked on as brave and valiant, when they allow themselves to be turned aside from the way of salvation by human respect, love or fear." "Our Father Christ," he says, "and our Mother the Church, send us to the city of Paradise;"¹ and behold, a little dog comes out and barks at us, some miserable mortal, who has succeeded in captivating our affection, makes us halt, and turn back, and run on the road to hell! Our heavenly Father sends us to assist at public devotions, and to hear His word in sermons, and we are even willing to go; but the dog barks at us, some one ridicules our piety, we are ashamed, and we remain at home. Our heavenly Father sends us to church to adore the Blessed Sacrament with down-cast eyes, folded hands, and bended knees, and with all modesty and reverence; at morning, noon, and evening, He wishes us to honor Him and His holy Mother by the usual prayer, when the bell gives the signal; when He is carried to the sick, He wishes us to accompany Him; but the dog barks; our companions laugh at and call us hypocrites, and we are afraid, we dare not act differently from other people. Our heavenly Father sends us to ask pardon of our neighbor whom we have offended, or to be reconciled to one with whom we have hitherto lived at enmity; but the dog barks; one thinks we are afraid, another will say that we have no spirit, a third will ask us if we mean to put up with such an insult. Alas, we are frightened and run back like little children; we are in dread of losing the good opinion of men, and so we try to avenge ourselves. Our heavenly Father orders us to change our lives, to avoid that house, that company, that gathering, that occasion; but the dog barks, or a child invites us to play with him; our companions insist on our joining in the usual amusements; their invitations are more pressing than ever; we yield, for we dare not resist them. Our heavenly Father expects us to fulfil exactly the duties of our office or employment, to practice justice, to protect innocence, to punish guilt, to reward merit, to abolish abuses, and to do away with public scandals; but the dog barks; we are afraid of making enemies for ourselves, of giving cause of displeasure to others, of arousing the

¹ Pater noster Christus et mater Ecclesia mittit, ut vadamus ad civitatem Paradisi.

hatred of our opponents, or else we have received a bribe to act unjustly, and we wish to earn it: therefore we make up our minds not to do what is right, to tolerate what should not be tolerated, to approve of what we should condemn, and to remain silent when we should speak the truth boldly. Our heavenly Father bids us observe modesty and humility, according to the Gospel of His poor and humble Son, in our actions, gestures, conversation, dress and outward behaviour; we are ready to do so; but we happen to see other children at play; the law of the world requires us to act otherwise, and we dare not disobey it; we do as we see others doing. Our heavenly Father has sent us into the world to lead chaste and pure lives according to our state; but we cannot always do as he wishes; other children lead us astray; people flatter and tempt us, and we must blindly obey them. In a word, our heavenly Father sends us here that we may follow the path of virtue that leads to Heaven; but a barking dog, a playing child, human respect, the fear or love of a creature makes us leave the path of virtue and enter on the broad road of vice, that leads to eternal ruin. What a disgrace! We are ashamed to be looked on as cowardly; and we forget that a vain fear of displeasing men is the most disgraceful form of cowardice. The same fear makes us ashamed of appearing pious and devout, and we do not see that it is of that very fear we should be most ashamed. In other things we wish to have the name of being brave and courageous, we will not yield a hair's-breadth to any one, we cannot bear the least word of contradiction, nor allow the most trivial insult to go unavenged; but in things that concern God and the services we owe Him we are more timid than a hare, more weak and inconstant than the reed that is shaken by the wind; the least word, a laugh, a sour look, a smile is enough to deprive us of all our strength, to overcome us completely, and to deliver us over to a mere mortal as his most obsequious slave.

And what do we expect to gain by thus selling our freedom so shamefully, and allowing others to keep us from doing good or to lead us into evil? We hope to please men. But we are sure to be disappointed. For, in the first place, all good and pious Christians will lose all respect for one whom they see perjuring himself to God for the sake of a creature; and in the second place, even those for whose sake he does evil, or omits doing good, will despise him; because, if they saw that he was steadfast and constant in obeying the law of God, without fear or

He disgraces himself, even before those whom he expects to please.

shame, they would be compelled at least in their hearts to admire his virtue, and to acknowledge that he is really a good and pious Christian. But since he makes himself like to them, although they outwardly appear to approve his conduct, yet in reality, when they consider the matter calmly, they must perforce look on him as a weak-minded fool, easily led astray, who thinks very little of God or his soul. That is the honor and glory that one gains by forgetting his duty to God and acting against his conscience, in order to please men, or to avoid displeasing them.

Pious men
act in quite
the opposite
way.

Christians, oh if we only had that holy pride, that bravery and courage which the Christian law requires of us, we could always boast in the words of St. Paul to the Romans: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel!"¹ I am not ashamed of virtue, nor of true devotion, nor of justice, nor of God; neither the fear nor the love of any creature can induce me to transgress in the least the duties that the Christian law, my state of life, and my sovereign Lord impose on me. We should imitate the courage of those heroes of old, who looked on it as their greatest honor to live piously in the midst of wicked people; we should be like Tobias, of whom the Scripture records, to his undying praise, that, "When all went to the golden calves, which Jeroboam, King of Israel, had made, he alone fled the company of all, and went to Jerusalem to the Temple of the Lord, and there adored the Lord God of Israel,"² without fear, or shame, or paying any attention to what the others were doing. In the same way, even if all those with whom we associate every day were to abandon the service of God, and lead lives of idleness, vanity, sloth, and vindictiveness; if they were to hate and ridicule us as singular, obstinate and self-willed monsters; we should consider it the greatest joy and happiness that true Christianity, that is the exact observance of the commandments of God and of the maxims of the Gospel, is to be found in us alone. Nor should the influence of the greater number of men, nor the caresses and flatteries of our dearest friends, nor any earthly authority, dignity, or power make us depart from this holy obstinacy, or swerve from our steadfast resolution to serve our God and Our Lord, openly, boldly and courageously, as He ought to be served; nor should we ever be brought to bend the knee, in sub-

¹ Non erubescio evangelium.—Rom. i. 16.

² Cum irent omnes ad vitulos aureos, quos Jeroboam fecerat, rex Israel, hic solus fugiebat consortia omnium; sed pergebat in Jerusalem ad templum Domini, et ibi adorabat Dominum Deum Israel.—Tob. i. 5. 6.

jection to any mortal, against the dictates of conscience. We should imitate the obedience of Abraham, who, according to the divine command, was on the point of sacrificing his beloved and only son Isaac, although he had good reason for believing that, in consequence of this act, he would be looked on as a barbarous murderer of his own child. "He was not afraid," says the learned Zeno, "of being accused of murdering his son; but rather rejoiced at having received this command from God."¹ We should imitate the zeal of Moses, who did not hesitate to reproach the Israelites daily for their want of union, to condemn their vices and to exhort them to serve God zealously, although he thus burthened himself to such an extent, that his father-in-law Jethro looked on him as a fool. "Thou art spent with foolish labor," said Jethro to him, "both thou and this people that is with thee."² We should imitate Anna, the mother of Samuel, who poured out her soul in fervent prayer, with sighs and tears before the Lord in the Temple, and was not at all disconcerted when the High Priest Heli, thinking her to be drunk, gave her a sharp reproof. "And he said to her; How long wilt thou be drunk? digest a little the wine of which thou hast taken too much."³ We should imitate Queen Vasthi, who, through love of modesty and purity, refused to show herself at the banquet of the king her husband, as we read in the first chapter of the Book of Esther; the innocent Joseph, who allowed himself to be cast into prison, rather than obey his wicked mistress and offend God; the holy penitent Magdalen who was not ashamed to intrude uninvited into a public banquet, and to throw herself at the feet of her Lord, in spite of the jeers of the Pharisees.

These and countless other examples, should encourage us, my dear brethren, to despise human respect and the way of the perverse world with a holy fearlessness, and to resolve firmly to bear whatever we may have to suffer from men for the sake of virtue, and to be servants of God, rather than slaves of men. I know well, pious souls, and experience teaches us, that you cannot escape wicked tongues; your just strictness will be looked on as extreme severity; your constancy, as obstinacy; your solitary lives, and your care in avoiding dangerous company, as evidences of ignorance or of a melancholy disposition; your frequent reception of the sacraments, as hypocrisy; your reserve, your temperance, your modesty in dress, as miserly economy; your

All should imitate them, in spite of the opposition of the wicked.

¹ Non timuit ne ei parricidium imputaretur; sed potius lætabatur hoc Deum jussisse.

² Stulto labore consumeris et tu, et populus iste qui tecum est.—Exod. xviii. 18.

³ Dixitque ei: Usquequo ebria eris? digere paulisper vinum, quo mades.—I. Kings. 1. 14.

humility, as fear; your love of peace, as cowardice; your pious holy lives, as a proof of weak-mindedness. You will draw down on yourselves, by your open and honest service of God, the dislike, hatred, and persecution of men; for, according to the words of the Wise Man already quoted, "The wicked loathe them that are in the right way" to Heaven. They are like camels which, when they see clear water, at once commence to stir up the mud with their fore-feet, so as to make it quite dirty; and this they do lest they should see their ugly shape mirrored in the clear water. In the same way the Christian virtues are an abomination in the eyes of the wicked, because they condemn and reprove their sinful and vicious lives. Hence they endeavor by flattery, ridicule, or fault-finding to hinder others from being pious, and to make them like themselves. But, pious Christians, do not let yourselves be disturbed! Let the world talk, laugh, or ridicule as much as it pleases, it cannot and should not deprive you of the liberty of the children of God. Is an artist troubled if his painting is found fault with by an ignorant peasant? Why then should we be disturbed if a foolish and presumptuous mortal condemns our just mode of action? It ought to suffice us to know that good men on earth, who are anxious to save their souls, the angels and elect in Heaven, and God Himself approve of and praise it. "It is a small thing for me," says St. Francis, "to be praised by men, if I am condemned by God; and it is a small thing to be condemned by men, if I am praised by God."¹ "Think what you will of Augustine," so says that Saint, "as long as my conscience does not accuse me before God."² "I do not fear the judgments of men, since God will be my judge,"³ says St. Jerome.

As the holy
martyrs did.

Look at the numbers of martyrs, amongst whom were our ancestors here in Treves in goodly number. If they had been afraid of men, if a cross look, or a threatening word had made them tremble, if they had allowed themselves to be led astray by gifts or favors, neither this city nor the world would have had so many champions of the faith to venerate. No; of their own accord they appeared before the tyrants, and made open confession of Jesus Christ and His holy Gospel; they willingly sacrificed themselves, and heroically sealed with their blood the law

¹ Parum est laudari ab homine, si a Deo vituperer; parum est vituperari ab homine, si Deus me laudat.

² Senti de Augustino quidquid libet, dummodo conscientia mea in oculis Dei me non accuset.—S. Aug. l. unico contra manich. c. I.

³ Non timebo judicium hominum, habiturus Deum judicem.—S. Hier. ad Julian.

of our faith. Were they perhaps bound by commandments different to those which bind us? Was the God they acknowledged and adored different from our God? Do we nowadays owe less respect and homage to that God than they did? What a shame then it is for us, what an undeniable proof of our pusillanimity and vile cowardice, to allow ourselves to be deterred from the exact observance of the law, the practice of the Christian virtues, and the love we owe to God, by the fear of displeasing others or the hope of pleasing them, although we have not to dread either the wheel or the gallows, or the sword or the spear, or torments or death!

Therefore let us resolve unanimously, my dear brethren, to despise all vain human respect, and to preserve and defend against all opposition that freedom which we received in Baptism as children of God. God is certainly worthy of such a resolution on our part, for His holy will and pleasure must be preferred to all creatures on earth. If we cannot serve Him freely and according to our obligation, if men try to prevent us from doing our duty in this respect, let us heroically cry out, as the Hebrews did to Pharaoh during the Egyptian slavery, "Let us go and sacrifice to our God;"¹ that is, as St. Jerome interprets the passage, let us go and hide ourselves in the desert, because, as long as we are here under thy grievous yoke, we cannot sacrifice to our God properly; in other things we are ready to obey thee; lay still more burdensome tasks upon us, we will perform them; scourge us still more severely than hitherto, we will bear it; but thou must give us perfect freedom in all that concerns the service of God. In the same way every true Christian should think and say: "Let us go and sacrifice to our God," and serve Him as we ought. In other things I will try to conform to the usages of the world as far as may be, and as the laws of God allow; I will follow all the fashions and customs of the place where I live, and will be courteous and helpful to all as far as I can; I will even do violence to myself, if necessary, in order to be friendly to all, and to avoid causing trouble or displeasure, and I will obey my superiors in all things lawful. But when there is question of God's honor, of acting according to or against my conscience, of observing or transgressing the Gospel law, of advancing on the way of salvation or receding from it, and of following the example of my humble Saviour; then no one must interfere with me; no custom, nor

Conclusion
and resolution
to despise human
respect.

¹ *Eamus, et sacrificemus Deo nostro.*—Exod. v. 8.

fashion, nor authority, nor power, nor any love, whether conjugal or fraternal, shall have any influence on me. In all these things I must have perfect freedom, and no one can find fault with me for that. If violence is used to deprive me of this freedom, I will rather, like the Israelites, leave my employment and seek another home, in which I shall be able to attend to the interests of my soul and to serve God without hinderance. Such is my unalterable resolution.

If others wish to go along the broad road that leads to hell, I cannot help them; they are free to do so. But as for me, I am determined to go to Heaven, and therefore to seek out and enter on the narrow way which alone leads thither; and I am free to do that. Let others look after their temporal welfare, and try to gain the favor of men; I will do so too; but my greatest care shall be the welfare of my soul, and to gain the friendship and grace of God. Let others talk, and flatter, and ridicule, and threaten as they will; I will do, and omit, and say whatever my conscience tells me. Let others be servants and slaves of the world and its fashions; I will faithfully serve Him who alone is worthy of my service, namely, my sovereign God. "I will give great thanks to the Lord with my mouth," I will say with David, "and in the midst of many I will praise Him."¹ In thee, O my God, I put my trust; let me not be ashamed."² Others may laugh and jeer at me, but I will not heed them. "They will curse, and Thou wilt bless;"³ my consolation shall be that I have pleased Thee. They will say that I am rude and ignorant, "and Thou wilt bless;" that I am obstinate and ill-mannered, and know not how to behave to people, "and Thou wilt bless." I shall have to bear many a cross and unfriendly look, to hear many a hard word, to endure much ill humor from others; I will lose the affection or favor of that person; but no matter, "Thou wilt bless," and that is enough for me. A time will come when they who now laugh at me for my piety will have to stand in my presence covered with confusion, and to confess publicly that I acted justly and prudently, while they were guilty of the greatest folly; and when that day comes, they will cry out in despair, like those in the Book of Wisdom: "We fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honor."⁴

¹ Confitebor Domino nimis in ore meo, et in medio multorum laudabo eum.—Ps. cviii. 30.

² Deus meus, in te confido, non erubescam.—Ibid. xxiv. 2.

³ Maledicent illi, et tu benedices.—Ibid. cviii. 28.

⁴ Nos insensati vitam illorum æstimabamus insaniam, et finem illorum sine honore.—Wis. v. 4.

We saw them behaving with such modesty and humility, and, we looked on them as fools; we saw them going frequently to church and behaving in it with reverence, and we looked on them as fools; we noticed that they led temperate, just, and conscientious lives, and we thought they were acting unreasonably. O fools that we are, would that we had imitated them! "Behold how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints;" while we are condemned to hell with the reprobate. Then I will laugh and rejoice in the eternal freedom of the children of God. Therefore I renew my resolution to serve Thee, O God, faithfully and constantly; neither love, nor fear, nor respect for persons shall keep me from Thee, or induce me to do anything which Thou, my sovereign Lord, hast forbidden, or to omit anything which Thou hast laid on me as a duty. Give to me and all here present Thy powerful grace, O God, that we may keep this resolution. Amen.

FIFTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE INJUSTICE OF HUMAN RESPECT.

Subject.

To do evil or to omit doing good through human respect is a great injustice to God; therefore we ought always to condemn human respect.—*Preached on the twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Ecce princeps unus accessit, et adorabat eum.—Matth. ix. 18.
"Behold a certain ruler came up and adored Him."

Introduction.

And it was right that he should do so. A beggar must speak submissively to his rich benefactor, a servant must honor his master, a vassal must bow down before his lord, a creature must reverence his Creator, man must adore his God. Princes, kings, emperors, and monarchs of earth, those over whom you are placed, humbly bend the knee before you; your subjects owe you great honor, respect, obedience and love; but when you have to

1. Ecce, quomodo computati sunt inter filios Dei, et inter sanctos sors illorum est. — Wis. v. 2.

do with the great God, you are only poor mortals, weak creatures, subjects and vassals, wretched beggars and servants, and you must bow down in humble reverence and adore Him! That you yourselves acknowledge; that we all, my dear brethren, consider most just. But how unjust it must be to honor a servant more than his master, to respect a beggar more than a king, to love a creature more than the Creator, to adore a man rather than the great and infinite God! And yet that is done by many reasoning beings, who forget God and His law through fear, love, or respect for persons; so that they do what God has forbidden, and neglect what He has commanded. Certainly a disgraceful, shameful thing for a man to do, as I proved in the last sermon. I now say further:

Plan of Discourse.

That it is a great injustice to God. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

Therefore, like the ruler in to-day's Gospel, let us put aside all human respect, and adore God alone, and love and honor Him above all things. Give us Thy powerful grace to this end, O God, through the merits of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

It is foolish and unjust to compare reality to nothingness.

It is unjust even to hesitate as to which of the two we ought to honor and respect the more, a mighty prince or a poor peasant. It is folly to hesitate as to which of the two we should more readily believe, an experienced, wise, and learned man, or an ignorant half-witted idiot. It would be a mark of great stupidity indeed for you to hesitate as to whether you should lean against a stone pillar, or a weak straw. It would be gross ingratitude to hesitate as to which you ought to love most, your father to whom, after God, you owe your existence, and who has fed and looked after you so carefully up to the present, or a savage barbarian from whom you have nothing to hope or fear. It would be childish folly to reflect as to which of the two you ought most to fear, a little dog that can bark at, but not bite you, or a fierce lion that can not only growl at, but also tear you to pieces. It is intolerable stupidity to compare truth to vanity, and all to nothing. Reason alone is sufficient to teach us this without further study.

He does this who commits sin out of human respect.

From this alone, you, who, after the manner of the world, do evil or omit good, through human respect, can see how unjust and unbecoming your conduct is. For what things do you weigh in the scales against each other? What things do you

compare with each other? On the one side is the Almighty God, on the other a miserable mortal; here is the all-powerful Creator, there a weak creature; here is the Master of all, there a poor slave. God has given you the command: "The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve;"¹ men, the world, say that you must live according to their ideas and customs. If you hearken to your God, and, laying aside all human respect, resolve to serve Him faithfully, as you ought, you will lose the favor and friendship of the world, and draw down on you its hatred and ridicule; for, generally speaking, they who please God displease the world. "Because you are not of the world," says Our Lord to His Apostles in the Gospel of St. John, "but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."² But if you follow the fashion of the world, and please men, you will make God your enemy; for, generally speaking, they who please men displease God; as St. Paul writes to the Galatians: "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ."³ The question for you then to decide is whether you will please God or the world; whether you prefer to have God as your friend, and man as your enemy; or man as your friend, and God as your enemy. But what an unjust thing it is even to hesitate in a matter of this kind! An injustice of which God with reason complains by the Prophet Isaias: "To whom have you likened Me, and made Me equal, and compared Me, and made Me like?"⁴ You have weighed Me against a mere mortal. Is that just? "Can man be compared with God?"⁵ One of the greatest insults that Pilate offered the Son of God was, doubtless, when he compared Him to Barabbas, and gave the people their choice as to which of the two should be spared. "Whom will you that I release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus?"⁶ Consider the full meaning of this my dear brethren. Which of the two shall I release; Barabbas a disturber, or Jesus a benefactor of the people? Barabbas a murderer, or Jesus the Saviour? Barabbas, who took away the lives of others, or Jesus who gives life to all? Barabbas, the robber, or Christ, who went about doing good and healing the sick? Barabbas, a wicked and impious malefactor, or Christ, who is innocence and holiness

¹ Dominum Deum tuum adorabis, et illi soli servies.—Matth. iv. 10.

² Quia de mundo non estis, sed ego elegi vos de mundo, propterea odit vos mundus.—Joh. xv. 19.

³ Si adhuc hominibus placerem, Christi servus non essem.—Gal. i. 10.

⁴ Cui assimilastis me, et adæquastis, et comparastis me, et fecistis similem?—Isa. xvi. 5.

⁵ Numquid Deo potest comparari homo?—Job xxii. 2.

⁶ Quem vultis dimittam vobis; Barabbam, aut Jesum.—Matth. xxvii. 17.

itself? “Whom will you that I release to you?” Choose whichever you please. O cruel insult! You execrate it, my dear brethren, even more than you wonder at it.

For he compares the Almighty God.

But if you allow yourselves to be influenced by human respect, you may turn this just anger against yourselves; for you are not a whit better than Pilate, in as much as you propose to your minds the choice between God and man. “Whom will you?” What shall I do? Shall I offend God, or men? Shall I retain the friendship of God, or that of men? Shall I reject God, or men?—There is no end to the greatness of God.”¹ If anything in the world is precious, it is so because God has made it; if anything beautiful, it is because God has adorned it; if anything worthy of love, it is because God has loved it. Why is Heaven so full of joys? Because God rules there visibly. Why is the earth so fruitful? Because it is the foot-stool of God. Why is the air so healthy? Because God has given it that virtue. If any one can be called happy in this life, he is so because he loves God. Is any one free and in safety: it is because he trusts in God. Is any one cheerful and joyous: it is because he serves God. Is any one wise and prudent: it is because God has enlightened him. Is any one good: if so, he has received his goodness from God. It is the greatest honor to be the servant of God, the greatest glory to suffer for Him, the highest life to die for Him, and endless joy to behold Him. By a mere act of His will He can do all things; “God, whose wrath no man can resist, and under whom they stoop that bear up the world.”² Under His feet is everything that is high in Heaven and great on earth; the mightiest sovereigns of earth must bow down and kiss His feet in humble adoration, and all princes, kings, and emperors must honor Him; before Him all that is beautiful among the angels, and terrible among the demons, trembles. Do you not yet know who and what God is? Neither do I. But my faith tells me that He is the incomprehensible, infinite, all-perfect Good, worthy of all love. Bring together all the might, dignity, glory, riches, treasures, joys, beauty, and wisdom of all men that have ever lived on earth, all the choirs of angels who rule with Him in Heaven, all the creatures He has made or can make without end, and what will it all be when compared to God? Let Isaias answer: “All nations are before Him

¹ Magnitudinis ejus non est finis.—Ps. cxliv. 3.

² Deus, cuius irae nemo resistere potest, et sub quo curvantur, qui portant orbem.—Job ix. 13.

as if they had no being at all, and are counted to Him as nothing and vanity. To whom then have you likened God?"¹

Do you wish to know? This ineffably great God is compared by you to a mortal, that is, to a creature whose origin is nothing as far as his soul is concerned, while his body comes from the slime of the earth. "Remember, I beseech Thee," sighs holy Job, "that Thou hast made me as the clay, and Thou wilt bring me into dust again."² A mortal who during life is no better than dust and ashes, than dried straw, than a withered leaf that is blown about by the wind; a mortal who of himself is nothing, has nothing, knows nothing, can do nothing, save and except sin alone which owes its origin to Him; who passes away like a shadow, or like the grass of the field, that is green in the morning and withers away before evening; who after this life will be turned to dust in the earth; whose father after death will be rottenness and corruption, whose mother, brothers and sisters will be worms; "I have said to rottenness: Thou art my father, to worms, you are my mother, and my sister."³ Such is man, as he is described by Isaias, Job and David. Whom now will you choose? Whom will you retain as your friend? The infinite God, or the miserable mortal? What a grievous injustice, I repeat, even to hesitate between these two, or to place them in the scales against each other!

To a miserable mortal.

But would that the evil went no farther than the mere deliberation! For what choice do we often make? What determination do we come to? Like the wicked Jews, we cry out: "Not this man, but Barabbas."⁴ I will not please God, but men; I will not have the friendship of God, but that of men! We are like the Jews when they cried out to Pilate: "If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar's friend."⁵ These few words were like a sharp arrow that pierced the heart of Pilate, "thou art not Caesar's friend;" they deprived the judge who, knowing the innocence of Jesus, had hitherto done all he could to save Him, of all courage, filled him with mortal terror, and made him deaf to all the claims of justice. Must I no longer be the friend of Caesar? he thought. If so, then let Christ suffer, so that I may retain Caesar's friendship. Let innocence be crucified, that

And even prefers the latter.

¹ Omnes gentes, quasi non sint, sic sunt coram eo, et quasi nihilum et inane reputatæ sunt ei. Cui ergo similem fecistis Deum?—Isa. xl. 17-18.

² Memento, quæso, quod sicut lutum feceris me, et in pulverem reduces me.—Job x. 9.

³ Putredini dixi: Pater meus es; mater mea, et soror mea, vermicibus.—Ibid. xvii. 14.

⁴ Non hunc, sed Barabbam.—John xviii. 40.

⁵ Si hunc dimittis, non es amicus Cæsaris.—Ibid. xix. 12.

I, although unjustly, may still be in favor with the emperor. Let the Son of God die, that I may please my sovereign. Human respect, what wonderful power thou hast! What the Scribes and Pharisees could not do with their calumnies, nor the high priests with their law, nor the elders of the people with their false testimony, nor the people themselves with all their clamor, that was at last accomplished by the few words, "thou art not Caesar's friend." At once, when he heard them, Pilate, against his own judgment and conscience, pronounced the unjust sentence; "Then therefore he delivered Him to them for to be crucified."¹

And
through
fear of men

What happens in the world nowadays, my dear brethren? How many there are who, from childhood, are inclined to virtue and the fear of the Lord! How many who would willingly lead a true Christian, devout, zealous, chaste and just life, because they know that such is the end for which God has created them! How many who would wish to serve God alone, and to love Him above all things, because they know that true happiness on this earth is to be found only in His service and love! How many, whom no other temptations and seductions have been able to lead astray from the path of virtue and innocence, but who, like Pilate, have yielded to the force of those few words, "If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar's friend," and have become so unnerved by them, that they have pronounced a similar unjust sentence! If I do this, I shall forfeit that man's friendship; if I lead a Christian life, and try to please God, what will people say? That I am not a friend of men. If I prefer works of devotion to joining in the parties usual among people of my class, although I know well that I should be right in making a choice of that kind, yet I shall be looked on as one who is "not a friend of men." What would people say of me? They would consider me as a sort of monster. If I prefer to remain at home in modest seclusion when I am invited out to some party that may be an occasion of sin to me, my choice would be prudent, but "I should not act as a friend of men." What would people say of me? They would call me a recluse, and ridicule me. If I allow this insult to go unavenged, meet my opponent with Christian meekness, bear wrongs patiently and return good for evil, I know that I should act according to the express command of Christ, but I would not be a friend of men." What would people say of me? They would laugh at me as a fool and a

¹ Tunc ergo tradidit eis illum, ut crucifigeretur.—John xix. 16.

coward. If in company, or during meal-times, when the honor of the absent is attacked, or impure conversation indulged in, or the faults of others discussed, I refrain from laughing or taking part in such sinful talk, and show how displeased I am at it by my downcast eyes and my obstinate silence, as the law of God requires me to do, "I am not a friend of men." And what will people think of me? They will all condemn me, and accuse me of being conceited. If I perform the duties of my office or employment conscientiously, and always do, omit, speak, remain silent, grant, refuse, advise and oppose according to the requirements of justice, then I should act as a good Christian, but "I should not be the friend of men." What would people think of me? I should forfeit the friendship of one, and draw down on myself the enmity of another. If a person boasts to me of his sins, and I, knowing them to be sins, instead of approving of them, were to condemn them, and try to persuade him not to be guilty of them again, I should fulfil the law of fraternal correction, but "I should not be the friend of men." If one to whom I am attached endeavors to persuade me to act against my conscience, and I refuse to do so, and express my determination rather to die than offend God, I should act right indeed, but "I should not be the friend of men," and I should lose that person's esteem and affection. If, as a good father of a family should, I am very attentive to keep away all occasions of sin from those under my care, and to correct their faults, I should only do my bounden duty, but "I should not be the friend of men;" I should be cried down in the place as a cruel master, whom no one could live with. If I were to abandon the dangerous company I have begun to frequent, and to amend my mode of life, an amendment that is only too necessary, what would people think of me? They would be very much astonished indeed, and would not be sparing in unfriendly comments. In a word, if, when others sin, I refuse to sin with them, if I am ashamed, where they are shameless, if I serve God when it is displeasing to them, "I am not their friend." Therefore, away with God, that I may be a friend of men! I renounce the virtues of a Christian life, that I may not displease men! Let then the innocent give way to the guilty, the poor to the rich, justice to injustice, modesty to impudence, chastity to impurity, devotion to impiety, and the service of God to that of men, provided only that I can be the friend of men.

But my uneasy conscience cries out to me, what are you doing?

Gives up
God alto-
gether,

of which the
Almighty
complains.

You are offending God. No matter, as long as I succeed in pleasing men! You are losing the inestimable friendship of God. No matter, as long as I can retain the favor of men! You are ruining your soul. I care not, as long as I can please men thereby! What will Heaven think of me, and my holy angel guardian, and Mary the Queen of angels, and Jesus Christ my Saviour, and God my heavenly Father, and all the just in Heaven and on earth? Let them think or say what they will; if only men are satisfied with me, if I can only please the common herd, if I can keep the friendship of this or that person, that is all I require. Is not that a far more unjust and wicked sentence and resolution than that of Pilate? The Almighty God, to show how bitterly He complains of it, orders His Prophet Jeremias to call all the heavens to witness His astonishment: "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and ye gates thereof be very desolate. For my people have done two evils. They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water."¹ They have chosen friends whose friendship is founded on sand, and is full of inconstancy, treachery, and falsehood, as they themselves know by daily experience, and My true constant and sincere friendship they have despised; they have selected as friends those who seek nothing but their own advantage, and they have rejected Me, who seek nothing but their temporal and eternal prosperity. "Be astonished, O ye heavens at this." O tyrannical human respect, to what a degree of madness thou violently impellest those, whom thou hast once brought under thy yoke!

How odious
and unjust
thus to act
towards
God, one's
greatest
benefactor.

Yes, they say; but that man can do me a great deal of good; I have already received many benefits from him. Who knows whether I may not be in need of his help again? The mountains, as the saying goes, remain always in the same place, but men can meet each other; therefore I must connive now and then at certain things, so as not to make that man an enemy. Is that so? (Hear this, O great God!) Has then your God done less for you than that man? Have you less to expect from God than from him? Do you require his help more than that of your God? Tell me; did that man create you, and call you forth out of nothing? Did he give you your soul and body and everything

¹ *Obstupescite coeli super hoc, et portæ ejus desolamini vehementer. Duo enim mala fecit populus meus: me dereliquerunt fontem aquæ vivæ, et foderunt sibi cisternas, cisternas dissipatas, quæ continere non valent aquas. —Jer. ii. 12-13.*

you have? No; God has done all that for you. When you were condemned to hell, did that man redeem you? No; but God redeemed you, and shed His blood for that purpose. Did that man allow even one of his fingers to be cut off for your sake? The Son of God gave up His whole body to the most cruel tortures for you. His sun gives you light during the day; His moon shines on you during the night. You are warmed by His fire, refreshed by His air, nourished by His bread, and by His help you have been hitherto saved from many dangers, and kept in health and strength. Did that man do anything of the kind for you? Do you hope for anything good? In and through God alone you can find all the good of nature and grace in the present and the future life. He has given you a right to endless joys, if you only serve Him for a short time; can you hope that that man will give you anything of the kind? Nay, can you expect the least thing from him? If he gives you anything, must he not first beg it from God? And after all, what do you imagine he can give you? The outward show of affection, a friendly word that he does not mean in reality, an empty praise which he uses only to conceal the contempt he has for you, for he knows well that it is through cowardice that you fail in doing your duty; or even if his esteem for you is sincere, it is nothing but a mere idea of the mind, a mere fancy of the imagination, and the most you can expect from him on account of it is that he will put in a good word for you here and there, and in so doing, will act probably against justice, through human respect, as you did yourself. This is all you have to hope for from him, and when you get that you must be satisfied. And is it for that, that you pay so dearly? Must you therefore give yourself so much trouble and anxiety, and connive at so many things? Must you therefore refrain from saying what you think, from doing what you would wish to do? Must you therefore so miserably barter the grace and favor of God, and the salvation of your soul? Is it worth while for the sake of that, to come to the terrible resolution of giving up God, so as to retain that man's friendship? O God of infinite liberality, Thy servant David, surprised at the manifold benefits bestowed on him by Thee, cries out: "What shall I render to the Lord, for all the things that He hath rendered to me?"¹ And now a man dares to cry out: What shall I not venture to do against God, what wickedness shall I not attempt, so that I may seek, gain, or at least hope for some slight advantage from men?

¹ *Quid retribuam Domino, pro omnibus, quae retribuit mihi?*—Ps. cxv. 12.

I would willingly love and serve Thee, O my God, as I ought; but the mortal whom I love must have the preference! If I could love Thee without displeasing him, I should do so; but as it is, I must forfeit Thy friendship! What odious and black ingratitude!

Who alone
can injure,
and there-
fore is alone
to be feared.

But, you say again, if that man cannot do me any good, he can at least do me harm, unless I make a friend of him. We must, as the proverb says, howl with the wolves, that they may not tear us to pieces; we must even burn a candle in honor of the devil, that he may not injure us; he who does not know how to humor the world will fare but badly nowadays. This objection is that insult, of which Eliphaz, in the person of God, complains in the Book of Job: "Who looked upon the Almighty as if He could do nothing;"¹ and of which David says, bewailing our folly: "They have not called upon the Lord, there have they trembled for fear where there was no fear."² We fear one who cannot hurt a hair of our heads unless God permits him, and we do not fear God, whose all-seeing eye and almighty hand no one can escape, who in all places, at all times, has us fully in His power, so that He can annihilate us if He wishes. Where, in God's name, asks St. Bernard, is our Christianity? Nay, where is our reason, since we fear the eyes of men more than the eyes of God? Does not Christ our Saviour say plainly enough in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul?"³ But O Lord, have I not reason to fear and tremble when a cruel tyrant threatens to persecute me, to kill me, to hang me on a gallows, to break me on the wheel, or to burn me alive? "Fear ye not;" not even tyrants should cause you to tremble; for if I allow them to carry out their threats, they can injure only your temporal goods or your mortal body, which in any case must rot away in the earth. "But rather fear Him that can destroy both soul and body into hell."⁴ Fear Him from whose mouth proceeds a two-edged sword, who at this moment can make you a poor beggar, and hurl you, body and soul, into eternal flames. Him should you fear, and Him alone. And now we have no sword, no want, nor illness, nor pain, nor death held forth to terrify us; the only thing we have to fear is a cross look, a hard word, a mocking laugh, or a refusal to assist us in some necessity

¹ Quasi nihil posset facere Omnipotens æstimabant eum.—Job xxii. 17.

² Dominum non invocaverunt, illic trepidaverunt timore, ubi non erat timor.—Ps. xlii. 5.

³ Nolite timere eos, qui occidunt corpus, animam autem non possunt occidere.—Matth. x. 28.

⁴ Sed potius timeate eum, qui potest et animam et corpus perdere in gehennam. *Ibid.*

that has not yet occurred; and through this fear we lay aside the fear of the Almighty God, and, as the saying goes, burn a candle in honor of men, and adore and pray to them as idols, that they may not harm us; while the honor due to the one true God, and the service He has a right to expect from us, are neglected altogether. In a word, God is disregarded and despised for the sake of pleasing men. "Who looked on the Almighty as if He could do nothing."

But wait; He will tell you Himself bye-and-bye, what He can do; He will let you see how He can injure and benefit you! For a time will come when you will be in extreme necessity, abandoned by all creatures, and then you will call in vain on the friends you have chosen. "And He shall come even to the top thereof, and none shall help him."¹ No one can possibly help him unless God alone; and Him you have despised and neglected through human respect. You will call upon Him of course: O my God, help me, take pity on me in my extremity! But He will mock at your sufferings and reject your prayers. "And He shall say: "Where are their gods in whom they trusted? Of whose victims they ate the fat, and drank the wine of their drink-offerings; let them arise and help you, and protect you in your distress."² Where are those whom you honored on earth as gods? "Let them arise and help you." Where are those men whom you have so long fawned on, and served most humbly, while I had to stand aside neglected and despised? Let them come and help you. Where are those whose cross looks you so dreaded, whose unfriendly words filled you with fear? Let them arise and help you. Where is the man on whose favor and protection you relied? The person for whose sake you have so often neglected Me? Where are those from whom you thought you had so much good to hope, so much evil to dread? Where are those whom you so much wished to resemble, that you conformed to all their fashions and usages most exactly? Let them now arise and help you. Go to them; let them, if they can, snatch you out of My hands, and save you from My inexorable justice. You have not wished to know Me; go to those whom you labored so hard to please, perhaps they will recognize you. "Let them arise and help you," for I know you not! You were ashamed of My service; go to those whom you considered it an honor to serve;

Such a one
will at last
be mocked
at and a-
bandoned
by God.

¹ Veniet ad usque summitatem ejus, et nemo auxiliabitur ei. —Dan. xi. 45.

² Et dicet: Ubi sunt dii eorum, in quibus habebant fiduciam, de quorum victimis comedebant adipem, et bibebant vinum libanimum? surgant, et opitulentur vobis, et in necessitate vos protegant. —Dent. xxxii. 37-38.

for I am now ashamed of you; away with you into hell fire! Let your friends come and help you when you are lying there in eternal darkness, and save you from it, if they can! When you are suffering among the demons, let them arise and help you, whom you feared more than Me, so that, to secure their friendship, you made Me your enemy many times. Where are they? "See ye that I alone am, and there is no other God besides Me; I will kill, and I will make to live; I will strike, and I will heal, and there is none that can deliver out of My hand."¹ This you have not tried to consider or to understand during your life; you were constantly saying: What will people say? What will they think? But when you are in extreme distress, what will the angels and saints in Heaven say of you? "The just shall see, and shall laugh at him, and say: behold the man that made not God his helper;"² who relied on men, and refused to acknowledge that God alone is the Master whom he should try to serve and please. Behold what a foolish man he is!

Therefore
we must try
to please
God alone.

O Christians, God is infinitely greater than man, infinitely wiser, infinitely more powerful, and an infinitely better and more faithful friend than man! It is from God alone, and not from man, that we have all good to hope, every advantage to expect. It is God alone who can do us real harm, in this life, as well as in the next; no man can hurt a hair of our heads without the divine permission. How unjust then, how foolish it is, to abandon God through human respect, through fear or love of a mere mortal, and to transgress His commands, and renounce His service! Let us then serve Him alone, freely and openly, as we ought; for we are in this world for the sole purpose of acknowledging Him as our God, of loving Him with our whole hearts, and of doing His holy will in all things. "Let us therefore displease those to whom Christ is displeasing,"³ to whom God is displeasing, and who advise, command, or try to persuade us to do the least thing against God.

Sorrow for
past faults
in this
respect.

O great God, worthy of infinite love, would that I had thought of this before, and had made this resolution long ago; I should not then have treated Thee with such shameful injustice! O how much evil I have done, how much good left undone, through human respect! How often have I been ashamed of

¹ Videte. quod ego sim solus, et non sit alius Deus præter me: ego occidam, et ego vivere faciam: percutiam et ego sanabo, et non est qui de manu mea possit eruere.—Deut. xxxiii. 39.

² Videbunt iusti. et timebunt, et super eum ridebunt, et dicent: Ecce homo qui non posuit Deum adiutorem suum.—Ps. li. 8 9.

³ Displicemus ergo his, quibus Christus displicet.

Thy public service, of Christian humility and modesty, on account of some mere mortal! How many shameful things I have done to please men! I have preferred a miserable creature to Thee, the King of Heaven; although Thou hast placed me, a poor worm of the earth, above Thy most excellent creatures. Amongst the blessed spirits there are none greater than the Cherubim and Seraphim; Thou hast preferred me to those when for my sake Thou didst come down from Thy throne in Heaven, and becamest, not an angel, but a man like to me. Amongst men on earth there are many thousand infidels, Turks, Jews, and heretics, and amongst them there are many nobles, princes, and kings; to all these Thou hast preferred me, for Thou hast left them in the darkness of error, but hast called me to the light of the one, true, Catholic faith. Thou hast preferred me and my welfare to Thy own most precious blood; for Thou hast shed the last drop of it for me; to Thy body, for Thou hast allowed it for my sake to be torn to pieces and to die on a Cross; to Thy soul, which Thou hast permitted to sorrow unto death for me. Thus, O God, Thou hast preferred me to Heaven, to earth, to all the angels, to countless numbers of men, and even to Thyself; and I, monster of wickedness that I am, have neglected Thee, my sovereign God, for a miserable mortal, who, like myself, is always in need of Thy protection; I have thought more of that mortal's favor, than of Thy friendship, and feared his anger more than Thy infinite justice! A friendly look, a word of praise or blame, has had more influence with me than Thy endless goodness. I have often turned my back on Thee that I might please a mortal man. I have despised Thee and Thy holy commandments, and renounced Thee forever, that I might not cause displeasure to a mortal man. This I have done, and I cannot deny it. O fool that I was! How far I have allowed myself to be led astray by human respect, by vain fear and love. I am sorry for it, O my God, from the bottom of my heart, and I execrate and detest my wickedness and ingratitude!

Henceforth I will honor Thee better. No man on earth, whatever be his dignity or wealth, or power, however useful or friendly he may be to me, shall ever bring me a hair's breadth away from Thee and Thy service. I will always remain faithful to Thee, let people think what they will, or say of me, or do to me what they will. As long as I have Thy favor and friendship, I have all that I can desire on earth; "They (men) shall perish, but thou remainest; and all of them shall

Resolution
to amend.

grow old like a garment.”¹ I can easily escape the threats, attacks and persecutions of men; but I cannot hide myself from Thy all-seeing eye. The friendship of men is, generally-speaking, disturbed by a thoughtless word, a sour look, a mere suspicion; Thy friendship, O God, no one can take from me but myself. I can be Thy friend when I will, and as long as I will, and I can rely on the word Thou hast said to comfort me and all men; ‘You are my friends, if you do the things that I command you.’² Yes, O my God, I will do them as long as I live; I will no longer try to please men, but please Thee! They may laugh at, and ridicule me, I will do as Thou commandest; they may flatter and fawn on me, I will do as Thou commandest; they may threaten and try to harm me as much as they can, I will say with the Prophet Jonas: “I fear the Lord, the God of Heaven.”³ What He commands I will always do, and allow neither human respect, nor vain fear, nor love, to prevent me from doing it; so that I may always be Thy friend, O God, here in time and afterwards in eternity. Amen.

FIFTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

ON UNLAWFUL FASHIONS AND CUSTOMS.

Subject.

To follow the ordinary fashions and customs in things that are opposed to the law of God, or to the teaching of the Gospel, is, 1. a most grievous insult to God; and 2. a still more grievous wickedness, which embitters the anger of God to the highest extent.—*Preached on the twelfth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Vade, et tu fac similiter.—Luke x. 37.

“Go, and do thou in like manner.”

Introduction.

Oh, that need not be said twice to most people nowadays, “go, and do thou in like manner!” But if one were to propose to them, as Christ did to the Scribes in the Gospel, to follow the example

¹ *Ipsi peribunt, tu autem permanes; et omnes sicut vestimentum veterascent.*—Ps. ci. 27.

² *Vos amici mei estis, si feceritis, quæ ego præcipio vobis.*—John xv. 13.

³ *Dominum Deum cœli ego timeo.*—Jonas i. 9.

of the saints, and were to explain how they loved God with their whole hearts, how charitable they were and how humble, and how self-denying in all things, and then to say: "go, and do thou in like manner;" oh, that would be another matter altogether; few would be found inclined to follow advice of that kind. Otherwise there is nothing more common in the world than for men to imitate each other in their lives and actions. Even children very soon learn the influence of fashion or custom; and it is a common thing to hear people say: oh, I must do so and so, because others like me do it, and I do not wish to be made an exception of, etc. Blind worldlings, who thus sell their freedom, and bind themselves to such a thralldom, that they must imitate others in everything they do! And worst of all, this spirit of imitation is observed in those fashions and customs of the world that are opposed to the law of God and to the teaching of the Gospel; a law and a teaching that are utterly disregarded when there is question of doing as the world does. Thus God is most grievously and wickedly insulted, and His anger is aroused. There you have, my dear brethren, the subject of to-day's sermon, which is directed against all the bad customs and fashions in vogue in the world.

Plan of Discourse.

To follow the ordinary fashions and customs in things that are opposed to the law of God, or to the teaching of the Gospel, is a most grievous insult to God; this I shall prove in the first and longer part. It is a still more grievous wickedness, which embitters the anger of God to the highest extent; this I shall prove in the second part. Act and live according to the fashions and customs which Jesus Christ has prescribed to His saints; such will be the conclusion.

Do Thou, O God, help us thereto by Thy grace, which we beg of Thee through the merits of Thy Mother Mary and the holy angels guardian.

The chief honor and service which subjects are bound to render their prince or king, is to observe his laws and commands at all times, with all respect and obedience. This is the crown that kings wear, the sceptre they hold; namely, the possession of such irresponsible authority, and such an absolute right to command and forbid what they please, that none of all their subjects dare oppose or transgress their orders. If even one individual were to say, I will not observe that law, in this or that particular my

A conspiracy of subjects against the law of their king is a great act of contempt towards him.

sovereign deserves neither respect nor obedience: that alone would constitute an act of contempt, an insult to the supreme authority, which is punished with death. But if many were to participate in an act of that kind, they would be guilty of conspiracy, revolt, and rebellion against their sovereign, and of trying to deprive him violently of crown and sceptre. If it were ever lawful under any circumstances for subjects to refuse obedience to their legitimate sovereign, and to violate the laws of the land with impunity, then the sovereign would be a mere puppet, set up on a throne as a laughing-stock of the people.

A similar insult is offered to God by those who follow the fashions of the world against the divine law.

Such, my dear brethren, is the terrible insult offered to the great Monarch of Heaven by all those who in any way act against the divine law and the Gospel teaching, in order to follow the customs of the world, and who try to excuse themselves by thinking and saying: "It is the custom, the fashion, to do so." For what do they mean if not this: I know that this thing is forbidden by the commandments of God; but I do not care for that; I will do as others do; it is the fashion now to transgress the law of God in this particular. Jesus Christ our Saviour has taught all men in His holy Gospel, and by His example, how they are to act in this or that particular; but His teaching deserves neither respect nor obedience, for the teaching of the world is quite opposed to His, and I must do as others do; the Gospel law and the will and command of Christ cannot prescribe any rule of conduct to me in this matter; custom goes before law; the example of men has more influence on me than the example and teaching of Christ; the world and its fashions deserve more respect and obedience than the great God and His holy will. That is, says St. Gregory, a conspiracy against God, a rebellion and revolt against the Monarch of Heaven, a public contemning of His absolute authority, an effort to dethrone Him, "to take the crown from His head,"¹ the sceptre out of His hand.

There are many who follow those fashions by neglecting their prayers and not doing good works.

Nevertheless, is it not the case that most men nowadays dare thus grievously to insult God, and to rebel without fear or shame against His sovereign Majesty? And no matter what you say to them about the wickedness of their conduct, they always return to the old excuse: "It is the fashion, the custom; the world will have it so," etc. And this is supposed to make lawful what is forbidden, to justify what is wicked and reprehensible, and on the other hand, to render contemptible what is good and obligatory in the sight of God and His saints. Is not that the case, my

¹ Hoc est Deo præripere coronam.

dear brethren? In many a house, there is little or no sign of Christian piety and the fear of the Lord, there is no morning-prayer, or good intention, or sign of the Cross; the members of the family never think of hearing Mass on the week-mornings, they retire at night without thanking God, or examining their consciences, or repenting of the sins they committed during the day; they never say a litany or the Rosary with the servants, nor do they read a spiritual book on Sundays and holy days; the only prayers they are heard to say consist of cursing, swearing, and profane language. If I were to speak to those people about the divine law and the Gospel teaching, and to say to them in the words of St. Paul: Is that the way to lead a Christian life? "Know you not, that railers shall not possess the kingdom of God?"¹ or in the words of St. James: "Pray for one another that you may be saved; for the continual prayer of a just man availeth much;"² pray together that you may go to Heaven together; or in the words of Christ Himself: "Watch ye and pray that ye enter not into temptation."³ Ah, Father, they would answer, that is not the custom in our house; we have not been brought up to it; it is a common thing for men to curse and swear; in fact they cannot get on without it, etc. And so I should have to be satisfied with this appeal to custom.

I go into another house and I find the expenses much greater than the income; the rooms are beautifully furnished, there are silver tea and coffee services, the members of the family are dressed in the height of fashion, they spend the day in idleness, in paying and receiving visits, in drinking and gambling; but meanwhile they are over head and ears in debt, and there is no prospect of their ever being able to pay; and of course they cannot give alms according to their condition. I remind them of the law of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ: "But yet that which remaineth, give alms."⁴ Give to Christ in the person of His poor, and you will purchase for yourselves the kingdom of Heaven; "Render therefore to all men their dues,"⁵ as St. Paul warns you; and that you may be able to give alms and to pay your debts, you are bound in conscience under pain of sin to reduce your expenditure and to give up that idle, luxurious life

By living
expensively
and not
paying their
debts.

¹ Neque maledici regnum Dei possidebunt.—I. Cor. vi. 10.

² Orate pro invicem, ut salvemini; multum enim valet deprecatio justii assidua.—James v. 16.

³ Vigilate, et orate, ut non intretis in tentationem.—Matth. xxvi. 41

⁴ Quod superest, date eleemosynam.—Luke xi. 41.

⁵ Reddite ergo omnibus debita.—Rom. xiii. 7.

you are leading; such is the law of God. Oh, there would be little use in my telling them that! They would be ready with their answer at once. Others like us live in that way, they would say, and we must keep up appearances as well as they. And that is all the satisfaction I should get from them.

I go into a third house, and find the people busied from morning till night in their usual avocations, in buying and selling, or working at their trade, or in studying, giving legal advice, or writing. Their only thought is to make money, and they commit all sorts of injustice without scruple; whether the case they have undertaken to defend is just or not, or the contract they have drawn up is valid or invalid; whether God has forbidden them to take bribes from the opposite party, or not; whether the wares they sell are good or damaged, their weights and measures fair or not; whether it is right or wrong for them to keep the material that remains over after they have finished the work they had to do for others; they never even think of those things, and they look on everything as lawful, as long as it brings them in a profit. I speak to them of the law of God: "Thou shalt not steal;" I explain to them the teaching of theologians on this subject: namely, that every time one steals a little in that way with the intention of continuing such thefts and of becoming richer thereby, he is guilty of a mortal sin. I say to them: "Pay what thou owest;" you are bound under pain of eternal damnation to make restitution for all such acts of injustice, and to give back what you have stolen to the lawful owner, or else to the whole community, according to circumstances. Ah, poor mortals, I say to them, in the words of our Saviour: "What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul? Or what exchange shall a man give for his soul?"¹ Of what use are all the riches and treasures of earth, if the poor soul has to spend eternity with the demons in hell? Ah, I beg you in the words of Our Lord: "Seek ye, therefore, first the kingdom of God, and His justice; and all these things shall be added unto you."² Whatever you require for your support will be given you by your heavenly Father in the measure that He knows to be good for you. Such is the law, such are the exhortations, warnings and promises of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But what do those people care about Christ or His law? They

¹ Quid enim prodest homini si mundum universum lucretur, animæ vero suæ detrimentum patietur? Aut quam dabit homo commutationem pro anima sua?—Matth. xvi. 26.

² Quærite ergo primum regnum Dei, et justitiam ejus, et hæc omnia adjicientur vobis.—Matth. vi. 33.

bring forward another law; it is the custom, they say, to act in this way in our employment; most people who are engaged in business do as we do; if we made an exception of ourselves, we should have small profits, and in time should be obliged to give up our business or occupation. In a word, it is the custom. And thus, O divine law, thou art abrogated!

I go on farther, and I find Christians who look on it as an honor to be able to drink more than another, and as a great glory to be able to persuade their guests to get drunk. My God, I say, what sort of a life is that for a Christian to lead? Have you not heard or read that drunkenness is never lawful, that it is a brutal vice, and that, as St. Paul says, they who are addicted to it cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven? "Nor drunkards shall possess the kingdom of God."¹ Have you not heard what St. Peter says: "Be sober and watch," do not deprive yourselves of reason, "because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour?"² Yes, they would say, we have heard all that; but that law is not binding any longer; it is abrogated; we have custom on our side; we must do honor to our guests, or else they will be offended, or think that we do not know how to live according to the way of the world.

By intemperance and drunkenness.

I go to another house, and there I find a young girl, who, after having slept till late in the day, and spent a whole hour before the looking-glass, passes the day in idleness at the window, or the door, or amuses herself with tea or coffee parties, or with playing cards, or reading romances and love tales. She appears at every ball and party; she is not at all shy of talking to and being in the company of persons of the opposite sex; she goes out walking with them, and takes their arm going to and from church; in fact it is by doing so that she distinguishes herself from the common herd; bye-and-bye she will be sent to a foreign country, to learn and understand thoroughly the maxims of the perverse world. Ah parents, I say, is that the training that God has told you by His Apostle, St. Paul, to give your children? "You fathers bring up your children in the discipline and correction of the Lord."³ You must know that you will one day have to give a strict account of their souls at the judgment-seat of God. Do you not believe the

By not bringing up their children properly.

¹ Neque ebriosi regnum Dei possidebunt.—I. Cor. vi. 10.

² Sobrii estote et vigilate, quia adversarius vester diabolus tamquam leo rugiens circuit, quaerens quem devoret.—I. Pet. v. 8.

³ Patres educate illos in disciplina et correptione Domini.—Ephes. vi. 4.

Holy Ghost, who says expressly: "Idleness hath taught much evil."¹ Christian children, is that the way in which you are to love God with your whole hearts, from youth upwards? Is that the way to walk in the narrow path of penance and the Cross, which alone leads to Heaven, and which, as Jesus Christ says, but few enter on? But what is the use of my talking? The same answer is ready again: "It is the fashion, the custom;" others like us bring up their children in the same way; our children must keep up as good an appearance as theirs, or else people will look on us as miserly. O holy Apostle St. Paul, Jesus Christ our Saviour, you have to be satisfied with that: "It is the fashion;" you need not bring forward any more your law, your exhortations; they do not deserve to be heeded; the fashion has superseded them!

By immod-
esty in
dress.

I have often seen a vain child of the world, dressed in a gaudy and scandalous style, who comes out to show herself and to be admired. I know well the law that God lays down by the Apostle St. Paul: "Women in decent apparel, adorning themselves with modesty and sobriety, not with plaited hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly attire; but as it becometh women professing godliness, with good works."² Mark the words, "not with plaited hair;" much less then with hair dressed by a person of the opposite sex; much less with painted faces; much less with scandalously short dresses, or bare necks and shoulders. I know well the threat of Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh;"³ woe to him who gives occasion for bad thoughts and desires! But I dare not mention this law, or I should be laughed at, and derided as an ignorant simpleton who knows nothing of the ways of the world. "It is the fashion," and there is no use in talking against it; others are dressed in this way, why should I not imitate them? It would be absurd for me alone to depart from the usual fashions. It is the common custom that is tolerated by ecclesiastical and civil authority, and even by confessors too; it is a custom that has obtained the force of prescription against the law of God; what St. Paul preached is too antiquated to be observed nowadays. "It is the fashion," and that is enough.

By irrever-
ence in
church.

I do not wish to go any farther, or even to enter the church

¹ Multam malitiam docuit otiositas.—Ecc. xxxiii. 29.

² Mulieres in habitu ornato, cum verecundia et sobrietate ornantes se, et non in tortis crinibus, aut auro, aut margaritis, vel veste pretiosa; sed quod decet mulieres, promittentes pietatem per opera bona.—I. Tim. ii. 9-10.

³ Vae homini illi, per quem scandalum venit.—Matth. xviii. 7.

of God; for there, before Jesus Christ, the Judge of the living and the dead, who is really present before the altar, the throne of the divine majesty, I should find acts of irreverence and disrespect committed, such as Christ punished in His anger, when He scourged the buyers and sellers out of the temple. Even here, too, custom has gained the upper hand. It is no longer fashionable for those who know the world to pray on bended knees, with downcast eyes and folded hands, to the great God who is present on the altar; (and, due allowance being made, I say the same of the ordinary prayers before and after meals; for it is no longer the fashion to make the sign of the Cross and fold the hands to say grace;) the proper thing to do nowadays is to stand in the church and look around, and laugh and joke with one's neighbors; and that is a custom that has been imported from foreign countries.

Great God! is that the way in which men, Thy own believing Christians, treat Thee? What others do has more authority and influence with them, than what Thou hast commanded them to do in Thy most holy law. They fear and dread the loss of Heaven, and the eternal pains of hell, with which Thou hast threatened them, less than the imaginary displeasure of other mortals, whose example they wish to follow in conforming to the unlawful customs of the world. They conspire together publicly to despise Thy doctrine and Thy holy law, and they show thereby that there are things in which Thou hast no authority over them. Thus they snatch the sceptre out of Thy hand, the crown off Thy head, and they laugh at Thee as a puppet-god, whom they are not bound to obey, unless when and how the prevailing fashions allow! "It is the fashion; it is the custom." Hear this, O Lord Jesus! Is it not the same cry that the infuriated Jews raised when Pilate was trying to set Thee free, and when they cried out unanimously: "We have a law; and according to the law He ought to die."¹ The same cry is still raised by a vast number of Christians, redeemed by Thy bitter Passion and Death, when Thy doctrine and Thy law are proposed to them. What law? what doctrine? they say. "We have a law," one which the world prescribes to us, and the divine law must yield to it. "It is the custom," and this custom rules everything; under its influence people go to confession and do not accuse themselves of following these unlawful customs; they appear afterwards at the Table of the Lord, and receive

Such is the disrespect with which the law of God is treated.

¹ Nos legem habemus, et secundum legem debet mori.—John xix. 7.

His Flesh and Blood; in this way they live and die and go into eternity! Ah, dear Christians, do you really believe that God is less offended by an insult, simply because it has become a prevailing fashion to which most people conform? Do you think that it is no sin, or that it is a less grievous sin to transgress the divine law, because most men are guilty of transgressing it? I shall now show that the contrary is the case, and that a sin committed in accordance with a general custom is much more grievous than it otherwise would be, because it embitters all the more the anger of God. This I shall now briefly show in the

Second Part.

To follow an unlawful custom is a greater sin, because it is a more general one.

To sin openly, to sin boldly, without shame or scruple, to praise and approve of sin, to encourage others to sin, to allure or entice others to sin, and thus to spread sin throughout the world, and, as it were, to proclaim by sound of trumpet a general law, everywhere abrogating the law of God, etc., do you think, my dear brethren, that there is less malice and wickedness in that, than in transgressing privately and secretly a commandment of God? Must not the divine anger be greatly increased by such audacity? And mark this, all those are guilty of it, who follow the customs of the world in things that are opposed to the law of God and to the teaching of His gospel. For there is no doubt that they sin, because sin is nothing else but a contempt and transgression of the law of God, against which law no prescription of fashion or custom can ever avail, so that it can never be lawful to transgress it; they sin publicly, because the customs and fashions they follow are public; they sin without shame or scruple, because they imagine that the common custom makes sin lawful and honorable; they praise and approve of sin, because they think they must conform to the fashion, or else they will have reason to be ashamed of themselves; they encourage each other to sin, because no one wishes to be the first to act against the unlawful custom; they entice others to sin, because their bad example draws many to imitate them, and thus sin is spread from one country to another, from one town to another, and is propagated freely throughout the world. This is the way of wickedness from which the pious David begged God so earnestly to keep him: "Remove from me the way of iniquity; and out of Thy law have mercy on me."¹ You know,

¹ *Viam iniquitatis amove a me, et de lege tua miserere mei.*—Ps. cxviii. 29.

my dear brethren, what happens when a crowd of people are hurrying along a road, each one trying to be first. The one pushes the other, and he pushes whoever is in front of him, and so it goes on through the whole crowd. Now, if there is a deep hole in the way, which they who are behind cannot see, what happens? Those who are in front are pushed on by the others until they fall into the hole; the second, third, and fourth ranks follow after them, and at last they all fall in and break their necks. An unlawful fashion is a way of that kind; one pushes the other into sin; those who are behind follow where they see others going, and they are too blind to notice the infernal abyss to which they are hurrying.

And thus the vice, that the good and merciful God bears patiently with, to some extent, in a single individual, becomes intolerable in His sight; and since it is collected into a greater mass, it cries out louder and more piercingly in the ears of the divine justice. Hear what St. Augustine says of the excuse alleged for an unlawful custom, "It is the fashion; we must do as others do." "That," he says, "is called a cry in the Holy Scripture, such as an angry God heard from Sodom and Gomorrah:" "And the Lord said: The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is multiplied, and their sin is become exceedingly grievous; I will go down and see whether they have done according to the cry that is come to me."¹ But why so? what had those people done? "Their sins cried to Heaven," answers St. Augustine, "not only because they committed them with impunity, but because they had become a general law and custom."² And therefore God was so angry that he sent down fire from Heaven, and destroyed those cities and all the surrounding country. "And the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of Heaven. And he destroyed these cities, and all the country about, all the inhabitants of the cities, and all things that spring from the earth."³

Ah, my dear brethren, let us be careful never in any way to join in a cry of that kind, and let us not act so foolishly as to condemn ourselves to hell with and for the sake of others! You

It embitters
all the more
the divine
anger.

Warning
not to fol-
low an un-
lawful
custom.

¹ Dixit itaque Dominus: Clamor Sodomorum et Gomorrhæ multiplicatus est, et peccatum eorum aggravatum est nimis. Descendam, et videbo utrum clamorem qui venit ad me, opere compleverint.—Gen. xviii. 20, 21.

² Non solum quia apud illos non puniebantur flagitia; verum etiam publice et de lege frequentabantur.—S. Aug. Euchirid. Tom. 3. c. 8.

³ Igitur Dominus pluit super Sodomam et Gomorrhæ sulphur et ignem a Domino de cælo; et subvertit civitates has, et omnem circa regionem universos habitatores urbium, et cuncta terræ virentia.—Gen. xix. 24, 25.

know how stupidly sheep act; if one of them leaps out of a boat into the water, the others follow suit, and all are drowned, nor is their destruction less certain because a number of them leap in together. Suppose that the last sheep left in the boat could understand you, and that you cried out to it, as it is on the point of springing overboard: unfortunate animal what are you about to do? Remain where you are, or you will lose your life; but that the sheep said to you in turn: all the rest of the flock have leaped into the water; why should I not join them? Must I be more clever than all the others? Ah, stupid, foolish animal that you are, you would reply, do you then wish to lose your life with the rest of the flock, rather than remain where you are in safety? Why should you concern yourself about the others? If they wish to be drowned, let them drown; but that is no reason why you should not save your life; remain therefore where you are. Can we not apply this to ourselves, my dear brethren? A great multitude of men conform to the customs of the world, and most of them leap into the abyss of hell. "Wide is the gate," says Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Matthew, "and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat."¹ Will you too go to destruction, because there are many to accompany you? Alas, poor soul, whither art thou going? Come back, or thou art lost forever! Such is the cry sent forth by your own uneasy conscience; the cry that God causes to resound in your ears by the law he has given you, by His interior inspirations, by the inward admonitions of your holy angel guardian, by the public warnings of preachers and confessors. Come back! Remain with the few who have found the right way that leads to Heaven. "How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life; and few there are that find it."² What answer do you make to this? "It is the fashion, the custom;" most people do so, and I must follow their example. O foolish soul, who can thus forget thyself and thy salvation, so that thou comest to the same determination as Radbodus, Prince of Friesland, as Baronius relates. This Radbodus was about to receive Baptism, when he asked the bishop where he thought the souls of most of his ancestors were. Doubtless answered the bishop, since they were heathens, and did not know nor love the true God, they are in

¹ Lata porta, et spatiosa via est, quæ ducit ad perditionem, et multi sunt, qui intrant per eam.—Matth. vii. 13.

² Quam angusta porta, et arcta via est, quæ ducit ad vitam: et pauci sunt, qui inveniunt eam.—Ibid. 14.

hell. In that case, said the foolish prince, I do not wish to be baptized; I prefer to burn in hell with the most of my people, than to be in Heaven with the smaller number. Christians, do we not act in the same way, when we think and say: most people follow that unlawful custom; I would rather imitate them and share their fate, than choose the surest way to Heaven with the smaller number? Do we not come to the same determination when we say: others do so, why should not I imitate them?

No, my dear Christians, we must not be so foolish. The only rule of our conduct should be the law of God. "What is written in the law?" asked Christ of that lawyer, who wished to know what he had to do to gain eternal life, "how readest thou?" He answering said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself."¹ Then Christ said to him: "Thou hast answered right; this do and thou shalt live."² In the same way I ask you: what is written in the law of God? Do that, regulate your conduct according to that; what is opposed to this law cannot be legitimized by any custom or fashion. "Though we, or an angel from Heaven," writes St. Paul to the Galatians, "preach a Gospel to you, besides that which you have received, let him be anathema;"³ let him be separated from the communion of the faithful. Is this observed by those who excuse the evil customs they follow, by appealing to the example of apparently pious people? Why, they say, should I not do so and so? It is done by people who are looked upon in the whole town as leading pious and edifying lives, who go to confession every fortnight, and receive Holy Communion with the greatest devotion. Surely, they must know what is lawful or not. They certainly wish to go to Heaven. Can I not therefore imitate them? Otherwise it would seem as if I wished to accuse them of sin. Pious, holy people follow the fashion, so it cannot be bad. No, my dear brethren, that argument will not do. There can be no doubt of the fundamental truth, that we must have no other rule for our conduct but the teaching of the Gospel, the commandments of God and of the Church; and no other pattern of a holy life but the ex-

The only
guide of our
conduct
should be
the law of
God.

¹ In lege quid scriptum est? quomodo legis? Ille respondens dixit: Dilige Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo, et ex tota anima tua, et ex omnibus viribus tuis, et ex omni mente tua: et proximum tuum sicut teipsum.—Luke x. 26-27.

² Recte respondiisti; hoc fac, et vives.—Ibid. 28.

³ Licet nos, aut angelus de cœlo evangelizet vobis præterquam quod evangelizavimus vobis, anathema sit.—Gal. i. 8.

ample of Jesus Christ, and of the elect who follow in his footsteps. Now, if an angel were to come down from Heaven, and to teach us, either by word or example, something that is opposed to the life of Christ and to His holy doctrine, we should be very careful not to imitate or follow him. People who seem to lead holy lives can sin as well as others; therefore, no matter how pious and devout they appear, if you see them following the custom of the world in unlawful things, you can at once come to the conclusion that, in that particular at least, they are neither good nor holy. Hence they who have the name of being pious give a hundred times more scandal in a community, by following unlawful fashions, than others who do the same, but have not as great a name for piety; since the example of the former is much more powerful than that of the latter in inducing people to imitate it. And it is quite a false argument to say, that, because people who are considered pious conform to the fashions, therefore it is right and lawful to conform to them. If those fashions are against the law of God, or the teaching of the Gospel, I must have nothing to do with them, or else I commit a sin. I have but one soul which I must try to save; this should be my greatest care, and I have not to trouble myself about the actions or the conduct of others, no matter who or what they are. I will not be asked on the day of judgment what others did, but how I tried to live according to the law of God.

“Be zealous for the better gifts;”¹ is my conclusion, in the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians. If you, my dear brethren, wish to imitate others, then imitate them in things that are good and holy. Think to yourselves: it is the custom of pious Christians to be upright, honest, merciful, charitable, meek, and humble of heart; I will endeavor to imitate them to the best of my ability; for I know that in those things their conduct is praiseworthy and conformable to the example and teaching of Jesus Christ. It is the custom of pious people to receive the Sacraments frequently after proper preparation; to hear holy Mass daily with due devotion; to assemble all the members of the household every evening before retiring to rest, in order to make the examen of conscience and to say their evening prayers together; to spend the day in union with God, and to offer up all their actions to Him by a supernatural intention. It is their custom to keep their senses in check, to go modestly

We must imitate others in doing good.

¹ *Emulamini autem charismata meliora.*—I. Cor. xii. 31.

dressed, to keep away from dangerous company, to fear and avoid even the shadow of sin, to attend with all possible care to the duties of their state, to bear crosses and trials with patience for God's sake, and to endeavor to do His holy will in all things. I am quite certain that all this is good and conformable to the teaching of Christ and His Apostles; and therefore I will imitate them therein. Never shall I lose sight of the warning of my Redeemer: "How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life; and few there are that find it." "Strive to enter by the narrow gate;"¹ do violence to yourselves that you may enter thereat. "The kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away."² "Many are called, but few chosen."³ Therefore I will follow the advice of St. Augustine: "Live with the few," not with the greater number, "that you may be found with the few elect in the kingdom of God."⁴ May it be so with us, my dear brethren. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Feast of the holy Apostles SS. Simon and Jude.

Text.

Non est servus major domino suo. John xv. 20.

"The servant is not greater than his master."

Even if the eternal truth had not told us, we should know that the servant is not greater than his master; all know that the servant must yield to his master in dignity, and that more honor and respect are due to the master, than to the servant who has to wait on him. Yet, although all acknowledge this, there are many who practically deny it, inasmuch as they honor the servant more than his master, and love, and fear him more. The reason of this is found in that wretched human respect, which makes people unduly attentive to the manner in which others live, so that they may conform to it. What is more common in the world nowadays, than this? Children even learn it from their tenderest years. "It is the custom," etc. *Continues as before.*

On the wickedness of sins against God in general, see the following Third Part. On venial sin, see the Fourth Part.

¹ Contendite intrare per angustam portam.—Luke xiii. 24.

² Regnum coelorum vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud.—Matth. xi. 12.

³ Multi enim sunt vocati, pauci vero electi.—Ibid. xx. 16.

⁴ Vive cum paucis, ut cum paucis inveniri merearis in regno Dei.

ON SINS AGAINST OUR NEIGHBOR.

FIFTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

ON THE SMALL NUMBER OF THOSE WHO LOVE THEIR NEIGHBOR.

Subject.

1. Very few love their neighbor. 2. Very few love their neighbor as themselves.—*Preached on the seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Diliges proximum tuum sicut teipsum. Matth. xxii. 39.

“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

Introduction.

There we have the great law of that Christian charity which one man owes another: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” “Thy neighbor;” these words teach us whom we are to love. “As thyself;” these, how and in what manner we are to love. It is a law, my dear brethren, which, well known though it is, is yet understood by very few; for most people show by their conduct that they know little of what is meant by that law. I imagine that there are many nowadays, who ask the same question as the lawyer asked Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Luke: “And who is my neighbor?”¹ So rare is the true love of one’s neighbor, that people neither know, nor care to know who their neighbor is; still less do they know what it means to love him as themselves. Since so much depends on the fulfilment of this law, that without it, according to the testimony of the holy Apostle St. John, it is impossible to love God, I shall endeavor to explain it to-day.

¹ Et quis est meus proximus?—Luke x. 29.

Plan of Discourse.

Who is my neighbor? The first question, which I shall answer in the first part. What does it mean, to love one's neighbor as one's self? the second question, to be answered in the second part. In both parts we shall have to acknowledge that the love of one's neighbor is very rare. The conclusion will be to amend our principal faults in this particular, when we have learned what they are.

O Mary, mother of beautiful love, and you, holy angels, obtain this grace from God for us.

“And who is my neighbor?” Is it only he who sits, stands, walks, or lives next to me? If that were the case, no one else in the world would have any claim on my love. “Who is my neighbor?” Is it only he who lives on the same street with me, and in the next house to mine? If so, I have nothing to do with those who live two, three, or four doors off. “Who is my neighbor?” Is it only my fellow-countryman, who was born and bred in the same country, town, or community as myself? If so, I owe no love to you, people of Treves, you are nothing to me. “Who is my neighbor?” asks St. Augustine still further. Is it only my father, and mother, my brothers and sisters, my friends and relatives? No, he answers: although all these are closely related to you, there is still another who is a near connection of yours, and who has a valid claim on your love. “There is no relationship so close, as that which exists between man and man!”¹ Whoever, therefore, in the whole wide world has human nature, is a neighbor of all of us, no matter who or what he is, whether he is great or small, rich or poor, learned or ignorant, beautiful or ugly, related or unknown to us, friend or enemy; as long as he is a human being he is amongst the number of those whom we must love, according to the command and the law of God.

“Thou shalt love thy neighbor;” this is a general law binding all men, which admits of no exception. Its meaning is not merely: parents, love your children; children, love your parents; husbands, love your wives; wives, love your husbands; friends, love your friends; servants, love and honor your masters; masters and mistresses, love and care for your servants; not merely, love those who do you good, those whose help you require, those who are placed in a high position; but it says to you, and to me,

Our neighbor, whom we must love, is man.

And every man, no matter who he is.

¹ Nihil tam proximum quam homo et homo.

and to us all: "Thou shalt love:" whom? "Thy neighbor." And who is he? Every human being, without exception; because we all belong to the same race; we have all the same origin, the nothingness of which we are created; the same Creator, who is the Almighty God; the same nature, which is the likeness of God; the same Father, who is in Heaven; the same Mother, the true Church, to which all men are called; the same spiritual food and drink, which is prepared for all, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ; the same hope, the same end, the same inheritance, the same Heaven. As St. John Chrysostom remarks, God, in order to preserve this fellowship amongst men, and thereby to foster mutual charity amongst them, did not create the great and the rich out of one material, and the poor and needy of another; but He caused us all, without exception, to descend from the one father, Adam, and our first mother, Eve. He did not create her independently, but took the material of which He made her from Adam, so that no one can treat another as a stranger, and no difference of nationality, family, condition, or manners, which generally is a cause of misunderstandings and difficulties, can excuse us from the obligation of loving all human beings, and looking on them as our brothers and sisters.

But alas, my dear brethren, we see already how rare true charity is amongst us; for what is more difficult to find, than this general love? What a circumscribed meaning is given nowadays to the word neighbor! Into what small parts we divide, and how miserly we are in doling out, our love and friendship! I find only three classes of men who receive any share of it. The first class founds its claim on blood-relationship, and consists of those who belong to the same family as we do, and even they must be careful what they do, if they wish us to love them truly and constantly; the second relies on our own interest, and consists of those who have done us good, or are likely to do us good; the third and principal class consists of those who suit our natural inclination, because they are beautiful or amiable in our eyes, or are endowed with great natural gifts and talents, or have a pleasing manner, or a sympathetic disposition, or because we have a special pleasure in the society of those of whose favor and friendship we are assured. These, I say, are the people who generally monopolize our hearts and affections; and you, my dear brethren, will acknowledge that what I say is true, and all the others are excluded; no one thinks of them. Hence, as there are few in the world who are related to us, fewer still from whom we

Very rare is this love, because we love only a very small number.

have received, or expect to receive benefits, and fewest of all who, without any fault or failing, are perfectly suited to our inclination, it follows clearly that the number of human beings in the world whom we love properly is very small indeed.

A clear example of our conduct in this particular, I find in the First Book of Kings, in Nabal. The Holy Scripture says of him, that he was a wealthy man, but very hard-hearted, unmerciful, and wicked. David, who with his followers happened to be in his neighborhood, sent to him to ask him in a friendly manner for provisions; but the churlish and foolish Nabal answered: "Who is David? and what is the son of Isai?" I know him not; what have I to do with him? "Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and the flesh of my cattle, which I have killed for my shearers, and give to men whom I know not whence they are?"¹ That is generally the way in which we talk, when there is question of showing charity, according to the Christian law, to the poor, the lowly, and the unknown. And when we are bound by that law to speak and act in a friendly manner to them, to do them a kindness, and to help them in their necessities, what, we say, who are they? They are nothing to me; I know not where they come from; I have never had anything to do with them; why should I do them a kindness? What! You do not know where they come from? Do you know where you come from yourself? As to your soul, you come from nothing, and so do they; as to your body, you are made of a handful of earth, so are they; you come from the hand of God your Creator, and so do they; you know not where they come from? Do you know where you and they are going to? Every day you are going to death, and so are they; you are hurrying on to eternity, nor have they any other end; you hope to get to Heaven, so do they, and perhaps they will succeed, and you will be disappointed; you are all in the same danger; you have all the same hope, and therefore, you are in the same condition, and you owe them the Christian and brotherly love of charity, as well as you owe it to your friends and relatives.

What have I to do with that man? He is not of the same standing as I am. He is a low, common, poor and abject wretch; must I love him, and associate with him? Is it true that that man is nothing to you, because he is poor and lowly? Must he therefore be excluded from your love and friendship? Is he not

We generally exclude strangers and unknown people from our love.

The poor and needy.

¹ Quis est David? et quis est filius Isai? Tollam ergo panes meos et carnes pecorum, quae occidi tonsoribus meis, et dabo viris quos nescio unde sint?—I. Kings xxv. 10-11.

a child of God, a friend of God, an heir of God, as well as you, if both of you are in the state of grace? He may be poor and abject in the eyes of the world; perhaps he is great and noble, even greater and nobler than you, in the eyes of God. It is not his fault that he is lowly of birth, and poor of condition; he is so in accordance with the will of God, who has been pleased to humble him here below. If you are rich and great in the eyes of the world, whom have you to thank for that? Certainly not yourself, for you are not a whit better on that account; but you have to return humble thanks to the goodness of God, who has freely bestowed as an alms on you what you have. Oh, how soon God, if He wished, could reverse your positions completely and take away your wealth from you at once, and suddenly enrich your poor neighbor! If the Almighty were to do so, you would be poor and needy, while he who now is poor would be great and wealthy. And if God does not effect that change in this life, He can do it in the next, by calling the poor man to reign with him forever, while you, if you deserve that punishment, will be excluded from His kingdom; the poor man, like another Lazarus, He may receive into His Fatherly Bosom, while you, like the rich glutton, may be condemned to the flames of hell. You must know that you have no right to despise or undervalue any one, no matter how lowly he may be; for we are all brothers and sisters who have the same Father. Hear what St. John Chrysostom says: "do not talk to me about one man being a cobbler and another a tanner; all you have to consider is, that he is strong in the faith, and true to Christ, and that we are all disciples of fishermen."¹

Those from whom we do not expect benefits.

That man is nothing to me, he never gave me anything, he has never done me a kindness; there is no use in expecting anything from him; why then should I love him, or be kind to him? One hand washes the other, according to the old saying; if I do a favor to any one, I must know why, etc. But listen a moment; if that man cannot, or will not do anything for you, is he therefore nothing to you? Are you therefore not bound to love him? Is your God nothing to you? Has he never done anything for you? Everything you have and are, is a benefit He has bestowed on you; but He commands you, under pain of eternal damnation, to love that man, even if he were to make an ill return for your kindness and to become your sworn enemy: "But I say to you; love your enemies; do good to them that

¹ Ne mihi dixeris illum sutorem esse, alterum coriarium; sed considera fidelem et fortem in Christo illum esse, et quod omnes discipuli sumus piscatorum.

hate you; and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you; that you may be the children of your Father, who is in Heaven.”¹ If then that man is unworthy your love, or your kindness, still God deserves that, for His sake, you should treat that man with charity and friendliness, and do good to him. A dear friend comes to visit you, and brings his servant with him; you treat not only your friend, but his servant also, with kindness. And why? The latter has never done anything for you, nor need you ever expect anything from him; and, as you said before, when you do a good turn for any one, you must know why. Well, you answer, I treat him well for his master’s sake; my friend’s servant, or even his dog, is always welcome in my house. You see now why you must love even the most wicked and ungrateful people; namely, for the sake of that Lord and God, whose servants and creatures they are.

I do not care for that man; I have not the least liking for him; he is not at all a nice person; how can I love him? He inspires me with such disgust, that I cannot even bear the sight of him; he is so rude, passionate and quarrelsome, that I cannot bear to have anything to do with him, much less to treat him as a friend. In a word, I utterly fail to see why I should love him. How? You find no reason for loving him? A bale of merchandise is offered for sale, you see the outside of it alone, and it seems to be nothing but a coarse, rough piece of sacking, that you would hardly condescend to touch; but wait till it is opened, and then you will see the silken stuffs, and the gold and silver plate it contains. If you consider only that man’s exterior, you will find him deformed and ugly; but perhaps his soul is beautiful and lovely, and that is certainly reason enough for loving him, and a far better reason than mere corporal beauty, which is only the outside covering of a body that will be food for worms. But, you say, he is rude and uncultivated. Even if, along with that, he were the most wicked sinner in the world, yet, if you are a Christian, you can and must find cause to love him; and you would find cause enough, if you were to form your judgment, not according to what the senses tell you, but according to divine and Christian maxims. What has Jesus Christ seen in you, or in me, or in any one, to make Him deem us worthy of such great and unspeakable love? Were we not all covered with

Those for whom we have no liking.

¹ Ego autem dico vobis: Diligite inimicos vestros, benefacite his, qui oderunt vos; et orate pro persequentibus et calumniantibus vos, ut sitis filii Patris vestri, qui in cœlis est.—Matth. v. 44-45.

the filth of sin, children of eternal damnation, and therefore objects of His just hatred, anger and reprobation? And yet, "for us men, and for our salvation, He descended from Heaven;"¹ and became a little child, was wrapped in swaddling-clothes and laid in a manger, underwent countless toils and labors for thirty-three years, and at last died on the shameful Cross in extreme agony. O great God, what a difference, an infinite difference, there is between Thee and me! And yet in me, wicked, deformed, and sinful creature that I am, Thou hast found something to please Thee! And I cannot find anything that I deem worthy of my love and friendship in that man, who is of the same nature as myself, and who is like me in all things! That very man who has gained Thy favor and love, and Thy whole heart, cannot win my affection and friendship! Thy image, which Thou hast seen in his soul, was sufficient reason for Thee to love Him; but it is not able to induce me to treat him with charity. Thou hast excluded none from Thy favor and love; but I find many undeserving of my love! I must be really blind then, if I find no reason for loving all men; or else I must be very wicked, if I do not wish to find a reason. If I were truly wise, I should see at once that I ought to love those whom Thou hast acknowledged to be worthy of Thy love! Alas, my dear brethren, our thoughts do not reach as far as that, and we judge our neighbor only by the bodily eyes, and according to outward appearances; and thus what I said at first is unfortunately true; namely, that we have true charity only for the very smallest number of our fellow-men.

Nay, I may say, that we love no one with that supernatural Christian charity, which Christ commands us all to have for our neighbor. For instance, you love one who is related to you, or one from whom you have received benefits, or who is so pleasing to you, that you like to be in his company: that is not a true, but a false love, says St. Bernardine of Siena. For it is in just the same way that you love the bread you eat, because it tastes well; the clothes you wear, because they keep you warm; the money you have, because it is useful to you; your horse, your cat, your dog, because you are fond of them.² A love of that kind is not the love of one's neighbor, but of one's self; for thus you love, not the person of another, but your own profit, sen-

¹ Propter nos homines, et propter nostram salutem, descendit de cœlis.

² Si diligit homo quibus utilis sibi sunt, aut delectabiles, manifeste apparet, quod eos non vero amore diligit, sed sicut equum, panem, etc.

Thus we
love no one
with a true,
super-
natural
love.

suality, or pleasure; and consequently you love yourself, and not him whom God has commanded you to love, that is your neighbor, no matter who he is, and without any selfish interest in view. Such a selfish love as yours, even if it is not unlawful, is of no value in the sight of God, and deserves not the least reward from Him. "For if you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more? Do not also the heathens this?"¹ If you love only those who are friendly and well-disposed towards you, if you do good only to those who do good to you, if you show friendship only to those who please you, "what reward shall you have?" Turks and the most savage barbarians do as much; idolaters and the greatest sinners in the world can love in that way; so that you can only expect the same reward as that given to Turks, barbarians and heathens.

On the last day, as St. Matthew tells us, Christ will reckon up all the works of Christian charity that have been performed in order to reward them duly. "Come ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; naked, and you covered me; sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me."² And all this, "you did to me;"³ and for my sake. Now come forward with that other love of yours, and hear judgment pronounced on it. You have done good to your neighbor; but why? Because you were in want of his help or assistance? But Christ will say to you, if you had no other object but that, you did it not to Me, but to yourself, and for your own end. You have visited a sick person; why? Through worldly courtesy, because he was an acquaintance of yours, or because you considered his friendship useful to you, or because you expected him to remember you in his will? If that was your only intention, you have not visited Me. You have given alms to a poor man; why? That he might work for you? You have not given it to Me. You have clothed one who was naked; why? Because he was your

As we shall
see at the
last day.

¹ Si enim diligitis eos, qui vos diligunt, quam mercedem habebitis? Et si salutaveritis fratres vestros tantum, quid amplius facitis? Nonne et publicani hoc faciunt.—Matth. v. 46-47.

² Venite, benedicti Patris mei, possidete paratum vobis regnum a constitutione mundi. Esurivi enim, et dedistis mihi manducare: sitivi, et dedistis mihi bibere: hospes eram, et collegistis me: nudus et co-operuistis me: infirmus, et visitastis me: in carcere eram, et venistis ad me.—Ibid. xxv. 34, 36.

³ Mihi fecistis. Ibid. 40.

relative, or a country-man of yours? Then you have not clothed Me. You have borne an insult meekly and silently, or been patient with the troublesome faults of another, or repressed your anger when he contradicted or spoke harshly to you; why? Because he was stronger than you, or you were afraid of incurring his resentment? You did it not to Me; it was not for My sake that you were so patient. You helped one who was in need, by your interest, good advice, or consolation; why? Because you had a natural liking for him? You did it not to Me. You were good-humored, friendly and agreeable with that person; why? Because he pleased you? Then you have not sought to please Me by your conduct to him. In a word, if you have loved your neighbor because he pleased you, and loved you in return, you did it not for Me, not for My sake. If you had done all this on My account and in obedience to My command, you would have loved all men without exception, because I commanded you to love your neighbor, that is, all mankind. And how are we to love all mankind? That we shall see in the

Second Part.

“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;” not with exactly the same affection that you have for yourself. No; for well-ordered charity begins with one’s self. To sacrifice one’s property, to shed one’s blood, to give one’s life for another, is often the effect of a heroic charity, but is seldom a duty or an obligation. I can love myself more than others in temporal things; and I must love myself more than all others in things that concern my eternal salvation. The law of charity, then, points to a certain likeness and similarity, so that the love I bear to myself should guide me as to the love I must have for my neighbor. The Holy Scripture, in order to guard us from error on this point, lays down two very clear rules, one of which shows us what we have to avoid; the other what we have to do. The first was given by the elder Tobias to his son: “See thou never do to another what thou wouldst hate to have done to thee by another.”¹ The second was given by Our Lord Jesus Christ to His Apostles: “All things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them. For this is the law;”² that is the way to love your neighbor as yourself.

¹ Quod ab alio oderis fieri tibi, vide, ne tu aliquando alteri facias. Tob. iv. 16.

² Omnia ergo, quæcumque vultis, ut faciant vobis homines, et vos facite illis. Hæc est enim lex.—Matth. v. i. 12.

But do we observe that? Ah! how many there are who often fail lamentably in this respect! I find two classes of people who err grievously in this matter; for some are too prodigal of their love, and others are too miserly with it; some do too much, others too little; some love their neighbor more, others less than themselves. For instance, you say or do something unlawful, to please another; you love your neighbor too much, more than yourself. To avoid displeasing another, you omit doing or saying what the duties of your state oblige you to do or say; you love that person too much, more than yourself. Through human respect you transgress the law of God; you love others too much, more than yourself. To avoid interrupting a conversation, you join in and approve of impure or uncharitable talk; you love others too much, more than yourself. A judge or a lawyer goes against his conscience and acts unjustly in order to help his friend or relative out of a difficulty. Unhappy man! You love your friend too much; you love him more than yourself. A father scrapes together all the money he can, and even tries to get possession of what he has no right to, that at his death he may leave his dear son well off. Father, you love your son too much, more than yourself! A mother, not wishing to displease her daughter, allows her to keep dangerous company, to be present at promiscuous nightly gatherings, and to go into other occasions of sin. Mother, you love your daughter too much, more than yourself! Neither father nor mother will punish their children when they do wrong, nor do they bring them up in the fear of God, or teach them how to work for the salvation of their souls, and thus they fail in performing the most important duty that God has imposed on those who enter the marriage state. Parents, you love your children too much, more than yourselves! A married couple will sometimes transgress the divine law to please each other; husband, you love your wife too well; wife, you love your husband too well! In a word, he who commits even a single sin, or omits one good action to please another, sins against the law of charity by prodigality. And why? Because he loves his neighbor, not as himself, but more than himself, more than his conscience, his soul, his salvation, his God; or, as the Gospel says, he hates himself mortally, that he may love another foolishly and unreasonably. And how many people of that kind there are in the world! I might look for a long time, and I should hardly find one in thousands, who would be willing to share his wealth with me through Christian charity; and there is many

We seldom do so, because some we love more than ourselves. and with a sinful love.

a one who would find hundreds ready to sacrifice their consciences, their souls, their salvation, for his sake. Nor am I alluding now to impure love, which should be called madness, rather than love; and yet, alas, how common it is, and how certainly the soul and its eternal salvation are sacrificed when the impure passion takes possession of the heart; so that, then, it is not so true to say that one sins for the sake of the other, as that one betrays the other into sin. "It is not a question then," says St. Augustine, "of loving as you love yourself, but of hating as you hate yourself." All these people love others too much.

What it is to love our neighbor as ourselves.

But there are others who love their neighbor far too little, and the number is, I am afraid, amongst us Christians nowadays, beyond calculation; for they either do to their neighbor what they would not wish to be done to themselves; or else they refuse him what they would reasonably and justly wish to be done to themselves. I say, reasonably and justly; because, if I were bound to do at once for all men every service that I would wish to be rendered to myself, then, indeed, I should have my hands full! I wish that some one would give me a thousand dollars; am I therefore bound to give that sum to another? By no means; that is not the meaning of the law; for my wish is neither reasonable, nor just. On the other hand, if you are really in want, and you wish that some rich man would help you now and then according to his means, your wish is just and reasonable. You are lying in bed sick, and wish that some prince or count would visit and console you; your wish is not reasonable; but if you desired to see your neighbor, or some good friend, who has heard of your illness, you do not go beyond your right. The sins you have committed are public and known to all; if you wished to be looked on as pious and innocent, you would entertain an unreasonable desire; but if your wickedness is not certainly known, you have a right to desire that others should think well of you; and so under different circumstances. You can see now what you are bound to do to others by the law of Christian charity; if you neglect that obligation, then you do not love your neighbor as yourself; because your love for him is less than the law of Christian charity prescribes.

Most people fail in this point, because

Let each one now enter into himself and see whether he is not cold and niggardly in practising this charity. I think a great deal of myself, feel the least slight very keenly, have a vain com-

¹ Non quomodo teipsum diligis, sed quomodo teipsum odisti.

placency in all my undertakings, and am firmly persuaded that everything I do is well done; meanwhile I look down upon all that another does, I despise him in my heart, I criticise and find fault with him, and put a bad interpretation on all his actions; it is evident that I do not love my neighbor as myself. I am so sensitive, that I cannot bear the least word of contradiction, and yet I speak to another very bitterly and sarcastically; I do not love him as myself. I often complain that this or that person has refused to do me a kindness; yet I hardly ever do anything for another person, who asks me to help him; I do not love him as myself. I wish that people should bear everything from me, but I cannot bear the least thing from them; I do not love my neighbor as myself. I am often vexed during the day at the natural faults and awkwardness of another, and I have many great faults which others must overlook patiently and meekly; I do not love my neighbor as myself. I abhor and condemn many men, because they are wicked and sinful, but I do not hate and condemn the sins which I myself commit every day; I do not love my neighbor as myself. When others do wrong, I wish to see them severely punished, but I do not punish myself; I do not love my neighbor as myself. I am naturally kind to myself; why am I not so to others? I am naturally severe and harsh to others; why am I not so to myself? It is evident that I do not love my neighbor as myself. In everything that concerns myself I am careful, industrious, indefatigable; but I am very negligent in what concerns others; if things go well with me, I am satisfied, nor do I trouble myself about others; my only care is to make matters as easy as possible for myself; whether I thereby make trouble for others, or not, is a question I never think of asking; that is a certain sign that I do not love my neighbor as myself. And so you can go on, my dear brethren, examining yourselves, to see how you act in different circumstances.

Thus I am driven to the conclusion that we have very little love for our neighbor, although we are bound to love him; and that we are far from loving him as we ought. Yet Our Lord Jesus Christ has told us clearly, emphatically, and frequently, that we are bound to love our neighbor as ourselves. The Gospel and the Epistles of St. John are full of the laws of charity. "These things I command you, that you love one another."¹ "We should love one another, as he hath given com-

they love
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those who
fulfill the
law, and
love God,
is very
small.

¹ Hæc mando vobis : Ut diligatis invicem.—John xv. 17.

mandment unto us.”¹ This was the last prayer of Our Lord to His heavenly Father when He was about to take leave of His Apostles: “Holy Father keep them in Thy name, whom Thou hast given me; that they may be one, as we also are.”² This was His last exhortation to His Apostles, and in their person, to all of us: “A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”³ “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.”⁴ Alas, where is the fervor of the early Christians, who were so exact in fulfilling this law? The Christian faith was known in those days more by the brotherly love of charity it produced, than by the miracles it wrought; for, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, in spite of the differences of race and nationality, “the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul; neither did any one say that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but all things were common unto them.”⁵ In fact, according to Tertullian, this fact alone convinced the heathens of the truth of the Christian religion, and they used to say to each other with astonishment: “See how those men love one another.”⁶ O happy, golden, heavenly days, whither have ye gone? If the heathens were to come into many modern Christian towns, would they see the same proof of the truth of our religion? Could they say with truth: “See how those men love one another?” Would they not rather have reason to think and to say: see how those men hate each other! See what misunderstandings, quarrels, and disputes there are amongst them! See how they curse, and persecute, and try to ruin each other; what little patience they have with each others faults! What little charity and mercy they show to the poor and needy! They believe in Jesus Christ, as we see by their altars and churches; but they have not the true characteristic of His disciples; “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.” And meanwhile people flatter themselves and imagine they are

¹ Diligamus alterutrum, sicut dedit mandatum nobis. —I. John iii. 23.

² Pater sancte, serva eos in nomine tuo, quos dedisti mihi, ut sint unum, sicut et nos —John xvii. 11.

³ Mandatum novum do vobis, ut diligatis invicem, sicut dilexi vos, ut et vos diligatis invicem. —Ibid. xiii. 34.

⁴ In hoc cognoscent omnes, quia discipuli mei estis, si dilectionem habueritis ad invicem. —Ibid. 35.

⁵ Multitudinis autem credentium erat cor unum et anima una; nec quisquam eorum, quæ possidebat, aliquid suum esse dicebat, sed erant illis omnia communia. —Acts iv. 32.

⁶ Videte, ut se invicem diligant.

good and pious, because they visit the churches, spend hours in prayer, lead chaste and mortified lives, observe the fasts of the Church, and keep the commandments of God. But how many there are who, almost unawares, incur eternal damnation, because they neglect the principal commandment, and in countless instances do not practise Christian charity! Let no one, says St. Cyril of Alexandria, depend on his fasting, or on his humble prayer, nor on his other good works, "unless he truly loves his brethren."¹ Do you think you love God, if you hate even one man? St. John will tell you, that, if you think so, you are a liar. "If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar."² And do you think that God loves you? You are mistaken; for if a man loves not his brother, "how doth the charity of God abide in him?"³ as the same St. John asks.

Alas, my God, of what use will all my devotions and good works be, if I do not love my neighbor? If I do not love him as myself? If I do not love all men as myself? "He that loveth not, abideth in death."⁴ If I gave up all I have, in order to follow Thee my Saviour; if I scourged myself every day for Thy sake, so as to draw blood, what good would it all be to me, if I love not my neighbor? Not the least; I can save my soul and be loved by Thee without this poverty and all these extraordinary austerities and devotions. But unless I love my neighbor, I can hope neither to save my soul nor to gain Thy love. Why then have I hitherto paid such little attention to this, the most important law of my faith? I must acknowledge, O my God, that I have not loved my neighbor as Thou hast commanded me! How often and how grievously have I not sinned against this love by rash judgments, uncharitable thoughts, harsh and sarcastic words, back-biting, impatience, murmuring, and cruelty! And yet, if I have not true charity, I am not Thy disciple! Nor am I a true Christian, nor have I any right to that beautiful title which I have borne so long! Neither can I love Thee, my God, if I do not love my neighbor. Woe to me then, if I am not loved by Thee, O God, because I am wanting in charity towards others! For in that case I have no reward, no salvation to expect. Therefore I must and will endeavor earnestly to practise this

Conclusion
and resolution
of
amendment.

¹ Nisi recte fratres diligat.

² Si quis dixerit: quoniam diligo Deum; et fratrem suum oderit, mendax est.—I. John iv. 20.

³ Quomodo charitas Dei manet in eo?—Ibid. iii. 17.

⁴ Qui non diligit, manet in morte.—Ibid. 11.

charity, in preference to all other good works; I will love my neighbor as myself; rejoice in his prosperity, as if it were my own; and, when occasion demands, help him as well as I can, and be as kind to him as I would be to myself. I will love all mankind without exception, rich and poor, great and small, those who cause me trouble and displeasure, as well as those who are agreeable and friendly to me. Thou, O my God, hast loved me, although I have often been an ungrateful, perjured, and wicked sinner; can there be any one then, in the whole world, who is unworthy of my love? Therefore I will love all mankind, as Thou desirest, in deed and in truth, by bearing their faults patiently, by meekness in word and action, by helping and comforting them whenever I can; I will love them as my brethren, as Thy disciples and children; I will love them with a supernatural love, that is, for Thy sake, because Thou desirest me so to love them. I will love them at all times, in all places, constantly, to the end of my life, yet so that I shall not transgress the least of Thy commandments for the sake of any of them. Thus I can be assured according to Thy promise, that I will one day love Thee, and be loved by Thee in eternity. Amen.

On why and how we must love our neighbor see the following Fourth Part.

ON SCANDAL.

FIFTY-NINTH SERMON.

ON THE MANIFOLD WAYS AND THE WICKEDNESS OF GIVING SCANDAL.

Subject.

1. Scandal is not a human, but a diabolical vice. 2. Still scandal is a common vice amongst men.—*Preached on the sixth Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Hæc locutus sum vobis, ut non scandalizemini.—John xvi. 1.

“These things have I spoken to you, that you may not be scandalized.”

Introduction.

This text supplies me with most important matter. To be scandalized is mostly an effect of human weakness; for we are easily betrayed into evil, when we see or hear of its being committed by others. But to give scandal is generally the result of sheer malice. Against the first vice Christ uses very gentle words: “These things have I spoken to you, that you may not be scandalized.” But against the second He inveighs in the strongest terms, in the Gospel of St. Matthew: “Woe to the world because of scandals;”¹ “woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh;”² “it were better for him that a mill-stone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea.”³ I will speak to-day, my

¹ *Vae mundo a scandalis.*—Matth. xviii. 7.

² *Vae homini illi, per quem scandalum venit.*—*Ibid.*

³ *Expedit ei, ut suspendatur mola asinaria in collo ejus, et demergatur in profundum maris.*—*Ibid.* 6.

dear brethren, of the latter vice, which, if it were removed from the world, both vices would cease at once; for if there were no one to give scandal, no one would be scandalized. With the object then, of removing these two vices, at least that is my wish and desire, I make my

Plan of Discourse.

To give scandal is not a human, but a diabolical vice, as I shall prove in the first part. Yet it is a common vice amongst men, as I shall show in the second part.

Christ Jesus, Thou didst warn Thy Apostles not to be scandalized; speak to-day to our hearts with Thy powerful inspirations, that none of us may give scandal. This we ask of Thee through the merits of Thy mother Mary and our holy angels guardian.

Just as they who promote the glory of God and the salvation of souls are called men of God :

It is true that every one who commits a mortal sin takes sides with the devil against God, for he despises and abandons God, and sells his soul to the devil for a little money, or for a short-lived pleasure. How blind and foolish a man must be to allow himself to be led so far astray for such a trifle! Still, the sinner gives only his own soul to the devil, as long as the sin is confined to himself. But he who by his actions gives scandal to others, joins with the devil in quite a special manner. In the Holy Scripture the Prophet Elias and other holy men are called "men of God," and St. Paul, writing to his disciple Timothy, calls him "man of God."¹ Why is that name given to them? The reason is evident; just as he who is employed by a king or prince, is called a servant, an agent, an ambassador, or a plenipotentiary of his sovereign, so he who is employed in doing the work of God, can be called a man, an agent of God. And what is the work of God amongst His creatures on earth? No other than to promote His own honor and glory, and to bring the souls of men to Heaven. Hence there is no work more divine than to co-operate in the salvation of souls, as the holy Fathers say.² Therefore, he who, by his good example, or salutary teaching, endeavors to gain over the souls of others, to lead them on to Heaven, and to keep them from evil, may really be called a man of God.

So he who gives scandal may be called a man of the devil.

From this it follows that, on the other hand, he who allows himself to be employed in doing the work of the devil, in furthering his interests, and carrying out his plans, must be called

¹ Homo Dei.—I. Tim. vi. 11.

² Omnium operum divinarum divinissimum.

a man of the devil, an ambassador and plenipotentiary, an agent and servant of the devil. Such in reality are they who give scandal. For what is the work of the devil? As the sworn, irreconcilable enemy of God, he labors day and night to upset all the plans of the Almighty, to thwart His designs, to draw souls away from His love and service, to lead them into sin and vice, and finally to drag them down to hell with himself. And therefore, in the Gospel of St. John, Jesus Christ calls him, "a murderer from the beginning;"¹ not, says St. John Chrysostom, because he slays the bodies of men; his object is to destroy something far more precious than that, namely, the immortal soul, by leading it into sin. To this end are directed all his plans and schemes, all his suggestions and temptations; and although, as theologians teach, his torments will be increased by every soul that goes to hell, yet, so great is his hatred of God and his envy of man, that he would rather increase his own torments, than allow a soul to serve God on earth, and love and praise Him in Heaven; therefore he tries in every possible way to prevent souls from serving God. Such are the malicious designs of the devil.

And what else do you do, O wicked men, when you give scandal to others in any way, and, as partisans of the devil, seek to further his interests, and help him to accomplish his designs? The devil, says St. Chrysostom, was a murderer from the beginning of the world in his own person, for by his cunning he deceived Eve, induced her to disobey the divine command, and thus brought death on all of us; but now it is by means of you that he murders souls; you are the dogs he sends out to drive other souls along with your own into his snares. What he cannot effect by his own temptations and evil suggestions, he works out by means of the scandalous manners, behavior, and language, by which you lead others into sin and bring them to their eternal ruin; for it is in that, that scandal really consists. The holy Apostle St. Paul, writing to the Romans about scandal, warns them not even to touch food or drink, if they thereby give occasion of sin to others. "Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died;"² "destroy not the work of God for meat."³ Hear this, O scandal giver! you do what the devil tries to do, that is, to destroy and ruin the work of God. What work is that?

For, like the
devil, he
ruins souls.

¹ Homicida ab initio.—John viii. 44.

² Noli cibo tuo illum perdere, pro quo Christus mortuus est.—Rom. xiv. 15.

³ Noli propter escam destruere opus Dei.—Ibid. 20.

The work of His hands, which He has created to the likeness of His own infinite Being. See, O Lord, says the Prophet David, "they have destroyed the things which Thou hast made."¹ But this is not enough; for they destroy a work which has cost Thee, O Lord, Thy life-blood! Can there be any greater malice than this?

Which it
cost the Son
of God so
much labor
to redeem.

Blessed Albert the Great, as Father Paul Segueri relates, once made a statue, and fitted it up so skilfully with wheels internally, that it could move itself to and fro, and now and then utter a sound like a living man. St. Thomas of Aquin, who was then his pupil, and who knew nothing of the statue, went once into his master's room, and seeing the wonderful movements of the figure, and hearing the sounds that issued from it, he thought it was an evil spirit that had come to tempt him, and raising his hand, he struck the statue with such force, that it fell to the ground in pieces. When Albert came in and saw what had been done, he cried out: "O my son, what have you done? In one hour you have ruined the work of thirty years!"² O man, if you give scandal only once, and are the occasion of even one soul committing a grievous sin, alas, what have you done? What precious work of art have you ruined and destroyed? Do you wish to know? Then look at Jesus Christ the Son of God, hanging on the Cross, with outstretched arms and opened side; He will say to you, that in one moment you have destroyed the work of thirty years! For during all that time, He will say, I have labored, and not only labored, but suffered, for the salvation of that soul. On its account I came down from Heaven, and became a poor servant, was laid in a manger as a little child, earned My bread by the sweat of My brow in a carpenter's workshop, and endured heat and cold in My journeys; for the sake of that soul I have wandered about over mountain and valley, and often suffered hunger and thirst; for the sake of that soul I have been vilified, and buffeted, and scourged; My head has been crowned with thorns, My whole body covered with wounds; for its sake I was nailed to the Cross, and gave up My spirit with the last drop of My blood. To keep this soul I have, after My death, employed so many means; I have fed it with My holy sacraments, and enlightened it by My inspirations; I have watched over it carefully by My holy angels, exhorted and instructed it in sermons preached by My servants,

¹ Quæ perfecisti destruxerunt. — Ps. x. 4.

² Fili, quid fecisti? Triginta annorum laborem una hora perdidisti.

sc that I might deter it from vice, encourage it to practise virtue, and keep it faithful to Me. This soul you have ruined in a moment by the scandal you have given it, and you have delivered it over into the hands of My sworn enemy, the devil! This sheep, which I have sought over mountain and valley, you have snatched from off My shoulders, and thrown into the jaws of the hellish wolf! Ask God the Father, and He will say to you: What have you done? You have torn out the apple of My eye! "He that toucheth you," He says by the Prophet Zacharias, "toucheth the apple of My eye."¹ Ask the Holy Ghost, and He will say to you: what have you done? You have ruined My temple and My dwelling place! "Know you not that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"² You have led astray My beloved bride, whom I had intended to espouse forever: "And I will betroth thee to Me forever."³ Thus you have done in a short time for the devil, what he could not do with all his wiles and stratagems.

Oh certainly, scandal-giving is a diabolical vice! "Accursed be the man," cries out St. Chrysostom in just anger, "accursed be the man who acts as an agent of the devil!"⁴ It is a sign of cowardice that deserves punishment, for a Christian to be afraid publicly to defend the honor of Jesus Christ, as was the case with some during the time of persecution, who concealed their faith through fear of death, and as many Christians do nowadays, who, through human respect, are afraid to open their mouth when there is a question of the glory of God, and whom Christ will be ashamed to acknowledge before His heavenly Father at the last day. But for a Christian to rise in open rebellion against Jesus Christ, to become a portion of the devil, and to enter into an alliance with him to destroy the souls that Christ redeemed at the cost of so much labor and suffering, that is indeed a most horrible depravity! O my God, we might well say, is it then possible that a man is more powerful to destroy souls, than Jesus Christ, Thy Almighty Son, is to save them? Certainly, answers St. Augustine; Christ has His sacraments, that, like so many fountains of grace, sanctify souls; but the devil has still more powerful sacraments, as instruments of reprobation, in order to damn souls; and these are they who give scandal to others. O just

Therefore to give scandal is a fearful and diabolical sin.

¹ Qui tetigerit vos, tangit pupillam oculi mei.—Zach. ii. 8.

² Nescitis, quia templum Dei estis, et Spiritus Dei habitat in vobis.—I. Cor. iii. 16.

³ Et sponsabo te mihi in sempiternum.—Osee ii. 19.

⁴ Maledictus sit homo diaboli advocatus.

God, how canst Thou bear with such people, and allow them to live? In the Old Law, which was not near so perfect and holy as the New, Thou gavest the command: "If a man open a pit, and dig one, and cover it not, and an ox or an ass fall into it, the owner of the pit shall pay the price of the beasts."¹ If a fire breaking out light upon thorns, and catch stacks of corn, or corn standing in the fields, he that kindled the fire shall make good the loss."² Behold now the fire of impurity, anger, and vindictiveness is often kindled by scandal, so that precious souls, created by Thee for Heaven, incur the eternal flames of hell; it is not oxen or asses, but immortal souls, that now fall into the pit dug for them by scandal-givers; and canst thou tolerate that? Dost Thou not require the loss to be made good?

Christ Himself says that a scandal-giver is a devil.

O meekest Saviour, how gently thou hast always dealt with the greatest sinners, so that Thou hast seldom reprov'd their vices harshly! Yet Thou wert once so displeas'd with Thy Apostle Peter, whom Thou didst love dearly, and who was animat'd with the best intentions towards Thee, that Thou didst call him a devil and drive him away from Thee, when he tried to dissuade Thee from undergoing Thy bitter Passion, although it was impossible either to lead Thee astray, or to scandalize Thee. "Go behind me, satan," Thou saidst to him, "thou art a scandal unto Me."³ When Judas actually betray'd Thee with a kiss, Thou saidst to him with the greatest gentleness: "Friend, whereto art thou come?"⁴ And Peter, who thought no evil, was call'd a devil by Thee? Herod, the incestuous tyrant, the adulterer and murderer, Thou didst call by no worse a name than that of fox: "Go and tell that fox."⁵ The wicked Pharisees, who were bursting with envy and hatred of Thee, Thou didst call simply "serpents, generation of vipers."⁶ But no one didst Thou call satan, that is, the worst of the devils, except Thy own Apostle Peter, who, through sheer compassionate love, wish'd to avert from Thee the disgraceful death that was in store for Thee; "Lord, be it far from Thee; this shall not be unto Thee."⁷ And no sooner had he said those words, than

¹ Si quis aperuerit cisternam, et foderit, et non operuerit eam, cecideritque bos aut asinus in eam, reddet dominus cisternæ pretium jumentorum.—Exod. xxi. 33, 34.

² Si ingressus ignis invenerit spinas, et comprehenderit acervos frugum, sive stantes segetes in agris, reddet damnum qui ignem succenderit.—Ibid. xxii. 6.

³ Vade post me, satana: scandalum es mihi.—Matth. xvi. 23.

⁴ Amice, ad quid venisti?—Ibid. xxvi. 50.

⁵ Ite, et dicite vulpi illi.—Luke xiii. 22.

⁶ Serpentes, genimina viperarum.—Matth. xxiii. 33.

⁷ Absit a te, Domine; non erit tibi hoc.—Ibid. xvi. 22.

Thou at once saidst to him: "Go behind Me, satan, thou art a scandal unto Me."

Oh, what a number of real scandals are given nowadays, and yet Thou art silent! Yes, God tolerates them; He is silent for the present, as He Himself says by the Prophet David: "Sitting, thou didst speak against thy brother and didst lay a scandal against thy mother's son; these things hast thou done, and I was silent." But wait; the day of my vengeance will come; "I will reprove thee and set before thy face;"² "woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh." Woe to him who joins with the devil, and robs Me of souls! Christians, is it possible that such a diabolical vice should be found amongst us? It is no wonder that the devil should plot against our souls, and do his utmost to lead us into sin; for his envy and hatred of God make him mad and desperate. But that men, who still adore the true God, that Christians, who publicly profess to be followers of Jesus Christ, and who still hope, as children of God, to inherit the kingdom of Heaven, should be guilty of leading others into sin, that implies such diabolical malice, that we might well question its possibility. But, alas, it is only too possible, only too true, for people are guilty of it every day. Although scandal-giving is a most grievous and diabolical vice, yet it is a common one nowadays amongst men, as I now proceed to explain.

And threatens him with special punishment.

Second Part.

There are many who have a wrong idea of the meaning of the word scandal; they confound it very often with back-biting, or else they use it in an improper sense to express an exceptional degree of malice or effrontery in an action. That is a scandalous thing, they say, meaning thereby that it is a very bad, or a very disgraceful thing. It is true that scandal is really given by a very bad action; but the epithet, as applied to that action, does not express fully the nature of the vice of scandal-giving. According to the teaching of St. Thomas, and of all theologians, to take scandal, or to be scandalized, means "to commit sin in thought, word, or deed, because one has heard or seen something in another which has given occasion to that sin," no matter what the nature of the sin may be. To give scandal, of which we are now speaking, is "to say or do anything which occasions the spiritual ruin of another."³ Thus he gives scandal who

How scandal may be given.

¹ Sedens adversus fratrem tuum loquebaris, et adversus filium matris tuæ ponebas scandalum. Hæc fecisti et tacui.—Ps. xlix. 20, 21.

² Arguam te, et statuam contra faciem tuam.—Ibid. 21.

³ Dictum vel factum occasionem præbens ruinæ.

does, or says, or omits, in presence of others, anything that either in itself, or through force of circumstances, is apt to lead them into sin, whether they really commit the sin or not, or whether or not it is the intention of the person who does or omits the action, to lead them into sin thereby. Alas, what is more common than this, among people of all classes! How often is it not found even among those who are otherwise good and pious? Nay, how often may not one thus be the cause of sin, when one least imagines it!

It is often given by words and outward signs.

In the first place, scandal may be given by word, and all those are guilty of it who by instructions, advice, exhortation, command, or request, endeavor to lead others into sin, or to deter them from doing good; all who praise the sins of others, or encourage them in wrong-doing; all who ridicule or laugh at others, in order to dissuade them from the good they are doing, or intend to do; all who, in presence of others, boast of the sins they have committed; all who speak contemptuously, or sarcastically, of God and His saints, of holy and spiritual things, or of the ceremonies of the Church; all who speak immodestly, or relate impure tales, or what is still worse sometimes, use double-meaning expressions tending to impurity; all who, in a quarrelsome and contentious spirit, use expressions that they know will provoke others to anger; and so on. Alas, what a number of people there are in the world who thus give scandal by word! Again, scandal may be given by outward signs, such as indecent behavior, laughing, winking, letter-writing, showing indecent pictures, editing, printing, selling, giving, or lending unchaste books and romances, and by immodesty in dress; for all these things occasion impure thoughts and desires. Alas, what a number of people there are who give scandal in that way!

By acts and bad example.

Thirdly, scandal is given by act and example; and all those are guilty of it who, in presence of others, do a wrong action, which is apt to be imitated by them; thus, they who associate with, or support, persons of bad character; those who openly go to houses of bad repute; who allow or tolerate in their houses dangerous promiscuous gatherings, or permit those under their charge to take part in them; those who lead reckless lives, and give just reason for suspecting that they are addicted to a certain vice. Alas, how many there are who give scandal in that way! Thus sin is committed, especially by superiors and those in authority, when they give bad example. For, if the elders of the Jewish nation cried out against Our Lord in their madness,

“crucify Him, crucify Him,” what wonder is it that the common people joined in the cry? If the town-clock goes wrong, how can the other clocks, which must be regulated by it, keep the right time? Priests and religious are especially guilty in this respect, if they lead worldly, sensual, intemperate or scandalous lives; for, as Christ says, they must be “the salt of the earth,”¹ and by their good and edifying example keep the souls of others from the corruption of sin. How inexcusable they would be, says St. Gregory, if they gave bad example, and thus were a cause of ruin to souls! They must be, “the light of the world,”² to show others the way to virtue and to zeal in the divine service. What a perversion it would be, if, although they must give light to others, the latter were to see nothing to imitate in them, but vice and imperfection. They must be, and are in fact appointed by Christ in His Church, by which they live, as pastors of souls, whose lives are to be imitated by the members of their flock. What inconceivable malice it would be for them to lead the hellish wolf into the fold of Christ, by their bad example! In the same way too, parents are guilty of sin, who are not careful as to what they say or do in presence of their children; for thus the latter learn much evil that they should be ignorant of; and the same is to be said of those parents who have a habit of cursing or swearing, or are addicted to other vices, and thus are the occasion of their children acquiring a habit of sin, and transmitting it to their posterity. Alas, it is but too true that many children have no worse spiritual enemies, than their own fathers and mothers!

Fourthly, scandal may be given by omission, that is, by not preventing sin when it is in one's power to do so; thus they are guilty of scandal-giving, who tolerate houses of ill fame, or do not punish or remove abuses from a community, when they are bound to do so by virtue of their office; masters and mistresses sin by not training their children and servants in the fear of God, by not punishing them for wrong-doing, by not keeping them away from dangerous occasions, and by not instructing, or causing them to be instructed, in good. Alas, how many there are who give scandal by negligence of that kind, and deliver over precious souls into the hands of the devil! Fifthly, scandal may be given through culpable ignorance. Many imagine, if they do no harm themselves, and do not wish to give scandal to others, or to lead them into sin, that they are all

By omission and culpable ignorance.

¹ Sel terræ.

² Lux mundi.

right, and have nothing to answer for. What have I to do with other people? they say. If they find an occasion of sin in my actions or behavior, it is due to their own malice; I do what pleases me, and I conform to the general custom; I have not the least intention of giving them scandal. A likely thing indeed! What is the value of your intention? "Shall we be any better off," asks St. Peter Damian, "if we are damned for the sins of others, although not for our own,"¹ when we could and should have prevented the sins of others? "Few sins, indeed, are committed by you," wrote St. Augustine once to a certain nobleman, "but many on account of you." After Berengarius had renounced heresy, and had done penance for his other sins, and when he was on his death-bed, ah, he said, now I must appear before the judgment-seat of God, and give an account of my past life! As far as my own sins are concerned, I hope to stand well with my Judge, for I have repented of and detested them with my whole heart; but as to the sins which I have caused others to commit by my false teaching and bad example, I am afraid I shall be lost on account of them! Alas, how many there are who will have to make the same confession at the hour of death!

Even by actions that are in themselves lawful.

Even by actions that are lawful in themselves scandal may be given, if there is reasonable cause for suspecting that others will find an occasion of sin in them. There was no law in former times, nor is there any law now, forbidding the eating of meat which has been offered to idols; the meat is just as good as before; and yet, since the early Christians refused to eat it, because they wished to have no fellowship with heathens or idolaters, St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Wherefore, if meat scandalize my brother, I will never eat flesh, lest I should scandalize my brother."² Although there is no law against it, yet the law of fraternal charity forbids me to do it. What a fearful amount of scandal is thus given by actions which are lawful in themselves, but are rendered bad by circumstances! For instance, there are many actions and many subjects of conversation that are lawful to married people among themselves, but become sinful if others are present. Your friendship with that person may be harmless in itself, but are you not bound to break it off, so as to prevent scandal, if it gives rise to a sus-

¹ Quid nobis proderit, non damnari proprio peccato, si damnatur alieno?

² Pauca quidem per te, sed multa propter te.

³ Quapropter, si esca scandalizat fratrem meum, non manducabo carnem in æternum, ne fratrem meum scandalizem.—I. Cor. viii. 13.

picion that you are committing sin? I do not intend leading others into sin, you say; and I believe you. For he would indeed be a man of the devil, and there are many such in the world, who would deliberately set about betraying his neighbor into sin. But that has nothing to do with your action; you may desire that no one should think evil; nevertheless you are guilty of the sin of scandal, if you do or say anything, or allow anything to be observed in your manner or behavior, that of its own nature, or by force of circumstances, is capable of enticing others to do evil.

For instance, a woman goes about, according to the detestable fashion of the day, with uncovered, or very lightly covered neck and shoulders. (Thanks be to God! there is a great improvement in that respect in this country.) She has no evil intention, she maintains; and her only object is to conform to the fashion. I quite believe her; but does that excuse her before God? She will find out that when she is summoned to judgment, no matter what the fashion is, even if all of her sex went about dressed in that way, she is still guilty of the sin of scandal, which no sound theology can excuse; for that style of dress is in itself apt to excite bad thoughts and desires. And here I do not wish to speak of a certain kind of dress, which is now very common amongst women, so that if any here present are dressed in that way, they need not be ashamed; but that dress owes its origin to nothing but the vain spirit of the world, which, to say the least of it, is opposed to the humble law of Jesus Christ, and it is very apt to give rise to bad thoughts and desires and thus be an occasion of sin. A few years ago, one could hardly look up, when meeting a fashionably dressed woman, so scantily was the upper portion of the body covered; now one can hardly look down, for the covering is deficient, on account of the hooped and puffed out dresses that are in vogue. I do not like to speak of this matter at all. I thought at first that that fashion was adopted for the sake of economy; but it appears that even more material is now required than formerly. Again I imagined that perhaps it was a comfortable style of dress; but in that too I was mistaken, for it seems that when those women are at home, they lay the hooped dress aside for comfort's sake; certainly they can move about more conveniently without it, as we see by the efforts they make, and the postures they assume, when trying to sit down or to get into a seat in church. The whole thing then is simply vanity, and a vanity

By vanity
in dress.

which can easily occasion bad thoughts to unmortified people. Oh, hold your tongue, you say to me; there is no use in your talking about it! It is the fashion, and it is useless for you to try to preach it down! And I am afraid you are right, too; otherwise I should not have kept silence about the matter so long; as it is, I will say no more about it; I will not even mention the name of the dress.

In which amendment is to be vainly looked for.

Ah, my good God, have things come to such a pass, that one dare not speak out the truth plainly, and for the sole reason that, since no amendment can be hoped for, they who would otherwise learn their obligations may not be punished more severely, and be less excusable before Thy judgment-seat! The floodgates are opened wide; no efforts can now keep back the torrent; the fashion is too general. Alas, it seems to me that I again hear the Jews crying out to Pilate, when he wished to free Our Lord: "We have a law, and according to the law, he ought to die."¹ But why? asks Pilate; what harm has He done? "I find no cause in Him."² No matter about that; we have a law, and according to it, He must die, even if He is innocent. In the same way, I say, people seem to me to act, when they allege the fashions as an excuse for indecency in dress. But, Christians, the fashions are opposed to the humble law of Jesus Christ! No matter; "we have a law, and according to the law He ought to die;" we have our fashions and customs, and according to them the spirit of Christ must die in us, and the spirit of His holy Gospel must be set aside. But your fashions give occasion to many eyes and hearts to crucify Jesus anew! We cannot help that; we have the fashion, and according to it, He must be crucified. Eyes may be scandalized, hearts may sin by bad desires, Jesus may have to die again; we must allow it to be so; the law of the world and the fashions require it. Christ Jesus, hear what is said by Thy Christians, who profess to be Thy children and followers! But what is the use of my giving up the fashions? each one thinks; others will still adhere to them, and then I shall have to be ashamed of myself; and so they all remain as they were before. Why then do you not say: what is the use of my entering on the narrow way that leads to Heaven? All the others will continue to walk on the broad way to hell; and then I shall have to be ashamed of myself to go to Heaven alone? What is the use of my being the only one to

¹ Nos legem habemus, et secundum legem debet mori.—John xix. 7.

² Nullam invenio in eo causam.—Ibid. 4.

abstain from giving scandal? All the others will give it, and I shall have to be ashamed of being the only one who is not an occasion of sin to others? No; you should rather say: let others go where they will, I am determined to enter on the way of humility, and to follow in the footsteps of Our Lord and His servants; let others undertake to be responsible for the sins they cause their neighbor to commit, I will look to myself, and see that I have nothing to answer for; let others follow the vain fashions of the world, I have but one soul, which I must and will bring to Heaven by the surest road. If each one would come to this determination, the objectionable fashion would soon be abolished. But people prefer to go with the crowd; "we have a law," they say. Now, dearest Saviour, what can I do? I must even let them have their way!

But I hear Thee crying out, and threatening. "Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh," no matter in what manner it is given! Woe to him who is the occasion of sin to others, either by word or deed, by signs or outward behavior, according to or against the fashion, with or without a malicious intention! Woe to that man from Me! The time will come when I will demand from him an account of the labors I underwent, the blood I shed, the death I suffered, which he made profitless to so many souls. Woe to that man from the souls that are scandalized and betrayed into sin by him! The time will come when they will cry out for vengeance against him, and I will hear their cry, and avenge them. Woe to that man from the very demons whom he joined, and whose interests he promoted! The time will come when he will be their companion in eternal torments.

Oh no, my God, let it not go so far as that! I hope for better things from Thy endless mercy, which I can still move by my repentance and tears! I acknowledge that I have dug a pit for many a soul, by my bad example! Perhaps there are now souls in hell who are lost through me. Oh woe to me, if that is the case! I can bewail my own sins, but an ocean of tears could not extinguish the flames of hell. What am I to do? I give Thee my soul, O Lord, as a pledge; avenge Thyself on it, but during this life, and according to the measure of Thy mercy. I will be more careful in future not to give any one knowingly the least occasion to sin; and I will work with all possible zeal to keep others from sin, and to incite them to good by giving them an edifying example, that I may bring them with me to Thee in Heaven. Amen.

Woe to all
who in any
way give
scandal.

Resolution
of amend-
ment.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Feast of St. Thomas, Apostle.

Text.

Nisi videro in manibus ejus fixuram clavorum . . . non credam.
John xx. 25.

“Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails . . . I will not believe.”

What a number of sins St. Thomas committed by making that resolution! First of all he was guilty of incredulity, since he did not believe the repeated assurances of Our Lord that He would rise again, and would not admit that the Resurrection had really been accomplished; secondly, of obstinacy, since he persisted in his wrong opinion, although the other Apostles and the holy women had told him that they had actually seen and spoken with the Lord; thirdly, of presumption, because he dared to prescribe to Our Lord the manner in which he was to be convinced of the truth: “except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe;” fourthly, of scandal, which he gave all the other disciples by his obstinacy, so that doubtless many of them were impatient, angry and discontented; nay, some of them may have commenced to doubt about the truth of Our Lord’s resurrection, and to think that they had perhaps seen a spirit instead of Him. It is not my purpose now, my dear brethren, to decide which of these sins is the most grievous; but I think the sin of scandal is one of the worst; for to take scandal is mostly a consequence of human weakness, etc. *Continues as before.*

SIXTIETH SERMON.

ON THE EVIL EFFECTS OF SCANDAL.

Subject.

They who give scandal are sworn enemies and bitter opponents of Christ and of the holy angels guardian; therefore, woe to them!—*Preached on the Feast of the Holy Angels Guardian.*

Text.

Vae homini illi per quem scandalum venit.—Matth. xviii. 7.
“Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh.”

Introduction.

Not without reason has the Catholic Church appointed the gospel of to-day to be read on the Feast of the holy angels guardian; for when we consider the matter rightly, we shall see that there is no sin which Christ and His holy angels hate more than scandal-giving; nay, they have no greater enemies on earth than those by whom scandal comes. For the latter, instead of being grateful to their Saviour and to their faithful guardians for the countless benefits received from them every day and moment of their lives, ally themselves with the devil and make war on Christ and His angels, as I shall now prove without further introduction. I speak now, my dear brethren, of scandal in general, no matter how it is given, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

They who give scandal are sworn enemies and bitter opponents of Christ and of the holy angels guardian; therefore, "woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh!" Such is the whole subject.

Christ Jesus, and you, heavenly spirits, help me to-day to defend your honor against those enemies of yours, and to gain a victory over their minds! This I beg especially of thee, O Mary Queen of angels, that none of those who are here present may be in the number of the unhappy wretches against whom that curse has been uttered, "woe to that man."

To give scandal and to be scandalized are two different things, one of which can be without the other. For instance, there are three of you together; one begins an impure conversation, and thus gives scandal to the other two; the second laughs at it, and consents to a bad thought; he is scandalized; the third is angry with both of them, and leaves their company; he commits no sin, but rather practises a work of virtue. From this we can see what little reason many pious souls have to grow uneasy, when they hear or see anything wicked that displeases them, and to complain that they have been scandalized. What nonsense that is! How have you been scandalized? Have you committed a sin on account of what you have heard or seen? By no means. You have been disgusted and angry at the sin committed by others, and therefore, instead of committing sin, you have rather done a meritorious action. Being scandalized, then, means to offend God on account of some action or omis-

In what scandal-giving consists.

sion on the part of others; while to give scandal means to do or omit something which gives or can give occasion of sin to another. This latter is the vice that Christ warns us against, in the gospel; a vice that, grievous as it is, is unfortunately only too common in the world nowadays amongst people of all classes; so that one might almost say with truth that one half of the world gives scandal, and the other half suffers from it, and thus, on account of scandal, the whole world is in a state of sin.

How scandal is given.

I should require a whole day for my sermon, if I were to explain the different ways in which this sin is committed, even by people who do not actually intend committing it. I shall briefly repeat what I have said more at length on a former occasion on this subject; for there are many who hear a sermon about the wickedness of a certain vice, and yet do not know how that vice is committed, so that they can neither know what faults and sins they are guilty of in that way, nor amend them. Be attentive, then, to what I am about to say. Scandal can be given by words, and all those are guilty of it who command, advise, urge, or request their neighbor to do something unlawful; also all who try to dissuade others from doing works of Christian piety and virtue; all who praise and approve of the evil done by others, and encourage them in doing it; all who condemn or revile others for being pious; all who boast of their sins, relate unchaste stories, or sing impure songs; all who vilify others knowingly, so as to make them angry; and so on. Scandal can be given by signs, by winking, laughing, writing impure letters, exposing indecent pictures to view, selling, giving, or lending bad books and love tales, indecency in dress, etc. Scandal can be given by act and example, by committing sin in presence of others, by purchasing stolen goods from the thief, by helping to commit sin, by keeping suspicious characters, or frequenting houses of ill fame, by encouraging or permitting dangerous gatherings, or allowing those under one's charge to take part in them, etc. Scandal can be given by omission, by not hindering evil when possible, by superiors not correcting and abolishing abuses and vices, by parents not instructing their children and servants in good, and not punishing them for their sins. In a word, scandal can be given by saying, doing, or omitting anything which, of its own nature or by force of circumstances, is capable of leading others into any kind of sin, although there be no intention of leading them astray, although no sin actually follows.

Woe to all men by whom scandal comes! Woe to them, if it were only because they take sides with the devil against Christ and His angels, who seek nothing so earnestly as the glory of God and the salvation of souls! In both these objects they are opposed by scandal-givers, who try to rob them of souls, and God of glory. The angels are commissioned by Jesus Christ to guard from evil and to encourage to good the souls entrusted to them; to that end they make use of inward inspirations and admonitions, by which our understanding learns divine truths and experiences the sweet impulse and movement by which the will is impelled to good, and the salutary uneasiness which warns us so often when we are in danger of sin. All this is to the end that we may progress more and more in the way of salvation. But how do the partisans of the devil, that is scandal-givers, act? Their object is to teach wickedness to innocent souls, and thus to lead them astray. David calls such people teachers who "sit in the chair of pestilence:" "Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the chair of pestilence."¹ What is that chair of pestilence, and who are they that sit thereon? St. Bernard answers in the following words: "He sits thereon, who teaches others to sin by his example."² Why does the Prophet call it a chair of pestilence, and not of impiety? Because, answers St. Basil, there are two kinds of sin; some are like ordinary maladies, which hurt only the person who suffers them; others are like a plague, which spreads its contagion among many. "The Holy Scripture," he says, "calls those sinners pestilential, who not only destroy themselves, but spread among others the plague that infects them."³ It is certain that most souls preserve their innocence and piety, because they know little or nothing of certain vices. Many children who are educated in convents preserve their innocence to their old age, and even to the grave, who, if they had lived in the tumult of the world, where they would have seen, heard, and learned wickedness, would have been led into many kinds of sin, and have been lost forever. Take a child ten or twelve years old; I ask you, if that child never heard an impure conversation, would it know how to talk impurely? If it never heard cursing or

He who gives scandal strives against Christ and the holy angels to ruin souls.

¹ Beatus vir, qui non abiit in consilio impiorum, et in via peccatorum non stetit, et in cathedra pestilentie non sedit.—Ps. i. 1.

² Sedet, qui docet exemplo suo, faciens peccare alios.—S. Bern. Serm. 35, ex parvis.

³ Pestilentes solet scriptura vocare, qui non solum seipsos perdunt, sed etiam in alios pestem suam juxta pestilentis morbi rationem transferunt.—S. Basil in Ps. i.

swearing, would it know how to use impious language? If it never was tempted to impurity by others, and knew not how sins of that kind are committed, would it be guilty of them? And if young people are dissolute in their morals, they have learned to be so from others; children learn it from grown-up people, and these latter from their seniors. See what a plague is spread in a community by those agents of the devil who give scandal!

He is worse
than the
devil in this
respect.

Why do I call them agents of the devil? The name is far too good for them; they do more to lead souls astray, than the devil himself. When Bajazet II., sultan of Turkey, had defeated the Christian forces at Nicopolis, he caused six hundred of the noblest among the French prisoners to be slain before his eyes. He had ordered John, Duke of Burgundy, who was also a prisoner, to be slain with the others, when a certain pasha stood up and said to him: Sire, let this man go free, and he will destroy more Christians than our whole army could. And the event proved that he was right; for the duke afterwards caused such dissensions and wars throughout the whole of France, that more people lost their lives, than the Mussulmans could ever have cut down with their scimiters. The same can truly be said of those who give scandal. One of them gains more for hell, and destroys more souls, than a hundred demons could, with all their temptations and snares. Which of you, my dear brethren, can say that an evil spirit has given him a bad example, and thereby led him into sin? Who can say the devil has taught me this or that vice? You have never seen one of those fallen spirits, and if one were to appear to you, you would run away through fear and terror of him? But are there not many who must acknowledge that they have been led to offend God by the treachery of their fellow-men? Thus, what the demon cannot do by himself to destroy souls, he effects by the help of scandal-givers. What caused the fall of our forefather Adam? The hellish serpent did not dare to tempt him, knowing well that he was too wise to yield to temptation, but when Eve came up to him with her flatteries and caresses, after having eaten the forbidden fruit, his ruin and that of us all was at once effected. In the History of the Church we read of holy men, such as Macarius, James, John, and others, who, after having spent long years in the desert and in the mountain caves, practising the greatest austerities, fell into the most shameful crimes. Who caused their fall? The devil cannot boast of having done it; he had made repeated attacks on them; he had appeared to them in the shape of a lion, *aa*

ox, a swine; he had beaten them till they were half dead, but he could not gain a single victory over them; an abandoned woman was able to do more than all the demons in hell, to make those men offend God and fall into the most grievous sins. So powerful is scandal to destroy souls; and the devil, with all his rage against souls and all his craft in tempting them, would often fail to succeed, were it not that he calls in scandal-givers to help him.

“Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire,”¹ says God by the Prophet Isaias. Who is that smith? He is the devil, answers St. Jerome, who kindles the fire of anger and impurity in the hearts of men. And how is that fire kindled? Go into a smith’s forge, and you will see that the fire is hidden under the ashes, as if it were quite extinguished; what does the smith do, when he wishes to go on with his work? Does he start the fire by blowing it with his breath? If he trusted to that alone, it would take him a long time to make the iron red-hot! No; he works the bellows two or three times, and the fire blazes up at once. What the smith cannot do by himself, he does by means of the bellows. In the same way does that hellish smith, the devil, act. How many innocent souls there are who, happy in their ignorance, do not yet know anything about impurity, anger, or vindictiveness! Evil inclinations and desires are, as it were, dead within them, like coals under the ashes, and the devil, who cannot bear to see them so innocent, attacks them and suggests bad thoughts to them; they, however, do not understand or know the meaning of such thoughts, and the temptation has no effect on them. What does the tempter then do? He blows his bellows, he makes use of some dissolute companion to explain to those innocent souls the evil they were hitherto in ignorance of, or to place the evil really before them by bad example or indecent pictures, and thus the flames of passion are fanned, the fire of impurity, of bad thoughts and desires blazes up, and burns so fiercely, that many years may elapse before it is extinguished. The devil is also compared to a hunter, who goes out to ensnare souls. A huntsman may go about for a long time with his gun or his snares, before he finds any game, because it all lies hidden in the bush. What does he do then? He takes a dog with him to start the game, and then he can easily secure it. Oh, how many a young girl spends her time in modest retirement at home, oc-

Shown by
similes.

¹ Ecce, ego creavi fabrum sufflantem in igne prunas.—Isai. liv. 16.

cupied with her usual work, without a wanton glance being ever cast at her, without the devil, in spite of all his efforts, being able to turn her mind away from the service of God and the practice of virtue! But how long does that last? Until some hellish dog finds her out and tempts her; some traitor, under the pretext of courtesy, friendship, or relationship, begins to speak to her at first in a most innocent manner; then he goes on to flattery, and last of all to scandalous talk and behavior; and eventually he brings matters so far, that she leaves her solitude, stands idly at the door, and mixes freely with the opposite sex. Alas, the hellish hunter of souls has succeeded in ensnaring her!

Therefore
he is more
to be feared
than the
devil.

O you wicked teachers of evil, who give scandal to others, are you not ashamed to think that you are worse even than the devil? Are you not afraid to act the part of incendiaries of hearts? Are you not terrified at the impious war you wage against Christ and His angels, endeavoring, as you do, to rob them of, and to ruin, human souls that have cost them such care and trouble? It would be better for us, if God were to open the gates of hell, and to allow all the demons to roam about the world in visible shape to tempt man to sin! Better, I say, and safer for us; for the just, in their fright, could and would easily defend themselves by the sign of the Cross, and by calling on Christ and His angels for protection. But when you, wicked men, attack innocent souls so secretly and treacherously, who can be sufficiently on his guard against you? Where can one fly, to be safe from your machinations? See, O dear Lord, “they have destroyed the things which Thou hast made;”¹ the good Thou hast built up in souls by means of Thy angels, they with Thy sworn enemy pull down! The precious souls, ransomed with Thy Blood, which Thou and Thy angels wish to bring to Heaven, are hurled by those traitors into the abyss of hell! Oh, “woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh.” What a terrible crime it is to lead others into sin!

He strives
against
Christ and
His angels
by spread-
ing sin and
vice.

The next charge laid on the holy angels, as ambassadors of Jesus Christ, and which they so carefully endeavor to fulfil, is to promote the honor and glory of their Creator, by spreading His name and His praises everywhere, by upholding His authority throughout the world, and exhorting all men to serve and adore Him, so that all may bless their Creator here in time and hereafter in eternity. O blessed spirits, what glorious things

¹ Quæ perfecisti, destruxerunt.—Ps. x. 4.

could you not do in fulfilling this office of yours, were it not for the scandal given by wicked men! For these latter are building up another kingdom in the world, the kingdom of the devil, the kingdom of the sins which they sow broadcast and spread everywhere by their bad example; they deprive virtue of its lustre, and vice of its shame, and thus vast numbers of people are made to dishonor their Creator during this life, and to be cursed by Him in the next. Let us see, my dear brethren, whether I am saying too much. If all were like the small number of whom the Prophet David says: "Much peace have they that love Thy law; and to them there is no stumbling block,"¹ because they pay no attention to what others do or say, but always mind what they have to do themselves, then indeed, (and would to God it were so in reality!) I should confess that I have said too much; but who does not see and experience the immense power of bad example, and how it draws others like a strong chain? "How easily," says St. Ambrose, "one goes astray when one has a bad guide!"² And this is all the more apt to occur, because, unfortunately, our nature is more inclined to evil than to good. Thus the words we read in the book of Jeremias are verified: "Lift up thy eyes on high; and see where thou hast not prostituted thyself; thou didst sit in the ways, waiting for them as a robber in the wilderness, and thou hast polluted the land with thy fornication, and with thy wickedness;"³ for a whole country or town is sometimes polluted by the scandal given by one individual. Because, as Sanchez remarks, if there is only one who sins publicly, or entices to sin, many others sin at once through him; for some sin by keeping silence and not decriing his wickedness, others by approving of it, others again by the uncharitable talk it gives rise to, and the greater number by imitating the bad example set them.

Hence it is that one is easily inclined to do what one, without being astonished thereby, hears of and sees others doing. A stranger on a journey comes to a river that he has to cross; he cannot find a bridge, nor does he know whether the river is deep or not, so that he is afraid to ford it. He walks along the bank for a time, and at length notices the traces of footsteps leading down to the water; he is overjoyed at this, and at once ventures

Which, on account of the scandal given, are committed openly and without shame.

¹ Pax multa diligentibus legem tuam, et non est illis scandalum.—Ps. cxviii. 165.

² Cito malis ducibus erratur.—S. Ambr. de fuga sæculi. c. ult.

³ Leva oculos tuos in directum, et vide, ubi non prostrata sis; in viis sedebas, expectans eos quasi latro in solitudine, et polluisti terram in fornicationibus tuis, et in malitiis tuis.—Jer. iii. 2.

in. Foolish man! wait: how do you know that you will be able to get across? Oh, I see that others have been here before me, and where they crossed, I can cross too. But are you sure that they reached the opposite bank alive, and were not carried down by the stream? He does not stop to consider that; he rushes in, gets into a deep place, and is drowned. The footsteps led him astray. Oh, you who give scandal, into what a raging, hellish sea you plunge, whenever you commit mortal sin! You dishonor your God, you kill your precious souls, you ruin yourselves completely! But that is not all; you leave behind treacherous footsteps to mislead those who follow, and thus you involve many souls in the same destruction with yourselves, as St. Gregory complains: "when by our works we give scandal to others, we go out of our way as it were, to leave footsteps, to lead astray those who follow us."¹ How many would never have entered on the way of sin, if they had not been led astray by the footsteps of others! At first a pious soul is horrified at the very name of this or that vice. Shall I do that? she asks herself. If you do, says her conscience, you will be ruined. But meanwhile she notices the footsteps of others, their examples and the customs they conform to, and her horror is gone at once! Where they have gone, she thinks, surely I may go. A well-reared child is horrified at the first oath or curse it hears; but if it grows accustomed to such language from its father at home, or from other children in the street, it will begin to curse and swear too; if my parents or the servants curse, it thinks, why should not I? A modest, innocent young girl is disgusted at anything approaching impurity; but if she hears unchaste conversation, attends promiscuous gatherings, in which the laws of purity are certainly not too strictly observed, or sees others behaving improperly, and if she hears and sees such things frequently, she will think that, since so many do those things, there cannot be much harm in them, and there will soon be an end to her former modesty and reserve. An innocent young man avoids dangerous company and suspicious houses; he is invited to such places by others, laughed at as wishing to appear a saint if he refuses to go, and at last he accepts the invitation. A man of a peaceful disposition hates nothing more than quarrelling and fighting; he knows that it is unchristian to return evil for evil; but he sees how the children of the world fight and quarrel, and become bitter enemies for a single word of contradiction; he hears

¹ Quasi inflexo extra viam pede sequentibus vestigia distrata relinquimus, dum per nostra ad scandalum aliena corda provocamus.—S. Greg. L. ii. Moral c. 25.

that they who bear injuries patiently, without trying to have satisfaction for them, are laughed at as cowards, and he too goes the way of the world. A business man, whose tender conscience at first makes him uneasy, lest he might now and then be guilty of an injustice, notices the footsteps of others, and sees how they are accustomed to act under certain circumstances; oh, he thinks, they have a conscience too; why should it not be lawful for me to do as they do? there is no other way of getting through the world nowadays; and so he acts as he sees others acting. Thus a countless multitude of souls are daily hurried to eternal ruin.

But if the bad example is also given by those who are in high positions, and they, whose bounden duty it is to punish vices and abuses, overlook them, and actually indulge in them, oh, then, indeed, the devil has all he wants; then all remonstrance and preaching are useless; there is no hope of amendment; vice has received the stamp of authority, and it can almost prescribe against the divine law; it loses even, so to speak, all its sinfulness, and passes for virtue. Hence, says Salvianus, it is looked on as dishonorable amongst Christians to live piously according to the maxims of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and men are almost driven to lead vicious lives according to the general custom, and to be ashamed of serving God, lest they should be ridiculed. In my youth, he says, I ran so blindly on in the way of sin, that I was ashamed to appear less wicked than others. I heaped sin upon sin, not merely for the sake of pleasure, but that I might be more praised and esteemed; and when I saw that others surpassed me in wickedness, I pretended that I had committed deeds of shame, of which I really was not guilty, and boasted of them, because I dreaded appearing more chaste, innocent, or pious than others. See, he concludes, what company brought me to! My dear brethren, how many vices are prevalent now in the world, which, by dint of frequent repetition, no longer cause shame, and are looked upon as honorable, so that there is no hope of amendment as far as they are concerned! If one were to come into this world for the first time, and to see a drunken man, he would think he was looking at a wild beast; but how do people in our dear fatherland look on drunkenness now? They have so many footsteps before them leading in that direction, that it is hardly deemed a disgrace any longer to say of a man that he is drunk. It is considered an honor to be able to make a man drunk. If one of our Christian forefathers were to rise from his grave, and to go into many cities of Europe,

Until all
shame is
lost.

and, alas, of Germany (I will not come any nearer home), and to hear the horrible oaths and curses which old and young daily utter against each other, would he think that he was in the country in which he was born and bred? Would he not rather imagine himself to be in a kind of hell, in which nothing is heard but imprecations, curses and blasphemies? If he saw how freely and openly young people of both sexes associate with each other, and the vain fashions in dress that have been invented by the devil for the destruction of souls, would he think that he was in the same town in which he lived formerly? Would he not rather imagine that he was in some part of the world, where half-clad savages roam about? But all that has become the fashion now; it is an honorable, a respectable thing to conform to it, and any arguing against it is only a waste of time and words. What God will have to say hereafter of those fashions, we shall find out too late. I will say nothing more of this, since I am speaking of scandal in general. Meanwhile, "woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh!"

Thus the labor of the holy angels is frustrated.

Ah, dear angels, what is the good of your coming down from Heaven to us, as ambassadors of Christ? Why do you remain always at our side? Why do you spend the whole day and the whole night watching over the salvation of our souls? Why do you take such trouble to keep us from evil, to urge us to good, and to promote the honor and glory of God? What is the good of it all? We miserable mortals put to shame all your diligence, care, and trouble; we labor, by word, and work, and example, to keep out of your society the souls you love so much, to deliver them over to the devil, and to banish from the world the honor and glory of your Creator and ours! Is it possible, my dear brethren, that Christians are guilty of such wickedness? It is no wonder that the devil persecutes virtue, for he has long since despaired of ever seeing God; that he tempts souls and tries to lead them into sin, we can readily understand, for he is full of bitter hatred against God, who has condemned him to hell for ever; that he opposes Jesus Christ need not astonish us, for he is driven out everywhere by the Sacred Name; nor is it surprising that he who is full of envy should try to prostrate the efforts of the holy angels, because he is banished out of Heaven and their society forever, and has nothing to hope for any more; but how can a Christian, who still has hopes of eternal salvation, who has been redeemed from hell by the Blood of Jesus Christ, who receives so many benefits every day, hour, and mo-

ment from the holy angels, and who is in such extreme need of their protection and guardianship,—how can such a one dare try to throw down what they are building up?

“Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh!” Woe to him! I will not now say from God, from the souls he has betrayed, or from the demons; but woe to him from the holy angels! How can they wish to guard him, if he acts as their enemy? “Behold,” says God, “I will send My angel, who shall go before thee, and keep thee in thy journey, and bring thee into the place that I have prepared;”¹ but, “take notice of him, and hear his voice, and do not think him one to be contemned.”² Why? “For he will not forgive when thou hast sinned.”³ And what revenge will he take, when, besides sinning yourself, you lead into sin the soul entrusted to his care? In truth, if, as Christ says, the conversion of one soul causes the angels such joy,—“I say to you, there shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance,”⁴—how great must be your sorrow, O blessed spirits, when a soul is lost eternally? Ninety-nine times greater than your joy at ninety-nine just. Imagine, my dear brethren, the anger of a mother with the servant who, through mere wantonness, allows her little son to fall out of her arms on the ground, so that he hurts himself, and is lamed. How, then, can an angel look on him who ruins eternally the beloved soul entrusted to his care by Christ? “See,” says Our Lord, speaking against scandal, “that you despise not one of these little ones; for I say to you that their angels in Heaven always see the face of My Father who is in Heaven;”⁵ that is, according to the interpretation of St. John Chrysostom: be on your guard, for the angels before the throne of God will cry out for vengeance against you, if you scandalize or injure a single soul.

Woe to the scandal-giver in this life from the angels.

Woe to you on your death-bed, when you are most in need of the help of the holy angels! Even the holiest men look on that anxious hour as a terrible and dangerous one; what must it then be for you, who have so often troubled the angels, and turned them against you? How will it be with you when you are on the threshold of eternity, and the prayer for your departing soul

Woe in the hour of death and at the last judgment.

¹ Eece ego mittam angelum meum, qui præcedat te, et custodiat in via, et introducat in locum quem paravi.—Exod. xxlii. 20.

² Observa eum, et audi vocem ejus, nec contemnendum putes.—Ibid. 21.

³ Quia non dimittet eum peccaveris.—Ibid.

⁴ Dico vobis: Gaudium erit coram angelis Dei super uno peccatore poenitentiam agente.—Luke xv. 10.

⁵ Videte, ne contemnatis unum ex his pusillis, dico enim vobis: quia angeli eorum in cœlis semper vident faciem patris mei, qui in cœlis est.—Matth. xviii. 10.

is being said, "May the holy angels of God meet him, and lead him into the heavenly city."¹ You will be forced to remember that you opposed those very angels during your life. Woe to you in the particular judgment, in which, according to the opinion of the holy Fathers, the Archangel Michael will be the judge in place of Jesus Christ! What answer will you make when he asks you, what has become of the soul you have betrayed, when he will require that soul at your hands? Will you answer him like the fratricide Cain: "am I my brother's keeper?"² That is what the children of the world say; what are others to me? they ask; I sin on my own account; I have no desire to lead others astray, etc. Certainly, the judge will answer, you are to blame for the ruin of that soul; your wicked talk, your flattery, your bad example has destroyed that soul, and many others too; I now require all these souls at your hands. What answer will you make? Woe to you, finally, in the general judgment, when the Son of God Himself will come and, as He says in the Gospel of St. Matthew, "the Son of man shall send His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all scandals."³ If these angels do not find amongst the elect the souls entrusted to their care, because through you those souls are lost, where will you fly from their anger? How will you be able to account for the number of sins that have been committed through the scandal given by you? Hear what will happen to you: "and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth;"⁴ in that eternal fire, of which Our Lord says elsewhere, that it "was prepared for the devil and his angels."⁵ But who are the angels of the devil? asks St. Cyril; they are, he answers, not only those unhappy spirits who fell from Heaven with Lucifer, but also those bad Christians who do the work of the devil by betraying others into sin; for them the eternal fires of hell have been prepared. Woe, and eternal woe, to that man by whom the scandal cometh!

Conclusion
and ad-
monition to
those who
give
scandal.

What resource is there left for those who give scandal! None but this: you must give back the souls that you have filched away from Christ and His angels; and first of all, you must give back your own soul to God by a true repentance for your sins, and

¹ Veniant illi obviam sancti angeli Dei, et perducant eam in civitatem cœlestem.

² Num custos fratris mei sum ego?—Gen. iv. 9.

³ Mittet Filius hominis angelos suos, et colligent de regno ejus omnia scandala.—Matth. xiii. 41.

⁴ Et mittent eos in caminum ignis: ibi erit fletus et stridor dentium.—Ibid. 42.

⁵ Qui paratus est diabolo, et angelis ejus.—Ibid. xxv. 41.

then you must endeavor to encourage others to virtue by edifying conversation, a pious life and good example, so that you may make some atonement for the loss you have caused by leading souls astray. Cannot the desire of your own salvation move you to this? Are you still resolved to offend your God? Have you renounced all hopes of Heaven? Does not the thought of an eternal hell inspire you with fear? Or have you made up your mind to be lost forever? If so, then have your own way; (alas, that I must say so, and how I pity your precious souls!) go on to your eternal destruction. But one thing I ask of you with God Himself: "let all your wicked doings suffice you;"¹ sin yourselves, but do not prevent others from doing good; let them save their souls, and do not drag them down to hell with you, for they will only increase your torments. If you are embittered against another, and are determined on having revenge, then I say to you, as God said to Satan, when the latter wished to have Job in his power to torment as he pleased: "Behold he is in thy hand, but yet save his life."² Go, impious man, and revenge yourself on your neighbor; I cannot prevent you from doing that; attack him in his honor, his property, his body; persecute and torment him as you will; but do not touch his soul; do not disturb his conscience; do not, by your scandalous example, make him rebel against God; do not keep him out of Heaven, nor drag him down to hell with yourself!

But you, just and pious souls, protect yourselves and those under your care from those wicked men, who join with the devil against Jesus Christ and His holy angels! Avoid their company and keep others away from them, for they seek your destruction. Fly most carefully every one who gives scandal. Hold fast to Christ and your angel guardian with childlike confidence. Pray daily with the Prophet David: "Keep me from the snare which they have laid for me, and from the stumbling blocks of them that work iniquity."³ I give my soul over to thee, O dearest angel! Preserve it from all danger of sin; inspire me with inward fear and dread of that house, that company, in which my soul might suffer harm; rather tear out my eyes, than allow them to rest on dangerous objects that might be a scandal to me; cut off my hand, rather than allow it to stretch itself forth to do what might lead me into sin; cut off

Exhortation
to the just
and inno-
cent.

¹ Sufficiant vobis omnia scelera vestra.—Ezech. xlv. 6.

² Ecce in manu tua est, verumtamen animum illius serva.—Job. ii. 6.

³ Custodi me a laqueo, quem statuerunt mihi, et a scandalis operantium iniquitatem.—Ps. cxl. 9.

my foot, rather than allow me to go where I may be betrayed into offending God! And if I have by my actions given scandal and occasion of sin to others, and thus perhaps robbed you of a soul, oh, I am heartily sorry for it! I offer you my own soul as a pledge that I will make restitution to you by sincere repentance, that I will carefully avoid the least word or sign that might lead others into sin, and that I will endeavor, by giving them good example, to encourage them to fear the Lord, so that instead of the sorrow I have caused you by giving scandal, you may have all the more joy, on account of my soul, as well as the souls of others; that thus I may have you as guardians during life, as helpers in the hour of death, and as companions in a happy eternity. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Sunday within the Octave of Christmas.

Text.

Ecce positus est hic in ruinam et in resurrectionem multorum in Israel.—Luke ii. 34.

“Behold this Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel.”

That Jesus is set for the resurrection of many to eternal life, is not wonderful; for He it is, “who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from Heaven, and was made man;” He it is who says of Himself: “the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost:”¹ and again: “I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly.”² But that the same Jesus should be set for the fall of many, how am I to understand that? And yet it is the infallible truth, which St. Paul assures us of, writing to the Corinthians: “but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling block, and unto the Gentiles, foolishness;”³ for the majority refused to believe in Him, and thus becoming hardened in wickedness, were lost forever, instead of being saved through Him. How many Christians, even, there are, for whose fall Jesus is set, because, although they acknowledge Him to be the true God, they do not honor Him as they ought, and are ashamed to follow His example; so that the life of Christ is to them only an

¹ Venit enim Filius hominis quærere, et saluum facere, quod perierat.—Luke xix. 10.

² Ego veni, ut vitam habeant, et abundantius habeant.—John x. 10.

³ Nos autem prædicamus Christum crucifixum, Judæis quidem scandalum, gentibus autem stultitiam.—I. Cor. 23.

occasion of a deeper damnation. But this is all contrary to the intention of our dearest Saviour, who came down from Heaven and suffered death, that all men might be saved; and therefore it was solely through their own malice that the Son of God was a stumbling block to the Jews and Gentiles; and it is still owing solely to the wickedness of Christians, that many of them turn away from Christ, and are lost forever. But how many Christians there are nowadays, my dear brethren, of whom one might say with truth, in another sense: behold, this man is placed, not for the resurrection, but for the fall, of many souls! They are those who deliberately go in opposition to Our Lord, and dig a pit for the souls of others, by giving them scandal and leading them into sin. I have already shown how wicked and how common this vice is; I have still something to add, in order to make its wickedness more evident.—*continues as before.*

ON WICKED TONGUES.

SIXTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON THE MULTIPLICITY OF SINS OF THE TONGUE.

Subject.

Many kinds of sins of the tongue are committed when speaking with others, against others, and of others.—*Preached on Easter Monday.*

Text.

Qui sunt hi sermones quos confertis ad invicem?—Luke xxiv. 17.
“What are these discourses that you hold one with another?”

Introduction.

From the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh; if you wish to know what another has in his heart and mind, find out what he generally speaks of. The two disciples who were going to Emmaus were thinking of Jesus, and therefore they were speaking of Him; they were talking of all that had happened to Him, how He was condemned to death by the high-priests, and crucified; and why should it then surprise us to find that Jesus came up to them, and walked with them? For He had already promised them: “for where there are two or three gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.”¹ Happy disciples, who, because you were speaking of Christ, deserved, in preference to others, to have Him as your companion! “He was present amongst those who were speaking of Him,”² says St. Gregory in his homily on to-day’s gospel. My dear brethren, if we wish to know whether Jesus is present with His grace

¹ Ubi enim sunt duo vel tres congregati in nomine meo, ibi sum in medio eorum.—Matth. xviii. 20.

² De se ergo loquentibus præsentiam exhibuit.

during our conversations at home, out walking, and in company, we have only to consider what is the subject of our conversation, and of whom and how we are talking. To this end I will examine now, as far as time allows, the conversations usually carried on in the world nowadays; and to proceed in due order, I will divide them into three classes, as follows:

Plan of Discourse.

What are the discourses that we generally hold one with another? That will be the first question. What are the discourses we hold against others who are present? The second question. What are the discourses we hold of others, who are absent? The third question. The conscience of each one, and daily experience will supply the answers. But I am afraid that I shall have to come to a rather unsatisfactory conclusion, that, namely, there are very few companies in which God and His blessing are found; and I shall have to acknowledge that very many, when they are speaking, have not Jesus as their companion, but a far different personage. Still, I will venture to speak of this matter, that we may know what faults we are guilty of in conversation, sincerely repent of the sins we have hitherto committed by the tongue, keep that unruly member in check, and use it only to praise God.

Give us Thy grace thereto, Christ Jesus, through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and our holy angels guardian.

Alas, I hardly begin to examine the style of conversation prevalent nowadays, when I am driven to despair! Oh no, Christ is not amongst us; God is no longer with us; His blessing has left the world! It is the devil who is present during most of the conversations that are now carried on. Where shall I find those blessed lips, that the Lord promised by the Prophet Sophonias: "I will restore to the people a chosen lip, that all may call upon the name of the Lord."¹ Where is the society to be found, in which people talk of the praises of God, of Christ and His sufferings, of the saints, and of things advantageous to souls? Have I not reason to complain with the Prophet David: "They are all gone aside, they are become unprofitable together, there is none that doth good, no not one."² Why? he gives the reason: "their throat is an open sepulchre, with their tongues they acted deceitfully, the poison of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of

Generally speaking, the conversation of men nowadays is wicked.

¹ Reddam populis labium electum ut invocent omnes in nomine Domini.—Soph. iii. 9.

² Omnes declinaverunt, simul in utiles facti sunt: non est, qui faciat bonum; non est uque ad unum.—Ps. xlii. 3.

cursing and bitterness.”¹ And when you consider the matter duly, my dear brethren, must you not acknowledge that such is the case? What are the discourses that you daily hold, at home, in the streets, in business? Is Christ always present at them?

It consists
of cursing
and swear-
ing.

Yet I need not ask you, nor do I require an answer. One need only go about to find how general is the habit of cursing and swearing. At almost every step you take you will hear imprecations and oaths from the soldier on guard, the peasant in the field, the boys in the streets, the tradesman in his workshop; masters and mistresses are ready with an imprecation if the servants do not obey the least sign; the servants in turn curse their employers, if they are told to do anything disagreeable. No work can be begun, nor a horse driven, unless the devil is called in to help. He is always on people's tongues; to him is consecrated not merely the tenth, but the third part, and even the half, of the words we use. It is looked on as an honor and glory to be an adept in cursing. Nay, there are in some families (and who would believe it, if experience did not teach us the truth of it) little children who can hardly stammer out words enough to ask for a bit of bread, and yet they know how to curse and swear. And after all, is that surprising? They hear nothing else from their parents, and of course they imitate them. It is the general style of conversation with their fathers and mothers, and consequently they are in the same state as those Hebrew children of whom we read in the Book of Esdras. When the Jews married women of other nations, their children could not speak the Hebrew language, so that it nearly died out: “And their children spoke half in the speech of Azotus, and could not speak the Jews' language, but they spoke according to the language of this people, and that people.”² Such is the case too, nowadays, unfortunately, in many households; because the parents are given to cursing and swearing, their Catholic children cannot speak the language of Catholics, but call on the devil, instead of saying the Lord's prayer. What a strict account will have to be rendered at the judgment seat of God by those parents, who are bound to teach their children how to praise and bless God!

Which is
very unbecom-
ing a
Christian.

How unbecoming, how wicked for Christians, to indulge in language of that kind! Is the devil then so beautiful, so wor-

¹ Sepulchrum patens est guttur eorum: linguis suis dolose agebant, venenum aspidum sub labiis eorum; quorum os maledictione et amaritudine plenum est.—Ps. xlii. 3.

² Et filii eorum ex media parte loquebantur Azotice, et nesciebant loqui Judæe, et loquebantur juxta linguam populi et populi.—II. Esd. xlii. 24.

thy of love, that he deserves to be always on one's lips? We are always ready to speak of what we love, and so it appears that the devil must have a place in the hearts of many, for they are continually speaking of him. Yet they need not do so, for that evil spirit is always at our side; he comes uninvited, and tries to do our souls all the harm he can; there is no necessity then for calling on him so often. Nay, in one way the devil is too good, or rather, I should say, God is too merciful; for if the Almighty allowed him to do what we often ask and desire of him, many a time he might have hurried us off alive into hell; thousands would be possessed by the devil; there would be hardly one in the whole town whose neck he would not have broken, according to the imprecations we give vent to under the influence of impatience, anger, vindictiveness, or malice. But go on with your cursing, wicked men; you will soon find that all your imprecations will fall on your own heads, according to the words of David: "He loved cursing, and it shall come unto him; and he would not have blessing, and it shall be far from him."¹ "And he put on cursing like a garment. May it be unto him like a garment which covereth him, and like a girdle with which he is girded continually."² Scarcity, unfruitful seasons, wars and famine, what wonder is it that you often reduce whole countries to extreme misery? The fearful curses that men are in the habit of uttering daily, would alone suffice to bring you upon a country; for what blessing can be expected from God, where there is nothing heard but oaths and imprecations? Nor must you try to excuse yourselves by saying that you mean no harm and that you curse only through habit; for that very reason, says St. John Chrysostom, your sin is greater, and you are under a stricter obligation to get rid of the bad habit. I am certain that if you were to give a halfpenny to a poor man every time an oath or a curse falls from your lips, you would conquer the habit in a few days, and you are bound in conscience to use some such means as that to free yourselves from it. Where such talk is carried on, Jesus is not present, nor is the blessing of God there.

What are those discourses that you hold one with another in your bickerings, when buying and selling, and making contracts? Is God and His grace with you when you adduce that

Unneces-
sary abjur-
ations.

¹ Dilexit maledictionem, et veniet ei: et noluit benedictionem et elongabitur ab eo.—Ps. cviii. 18.

² Induit maledictionem sicut vestimentum. Fiat et sicut vestimentum, quo operitur, et sicut zona, qua semper præcingitur.—Ibid. 18, 19.

great God as a witness to everything you say, and constantly swear by your soul and its salvation? Swearing, says St. Augustine, is so wicked, that even blind heathens, who adored stocks and stones, were afraid to swear by their false gods, lest they should be punished for it. But who nowadays is afraid to call upon the living, Almighty, and all-just God to witness the truth of the most trivial things, and even in support of deliberate falsehood? Are there not many who forswear themselves a hundred times, before they once pray for their daily bread? Even if there is question of only a few pence, one is ready to swear by all that is sacred, that he cannot give it so cheaply, etc., as if we could secure temporal prosperity by transgressing the divine law! You would not dare, says St. Chrysostom, to call upon a man in high position as a witness in such matters; he would take it as an insult; but you do not hesitate to mention the King of Heaven and earth, at whose name the heavenly spirits tremble, as a witness in your business, your sports, or your conversation. I must do so, you say, or else people will not believe me, and I shall not be able to sell my wares. And do you think people believe you when you swear so horribly? They will be far less likely to trust you, and even if they have hitherto looked on you as an honest man, they will now begin to doubt you. You should follow the advice of St. Paul, and, like all good Christians, not go beyond yea and nay in your speech; then people would have a good opinion of you, and acknowledge that you are upright and honest. As it is, Christ has no part in your discourse, nor is the blessing of God on it.

Impure
songs and
conversa-
tions.

What are those discourses that you hold in company, in public houses, when out walking and amusing yourselves, and when you are dancing and diverting yourselves in remote lanes and alleys? What sort of discourse, I ask, do you then either openly carry on, or secretly whisper into each other's ears? I am ashamed to allude to it, nor dare I examine this question at length, for fear of sullyng my own thoughts! But you know well enough what I mean; I am speaking of those shameless and foul-mouthed people, who, like cesspools, vomit out their filth on every one who has anything to do with them. "Was not our heart burning within us," said the two disciples who were going to Emmaus, as we read in to-day's gospel, "whilst He spoke in the way, and opened to us the Scriptures?"¹ Oh what

¹ Nonne cor nostrum ardens erat in nobis, dum loqueretur in via, et aperiret nobis Scripturas.—Luke xxiv. 32.

a different fire is set alight in the hearts of those who hear the abominable discourses that are held on the way to an impious Emmaus: a fire which comes from hell, and belongs to hell alone; they sing impure songs and, partly by gestures, partly by words, give expression to filthy ideas that no decent man ought to think of for a moment, much less speak of afterwards. Such filthy language is enough to make us forsake the world altogether. They think they cannot enjoy themselves, nor have a hearty laugh, unless obscenity has at share in their conversation.

Nor is the impure talk confined to the common people in public houses; for there is reason to fear that it may be heard also amongst those of the better class, not indeed in such coarse and unpolished words as the lower classes make use of, but in double-meaning expressions, which are even more dangerous and injurious. A violent wind often blows out a fire that has just began to light, but a gentle breeze fans it into a flame. In the same way, if a person uses coarse and impure language in company, a decent man who hears him would blush for shame and feel quite uncomfortable; and even if he had a secret pleasure in that kind of talk, still, for decency's sake, he is obliged to act as if he did not like it, and thus the other is soon reduced to silence. But if impure subjects are talked of in a hidden and polished manner, and by means of similes and figures, it is quite another matter; the conversation is then looked on as witty, and it is considered good taste to laugh at it, so that even they who do not know what it is about, join in the laugh; and so one word brings on another, and the filthy conversation is carried on for hours. When a thing of that kind is blurted out at once, every one knows what is meant, and there is an end of the matter; but when it is talked of covertly, and hidden under figures, the imagination at once sets to work, and the mind is filled with all sorts of impure thoughts, which are often worse than those suggested; thus the fire of impurity is made to burn more fiercely.

Certainly one would have to go somewhere out of this world altogether, if he wished to keep his ears from being sullied, so common is impure conversation. And what a disgrace that is! When we are in decent company, we abstain, as far as possible, from coughing and spitting; yet we do not hesitate to vomit forth filth of that kind! Is that language befitting the tongues of Christians, that are so often washed with the Blood of Jesus

Double-meaning expressions, which are still more dangerous.

Great scandal is thus given.

Christ? O wicked tongues, what a strict account you will have to render, not only for your own sins, but for the souls that you have led into sin by your wicked conversation! Do not try to excuse yourselves by saying that you have no bad intention, and that you only wish to raise a laugh. It is a laugh in which the devil joins! And how do those who listen to you know what intention you have? How do you know what foul thoughts and unchaste desires are excited in them by what you say? Alas, how many would still have preserved their baptismal innocence, if they had not happened to be present in company in which such impure conversation was indulged in! Why should you pour oil on the fire? Human nature is already only too much inclined to impurity; there is not the least necessity for your increasing that inclination. But woe to you, if you do increase it by your wicked tongues! If you wish to go to hell, then go, although I pity your poor souls; but do not interfere with those who are innocent, for if you betray them into sin by your filthy talk, they will increase the torments you will have to suffer for all eternity. I will say no more of this, my dear brethren, it is clear enough that not Christ, but the demon of impurity is present at such conversations.

Wicked talk about those who are present; namely, quarrelsome and bitter words.

To go on now to the second class: what are those discourses that you hold when visiting one another, against those who are present? Is Christ always present at them! Here I may remark, that there are many of whom one might say what Moses writes of Joseph's brethren, "they could not speak peaceably to him."¹ Quarrelsome and bitter words that disturb peace, and injure Christian charity, how common you are! Hardly can a few people meet together, even if they are otherwise friendly, when they commence to talk uncharitably to each other, politely of course, and with a smile on their lips, but with envy and bitterness in their hearts, and to make unkind allusions to each other's faults, allusions that one would not dare to make openly to one's greatest enemy. Thus one is reproached with his curiosity, another with his stupidity, a third with his secret poverty, a fourth with his lowly origin, a fifth with his ill success; in a word, everything that is likely to annoy another is brought up. From this come misunderstandings amongst friends, and hatreds and enmities that it may take years to heal. One cutting word may sometimes give rise to an enmity that will cease only with life itself. If we all acted like good Christians,

¹ Nec poterant ei quidquam pacifice loqui.—Gen. xxxvii. 4.

returned good for evil, and bore the sarcasms of others with patience and meekness, as St. Paul says of himself and the first Christians: "We are reviled, and we bless; we are persecuted, and we suffer it,"¹ then that kind of conversation would not be the cause of so much evil. But, alas, how far differently we act! we cannot bear the least word that is said against us; we must give vent to the displeasure it causes us, and return sarcasm for sarcasm, and so the quarrel never comes to an end. We act something like that brave Portuguese soldier, of whom Bidermann writes. During a siege he had shot away all his bullets at the enemy, and could not get a fresh supply; so he pulled out his teeth one by one, loaded his musket with them, and shot them off at the enemy. In the same way, but sinfully, we spare ourselves no trouble nor discomfort in order to have satisfaction for the sarcasms flung at us. Christ cannot be present during such uncharitable conversation, for He is a lover of peace, charity, and fraternal unity.

But where these sarcastic and biting expressions are wanting, there is another kind of discourse much favored by those who are far too fond of peace, namely, those who are given to fawning and flattery, and who can suit what they say to every one's inclination, although they do not at all speak with sincerity. They have nothing but sugar and honey on their tongues, but gall in their hearts; they approve outwardly of everything that others say or do; they are so much under the influence of human respect, that they have not a word of blame, even for the worst actions. Thus, for instance, they praise a man for having taken revenge, and say that he has acted rightly, so that they actually confirm him in his wicked purpose. St. Gregory compares such flatterers to the dogs that licked the sores of Lazarus, but did not heal them. "Woe," says the Prophet Isaias, "to you that call evil good, and good evil, that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter; that justify the wicked for gifts, and take away the justice of the just from him."²

Fawning
and flattery.

I come now to the third class, and I ask, what are those discourses that you hold in your meetings and gatherings about others who are absent? Is God always present at such discourses? Alas, I shudder, when I think that the sins of the tongue,

Impious talk
of the
absent;
namely,
detraction.

¹ Maledicimur, et benedicimus; persecutionem patimur, et sustinemus.—I. Cor. iv. 12.

² Vae, qui dicitis malum bonum et bonum malum; ponentes tenebras lucem, et lucem tenebras; ponentes amarum in dulce, et dulce in amarum, qui justificatis impium pro muneribus, et justitiam justii aufertis ab eo.—Isai. v. 20, 23.

to which I have now to call your attention, are the most dangerous and the most common of all, that is to say, backbiting and detraction, by which the absent are robbed, either partially or wholly, of their best and dearest possession, their honor and good name. I say it is the most dangerous of all kinds of sins of the tongue, for, with the sole exception of impurity, there is no vice which causes the loss of so many souls. And it is the commonest of vices; for where can one find a town, a street, a house, that is not infected with it? When two people are talking together, they soon begin to make some one who is absent the subject of their discourse, and then, either through malice or through hatred and envy, or through sheer loquacity, they relate what they have seen, or heard, or dreamt, or imagined, or suspected of him, and thus they lessen his reputation. In that way they take away his good name, whether they speak the truth, or not. How many there are who eat and drink together, while some one, who is far away from them, and has no share in their enjoyment, must pay the score, inasmuch as his faults and failings are made the subject of conversation! The Wise Man warns us to be on our guard against those sins of the tongue: "Be not in the feasts of great drinkers, nor in their meetings who contribute flesh to eat."¹ "What is the meaning here of eating flesh," asks Richard of St. Victor, "if not to tear the infirmities of others with a poisonous tooth?"² The Prophet David says of such people: "shall not all they know that work iniquity, who devour my people, as they eat bread?"³ Why do the Prophet and the Wise Man compare those backbiters to people eating meat and bread? Why do they not compare them to one who eats fish? Because he who eats fish must be very cautious lest a bone should stick in his throat; whereas meat and bread can be eaten without any such fear. So it is with backbiters and detractors. They devour the good name of others like meat or bread, without any respect for the persons of whom they speak; they attack every one, and spare none. That priest, they say, does not give good example; that man is unjust, we know how he has made his money; that woman is not what she ought to be; that young girl is too free in company; one is this, another that, etc. If what they speak of is true and commonly known, they can add

¹ Noli esse in conviviis potatorum, nec in comessionibus eorum, qui carnes ad vescendum conferunt.—Prov. xxiii. 20.

² Quid est hic carnes comedere, nisi aliena infirma maledico dente lacerare?

³ Nonne cognoscent omnes, qui operantur iniquitatem, qui devorant plebem meam sicut escam panis.—Ps. xlii. 4.

to it and make it worse than it is in reality; a word put in here and there can do a great deal of harm, until the thing is magnified to an enormous degree, and in a few days is known all through the town. If what is thus said is not against justice, because it is true, there is no doubt that it is against Christian charity, which commands us to hide the faults of others as much as possible. Tell me; suppose one of you had done some disgraceful thing, which has already come to the knowledge of a good many people, would it be all the same to you if that act of yours were made a common topic of conversation, and a subject of ridicule everywhere? I think not; and you would have just cause for sorrow if your name were thus bandied about. Hence the first general rule of Christian charity is, to do unto others, as you wish they should do unto you. And what pleasure, or honor, or profit, do we find in backbiting? It is a fine honor indeed to attack the absent, who cannot defend themselves! Is there nothing else in the world worth talking of, that we must tear one another's good name to pieces? Oh, if every one paid attention to his own faults, what a lot he would find to correct! Every one would find enough weeds in his own garden, enough dirt at his own doorstep, and a beam in his own eye. Are we not miserable mortals, thus to heap up so many evil acts for the day of judgment, when God, that most strict and inexorable Judge, will examine into, and punish, each one of them?

Thoughtless and wicked people! do you know what a grievous sin you commit? It is not my intention to explain it to you at length to-day, as it will be the subject of a future sermon; my only design now is to examine it, along with other kinds of evil talk. But this much I may say; not only is Jesus Christ far from you when you are engaged in such conversation, but I very much fear that He will never be with you for all eternity; for that is the vice against which the wise Ecclesiasticus warns us in the following words: "Take heed lest thou slip with thy tongue, and fall in the sight of the enemies, who lie in wait for thee, and thy fall be incurable unto death;"¹ so that you will never rise again to grace. Not that God is wanting in mercy, or that He is less ready to forgive this sin, than any other; but because the whole difficulty in obtaining pardon of it rests with ourselves. For what is more difficult for a respectable man, than to acknowledge himself a liar who has robbed another of his good

It is a
grievous
and danger-
ous sin.

¹ Attende, ne forte labaris in lingua, et cadas in conspectu inimicorum insidiantium tibi, et sit casus tuus insanabilis in mortem.—Ecc. xxviii. 30.

name? Yet that he must do, if he has falsely attributed a fault to another. But if the fault really exists, although it is not publicly known, he must make what restitution he can for having injured the fair fame of another, and moreover make good to the latter all the harm caused by the detraction, if he wishes to be reconciled to God. Otherwise, neither confession nor prayer will be of any help to him. This is the general teaching of theologians, and it is founded on right reason: "The sin will not be forgiven, unless restitution of the stolen goods be made."¹ My own impression is, that out of a hundred who accuse themselves properly in confession of a sin of detraction, there are hardly ten who make due restitution for having injured their neighbor's character. Certainly then, my dear brethren, most dangerous is that conversation which has for its subject the faults of others! There is one thing, however, that I will tell you for your consolation; and that is, that there are reasons which excuse from making restitution in this case. Therefore he who is guilty in this respect, and wishes to know what he has to do, should consult an experienced confessor, and tell him plainly all the circumstances regarding what he said, the social position of the persons of and to whom he spoke, how many there were who heard him, whether what he said was true or not, whether it was publicly known or not, whether it is lately, or many years ago that he was guilty of the uncharitable conversation, whether they who heard it are still in the same place, or have gone away, whether they have probably forgotten it or not, whether the person spoken of is living or dead, whether the conversation has caused injury to others, or is likely to cause it or not, and so on; then the confessor can advise him as to what he has to do. Once for all, anything that injures another's good name, is a delicate and difficult matter to deal with. Let us then be careful never to say anything injurious to others, since it is so difficult to obtain forgiveness for such a sin.

Tale bearing, murmuring, and complaining.

What are the discourses held by tale bearers, who try to please all parties, who blow hot and cold out of the same mouth, cool sweet and sour in the one pot, and carry stories about from one to another of what they have heard and seen? Listen my good friend, they say, to a word of advice; such a one has said this of you; be on your guard against that person; you think he is your best friend, but you are mistaken; he has this or that against you, etc. Thus they cause or increase misunderstandings, dis-

¹ Non dimittitur peccatum, nisi restituatur ablatum.

union, and enmity between those who were formerly fast friends, between brothers and sisters, nay, between husband and wife, who otherwise would live like angels together, in love and peace, so that they now can hardly bear the sight of each other. Still more impious is this kind of conversation, than all the others! Christ can have no part in it; it is the devil who prompts it. "The whisperer and the double tongued is accursed; for he hath troubled many that were at peace."¹ What are the discourses that subjects often hold against their superiors, citizens against their magistrate, servants against their masters and mistresses? They complain of and murmur against their rule, find fault with their roughness of manner, are dissatisfied with the food given them, etc., and thus make their superiors odious to every one. And what is the good of your talking in that way? Why do you not complain to those who have the power of making things better? There is certainly not the least use in retailing your grievances to those whom they do not concern. God has nothing to do with such conversation.

What are those discourses which you hold against Heaven, Blasphemy. against the elect, and even against the great God Himself? "They have spoken iniquity on high," says the Prophet David, "they have set their mouth against Heaven;"² they are blasphemers. Who would imagine that a worm of the earth would dare to open his mouth against Heaven, and to speak disrespectfully of the great God? And yet, it is unfortunately only too often the case. For what else are they but blasphemers, who murmur against God, say that He is unmerciful to them, and that He sends them too many crosses and trials? What are they but blasphemers, who criticise the all-wise Providence of God, as if in this or that particular it had acted unwisely? What else are they but blasphemers, who despair, on account of the number of their sins, and say that God cannot or will not forgive them? How often do we not hear the most horrible expressions used against God in anger? How many are there not, who make sport of God and of Heaven, by speaking of them in a ridiculous manner, such as, God is a good man, He knows me well and will not do anything against me; Heaven is not made for geese; St. Peter is an old acquaintance of mine, he has the keys of Heaven, and will let me in, etc.? What else is that, but mak-

¹ Susurro et bilinguis maledictus; multos enim turbabit pacem habentes.—Ecl. xxviii. 15.

² Iniquitatem in excelso locuti sunt; posuerunt in cœlum os suum.—Ps. lxxii. 8, 9.

ing a laughing stock of God and His saints, as if they were abject mortals? Jesus Christ has no part in such impious talk.

Many other kinds of wicked conversation.

I have not time now to examine many other kinds of wicked conversations, such as, revealing secrets, boasting and speaking in one's own praise, and even glorying in the sins one has committed. I will say nothing at all of lying. For who thinks anything of it? If no one is injured by a lie, it is looked upon as quite lawful. Nay there are some who think they have to tell lies occasionally. Nor do I wish to speak now of the vice of loquacity, beyond saying that Jesus Christ assures us that we shall have to give an account of every idle word at the judgment-seat; nor of those who speak too little, who are dumb when they should speak out to defend the right, to admonish those subject to them, such as their children and servants, and even their fellow-men sometimes, when occasion requires that their vices should be corrected. The Prophet Isaias complains, in the person of such people: "Woe is me, because I have held my peace, because I am a man of unclean lips."¹ Would to God that those dumb people never came to confession, for through shame they conceal their sins, and sometimes from youth to old age continue to make sacrilegious confessions and Communion, of which they take the guilt on their souls into eternity! I find no end of the sins which are committed in the world by the tongue, and I should require more tongues than one to speak of them all. Only one thing more I have to say in the words of St. Jerome: "few there are, and very few who are not guilty of some sin of the tongue."²

Thus in most conversations Jesus is not present.

No one need now wonder at what I said in the beginning, that I would hardly find Jesus present at any conversation. No one need be astonished that the blessing of God is leaving the world more and more nowadays, and that hard times, and want, and calamity are so general. We drive God away from us by our wicked tongues, and close the heavens so that they do not rain down fruitfulness on the earth. A single complaint on the part of Aaron and Mary against their brother Moses was enough to cause the people of Israel to remain seven whole days longer in the desert, for the cloud that guided them remained immovable during that time: "Mary, therefore was put out of the camp seven days; and the people moved not from that place."³

¹ Vae mihi, quia tacei, quia vir pollutus labiis ego sum.—Isai. vi. 5.

² Pauci sunt, qui linguæ vitio renuntiant.

³ Exclusa est itaque Maria extra castra septem diebus; et populus non est motus de loco illo.—Num. xii. 15.

What evils and misfortunes then, are not caused nowadays, in a whole city or country, by the many and manifold sins of the tongue that are committed against God and man! Let no one be astonished at the fewness of the elect; if there was no other vice in the world, wicked tongues alone would be enough to fill hell with lost souls. If there was neither adultery nor impurity committed in a country, of which, alas, there is only too much, yet there is enough impure conversation to bring down fire from Heaven, to consume us like Sodom and Gomorrha. If there was no injustice in the world,—and God knows there is too much of it!—there is enough cursing and swearing, and backbiting and uncharitable talk to doom us to eternal death. “If I would justify myself,” says Job with fear and trembling, and sitting on the dunghill, “my own mouth shall condemn me; if I would show myself innocent, he shall prove me wicked.”¹ Although I am not aware of being guilty of any evil, my mouth will condemn me. Oh, pious, patient, and holy man, art thou afraid of thy mouth? Ah, that is a complaint for me and others like me to make! For in spite of all your trials, the loss of all your wealth, your abandonment by your friends, and the bodily torments you endured, you never sinned in word, as God Himself testifies: “In all these things Job did not sin with his lips.”² Your speech, your words, were constantly: “As it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done; blessed be the name of the Lord.”³ And yet thou art afraid thy mouth will condemn thee! Hear this, you who commit so many sins of the tongue! How will it be with you and me? How shall we escape damnation?

Ah, dear Christians, watch over your tongues! Even if you are as just and holy as Job, still be careful of what you say in your ordinary conversation; see that it will not be a cause of condemnation to you hereafter! If I could open hell, and show you the lost souls there, and tell you why they are lost, thousands of them would point to their tongues, and cry out like the rich glutton: “I am tormented in this flame,”⁴ my mouth has condemned me! This talkative, impure, profane, uncharitable tongue of mine, is the cause of my ruin! “Restrain the tongue,” is my conclusion, in the words of St. Chrysostom; “and if it will not be quiet, bite it, until it is silent; for it is better for it to suffer that pain here, than to seek in vain for a

Conclusion and exhortation to watch over the tongue.

¹ Si innocentem ostendero, pravum me comprobabit.—Job. ix. 20.

² In omnibus his non peccavit Job labiis suis.—Ibid. ii. 10.

³ Sicut Domino placuit, ita factum est: sit nomen Domini benedictum.—Ibid. i. 21.

⁴ Crucior in hac flamma.—Luke xvi. 24.

drop of water to cool it in eternity.”¹ Therefore, my dear brethren, let us not spare our tongues in our Easter confession, and do penance for the sins we have hitherto committed in our conversations; and let us be mindful of the exhortation of the Apostle: “If any man speak, let him speak as the words of God.”² God has given us our tongues to praise and bless Him; let them be used then to that end, and let us begin now to hold that discourse which we hope and desire to continue in our eternal country, where our only conversation will be a joyful Alleluia, praised be God. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for Pentecost Sunday.

Text.

Cœperunt loqui variis linguis, prout Spiritus Sanctus dabat eloqui illis—Act. ii. 4.

“And they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak.”

Nothing but good and holy can the tongues be, that are ruled by the holy spirit of God; nothing but wicked can the tongues be, that are moved by the spirit of evil. Do we wish to know, my dear brethren, whether the Holy Ghost or the evil spirit dwells in us? We must, if so, pay special attention to the use we make of our tongues. To find it out, I will examine to-day, as far as time allows, the conversations in vogue in the world, and I will divide my sermon into three questions: first, what are the subjects of our daily conversations? Secondly, how do we speak of those who are present? Thirdly, how do we speak of the absent? Each one’s conscience and daily experience will furnish the answers to these questions. But I am afraid I shall have to come to the conclusion that there are very few tongues ruled by the spirit of God, etc.—*continues as before.*

¹ Refræna linguam et si non paritur reticere, dentium morsu quiescat; nam hoc ei est conducibilius sustinere, quam postea aquæ guttam nullateus promereri.

² Si quis loquitur, quasi sermones Dei.—I. Pet. iv. 11.

ON FAULT-FINDING, AND INTER-
PRETING IN A BAD SENSE THE
ACTIONS OF OTHERS.

SIXTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON THE INJUSTICE OF FINDING FAULT WITH, AND INTERPRETING IN A BAD SENSE, THE ACTIONS OF OTHERS.

Subject.

To concern one's self, through a spirit of curiosity, with the affairs of others. is especially opposed to the charity we owe our neighbor, whether that meddling on our part arise from malice or from imprudence.—*Preached on the sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Et ipsi observabant eum.—Luke xiv.1.
“They watched Him.”

Introduction.

The Pharisees, being once filled with hatred and envy of Our Lord, kept a close watch on everything He did. But what did they consider especially? The holiness of His life, by which He wished to give to the world an example, and a proof of His divinity? The many miracles with which He confirmed His teaching? Oh no; these were the very things that filled them with envy and bitterness; of them they say nothing, and if they could, they would blot them out of the memory of every one. What then was the object of their vigilance? They desired to see or to hear something from Him, which they could have found fault with, so as to make Him odious to the people. For this reason alone “they watched Him.” O Christian world, how many

critical observers of the same kind thou canst count in our days, who examine, watch, and pry into the actions of others, put a wrong interpretation on and criticise them, make them the subject of rash judgments and groundless suspicions, and thus talk of and condemn their faults and failings! A vice which, alas! is very common among all classes of people, and is especially injurious to the charity we owe our neighbor, as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

To concern one's self thus with the affairs of others is especially opposed to the charity we owe our neighbor, whether that meddling on our part arise from malice or from imprudence. Such is the whole subject. Let each one attend to his own faults; and let no one who is innocent mind what others say of him; such shall be the conclusion.

Help us thereto, O God, by Thy grace, which we beg of Thee through Thy dear Mother Mary and the holy angels.

Evil interpretation and fault finding, wherever it comes from, is against charity.

That prying, inquisitive spirit, that criticising, finding fault with, and talking about the affairs of others, which is so common nowadays, comes principally from two sources; either from hatred and dislike towards our neighbor, and then it is malice; or else from curiosity and a thoughtless loquacity, and then it is imprudence. From loquacity, I say; because we are human beings, who love to be in each other's society, which necessitates talking; and when we have exhausted all we have to say about our own concerns, we must bring up those of our neighbor, and make them the subject of our conversation. From hatred and dislike, as is often the case; for if I have an ill feeling towards another, and find out something against him, although my heart, as far as charity is concerned, is far from him, yet my ill-will accompanies him everywhere, and so my mouth overflows with the dislike I have towards him, and I seek to lessen the sense of injury I am laboring under, and to have some satisfaction by talking of his faults. Whatever be the source and origin of such talk, it is certainly always against the rights, or at least against the charity which is due to our neighbor.

For if it comes from hatred and dislike, we observe

In the first place, as far as hatred and dislike are concerned, not much proof is required. Everything that comes from passion is opposed to fraternal charity; for we can easily imagine that, when we have a bitter feeling towards another, we are not likely

to think or speak well of him when he is made the subject of conversation. When the envious Pharisees failed to find anything faulty in Our Lord's conduct, they began to complain of His disciples, and to accuse them of being transgressors of the law, because they ate with unwashed hands, plucked ears of corn on the Sabbath, etc. But they took no notice of how the same disciples healed the sick, drove out devils, practised voluntary poverty, and did other praiseworthy actions, as the Pharisees themselves were well aware. Thus the effect of hatred and dislike towards another is to make us hide and conceal what is praiseworthy in him, and to publish his faults as much as possible. Anything that we hear, see, or suspect him of to his discredit, we cannot keep secret; we must speak of it at the first opportunity, and we are more inclined to exaggerate, than to lessen it. We say: "do you know what happened lately? Such and such a one acted most shamefully, his villany has been discovered, I cannot trust him any longer; I thought that man knew better, he pretended to be very clever, but now he has made a grievous blunder, etc." But they who thus give way to hatred of their neighbor, are not always willing to make known their feelings, much less do they wish to incur the blame of trying to injure another's character, and therefore they endeavor to conceal their motive as well as they can. It is a well-known fact, they say, otherwise I would not mention it; I am sorry for the poor man; it is a great pity he has such a fault, etc. O hypocrite! Are you really sorry for him? If so, why do you not try to conceal his faults, that he may at least have a chance of retaining the esteem of others? Why do you bring further disgrace on him, by relating his faults? It is a well-known fact, otherwise I would not mention it! If it is so well-known, then what is the use of your saying anything about it? You are merely wasting your words. Suppose I said to you, my dear brethren: "Two and two make four; to-day is Sunday; these are well-known facts, otherwise I would not mention them;" would you not think me mad? We know these facts already, you would say, there is no necessity for you to repeat them to us. It is a well-known fact, otherwise I would not mention it! To whom is it known? To yourself, and not to others? Then you are evidently guilty of injuring your neighbor's character; you act against the right he has to his good name, and you are alone to blame for making known his faults. If his faults are known to many in the town, but not to those to whom you speak of them, you still

only the faults of our neighbor to criticise them.

cannot be excused from a breach of charity, since you spread still farther what is disadvantageous to his good name. If Christian charity and not ill feeling prompted you to speak, you would find in the same person many good qualities that redound to his praise; but as it is, you say not a word about them. You are like a spider; you seek the poison, and leave the honey behind, because your heart is full of ill-will against your neighbor.

The praise-worthy qualities of another are misinterpreted.

There is a still worse consequence of that fault-finding and criticising, when it comes from hatred and envy; for, not only are the faults and failings of another noticed and talked of, but even his good qualities are misinterpreted; because, when the heart is once filled with hatred of another, it is very hard to look with a favorable eye at anything he does. The envious Pharisees were not satisfied with criticising what they imagined to be faulty in Christ and His disciples; they found fault even with what they should have praised and approved of. Such is the complaint Our Lord makes in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say: he hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say: Behold a man that is a glutton and a wine-drinker, a friend of publicans and sinners."¹ If I drive out devils, they say I do it in the name of Beelzebub, the prince of devils; if I heal the sick, and teach the people, they cry me down as a disturber and a raiser of sedition. St. John Chrysostom makes the same complaint of those Pharisees who are still to be found in great numbers amongst Christians. If one, he says, whom I do not love, is really humble of heart, I call him a hypocrite; if he is patient and a lover of peace, he is looked on as a coward; if he frequents respectable company, he is accused of being fond of the pleasures of the table; if he avoids company, he is called a misanthropist; if he does his duty without any regard to human respect, he is looked on as an unmannerly boor; if he is friendly and polite to every one, he is considered a flatterer and a deceiver; if he is reserved, either naturally, or through love of virtue, with the opposite sex, he is again accused of being unmannerly, and of not knowing how to deal with people, and so on. This hatred and ill-will finds something sinful and faulty even in virtues, and when a man forms a judgment of that kind, of course it comes out in conversation with others.

¹ Venit enim Joannes neque manducans, neque bibens, et dicunt: Dæmonium habet. Venit Filius hominis manducans et bibens, et dicunt: Ecce homo vorax et potator vini-publicanorum et peccatorum amicus.—Matth. xi. 19, 20.

Nay, what adds to the malice and injustice of these hostile criticisms, is that when nothing in a person's outward life and actions can be found fault with, his secret thoughts and intentions, although known only to God and himself, are made the object of attack, and bad motives are imputed to him; his words, and actions, and behavior are carefully studied, in order to find in them some proof that his intentions are bad. Thus they say: that priest goes so often to that house and visits such and such a person, he cannot mean anything good by it; that woman, that girl is always well dressed when she appears in church, she can hardly come for devotion's sake alone, she never paid for that dress out of her own pocket, etc.; I have seen those two talking together for along time, and could see by their manner how they are affected towards each other; did you not notice what a face so-and-so made? I can easily guess what he is thinking of; did you hear what he said, on that occasion? I know what he means well enough, etc. Do not people very often talk, my dear brethren, in the manner spoken of by St. James in his Epistle, although in a different sense: "Do you not judge within yourselves, and are become judges of unjust thoughts?"¹

Even bad motives are attributed.

Now is not that a really diabolical malice? If the law of Christian charity obliges a man to esteem his neighbor, and to give him credit for good intentions, unless there is undoubted proof of his wickedness,—and even in case of doubt, one is bound to believe in the innocence of one's neighbor, rather than in his guilt;—and if the same charity obliges us to excuse another's intention, even when we cannot approve of his outward actions, how unchristian, then, and wicked it must be to condemn the thoughts and motives of another, when one cannot find fault with, or condemn his actions, and thus to attribute to him a fault that he never perhaps thought of? Let all the evil spirits appear against me; let my outward actions accuse me before the throne of God; as long as my own conscience does not give testimony against me, I am innocent in His sight; if my own conscience does not condemn me, neither will God.

Thereby charity is grievously injured.

But what neither the conscience of an innocent man, nor the demons of hell, nor the angels of Heaven, nor God Himself can do, a mere mortal treacherously attempts by rashly judging, criticising, and defaming his neighbor's character. What

¹ Nonne judicatis apud vosmetipsos, et facti estis judices cogitationum iniquarum?—James ii. 4.

an injustice! What has become of Christian charity? Still, where there is hatred against another, we can easily see that it will give rise to rash judgments and uncharitable talk.

When others are spoken of through sheer loquacity, their faults, not their virtues, are likely to be the subject of conversation.

But what we cannot sufficiently wonder at and deplore, is the fact that the great majority of men, and even those who have no hatred or enmity towards others, and who otherwise lead holy, pious, and spiritual lives, are subject to this vice; for they cannot restrain their suspicious thoughts, their rash judgments, nor can they keep their slippery tongues in check. Sometimes, when in company, they tell all they know about another; not out of ill-will, or malice; but through sheer thoughtlessness, or love of talk. These latter are not guilty of so great a sin as the former, since their intention is not wicked; still, they infringe the right which he of whom they speak has to their charity, when his faults and failings are made the subject of conversation, as is generally the case; for our corrupt nature is far more apt to remark, to remember, to be impressed by, and therefore to speak of what is faulty and vicious in another, than what is good and virtuous. In ancient times the Egyptians had a symbol representing an eclipse of the sun and a clock, with the inscription: "Neither of these is looked at unless it is in fault."¹ Not at all a bad idea, my dear brethren, and one which will serve admirably to illustrate my subject. The sun rises and sets every day, and all things enjoy the benefit of its light; the fields and forests receive their fruitfulness from it; and yet, who is there who ever thinks of the sun during the day? Hardly one, except perhaps astronomers, who are wont to study the courses of the heavenly bodies. But when the sun is eclipsed, every one looks at it; the most ignorant then become astronomers and examine it; they talk of its cause, its duration, its probable effects, and they know enough about it to keep them talking for a whole day; "the sun is not looked at unless it is in fault." It is the same thing with a clock; as long as it gives the right time, people are satisfied; they like to know what progress the day is making; but of the clock itself they never speak, unless it happens to go wrong, and to strike out of time; and if it does so once or twice, they are wont to say: oh, that clock is of no use; it strikes when it likes. It is just the same with the criticisms that men have to bear from one another. When a man by his virtues and piety shines like the sun, while the holiness of his life might serve as a clock for others to regulate their

¹ Non nisi cum defleat, spectatorem habet.

lives by, there are few who pay any attention to him; hardly one in a thousand takes the least notice of him, and it would be looked upon as bad taste to bore others with a long conversation about his virtues. But if this sun is eclipsed for a moment; if this clock strikes the wrong hour only once; if that man says or does anything faulty; if he makes even an apparent mistake, then indeed he has observers enough to watch him, to examine and scrutinize his conduct, and to speak about it, some through envy and hatred, most through thoughtlessness and loquacity.

Hence it is, and it can hardly be otherwise, that in this fault-finding and criticising there is a great deal that is false and untrue, and the person spoken of is accused of doing what he is altogether innocent of, and thus he suffers great injustice. Why so? Because our opinions and judgments, and our imaginary knowledge of another's actions are nearly always founded on uncertain and deceitful appearances. For, tell me, how do you know that what you say of that person is true? I have seen, or heard it, you answer. And that is generally the only foundation of the criticism: I have seen, or heard it! That is the judgment-seat before which the virtues are summoned to receive their sentence. Has not the Holy Ghost given us to understand clearly enough, by the Prophet Isaias, that we must not trust such treacherous witnesses as our eyes and ears? "He shall not judge according to the sight of the eyes, nor reprove according to the hearing of the ears."¹ How many there are whom these senses deceive! "I have seen it!" What have you seen? "What that man did, where he went, how he behaved." And is that all? Have you seen his heart? Have you seen the intention he had in acting as he did, in going to that place, in behaving in that way; for it is certain that the goodness or malice of an outward act depends principally on the intention one has when performing it. "For what man," asks St. Paul, "knoweth the things of a man, but the spirit of a man that is in him?"² If you were to see a young woman, splendidly dressed, going through a hostile camp to the tent of the general whose licentiousness is well-known, and spending the night in it, what would you think? Oh, certainly, you would say, she has lost her virtue, and is a bad woman. And yet that was done in the old Law by one of

They mix up a great deal of falsehood with what they say, because outward appearances often deceive.

¹ Non secundum visionem oculorum judicabit, neque secundum auditum aurium arguet. —Isai. xi. 3.

² Quis enim hominum scit, quæ sunt hominis, nisi spiritus hominis, qui in ipso est.—I. Cor. ii. 11.

the most chaste of women, Judith, whose purity was untarnished. If you saw a religious going by night into a house of ill fame, and giving money to a noted courtesan, what would you say? Certainly that he was guilty of a grievous sin. And yet that was done once by a holy hermit, whose only intention was to prevent that woman from offending God, at least for one night. Thus we are often deceived when we form our opinions from outward appearances alone.

And much more our ears.

“I have heard it.” Indeed? And must it be true therefore? If we are to take all we hear as Gospel, there will be no lies in the world any longer. If everything people say is true, hardly any one will have a good character, and we must look on Susanna and Joseph as guilty of adultery, and Our Lord Himself as a drinker of wine, a disturber of the people, a blasphemer, and a deceiver. Susanna was accused on oath by the two elders, and all the people believed the accusation, and were about to stone her; Joseph was accused by the wife of Putiphar, and was cast into prison; Christ Himself was publicly accused by the high-priest, the scribes, and nearly all the Jewish people, and was condemned to death and nailed to the Cross; yet all these accusations were wicked calumnies. How often have you not been deceived by reports you have heard, so that you have afterwards found to be false what you at first believed? How often do not people interpret a thing in a wrong sense, either because they do not understand what is said, or because some important word has escaped their ears? How often does it not happen that an exaggerated or an imperfect report of a thing makes it look quite different from what it really is? In a word, he who believes things on hearsay evidence will very often put his faith in falsehood.

Thus a grievous injustice is done to one's neighbor.

Meanwhile, with such a weak and treacherous foundation to build on, you imprudently talk of others, and relate what you have seen or heard of them. Prudent people will take what you say as a joke; others will believe it, because they are prying, ill-disposed persons, and will carry it farther, and so the story goes on, with no other foundation than mere hearsay, until it becomes public talk and is accepted as a fact. But the poor, innocent person of whom it is told has to bear all the blame and the disgrace, and frequently suffers grievously on account of it; he loses his good character, and becomes the talk of the town; when he finds out that such is the case, he may perhaps begin to give vent to his anger, and thus enmities and dissensions are

caused; the religious is no longer looked on as true to his vocation; no one will look at that poor girl; that lawyer loses a great number of his clients; people are afraid to trust that business man; that tradesman loses his customers, etc. See what mischief you cause by your imprudent tongue! How are you to make good the loss you have caused, and restore the good name you have ruined, the friendship you have destroyed? You had no trouble at all in speaking; but it will take time and trouble enough to make restitution for all the injury you have inflicted on others. And how difficult it will be for you to account for your conduct satisfactorily in this respect to your divine Judge!

Supposing even that what you say is literally true, and that many are already aware of it, nay more, supposing that no harm is done to any one by your talking of it; yet you can hardly avoid violating Christian charity even then. For you act in direct opposition to the rule of charity: "do unto others as you wish them to do unto you." Consider the matter fairly, and acknowledge the truth, if not to me, at least to your own conscience; would you be satisfied if others spoke of you in that way? if you were painted in such black colors? Would you like other people, to whom you are not at all answerable, to pry into your concerns, to watch all your actions, to keep a list of the persons with whom you associate, the places you visit, the conversations you hold, to interpret your behavior, your faults, and failings according to their own ideas, and to make sport of them with others, to laugh at and ridicule them? Even if your faults are known to many, would you like to have them frequently spoken of, so as to keep them fresh in people's memories? I do not think that, if you have any love for yourself, you would be indifferent to such a proceeding; for how could you like to have others tearing your character to pieces? But if you do not wish that to be done to you, you must be careful not to do it to others. Why can you not keep silent about your neighbor's faults; when you are so anxious that your own should be kept secret? This is what St. Augustine could not understand. "Why is it," he asks, that he who is unwilling to be judged by others, should set himself up as their judge?"¹

Even if the report be true, it is against charity.

In a word, if you loved your neighbor as yourself, according to the Christian law, you would abstain from finding fault with and putting a bad meaning on the actions of others. When we love a person, we hardly like to condemn his faults, much less

For charity looks at everything in the best light.

¹ Cum homo non ita se velit ab aliis judicare.

to speak of them to others; and if we hear a word against him, we are pained, and show, by our silence at least, that such talk is not pleasing to us. That is the charity that St. Paul requires all of us to practise towards our neighbor. "Charity is patient, is kind," he writes to the Corinthians; "dealeth not perversely," nay, "thinketh no evil;"¹ much less does she talk ill of others; she excuses as well as she can the faults she has witnessed; if she cannot approve of the outward act, she tries at all events to attribute it to a good intention, and if she cannot do that, she puts the matter out of her thoughts altogether, and leaves it to the all-seeing Judge.

After the
example of
Christ.

Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Saviour, who has proposed Himself to us as a model and pattern of all virtue, has given us a special example of the charity we must practise towards one another. It is well known how cruelly He was treated by the envious Jews; He could not excuse the hatred of the high-priest, the bitter feelings of the Scribes and Pharisees, the odious ingratitude of those on whom He had conferred so many favors, the falsehood of the suborned witnesses, the injustice of Pilate, the unheard of cruelty of the soldiers and executioners who tortured Him more than they had been commanded to do; He knew all this too well to be able to palliate it, so that His charity could find only one excuse, and that was that His persecutors did not really know who He was; and while He was hanging on the Cross, He put forward that excuse to His heavenly Father, in order to lessen the gravity of their crime: "Father," He cried in His death agony, "forgive them, for they know not what they do."²

Therefore
fault-finders
and they
who put a
bad interpretation
on others'
actions,
show that
they do not
love their
neighbor.

O dear Lord, Thou hast found in Thy worst enemies a reason to excuse and to palliate the heinous crime of deicide, of which they were guilty; and we, sinful mortals, cannot, or rather will not, keep silent about the faults of our fellow-men, of our own brethren, although we cannot have a certain knowledge of them; for since we are not able to see into their hearts, we cannot be sure that they are actuated by bad motives! Instead of following Thy example, and interpreting what they do in a good sense, we make them out to be worse than they are; instead of hiding their faults, we do our best to make them known! O my God, why are we not so fond of criticising and finding fault with ourselves?

¹ Charitas patiens est, benigna est, non agit perperam, non cogitat malum.—I. Cor. xiii. 4, 5.

² Pater, dimitte illis: non enim sciunt, quid faciunt.—Luke xxiii. 34.

How is it that we are so anxious to hide our own faults? We are ready at once with a hundred excuses to palliate them. And why do we not act in the same way towards others? Ah, why indeed? Because we do not love our neighbor as ourselves; and therefore, when with our fault-finding and attributing bad motives to others, and speaking ill of them, we offend against charity, and violate Thy chief command, neither do we love Thee. O Lord, nor walk in Thy footsteps, and consequently we can have no part in Thee!

I address you now, my dear brethren, in the words of our Saviour: "Judge not, that you may not be judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged, and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again."¹ If you wish to give your neighbor his due, and to practise the charity you owe him; if you wish to be friends and followers of Jesus Christ; if you wish to stand well with God at the judgment-seat, then you must never judge ill of another, and much less say anything to his detriment. Do not meddle with the affairs of others. If curiosity should prompt you to inquire what this or that person has said or done, if the slippery tongue is on the point of criticising others, restrain it, reprove it in the words in which Christ reprov'd Peter, when the latter was too anxious to find out what was to become of John: "What is it to thee; follow thou Me."² What hast thou to do with the faults of others? Art thou created for no other purpose but to criticise them? Look after yourself and your own soul; that is all that God requires of you. Thus you should criticise your own actions, and see whether they are good or bad, praiseworthy or reprehensible. According to the beautiful exhortation of St. Paul, "Let every one prove his own work, and so he shall have glory in himself only, and not in another,"³ that is a matter that concerns us all; but we have nothing to do with the actions of others, for whom we are not responsible to God. "For every one shall bear his own burden;"⁴ every one will have to give an account of his own works, and according to them he shall be either punished or rewarded. Let us act like the Apostles at the Last Supper, when Christ told them that one of them was about

Conclusion
and exhortation to
each one to
mind his
own faults.

¹ Nolite judicare, ut non judicemini. In quo enim judicio judicaveritis, judicabimini: et in qua mensura mensi fueritis, remetietur vobis.—*Math.* vii. 1, 2.

² Quid ad te? tu me sequere.—*John* xxi. 22.

³ Opus autem suum probet unusquisque. et sic in semetipso tantum gloriam habebit, et non in altero.—*Gal.* vi. 4, 5.

⁴ Unusquisque enim onus suum portabit.—*Ibid.*

to betray Him. "And they being very much troubled, began every one to say: Is it I, Lord?"¹ Not one asked, is it my neighbor? Is it Peter, Andrew, or Judas? but each one was afraid that he himself might be the unhappy traitor. "Is it I, Lord?" Oh, if every one were to attend to himself, and to his own faults and sins, how much would he not find to blame and condemn! He would soon see that he is like a traveller who is carrying a bag on his back, and who can see only what is before him, but not the load of sins he himself is carrying. You know my dear brethren, how Christ acted when the Pharisees brought before Him the woman taken in adultery, and said to Him, that she should be stoned: "Jesus, bowing himself down, wrote with His finger on the ground;"² that is, as commentators say, He wrote on the ground their secret sins. "When, therefore, they continued asking Him, He lifted Himself up and said to them: he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."³ How astonished they must have been when they heard this! They slunk away one after the other, like thieves caught in the act; not one of them dared to cast a stone at the guilty woman. "But they hearing this went out one by one, beginning at the eldest; and Jesus alone remained, and the woman standing in the midst."⁴ Oh if that same finger were to write down the sins and daily faults of each one of us, so that we could see them, then indeed we should be silent about others, and not be so ready to find fault with and to cast stones at our neighbor; we should then leave him in peace, and try to rectify our own misdeeds! Therefore, if ever you are present when the faults of others are talked of, look at once into your own consciences, where your offences against God are written down, and ask yourselves: have I then no fault? Certainly, and not a few of them! Then why should I condemn others? I must repent of my own misdeeds, accuse myself of them in confession, and do penance for them.

Advice for
those who
listen to
such talk.

But you, who sometimes hear talk of that kind in company, you should follow the advice of the Wise Ecclesiasticus: "in many things be as if thou wert ignorant."⁵ Act as if you did

¹ Et contristati valde, cœperunt singuli dicere: Numquid ego sum, Domine?—Matth. xxvi. 22.

² Jesus autem inclinans se deorsum, digito scribebat in terra.—John viii. 6.

³ Cum ergo perseverarent interrogantes eum, erepit se, et dixit eis: Qui sine peccato est vestrum, primus in illam lapidem mittat.—Ibid. 7.

⁴ Audientes autem unus post unum exibant, incipientes a senioribus; et remansit solus Jesus, et mulier in medio stans.—Ibid. 9.

⁵ In multis esto quasi inscius.—Ecel. xxxii. 12.

not know what the talk is about; for if you listen to it, and show that you take pleasure in it, you co-operate in the sin and in the injury done to charity. Therefore, if you have any authority over those who are finding fault with their neighbor, you must exercise it, and say to them with a holy zeal: what is that to you? And this you are bound to do. If they are not subject to you, although they are your inferiors, you must modestly say to them; what is that to me? I know nothing about the matter, nor do I concern myself with the affairs of other people; or else, like St. Chrysostom, you may say: If you wish to praise another in my hearing, I will listen to you; but I have no ears for fault-finding. And this is required by Christian charity. But if your superiors talk in that way, so that you dare not remonstrate, then be silent, and think to yourself: What is that to me? There is so much talk of that kind going about, that one knows not what to believe; I will not form a rash judgment of my neighbor, etc. If all listeners were to act in that way, there would soon be an end to uncharitable talk.

Finally, you, who are exposed to the criticisms and fault-finding of others, be not disturbed at it; let people think and say of you what they please; if you are guilty of what they accuse you of, humble yourselves, acknowledge that you deserve to be found fault with, and resolve to amend. If you give reasonable grounds for suspicion or for unfavorable judgments of your conduct, you are bound in conscience to remove that stumbling block out of the way of others. If you are innocent, then be comforted! You are not the only one; you have countless companions who must bear patiently similar criticisms of their conduct; the saint who is free from them, has yet to be born. Continue then to live as true Christians; say confidently with St. Paul: "But to me it is a very small thing to be judged by you, or by any man's day;"¹ it does not trouble or concern me in the least, that men should condemn me; I seek not their favor, nor do I fear their displeasure; "but he that judgeth me, is the Lord."² He can see into my heart, of which men know nothing; they may now condemn my actions behind my back, but by and by they will not be my judges: there is One who will judge me, and He will judge them too, and their talk. To Him I appeal; to Him I entrust my cause; if He does not speak against me, then my affairs are prospering, even if the

For those
who are
criticised
and found
fault with.

¹ *Mihi autem pro minimo est, ut a vobis judicer, aut ab humano die.*—I. Cor. iv. 3.

² *Qui autem judicat me, Dominus est.*—Ibid. 4.

whole world were to look on me as the greatest malefactor. Oh what a consolation it is for me, O Lord, to be able to say to Thee with Thy penitent servant David: "To Thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before Thee."¹ If I have transgressed Thy commands, as, I now sorrowfully acknowledge, I have done only too often, Thou art the only one against whom I have sinned. If I have done my duty and led a good life, it is for Thy sake alone. If I have deserved punishment, it is from Thee alone that I have to fear it, it is Thy pardon alone that I still can implore. If I have deserved a reward, it is Thou alone who wilt give it me. The world, O Lord, has judged, condemned, and reviled Thee; am I any better than Thou? I ought to look on it as an honor to suffer a little with Thee. Yes, O Lord, I am satisfied! I will continue to serve Thee, and to seek Thee and Thy favor alone! If I have Thee as my friend, I have enough. Amen.

SIXTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON THE INJURY DONE TO ONE'S SELF AND TO GOD BY
FAULT-FINDING.

Subject.

He who pries into, criticises and finds fault with the actions of others, 1. Neglects his own soul, and therefore acts against the love he owes himself; 2. Usurps the right and the office of God, and therefore acts against the love he owes to God.—*Preached on the Feast of St. John the Evangelist.*

Text.

Quid ad te? Tu me sequere.—John xxi. 22.
"What is it to thee? follow thou Me."

Introduction.

There seemed to be some ground for the question asked by Peter. O dear Lord, he said, Thou hast told me how I am to be like Thee in my death; but here is another whom Thou lovest very much, my fellow Apostle John: "What shall this man do?" What will become of him? Certainly the question appears reasonable enough, and evinced an anxiety that arose out

¹ *Tibi soli peccavi, et malum coram te feci.*—Ps. l. 6.

of brotherly love. Yet St. Peter received a sharp reproof by way of answer: "What is it to thee? follow thou Me," you must be satisfied with what I have told you. My dear brethren, Our Lord, who acted and spoke always for our instruction and justification, warns by this reproof, not only Peter, but all of us, to abstain from inquiring curiously into the affairs of others; for we must look after ourselves and our own souls, if we wish to follow Christ to Heaven. How many there are nowadays who deserve that reproof! "What is it to thee?" You who are fond of prying into the lives of others, "what is it to thee?" You, who, without sufficient grounds, suspect and condemn your neighbor, "what is it to thee?" You who put a bad interpretation on the actions of others, and blame and criticise them, "what is it to thee?" You who are fond of speaking of others' faults and failings, "what is it to thee?" Look to yourself, and see that you follow the Lord by leading a Christian life. But that you cannot do, as things are; for, is it following Christ, to usurp the office of judge, which belongs to God? Is it following Christ, to neglect the salvation of your soul? Is it following Christ, to violate the law of Christian charity? But that is what you do whenever you interfere with others, either by judging them, or prying into their concerns, or finding fault with and talking about them. Thereby you violate the law of Christian charity, and act most unjustly, as I have already shown: but you act also against the love of yourself and the love of God, as I shall now prove.

Plan of Discourse.

By thus interfering with the affairs of others which do not concern us, we neglect our own souls, and therefore act against the love we owe ourselves: the first part. We usurp the right and the office of God, and therefore act against the love we owe Him: the second part.

O Almighty and merciful God, what a great thing it would be for us, if Thy grace were this day to impel us all to amend or to avoid that great and common fault! We humbly beg that grace of Thee through the merits of Thy dearest Mother Mary, and the intercession of our holy angels guardian.

It is a well-known saying that he who is intent on too many things at once, is not likely to do any of them properly; ^{He who at-} nay it ^{tempts to do} many differ-

¹ Pluribus intentus minor est ad singula sensus.

ent things
at once, will
do none of
them well.

is almost an impossibility for our weak human understanding to bring even two opposite undertakings to a successful conclusion at the same time; one of them must necessarily give way to the other, or be accomplished in a very imperfect manner. I have not ten hands; I cannot be present in two places at once; how then can I do everything at once? Such is the cry that we hear from servants, when their masters expect too much from them. And sometimes too they have a right to excuse themselves humbly and respectfully; but they should never murmur or grumble against their master or mistress.

Our great-
est concern
should be
to serve
God and
save our
souls.

What, my dear brethren, is the chief duty that God has imposed on each one of us during this life? Ask the children in the catechism class, why man was created, and they will answer you: to love and serve God, and to be happy with Him forever. This is the one necessary thing by which, as Ecclesiastes says, a wise man may be known: "Fear God and keep His commandments; for this is all man."¹ This is the only affair that concerns every one in particular; the king in his government, the peasant at the plough, the soldier in the field, the merchant in his office, the tradesman in his workshop, the servant in his employment, the maid in the kitchen or at the spinning-wheel, all have to serve God, to keep His commandments, that their souls may gain Heaven. This is what we must unceasingly attend to at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances; all other thoughts, cares, considerations, words, and works, must depend on this; what does not help us therein, is of no concern to us; what hinders us therein, we must avoid as the greatest evil. This is the only thing about which each one will be questioned at the judgment-seat of God, as to whether and how he attended to it. "For," as St. Paul says, "we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. Therefore every one of us shall render account to God for himself."² Whether another, who is not under my care, has lived well or ill, served his God faithfully or not, that I shall not have to answer for; but I shall certainly be asked how I lived myself, and how I loved and served my God. Where the soul of my brother is gone, unless I have perverted it and am bound to convert it, that is not the question that will be put to me; if it is lost it will not hinder my salvation; if it is in Heaven, it will not prevent my damnation if I deserve

¹ Deum time, et mandata ejus observa, hoc est enim omnis homo.—Eccles. xii. 13.

² Omnes enim stabimus ante tribunal Christi. Itaque unusquisque nostrum pro se rationem reddet Deo.—Rom. xiv. 10, 12.

it. It is the eternal welfare of my own soul that I must look after; this is the most important and necessary thing I have to attend to, as long as I am on this earth. All other things in the world do not concern me.

And, O inquisitive, meddling man, this one necessary thing is the very one that you neglect, when you meddle with the affairs of other people, whom God has not committed to your care. For, while you are engaged in prying into their lives and actions, how can you keep a watchful eye over yourself, so as to regulate your own conduct? If you think and judge ill of others, and put a bad interpretation on their actions, how can you form a sound opinion of the nature of your own thoughts, words, and works, so as to decide whether or not they are in accordance with your last end? If you like to listen to backbiting and detraction, and to hear the faults of others spoken of, how can you hear the voice of conscience, or know what faults it reproaches you with? If you ridicule, criticise, and comment on the defects you have seen, heard of, or suspected in your neighbor, either through hatred and ill-will, or through imprudence and loquacity; how can you be in earnest in your efforts to correct and amend your own defects? If you are so quick in discovering your neighbor to be sinful or vicious, so that you therefore despise and condemn him secretly to yourself, and publicly in presence of others, how can you repent of and detest your own faults? And therefore, how can you at the same time attend to the most necessary affair of your salvation, and fulfil it as you ought? That is, humanly speaking, impossible; these things are so different from each other, that they cannot be attended to at the same time.

It is neglected by him who meddles with the affairs of others.

When the natural heat of the body comes too much to the surface, it is, according to the testimony of all medical authorities, a sign that the internal heat is decreasing, and that the stomach is getting all the colder. And we find that to be true by our own experience; we have, generally speaking, a better appetite in winter than in summer; and in summer a cold drink is far more injurious than in winter. Why so? Because in summer, when the surface of the body is heated, the stomach loses a portion of its natural and necessary heat through the opening of the pores of the skin; but in winter the cold outside prevents the escape of the internal heat. So it is with those who pour out their thoughts, cares, and conversation, over things outside themselves, and are anxious to know how others live, and how they act, and speak; but with regard to their own interior, their own souls,

For he does not try to attend to the amendment of his own faults.

they are ignorant, careless, and indifferent. As the ancients used to say, they carry a sack over their shoulders, in the front part of which they have the faults and sins of their neighbor, so that they can always keep them before their eyes and criticise them; but in the back part they have their own faults and sins, so that they cannot see, feel, or notice them, and therefore cannot correct them. The holy Fathers, and especially St. Basil, St. Chrysologos, and St. Bernard, compare those people to an open eye, which sees everything that comes in its way in clear daylight, but cannot see itself. St. Augustine calls them lazy or indolent people; "they are curious about the lives of others, but careless about amending their own lives."¹ "The great fault of curiosity is," says St. Gregory, "that it leads the mind of an individual away from himself to study the lives of others, while it hides from him the state of his own soul; thus he knows much about others, and very little about himself."² As we read in the Gospel of St. Matthew, the Son of God made the same complaint when he warned us not to judge others, and much less to speak ill of them: "Why seest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye; and seest not the beam that is in thy own eye? or how sayest thou to thy brother: Let me cast the mote out of thy eye; and behold a beam is in thy own eye?"³ but you do not notice it; you see, judge, criticise and condemn a friendly look, a quiet word, which one person has exchanged with another; but you do not see or condemn your own far worse misdeeds, which you commit daily; you can talk about and find fault with the amusements of others, which are often innocent enough; but you do not seem to notice that your own life is consumed in idleness, eating, drinking, sleeping, and dangerous amusements; you put a bad interpretation on your neighbor's actions, although you cannot know whether they are bad or not; but you do not amend your own wicked ways, although you have no doubt of their malice.

Poor blind man that you are! look to yourself; attend to yourself before interfering with and talking of the concerns of others, which are nothing to you! "Thou hypocrite, cast out first the

¹ Curiosum genus ad cognoscendam vitam alienam, desidiosum ad corrigendam suam.—S. Aug. L. i. Confess.

² Grave curiositatis vitium est, quæ dum cujuslibet mentem ad investigandam proximi vitam exterius ducit, semper ei sua intima abscondit, ut aliena sciens, se nesciat.—S. Greg. L. Mor.

³ Quid autem vides festucam in oculo fratris tui, et trabem in oculo tuo non vides. Aut quomodo dicis fratri tuo: Sine, ejiciam festucam de oculo tuo: et ecce, trabs est in oculo tuo.—Matth. vii. 3, 4.

If each one did so, there would not be so many rash judgments and criticisms.

beam out of thy own eye, and then shalt thou see to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."¹ Why should it concern you to know and be able to speak of how others live? Have you to answer to God for them? Is there perhaps nothing in your own heart and conscience that is worth thinking about and amending? Can you say with St. Paul: "I am not conscious to myself of anything?"² It would be rare indeed to find one who could say that. But hear what the Apostle adds: "Yet am I not hereby justified."³ How! says St. Chrysostom, Paul does not dare to say that he is free from faults and sins, although his conscience does not accuse him of any; can we then venture to say that we are innocent? But if we cannot say that, if we do not even know how it is with us, how can we be so presumptuous as to pass judgment on others? "I know not myself; how can I say anything of another?"⁴ Oh, says St. Peter Damian, "if we were as strict in judging ourselves as we ought to be, others would not have so much to suffer from our censoriousness."⁵ If the Pharisee, who extolled himself in the temple so much above other men, had looked into his own heart, and seen the secret pride and hypocrisy that filled it, he would not have despised, nor condemned as a robber and adulterer, the public sinner who, filled with humility and sorrow for his sins, stood at the door, and did not dare to raise his eyes to Heaven. If the Jews, as we read in the eighth chapter of the Gospel of St. John, had considered their own sins and vices, which Christ wrote with His finger on the ground, they would not have dared to accuse the woman taken in adultery, nor to condemn her to be stoned. If the scribes and the high-priest had examined their own consciences, and tried to amend their wicked lives, Jesus Christ, the Holy of holies, would not have had so many to spy and watch Him. In the same way, my dear brethren, if each one of us were to attend properly to the affairs of his soul, no honest man would be troubled by censorious critics. But, as daily experience proves, since the whole world is filled with those critics, it is no wonder that there are so very few who really strive earnestly to save their souls. Once for all; it is impossible to attend to

¹ Hypocrita, ejice primum trabem de oculo tuo, et tunc videbis ejicere festucam de oculo fratris tui.—Matth. vii. 5.

² Nihil mihi conscius sum.—I. Cor. iv. 4.

³ Sed non in hoc justificatus sum.—Ibid.

⁴ Quomodo, qui mea nescio, aliena indicare potero?

⁵ Si districti circa nos essemus, ut dignum est, judices, non tam rigidos experiretur vita aliena censores.

one's soul properly, and at the same time to judge and find fault with the actions of others.

He who is given to fault-finding shows thereby that his soul is not in a good state.

Nay, they who are so fond of fault-finding show clearly enough that their souls are not in a good state. Nor do I allude now to the violation of the law of charity of which they are guilty, as I have proved already. But they give clear proof that they are guilty of the very faults and sins which they think they find in others. "Wherefore," says St. Paul to the Romans, "thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art, that judgest. For, wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou dost the same things which thou judgest."¹ How is it that the same food and drink is bad for one, and good for another? The one is healthy and strong, although his food is coarse and common; the other, although he has the healthiest, choicest food every day, is always pale, thin, and delicate. What is the reason of that? The one has a healthy stomach which digests the food it receives, and converts it into flesh and blood; the other has a delicate stomach, which converts even the daintiest food into bile and evil humors. "So it is with us mortals," says St. Augustine, "we suspect, judge, and speak of others according to our own interior dispositions."² We measure our neighbor's shoe by our own last. He whose soul is in a good state interprets the actions of others in a good sense; he whose soul is corrupted by faults and sins sees nothing but evil, even in the good that others do.

For he judges others by his own faults and sins.

A pious Christian, who makes profession of true virtue, thinks that every one is like himself; he looks on every one as good and pious, whose wickedness he is not thoroughly convinced of; he hardly ever suspects and never judges ill of others. He does his duty, and leaves the rest to God. A wicked, tepid half-Christian thinks that every one is defiled with the filth in which he himself is buried up to the eyes. "The fool when he walketh in the way," says the wise Preacher, "whereas he himself is a fool, esteemeth all men fools."³ The impure man thinks that all are like himself, and that they have the same thoughts, the same meaning in their words and conversations as he has; a treacherous flatterer trusts no one, through fear of being deceived; an impatient, quarrelsome, passionate man takes every sour look, every thoughtless word as an insult; a proud, conceited man,

¹ Propter quod inexcusabilis es, O homo omnis, qui judicas. In quo enim judicas alterum, teipsum condemnas; eadem enim agis, quæ judicas.—Rom. ii. 1.

² Hoc homo proclivius suspicatur in aliis, quod sentit in se ipso.—S. Aug. in Ps. 118.

³ In via stultus ambulans, cum ipse insipiens sit, omnes stultos æstimat.—Eccles. x. 3.

whose only idea is to have a high position in the world, thinks that every one is trying to forestall him. In a word, just as looking through a red or blue glass makes everything appear red or blue, so each one will judge another according to the vices to which he himself is subject. Hence, when he has discovered a fault in his neighbor, his memory seizes hold of it at once, his imagination paints it much blacker than it really is, and on the first opportunity that offers, he will talk about it, either because it gratifies him to see that another is subject to the same fault as himself, or because he is so full of hatred and envy, that he cannot bear to see any good qualities in him.

What wicked thoughts King Saul had of David? He often complained to his attendants that he was in dread of his life on his account, and he even asked David to spare his life, when he was come into the possession of his kingdom. How could Saul have given way to a fear of that kind? How could such a thought have entered his mind? For David had always served him truly, had saved him from the hands of the Philistines, and more than once had spared his life, when he might have taken it. How was it then that Saul had such a bad opinion of him? Because he himself had a violent hatred of the innocent David; and for that reason he thought the latter as wicked as himself. Cain cried out full of anguish: "Every one therefore that findeth me, shall kill me."¹ But why? why should they kill you? No one will harm you! But he himself had killed his brother, and therefore he was afraid of every one. When Luther, the heresiarch, had turned apostate, doffed his monk's habit, and given himself up to impurity, he publicly taught in his writings that it was impossible for any one to observe chastity. Thus people who are fond of meddling with others' affairs are apt to measure them by their own standard. Hence, when they are given to criticising and fault-finding, no matter how good and pious they are in other respects, they have good reason to fear that their own souls are in a bad state; that their lives are not, or have not been good, that their consciences are burdened with many secret faults and vices, and therefore, that they condemn themselves as guilty of the very sins of which they accuse others.

I shall conclude this part in the words of Christ: "What is it to thee? follow thou Me:" What have you to do with others? You must follow Christ. Do you wish to gratify your curiosity? asks St. Chrysostom; if so, I will give you matter

Proved by
examples.

Conclusion
and exhortation to all
to look after
themselves
and their
own souls.

¹ Omnis igitur, qui invenerit me, occidet me.—Gen. iv. 14.

enough; you have not to go far to seek it; you need only look at yourself; begin and end with yourself; see how matters are with your own soul and conscience; criticise your own faults and sins; amend what is still unchristian and imperfect in your own language, behavior, and actions; look after yourself; see that you serve God and love Him with your whole heart, above all things, that so you may save your soul. You will find so much to arrange and set in order in this one only thing, which necessarily concerns you, that you will easily forget the faults of your neighbor, which do not concern you, and will leave him in peace. Oh, what a great thing it would be, if every one were to live in that way, if every one tried to do his own duty, and left others to attend to theirs! What peace and union there would be in families, what happiness and prosperity everywhere! What a Heaven there would be on earth! I am astonished when I consider that marriage feast in the Gospel of St. Matthew. One of the guests present had not on a wedding-garment. "Then the king said to the waiters: bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the exterior darkness."¹ Is it possible, I ask, that none of the guests noticed that the man was not properly clad, and did not warn him to procure a wedding garment before the king's arrival? No, says a holy Father, every one was intent on himself, so that his own garments might be in good order; consequently no one troubled himself about that man, but left him altogether to the king's good pleasure. Let us act in the same way, my dear brethren; we are all invited to the heavenly banquet; let each of us endeavor, with all possible diligence, to appear at the end of our lives with the garment of sanctifying grace. We have nothing to do with others; we must leave them to be disposed of according to the good will and pleasure of the King of Heaven. And this is the second point in which those prying, inquisitive fault-finders are guilty of sin, for they usurp the right and office that God has reserved to Himself, namely that of examining and judging our actions, and therefore they act, not only against the love they owe themselves, but also against the love and reverence they owe the divine Majesty, as I shall now show in the

Second Part.

But what am I saying? Has God then so strictly reserved to

¹ Tunc dixit rex ministris: Ligatis manibus et pedibus ejus, mittite eum in tenebras exteriores.—Matth. xxii. 13.

Himself all examination of the actions of others, that each one must attend to himself alone? Am I usurping the office of God, when I take an interest in the souls of others? If that is the case, why am I here preaching to you? And how can I have the audacity to reprove and condemn loquacity in others? What would it concern me if every one were addicted to this vice, and what would be the use of preaching? Sin may flourish and gain the upper hand as much as it will, preachers have nothing to do with that; they must look after their own souls! Hear this, masters and mistresses, magistrates and superiors! See what a load of care is lifted off your shoulders! You need not trouble yourselves about what goes on in the town or district, about how those subject to you live, or about the abuses that are prevalent; it is no concern of yours, whether your servants lead Christian lives or not; you have only to look after your own souls! Even you, parents, may be indifferent about your children, you need not try to bring them up carefully, or to keep them out of bad company, or from keeping late hours; for it is all one to you, whether they go to Heaven or to hell; you must take no interest in them, as you have only your own souls to mind! But how can that be, my dear brethren? If God says to us all in general: “judge not, and you shall not be judged; condemn not, and you shall not be condemned,”¹ yet He tells parents by His Apostle, St. Paul, how they are to deal with their children: “You fathers, provoke not your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and correction of the Lord.”² He tells masters and mistresses how they are to treat their servants. “But if any man have not care of his own, and especially of those of his house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”³ He tells preachers and pastors what they must do. “Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, entreat, rebuke, in all patience and doctrine;”⁴ and He says to all men: “if thy brother shall offend against thee, go, and rebuke him between thee and him alone.”⁵ But how can all

office of the Almighty, who take an interest in those who are entrusted to their care.

¹ Nolite judicare, et non judicabimini: nolite condemnare, et non condemnabimini!—Luke vi. 37.

² Vos patres, nolite ad iracundiam provocare filios vestros, sed educate illos in disciplina et correptione Domini.—Ephes. vi. 4.

³ Si quis autem suorum, et maxime domesticorum, curam non habet, fidem negavit, et est infideli deterior.—I. Tim. v. 8.

⁴ Prædica verbum, insta opportune, importune: argue, obsecra, increpa in omni patientia et doctrina.—II. Tim. iv. 2.

⁵ Si peccaverit in te frater tuus, vade, et corripe eum inter te et ipsum solum.—Math. xviii. 15.

this be done without watching, judging, and reprov-
ing the actions of others?

Superiors,
parents,
etc., are
bound to do
this.

We must not, therefore, imagine that this command allows of no exception. It is one thing to watch and notice the conduct of those whom God has committed to our care, and another to interfere with those for whom we are not at all responsible. Again, it is one thing to notice others' conduct, in order to prevent sin and to bring souls to Heaven, and another to notice it out of sheer curiosity, and to look only for faults in our neighbor, that we may condemn him and speak ill of him. God has given us no right to this latter, but the former He has imposed on many as a duty. Thus superiors must keep a watchful eye on their subjects, for the good of the latter; masters and mistresses must try to keep their servants from sin, and encourage them to practise virtue; preachers and pastors of souls must instruct their flocks, guard them from vice, and show them the road to Heaven; but especially parents must bring up their children in a Christian manner, keep them from occasions of sin, chastise their faults, and teach them to love and fear God. And this duty He has laid on them in such a way, that He will require at their hands the souls He entrusted to their care. Oh, would that we were more curious still in this respect, and that we took as much trouble to fulfil that duty, as we do to notice and criticise the faults of our neighbor!

But many of
them neglect
their
duty, and
meddle in
things that
do not concern
them.

But, strange to say, we neglect what we are commanded to do, and devote ourselves thoroughly to what we are forbidden to interfere with. We have a striking example of this in the First Book of Kings, in the person of the High-Priest Heli. He had the eye of a lynx to spy out the slightest fault committed by strangers who entered the temple; but he was blind to the great sins which his own sons committed, in his own house as well as in the temple. The whole city complained of the conduct of his sons, the people murmured at their impurity and the sacrileges they were guilty of, and spoke of the scandal they gave publicly. "The sin of the young men was exceedingly great before the Lord,"¹ says the Sacred Scripture. But their father was the last to know anything of their wickedness, or to reprove it. Meanwhile he was very sharp in detecting the faults of others. When the pious Anna came into the temple, laboring under a grievous sorrow, he rebuked her at once, and accused her of being drunk, "and said to her: How long wilt thou be

¹ Erat ergo peccatum puerorum grande nimis coram Domino.—I. Kings ii. 17.

drunk? Digest a little the wine of which thou hast taken too much.”¹ How many there are nowadays who resemble him! Tell that father to look after his son; that master to be careful of his servant, and not to allow him to go with bad companions, or to spend his time in drinking and gambling; tell that mother, her daughter or her servant-maid spends too much time at the door in the evening, talking to a person of the neighborhood. What is that to me? is the answer you would get; I do not meddle in other people’s affairs. What a pious mortal you are to be sure! You do not meddle in other people’s affairs! And why then are you so fond of talking of your neighbor’s faults to those who cannot help him to amend them, and with no other object but to bring ridicule and dishonor on him? What are his faults to you? But even if I were to make known the faults of another, with a good intention, to his parents or superiors, what better should I be? Mind your own business, is the only answer I should often get; I cannot believe such a thing of my children, or my servants; they are too good for that; I know well that they mean no wrong. Ah, mind your own business! Why do you not think of that when you spend hours talking of your neighbor’s faults. You cannot imagine that your children or servants mean any wrong; you do not believe they are guilty; you look on them as pious. Why do you not act in the same way when the faults of other people’s children are related to you by some backbiting, talkative individual? You are only too ready to believe them, and to join in the uncharitable remarks that are made. The law of Christian charity requires us, even in a private capacity, to warn our neighbor of his faults and reprove them in private, if we think that such warning will help him to amend; but who is there who has the courage to undertake to perform a duty of that kind? We are only too apt to say then, that the man is nothing to us; we have nothing to do with him, etc; and yet, when he is not present, and there is not the least hope of doing him any good, we criticise his faults, and make him the subject of injurious suspicions, rash judgments, and uncharitable talk, and we make light of doing so, although it is then, really, that we should remember that we have not to trouble ourselves about our neighbor’s affairs.

For it belongs to God alone to pronounce judgment on others, and we are thus guilty of usurping His office. “But who art thou that judgest thy neighbor?”² asks St. James in

And thus
usurps the
office of
judge that

¹ Dixitque ei: Usquequo ebria eris? digere paulisper vinum, quo mades.—I. Kings i. 14.

² Tu autem, quis es, qui judicas proximum?—James iv. 13.

belongs to
Christ.

his epistle, and who find fault with and condemn his actions? Who has commissioned you to do that? Are you appointed his judge and overseer? No, for the Supreme Judge has forbidden you to usurp that office: "Judge not;"¹ "Look not after wickedness in the house of the just;"² nor seek for faults in your neighbor. If a stranger came into your house without knocking at the door, and entered your room, you would consider him guilty of great insolence, and show him the door at once; and yet you venture, uninvited, into the houses of others, that is, you examine, criticise, and find fault with what is done in them, and speak of it everywhere. Who gave you authority to do that? You usurp an authority that does not belong to you, nor indeed to any mortal like yourself, for God does not allow any one to judge his neighbor in that way; nor does it belong to the angels, for God, who has appointed them to do His will, and to guard the souls of men, has not given them the right to judge our actions and intentions: "For God hath not subjected unto angels the world."³ But you usurp a right which belongs to Jesus Christ alone, the Son of God, who purchased it with His blood, the right namely, of judging the living and the dead. "There is one law-giver and judge," says St. James, "that is able to destroy and to deliver."⁴ Therefore St. Chrysostom warns us not to take upon ourselves this office of Our Lord: "Be careful not to usurp the office of judge that belongs to Christ; because it is for Him alone to examine your neighbor's life," and to pronounce upon his thoughts, words and actions, "and not for you."⁵

That is
great pre-
sumption.

Job, although he was the most patient of men, and bore all his trials meekly and silently, blessing God for them, yet, when his inconsiderate friends, not content with reproaching him with his sufferings, began to find fault with his actions, and to attribute the calamities that had befallen him to his sins, he could not restrain himself any longer, and he cried out: "Why do you persecute me as God?"⁶ Why do you presume to act the part of God, and to sit in judgment on me and my actions? Inquisitive and meddling fault-finder! do you then wish to make yourself equal to God, as far as His office as Judge is concerned?

¹ Nolite judicare.—Matth. vii. 1.

² Ne quaeras impletatem in domo just.—Prov. xxiv. 15.

³ Non enim angelis subjecti Deus orbem terræ.—Hebr. ii. 5.

⁴ Unus est legislator et iudex, qui potest perdere et liberare.—James iv. 12.

⁵ Noli praeripere Christi iudicis ordinem. Illius est munus, ista discutere, non tuum.

⁶ Quare persequimini me sicut Deus?—Job. xix. 22.

But what do I say? Equal? You arrogate to yourself even greater authority than God exercises. Christ, although He is the Lord of all created things, and has full power over the present and the future, yet does not pronounce judgment on any one, until after death: "And then will He render to every man according to his works."¹ He will examine the life of each one, and render to him according to his deserts. How patiently meanwhile He bears with sinners! How careful He is to prevent their misdeeds from being publicly known! How strictly He commands confessors never to make known by the least sign any sin they have heard in confession! But you, presumptuous man, dare to anticipate His judgment, and to pry into, judge, condemn, and talk about the faults of others, while the latter are still on earth, and perhaps, too, even after they have amended those faults, or resolved to amend them at some future time. What excessive presumption on the part of a miserable mortal, who is himself in great need of the divine mercy, to arrogate to himself what belongs to God, and to criticise his neighbor!

Woe to you, fault-finders and prying intermeddlers, on that day when your turn shall come to be judged! I would not willingly be in your place then! Not without reason has Our Lord, who cannot and will not allow His honor to suffer, threatened in three of the gospels, that, as you deal with others, so will He deal with you. You now constitute yourselves judges of others, without any right to do so; but you yourselves will have to appear before a Judge from whom you will not be able to conceal anything. You now discuss and examine, partly through curiosity, partly through envy and malice, the lives of others, and you notice the least fault they commit; "with the same measure that you shall mete withal, it shall be measured to you again."² God Himself will subject your lives to a strict examination; He will light a lantern, as He says Himself, and will search the most-hidden recesses of your hearts, nor shall the least fault escape Him. You now interpret in a bad sense all you see or hear of others, although you should give them credit for a good intention, even when their outward acts are inexcusable; "it shall be measured to you again;" God will take no excuse from you, but will pronounce sentence on you, according to the strictness of His justice, and the full weight of your sins. You now

Woe at the last judgment to fault-finders and those who pry into the actions of others.

¹ Et tunc reddet unicuique secundum opera ejus.—Matth. xvi. 27.

² Eadem quippe mensura, qua mensi fueritis, remetietur vobis.—Luke vi. 38.

Speak of your neighbor's faults, and make no secret of anything that you know or suspect to another's disadvantage, and thus you bring ridicule and dishonor on many a one: "it shall be measured to you again;" when the proper time comes, God will not keep silent about you; He will open the Book in which He has the record of all your wickedness, even to your most secret thoughts, and He will read it out, to your unutterable confusion, in presence of the whole world, before Heaven and earth, before angels, men, and devils. You now talk ill of and condemn many an honest man behind his back, when he cannot defend himself: "it shall be measured to you again;" God, without asking you about it, will pronounce on you that most severe and irrevocable sentence, without pity or mercy, which condemns the wicked to the flames of hell, and makes them accursed forever.

But you, pious and sensible Christians, who, according to the Christian law, look after your own souls, and can say with truth: I do not trouble myself about others for whom I am not responsible; I neither suspect, nor judge ill of my neighbor; I put the best interpretation on his actions; rejoice at the favorable, mild, and merciful judgment that awaits you. You are amongst the number of those of whom Our Lord says: "judge not, and you shall not be judged," and of whom He again assures us by St. Paul: "But if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."¹ Let us then, my dear brethren, shut ourselves up within our own consciences, in order to detect and to amend the faults we are guilty of. What does a river gain by overflowing its banks, except to sully and dirty its waters? Our lives, the time given us here below by God, is too short to be wasted in prying into and criticising the actions of others. The business of our eternal salvation is too difficult, and perilous, and important, for us to set it aside that we may occupy ourselves uselessly and mischievously with others' concerns. The account that we shall have to give of ourselves at the judgment-seat of God is perplexing enough already; why should we seek to make it worse by interfering unnecessarily with other people? Heaven and its eternal joys are far too beautiful to be sacrificed for the sake of gratifying a miserable curiosity regarding the conduct of others. Let others think, judge, talk, and laugh about our faults, as long as they please; our only concern must be to look well to ourselves, and to live as we ought. That is the way to act in a sensible, Christian manner. O Lord, from whose hands all good thoughts and

Conclusion
and exhortation
not to judge, much
less to speak
ill of others.

¹ Quod si nosmetipsos didicaremus, non utique iudicemur.—I. Cor. xi. 31.

purposes must come, grant that I may always have this true Christian spirit! If I sometimes am inclined to suspect others, to judge them in thought, or to put a bad interpretation on their actions, do no omit to warn me by my holy angel guardian, and to whisper to me: "what is it to thee? follow thou Me." If uncharitable conversation is going on in my presence, stop my ears, or else enlighten my understanding, that I may take what I hear in a good sense, and think to myself, what is it to me? If my slippery tongue is on the point of talking of my neighbor's faults, remind me of the same words: "what is it to thee?" so that I may keep silence, "that my mouth may not speak the works of men,"¹ according to the prayer of Thy servant David; so that I may not usurp the office of judge, which belongs to Thee, but attend to my own business constantly, follow Thee, serve Thee, with all possible care, and save my soul. Amen.

¹ Ut non loquatur os meum opera hominum.—Ps. xvi. 4.

ON INJURING THE CHARACTER OF OUR NEIGHBOR.

SIXTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON THE WICKEDNESS OF DEFAMING THE CHARACTER OF OUR
NEIGHBOR.

Subject.

To defame the character of others is one of the most grievous of vices; therefore all should avoid it most carefully. *Preached on the third Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Et murmurabant Pharisei et Scribæ, dicentes; quia hic peccatores recipit.—Luke xv. 2.

“And the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying: This man receiveth sinners.”

Introduction.

Out of the flowers, from which the bees extract honey, spiders extract poison. We see by the Gospel of to-day that the same holds true of men in another sense. The publicans and sinners came to Jesus Christ to hear His divine words, and to be moved to repentance and amendment of their lives. “Now the publicans and sinners drew near unto Him to hear Him.” Certainly their intention was a good one, and who could find fault with it? Christ receives sinners; He goes into their houses; He eats and drinks with them, so as to win their hearts, and convert them to God. A most holy work indeed, and who could have anything to say against it? And yet there were false and wicked tongues that spat out poison, and murmured and complained, and cried down Our Lord as a public sinner, on account of that holy work. “The Pharisees and the Scribes murmured, saying: this man

receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." But, if that was a good work, why did they complain of it? If it was wicked, why did they not represent that to Christ Himself, in the spirit of fraternal correction? Why did they talk about it everywhere behind His back? I am not so much surprised, my dear brethren, to find the wicked Jews guilty of acting in that way, for they were filled with bitter hatred and envy against Our Lord; but it is surprising that the same fault should exist amongst us Christians. What is more common among not only those who have a deadly hatred towards each other, but also among friends and relations, and Christians who otherwise are lovers of peace, and seem to lead holy lives, than for one to speak behind another's back of what he has seen or heard of him, to make his faults and defects the subject of conversation, and to rob him of his good name, and lessen his reputation by murmuring against and finding fault with him? This vice of uncharitable tongues is as common, as it is grievous and damnable, nor can one speak often enough against it, because generally it becomes almost incurable on account of the habit of loquacity it fosters. O Holy Spirit of God, Thou art the master and Lord of hearts, and rulest over them according to Thy good pleasure; Thou canst at once effect that which has cost me already much useless labor, and canst restrain the tongue, that unruly member which, as St. James says, no one can keep in order properly. We beg of Thee, by the merits of Thy virginal Spouse Mary, and through the intercession of all our holy angels guardian, to restrain our tongues, that they may never indulge in uncharitable talk. Trusting in the help of Thy light and grace, I shall speak to-day of the malice of this talk, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

To defame the character of others is one of the most grievous of vices; therefore, Christians, guard against it most carefully. Such is the whole subject of my sermon.

If he who defames his neighbor did nothing more than sever the bond of charity, harmony, and union, which should exist among men, he would, by that fact alone, be guilty of one of the most grievous of vices, since he acts against the fundamental law of charity. How important is it not in the sight of God, that this union and charity should exist and be constantly preserved among us! To love God, to love Him above all things, to love Him with our whole heart; what can be more reasonable than

The Almighty lays great stress on preserving the bond of charity amongst men.

that? And therefore that is the first and greatest command that God lays upon us: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart." Still, great and important as is this command to love God, He places another command in the same rank with it. "And the second is like to this, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;"¹ that is every one, great or small, rich or poor, friend or enemy, good or bad, and you must love them all as yourself. Nay, God frequently commands you, under pain of sin, to set aside the service you owe Him, when the love of your neighbor requires you to do so. For instance, on a Sunday or holyday, when you were prevented from hearing any of the earlier Masses, you hear the bell ringing for the last Mass; but there is a sick person whom you must attend to, and you have no one to take your place; what are you to do under these circumstances? It is true that you are bound to hear Mass every Sunday and holyday under pain of mortal sin; but not in this case, for the love of your neighbor has a prior claim on you; you must remain with the sick man if he is really in need of you and would suffer great inconvenience if deprived of your services; so that you must omit hearing the Mass that you would otherwise be bound to offer to God. Jesus Christ our Saviour has given to His disciples, and in their persons to all of us, many beautiful instructions and exhortations; but there is nothing He impresses on us so forcibly as mutual charity. How often did He not repeat, both before and after His resurrection, the words: "These things I command you, that you love one another;"² "A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another."³ The last prayer that He offered to His Father for His Apostles, before He took leave of them, was that they might practise this charity: "Holy Father:" I offer Thee those whom Thou hast given Me, and all who will believe in Me; "keep them in Thy name . . . that they may be one, as We also are . . . And not for them only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in Me; that they may all be one, as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee."⁴ To the same end, as St. Augustine says, He has given us His flesh and blood in the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, in order that all Christians partaking of the

¹ Secundum autem simile est huic: diliges proximum tuum, sicut teipsum.—Matth. xxii. 39.

² Hæc mando vobis: ut diligatis invicem.—John xv. 17.

³ Mandatum novum do vobis, ut diligatis invicem.—Ibid. xiii. 34.

⁴ Pater sanete, serva eos in nomine tuo, . . . ut sint unum, sicut et nos. Non pro eis autem rogo tantum, sed et pro eis qui credituri sunt per verbum eorum in me; ut omnes unum sint, sicut tu Pater in me, et ego in te.—Ibid. xvii. 11, 20, 21.

same spiritual food may be united in the bonds of charity; and for that reason the reception of this sacrament is called Communion, to signify the love and harmony that should reign amongst Christians. In a word, on this charity depends the observance of all the laws of God, as Christ tells us in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "On these two commandments," namely, that of the love of God, and that of the love of our neighbor, "dependeth the whole law and the prophets."¹ "My little children, love one another;"² was the only sermon that St. John, the beloved disciple, preached to his disciples; for, said he, if you do that, it suffices.

Wicked, uncharitable tongues, what do you do, when you talk about, criticise, ridicule, and find fault with the actions, the failings, and the defects of the absent? You violate the great fundamental law of charity; you break the bond of union that should exist amongst those for whom Christ died, that they might love one another; you tear out of their hearts the spirit of charity that Christ wishes to nourish in them, by giving them His own flesh and blood as their food and drink; you deprive of its effect that prayer that Our Lord and Saviour offered to His Eternal Father for all the faithful, that they might be one; for the only result of your uncharitable talk is to foment hatred and discord among men.

For, in the first place, what is it that gives rise to talk of that kind if not ill-will, or hatred, or envy, or vindictiveness and bitterness, with which your hearts must be filled towards those whose faults or failings you talk about? "Charity covereth all sins,"³ says the Holy Ghost by the Wise Man; it is a mantle that hides, as far as may be, all the vices and defects of our fellow-men. If I love a person, I would rather bite my tongue off, than say the least thing to his disadvantage, or to make him appear ridiculous. Besides, you cause those who listen to you to have a similar ill-will and aversion to the person you speak ill of, so that they lose the good opinion they formerly may have had of him. Nor will they, if they are as fond of talking as you are, keep to themselves what they have heard, but will make a point of spreading it about just as wickedly as you did, until everybody in the place knows all about it. Finally, what effect do you think your talk will have on the person of whom you speak, supposing it comes to his ears? What is more likely than that anger, ill-will, hatred,

This command is violated by him who defames his neighbor.

In his own heart, and in the hearts of those to whom and against whom he speaks.

¹ In his duobus mandatis universa Lex pendet, et Prophetæ—Matth. xxii. 40.

² Filioli mei diligite invicem.

³ Universa delicta operit charitas. Prov. x. 12.

and desire of revenge will take the place of charity? You see now that with one breath, one uncharitable word, you have destroyed the peace, unity, and charity that God has so emphatically recommended to us! This it is, that makes the sin of injuring another's character so odious to God and man. O my God, if it were my good fortune to be able to banish this hateful vice out of even one town, what quarrels, and disputes, and misunderstandings, and hatreds, and persecutions I should put a stop to! For those are the evils caused by wicked tongues amongst neighbors, friends and relations, brothers and sisters. What a number of souls I should rescue from hell! For back-biting and injuring the fair fame of others causes the loss of many a soul! But my wish is in vain, and I need not waste any more time in giving expression to it.

A good name is the greatest and best of all natural possessions.

There is nothing which proves more clearly the wickedness of uncharitable talk, than the great value of the treasure it robs one of. "The greater the value of the property that is injured," says St. Thomas, "the greater is the harm done." But of all the natural and temporal possessions that a man can have on this earth, is there any which is more esteemed, valued, and loved, than a good name or reputation? God, our religion, the world and its prudence, all unite in saying to and inculcating on every one that he must preserve his good name. God exhorts us by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "Take care of a good name; for this shall continue with thee, more than a thousand treasures precious and great."¹ Our religion calls a good name the good odor of a Christian life, which encourages men to practise virtue, as much as the bad example and scandal-giving betrays men to evil. The maxims and principles of the world forbid any one to suffer the least taint to rest on his honor. Ask any honorable man whether he would prefer to be looked upon as dishonorable, or to lose a hundred ducats: away he would say at once; away with all my money! My good name is far more to me! I would rather be poor and keep my good name, than rich and dishonorable. All worldly offices and employments depend on the good name of those who fill them; master, lord, merchant, magistrate, prince, king, emperor, all these are mere empty titles, if those who bear them have lost their good name; credit, faith, confidence, everything is lost, when honor is lost. As the saying goes, there is nothing more pleasant than health, and it is true; and there is

¹ Curam habe de bono nomine: hoc enim magis permanebit tibi, quam mille thesauri pretiosi et magni.—Eccel. xli. 17.

nothing sweeter than life, to preserve which a man will readily sacrifice all his wealth. And yet honor and a good reputation are sweeter and more pleasant than life and health. How many there are who risk their lives for the sake of making a name for themselves! And why? The reason of that the Holy Ghost gives by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "A good life hath its number of days; but a good name shall continue forever;"¹ everything we can enjoy during life, comes to an end in a short time; but a good name is not confined to this life, for it lasts after death, and is carried down to posterity. Hence, a good name is called the moral life of a man, and he who takes it away is called by the Apostle a murderer.

Murderers you are, then, you who defame your neighbor, and take away his moral and most precious life. One can compare you to nothing better than to that stone that was cut from the mountain without hands, as we read in the Book of Daniel. King Nabuchodonosor once saw in a dream a great statue, the head of which was of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet partly of iron and partly of clay. Suddenly the whole statue fell to pieces and crumbled into dust, which was blown away by the wind. What was the cause of this utter ruin? A single stone that fell from the mountain. "A stone was cut out of a mountain, without hands, and it struck the statue."² And on what part of the statue did the stone fall? On the golden head, the silver breast, the brazen body, or the iron legs? No; for it could not have broken those metals; but it fell on the feet, that were of clay. "It struck the statue upon the feet thereof, that were of iron and of clay, and broke them in pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver and the gold broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of a summer's threshing-floor; and they were carried away by the wind; and there was no place found for them."³ A picture, my dear brethren, of what is done every day in the world by uncharitable tongues. Many a one is as beautiful as gold in virtue and piety, as shining as silver in his purity, as strong as brass and iron in his constancy, while the good name he enjoys makes him like a beautiful statue in

This is taken away by him who defames his neighbor.

¹ Bonæ vitæ numerus dierum: bonum autem nomen permanebit in ævum.—EccI. xli. 16.

² Abscessus est lapis de monte sine manibus, et percussit statuam.—Dan. ii. 34.

³ Percussit statuam in pedibus ejus ferreis et sctilibus, et comminuit eos. Tunc contrita sunt pariter ferrum, testa, æs, argentum, et aurum, et redacta quasi in favillam æstivæ aræ, quæ rapta sunt vento, nullusque locus inventus est eis.—Ibid. 34, 35.

the eyes of men. And yet, how little is required to overthrow this statue and reduce it to dust! A single stone is enough; that is, a single word of calumny or detraction. And what does the calumniator or the detractor first attack? The gold and silver? What is good and praiseworthy in the man? By no means; he says not a word of that; but he begins by assailing the earthen feet; he finds out even the smallest faults and defects in the other, and talks about them, frequently exaggerating them, until the beautiful statue is destroyed, and the innocent and honorable man loses his good name and the moral life he before enjoyed.

Shown by a
simile.

Sperenger, in his "*Malleum Maleficorum*," relates that there were in his day certain sorcerers and professors of the black art, who, on being asked how they could manage to deprive of life, when desired to do so, a person who was perhaps a hundred miles distant, replied that they had received from the devil certain arrows that they had to shoot at a crucifix, and if the arrow hit the mark, the person would surely die, even if he were in the Indies and within four walls. We have reason to be horrified at such wickedness, my dear brethren; but for my part I should perhaps refuse to believe in the truth of it, if I were not aware that all who attack their neighbor's character are guilty of just as great a crime. "A man that beareth false witness against his neighbor," says the Holy Ghost, "is like a dart and a sword and a sharp arrow."¹ How is he like an arrow? The Prophet Jeremias answers: "Their tongue is a piercing arrow."² And what bow do they shoot with? "And they have bent their tongue as a bow,"³ in order to shoot off their calumnies, and with them to kill, not only those who are near them, but also and generally, those who are absent and far away, whom they deprive, not of bodily life, but of moral life, which is far more precious, by taking away their good name and reputation.

God takes
care of a
man's good
name.

And that life is so precious in the sight of God, that generally speaking, whenever He mentions the wicked in Holy Scripture. He conceals their names that they may not be known. In the Book of Genesis we read of the presumption of those who attempted to build the tower of Babel. Who was the first to propose the building of it? Who made the plan? We know not; all we read is: "and each one said to his neighbor; come let us

¹ *Jaculum, et gladius, et sagitta acuta, homo, qui loquitur contra proximum suum falsum testimonium.*—Prov. xxv. 18.

² *Sagitta vulnerans lingua eorum.*—Jerem. ix. 8.

³ *Extenderunt linguam suam quasi arcum.*—Ibid. 3.

make bricks, and bake them with fire.”¹ In the same Book we read that the people of Sodom surrounded the house of Lot, in order to seize the strangers whom he had harbored; not one of those wicked people is mentioned by name. In the Book of Exodus, the king who persecuted the Israelites is called Pharaoh, a name that was common to all the Egyptian kings; which of the Pharaohs he was, is not recorded. In the Book of Leviticus you will read of a blasphemer who was stoned, in the Book of Numbers, of one who profaned the Sabbath by servile works, but you cannot find out the name of either of them, nor of the Levite, whom we read of in the Book of Judges, who adored an idol in the house of Michas. Nor of the Benjaminites, whose foul lust caused a rebellion amongst the people, as we read in the same Book. In the gospels we seldom find the name of any guilty person recorded; they are called by general appellations, such as Scribes and Pharisees, the buyers and sellers in the temple, the woman who was a public sinner, one of the servants buffeting Jesus, the soldiers mocking Him, and so on. Whereby God gives us to understand how He hates and detests vice, but at the same time how careful He is of the sinner’s reputation, since He does not mention his name.

For the same reason God has strictly forbidden any one to mention even in confession the sin of another, when the latter is known to the confessor, who is still ignorant of his sin. But here I must remind you, my dear brethren, that it is a different matter to mention the fault of another to a confessor, or to some other person, with the intention of being helped to amend one’s own fault, or of helping one’s neighbor to amend; for in that case the law of fraternal correction obliges us to speak of the shortcomings of others, if we cannot induce them to correct those faults by privately admonishing them; otherwise it would be a great mistake to mention others by name in confession; and yet it is a common one. For instance, it oftens happens that the confessor is acquainted, or likely will be acquainted, with all the members of a family, husband, wife, brothers, sisters and servants. The wife comes to confession, (I am not repeating anything heard in confession, my dear brethren; I am merely saying what might happen) and though she ought to mention nothing but her own sins, she begins something in the following style: Alas, I have cursed, and sworn, and given way to impatience

So that it is never lawful to mention another’s sins in confession.

¹ Dixitque alter ad proximum suum: venite, faciamus lateres, et coquamus eos igni.— Gen. xi. 3.

very often; but I cannot help it; I am driven almost to desperation; my husband is enough to drive me mad; he gambles away all we earn; he is drunk nearly every day, and when he is in that state, one is not safe with him; he goes to houses of ill fame, etc. But what has that to do with your confession? You do not come here to accuse your husband, but yourself. You have cursed, and been impatient, and have almost despaired; these are your sins, and you should have told them without saying anything of your husband, who was the occasion of those sins. The husband acts in the same way with regard to his wife, and neither of them has gained anything by confession, but each has taken away the other's good name. Mothers, too, often act in the same way: I have a disobedient, wayward son, who will not obey me; he curses and abuses me if I give him good advice, and I cannot help myself; I must give way to my anger, and curse him in turn. My sister, says another, is so snappish and unkind, that I cannot bear her, etc. But what has your son, or your sister to do with your sins? What does the confessor want to know about their faults? Would you be satisfied if your children and relations were to mention your faults in confession? I have a hatred, says a fourth, against that judge, that lawyer, who took a bribe from my opponent, and caused me to lose my case unjustly, etc. Still! You have said enough already, without mentioning anything about the judge or the lawyer. My master, says a servant maid, has made improper proposals to me, in which I took pleasure; my mistress keeps up an unlawful intimacy, by which I was scandalised. Hush! You must not mention your master, or mistress, or any one else; it is not only quite unnecessary to do so, but it is also injurious to the fair fame of your neighbor; you cannot mention the sins of another, even under the seal of confession and to your confessor, without committing another sin; for he either knows the person you mention, or will likely know him at some future time, and thus the latter's good name will suffer.

Nay, according to some theologians, we should not name even the accomplice of our sin, although otherwise the nature

To make this matter still clearer, theologians propose the following question. In a place where there is only one priest to hear confessions, as is the case in remote country villages, and where the priest knows all the inhabitants, a person has committed sin with one of his own relations, his sister-in-law, for instance. What is that person to do when he goes to confession? If he mentions his accomplice, he reveals the sin of a person who is known to the confessor; and if not, he fails to declare the

nature of his sin and its circumstances, which ought to be confessed. Thus two precepts come into collision, both of which bind under grievous sin; one, which forbids us to say anything derogatory to the fair fame of our neighbor, and another, which forbids us to conceal deliberately the nature of the sin we have committed. What is to be done in a case of that kind? Generally speaking, theologians are agreed in saying that he who has the opportunity, or who can afford to wait for a short time until he has the opportunity, of confessing to a strange priest, should avail himself of it; but if he is obliged to go to his ordinary confessor, he must declare the nature of his sin, and mention the first degree of relationship as a circumstance of it, although thereby he reveals the guilt of his accomplice; because that revelation is, under the circumstances, only accidental, and cannot be helped. Still, there are many celebrated theologians who hold the contrary opinion, and maintain that the penitent, in such a case, must simply mention that he was guilty of the sin of impurity, and say nothing about the degree of relationship; but if he afterwards has the opportunity of confessing to a strange priest, he must then declare his sin fully; thus the accomplice does not lose her good name.

of the sin
cannot be
declared.

From all this, my dear brethren, I draw the following conclusion. If it is forbidden, even with the protection of the seal of confession, which binds the confessor so strictly that he can no more speak of what he hears therein, than if he had never heard it, and if theologians say with good reason that one is bound rather to conceal the nature of his sin, which should otherwise be declared in confession, rather than run the risk of injuring the character of another; if it is forbidden under those circumstances to disclose another's sin; how grievous, how inexcusable must not be the malice of those evil-tongued persons who, in company, without any cause whatever, speak of the faults and defects that they have seen, heard of, or noticed in others, or even merely suspected them of, whether they do so out of hatred, envy, and malice, or out of mere loquacity; for they rob their neighbor of his fair fame, that best of all natural possessions, which is so important in the eyes of God and man? With reason does St. Bernard cry out three times in succession: "detraction is a great vice; detraction is a grievous sin; detraction is an enormous crime."¹ And yet, alas! what a common thing it is in the

What a
fearful sin
it must then
be, to de-
fame another
without
necessity.

¹ Detractio grave vitium est! Detractio grave peccatum est! Detractio grande crimen est!—S. Bern. de modo bona vivendi. L. 3.

world nowadays, among people of all classes and conditions! How seldom can one hear a conversation in which the absent are not spoken ill of! On a future occasion I will explain the different ways in which the fair fame of others is attacked.

Therefore it is no wonder that God often punishes severely, in this life, those who defame others.

Oh woe to us, if each time that we are guilty of defaming our neighbor, we were to be punished for it visibly and evidently, by the divine justice, as was the case formerly with those who committed that sin! What misery there would then be in the world! Many a one would have his tongue rotting away in his mouth, or eaten up by worms. Many a one, as he is about to open his mouth to speak uncharitably, would find his tongue withered away. Many a one would be compelled to bite his own tongue in pieces, and devour it. Many a one would become possessed by the devil, or would die suddenly, or would be obliged to appear on earth after death, to restore the good name he injured during life. All these punishments, inflicted for uncharitable talk, are recorded in the *Magnum Speculum Exemplorum*; I have not time now to mention any more of them. How can he who exposes the sins of his fellow man dare to ask God to pardon his own sins? How can I say: "The sins of my youth and my ignorances do not remember,"¹ if my conscience upbraids me with having published my neighbor's sins, which were known otherwise only to himself and to God?

And in death.

How can I expect with confidence, at the end of my life, to receive the grace of final perseverance and a happy death, after having so often taken away from my neighbor his moral life, which God so strictly commands me to respect? Hear what happened to that unhappy man of whom Father Ambrose Cataneus writes. He was on his death-bed, and was earnestly exhorted to confess his sins, and to trust in the mercy of God. What mercy, asked the dying man, can I expect from God? How can I hope that He will "cover the multitude of my sins,"² since during my life I did not hide the sins of my neighbor, but brought them out into the full light of day by my uncharitable tongue? Having said those words, he stretched forth his tongue, which suddenly became black and swollen, so that he could not draw it into his mouth again; in this fearful condition he breathed his last. Another man, who had made an agreement with a comrade of his to let him know in what state he would be during eternity, appeared to him after death, surrounded with flames,

¹ Delicta juventutis meæ, et ignorantias meas ne memineris.—Ps. xxiv. 7.

² Ut operiat multitudinem peccatorum meorum.

and crying out, "I am lost, I am lost forever!" "And why?" asked the other, trembling; "did you not repent of and confess your sins?" "Alas, answered the unhappy soul, when I was on my death-bed, and was on the point of preparing myself for death, I saw a number of souls stretching out their hands before the judgment-seat of God, and crying out: 'Avenge, O Lord, our blood on this detractor,'¹ who has shed the living blood of our honor and good name. Thereupon all sorrow and repentance, all thoughts of confession, and all hopes of Heaven left me, and I died in despair." Terrible indeed will it be for the defamer of his neighbor's character, when the souls of his victims will cry out for vengeance on him! It is true, they will say, we have done evil, we have sinned often and grievously against the good God; but we have done penance for our sins, and the merciful God, who before was angry with us, has forgotten them, and has freed us from the eternal shame that we have so richly deserved. But you, wicked detractor, whom our secret sins did not at all concern, you, who were not responsible for them, and whom we have not in any way injured by them, and who perhaps were yourself guilty of the same and even worse sins, you did not spare our honor before men. Why did you speak of our sins to others? Justice, O Lord, "avenge our blood on this detractor!"

Ah, my dear brethren, I conclude with well-meant advice, which I give you in the words of the Holy Ghost, as we read in the Book of Wisdom, "keep yourselves therefore from murmuring, which profiteth nothing, and refrain your tongue from detraction."² Let each one make the same resolution as David: "that my mouth may not speak the works of men."³ The works of men are sins, faults, and defects; whatever is good and praiseworthy in them, is the work of divine grace. If then I must speak of others, I will relate openly and fearlessly what they have received from God; I will not speak of the works of men, but will be careful not to allow the least word to escape me that might injure them, or lessen their reputation. Let each one remember the golden rule of charity. do unto others, as you wish them to do unto you. I do not wish my sins and faults, although they may be known here and there, to become the subject of common conversation; and therefore I must be careful not to speak of the faults of others. Let him who is tempted to

Conclusion
and exhortation to all
to avoid this
vice.

¹ Vindica, Domine! sanguinem nostrum de illo detractore.

² Custodite ergo vos a murmuratione, quæ nihil prodest, et a detractone parcite linguæ.
—Wis. i. 11.

³ Ut non loquatur os meum opera hominum.—Ps. xvi. 4.

speak uncharitably think of his own misdeeds, as I have explained already on a former occasion, and he will find enough to accuse himself of, to be sorry for, and to amend. Why should I waste my precious time in weeding the gardens of others, when I have my own garden to attend to? Ah, my Lord and my God, I find only too much in myself that needs amendment; only too many faults and defects, that are deserving of eternal shame and disgrace! These I am now determined to examine, to declare in confession, and to endeavor earnestly to correct, with the help of Thy grace. Amen.

SIXTY-FIFTH SERMON.

ON THE IRREPARABLE INJURY CAUSED BY DEFAMING
ANOTHER'S CHARACTER.

Subject.

Amongst all sins there is none so difficult to atone for, and to make reparation for, as the sin of injuring our neighbor's character; therefore we must avoid it with the greatest care.—*Preached on the fifth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Vade prius reconciliari fratri tuo.—Matth. v. 24.

“Go first to be reconciled to thy brother.”

Introduction.

It is a very difficult thing, when people are once embittered against each other, for them to be thoroughly reconciled: and yet it is a necessary thing to salvation; for without it all one's confessions and communions are sacrilegious and cannot merit the grace of forgiveness. I have lately, my dear brethren, spoken of the vice of defaming our neighbor, and have shown how grievous it is, because it violates Christian charity, and injures our neighbor's fair fame. There is still another point to be explained, in order to deter you all the more from this fearful vice, and to show those who are guilty in this respect, what they have to do. And what is that? “Go first to be reconciled to thy brother.” Have you said anything to injure his fair fame? “Go to be reconciled to him,” and to all those whose honor you have attacked; make good the harm you have done. Alas, I

shudder, and am filled with apprehension, when I think of this! I would rather not be obliged to speak of it! How easy it is to offend in this matter of defaming our neighbor, but how hard and difficult to atone for the injury done! This I shall now proceed to show.

Plan of Discourse.

Amongst all sins there is none so difficult to atone for and to make reparation for, as the sin of injuring our neighbor's character; therefore we must avoid it with the greatest care. Such is the whole subject. If there are any here present who must acknowledge that they are guilty of this sin, I would ask them to repress until the end of the sermon the fears and apprehensions that will likely arise in their minds; for they may hear something before they go away, and after they have well understood the subject, which will console them.

But do Thou, O Lord, inspire me and all here present with a salutary dread of that vice, and with a firm resolution never to be guilty of it again. This we ask of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy angels guardian.

If he who has defamed another wishes to be reconciled to God and to his neighbor, and to atone for his sin, besides a true repentance, a firm purpose of amendment, and a candid declaration of his sin in confession, he must make complete reparation for the injury he has inflicted on his neighbor's character, whether he has simply lessened that character, or taken it away altogether, provided such reparation be possible. This truth, my dear brethren, stands in no need of proof. "The sin will not be forgiven, unless that which is unjustly taken away be restored to its lawful owner."¹ If that axiom holds good, as no sensible man can doubt, of mere material goods, so that he who has committed a theft cannot hope for pardon, no matter how often he repents of and confesses his sin, unless he is firmly resolved to make restitution as soon as he can; how much more, then, must it not be true of the greatest and most valued of all natural possessions, namely the fair fame and good name, which are even more prized than life itself?

But, just Heaven! how fearfully difficult it is to make this reparation as it ought to be made! So difficult, that it is generally the next thing to an impossibility! Why so? For these three

Reparation must be made for the injury done our neighbor's character, before the sin is forgiven, when such reparation is possible.

This reparation is almost indescribably difficult.

¹ Non dimittitur peccatum, nisi restitatur ablatum.

reasons: if I have stolen money from a man, or otherwise inflicted some material injury on him, I can easily calculate the amount of harm done, or the sum that I possess unjustly, and so I can find out without difficulty what restitution I must make, unless, indeed, I have committed repeated rogueries in all kinds of ways, and on all sorts of people who are unknown to me, and have continued doing so for many years, as is often the case in buying and selling and in other business transactions; but even then I need only have a firm purpose of making restitution; the only real difficulty I have to overcome, is that of conquering my greed of gain, and giving up freely all that I have unjustly acquired. And when I have once made that firm resolution, there are a hundred ways in which I can make due restitution, and fulfil my obligation, without putting myself to shame. If I know who the rightful owner is, I can make restitution to him secretly through my confessor; if I do not know, and have no hope of ever finding out who he is, I can give to the poor what I possess unjustly. But under all these circumstances, it is quite different with regard to making reparation for injuries inflicted on the fair fame of others.

First, I must know what reparation I have to make.

For, in the first place, the reparation must be in proportion to the amount stolen, or to the injury committed; that is, I must give back as much as I have stolen, and make good all the harm I have done. But who can find out that proportion in the matter of injury inflicted on another's character, so as to be able to say: so much and no more have I taken away from that person's good name? You have, for instance, said of that lawyer, which was not yet publicly known, that he took bribes from the opposing party; that he spun out suits as long as possible, so as to make more by them; that there is no use in going to him, unless with a full purse, etc. You have said of that neighbor, or man of business, that he cannot be trusted, and that he cheats people, as you know by experience; of that doctor, that he knows nothing, that he is always drunk when visiting a patient, etc; of that young girl, that she makes herself too common, that you saw her one evening acting improperly, etc.; of that official, that he has acted greatly against his employer's interest; of that servant, that he or she is unfaithful, and takes things secretly out of the house, that you would not have such people in your employment, etc.

For, generally speaking, any-

Now, what you say in that way to another, or to two or three people, they tell afterwards to others, and these latter spread it

still further, so that the evil report against your neighbor soon becomes known to a great number. Sometimes a dog goes quietly along the street, doing no harm to any one, when suddenly some mischievous boys begin to shout and to throw stones at him; at once the whole neighborhood is in an uproar, and every one runs after the poor animal; the other dogs run out of the houses, even the little lap-dogs are not to be held back, and though they are afraid to join in the pursuit, they add to the confusion by barking with the others. Thus a whole crowd of people rush after the poor dog; some beat him with sticks, others throw stones at him; one says he must be mad, another, that he has severely bitten a child, a third, that he has stolen some meat in the neighborhood. Meanwhile the poor dog's only fault is his misfortune in meeting the mischievous boys who occasioned the whole uproar. So it is also with the unfortunate, and sometimes completely innocent man, who comes across some ill-tongued person. That lawyer, that business man, that official, that young girl, that servant; wherever they go, they have a bad name, and everybody speaks against them. And how did that come to pass? They came across some mischievous boys; some one, who, either through malice or loquacity, related something bad about them, which he either heard, or saw, or merely suspected them to be guilty of; the report was spread from one person to another, from one street to another, until it became the talk of the town. See, O ill-tongued man, what mischief you have done by your imprudence! You are to blame for it all; you were the first to cause your neighbor's reputation to suffer, and no matter how many have helped to spread the report, the origin of it is to be traced to you; and of those who have heard it, some have attached perhaps but little faith to it, others were more credulous in believing it, while others again have, on account of it, lost all respect for the person about whom you spread it. Now, if you wish to atone for your fault, you are bound in conscience to restore your neighbor's good name with all those people to whom you have defamed it, and in proportion as you have defamed it to each one, so that he will enjoy just the same good reputation as before; provided that it is possible for you to make such reparation, and that your neighbor's good name has not already been restored by others. But who does not see that it is almost an impossibility to do this? For you would have to find out how far the uncharitable report has spread, how people have accepted it, and how far they have believed it; and you would have to go to each and every one of those people

thing injurious to another's character is spread abroad.

and persuade them to have their former good opinion of him whom you have maligned. But, you ask, how can I do that? Nevertheless, according to the teaching of theologians, you are bound absolutely to do it, if you wish to make reparation for the harm you have done by your slanderous tongue. And this, I say, is the obligation which is so hard of fulfilment, that it is never properly fulfilled.

Secondly, I must find out what I have to restore, on account of the material loss caused by my spreading the evil report.

But there is still another difficulty, another obligation, you have to attend to. And what is that? Besides the loss of character you have occasioned, you may also have been the cause of a loss in business or other material concerns to those you have maligned. That lawyer may have lost his clients, as people are afraid to trust him any longer in any matter of importance; that man of business has lost credit, his customers abandon him; that doctor is no longer employed, as people are afraid to trust him; that young girl might have married well, but now no one will have anything to say to her; that official is dismissed; that servant cannot find a place any more. Count up now, if you can, the amount of injury you have done in each case. All this you are bound to make reparation for, if you possibly can, if you wish to make full atonement before God and man for what you have done. But how difficult that is! It is almost an impossibility; for, how can one find out the exact amount of harm done by slander to a neighbor's character and to his worldly prosperity?

Thirdly, I must resolve to use all available means to make reparation.

Suppose now that you have calculated exactly all the injury you have done your neighbor's character, and the amount of loss you have caused him to suffer in his business; are you still really determined to make full reparation? Then, if what you have said of your neighbor is false, all theologians agree in saying that you are bound to contradict it before every one to whom you said it, and in whose estimation your neighbor's character has suffered in consequence; and you must say to each one of them: what I told you of so and so, is not true; it is a lie. But if they refuse to believe your retractation, you are bound to confirm it with an oath, if necessary, although your own honor suffers, and you are put to confusion thereby. If what you said is true, but not yet publicly known, you are bound to do all you can to restore your neighbor's character before all those in whose presence you have injured it. For instance, if you really think you can do any good thereby, you might say: I did so and so a great injury when I spoke of him in that way; do not believe it;

people often say through thoughtlessness more than they ought. Or else you must speak in that man's praise whenever you get a chance, until you have completely restored his good name. And what a difficult thing it is to make up one's mind to do this! How one must fight against, and do violence to, one's inclinations! But what will it be when, in addition to that obligation, there is also another, namely that of making good all temporal losses caused by slander? It is hard enough to have to part with money that one has acquired unjustly, and there are many who deliberately renounce their hopes of Heaven, and choose hell, rather than do it. But what an iron resolution it must require to disgrace one's self, to swallow one's own words, and to acknowledge one's own guilt, besides making reparation for the material losses caused! Many and many a slanderer there is in the world; but you will hardly find one in a hundred, who makes reparation as he ought, for the injury done his neighbor's good name. And you must confess that this is literally true, my dear brethren. How many have you not heard during your lives speaking ill of others, and injuring their reputation more or less seriously? But can you remember even one who came back to restore his neighbor's character? In spite of the numbers of confessions in which people accuse themselves of slander, there is hardly ever a case in which due reparation is made.

Finally, suppose that you think to yourself, as every good Christian who values his soul, must think: no matter what it costs, I will not lose my soul, but will bring it safely to God in Heaven, and therefore I will do my very best to make reparation for the injury I have inflicted on my neighbor's good character, and to make good all the material losses he has suffered thereby, although by doing so I disgrace myself and lose my own honor. What a brave and Christian resolution that would be! But now I ask you: how are you going to do it? When you have done all in your power to restore your neighbors' good name with all those before whom you have defamed it, and who heard the evil report from you; are you still sure of succeeding? especially if what you have said is true, and if many have already heard it? You will say: I have wronged so and so by my thoughtless talk; I am very sorry for it; you must not have a bad opinion of him on account of what I have said, etc. But what will you effect thereby? If you say that to a pious and sensible man, he will think that you are doing quite right in acknowledging your fault, and in trying to make due atonement

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for it ; but he will not on that account lose the bad opinion he has formed of the person whom you have slandered; he will think there must be some ground for that opinion, or else you would contradict your slander even on oath. If you say it to other talkative people, they will give you the same answer that the high-priests gave to Judas when he brought back the thirty pieces of silver, saying: "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood;"¹ but they answered him: "what is that to us? look thou to it."² You will begin to praise the man you have defamed, and to speak well of him whenever you can. Quite right; that is one of the best means, under such circumstances, to make reparation for the injury inflicted. But what a difference there is to us mortals between hearing our neighbor praised, and hearing him slandered! You found people enough to believe the slander; will you be likely to find as many to believe the praise? And will they be as ready to believe the praise, as they were to believe the slander? We easily forget what is praiseworthy in others; but if we hear anything to their disadvantage, we remember it a long time. The evil report that you originated is now in all probability spread abroad, and they who hear you speak in praise of the person you have defamed will hardly be so quick in spreading the good report, as the bad one. However that may be, you will never succeed in so completely restoring your neighbor's good character, that some of the slander will not stick to him more or less.

Therefore it is most difficult, nay almost impossible, to make complete atonement for the sin of slander.

See now how difficult, nay almost impossible it is to make due reparation for the injury inflicted on your neighbor's honor, and to make that atonement for your sin which is, absolutely speaking, required; how difficult it is to resolve to make a reparation of the kind; how impossible it is, humanly speaking, to know how much reparation one is bound to make, and how almost impossible it is, in spite of all one's efforts, to make complete reparation. Oh my God, in what a labyrinth those talkative and scandalous tongues of ours involve us! How easy it is to get into it; how difficult to get out of it! The word falls from the lips without any trouble; but what great art is required to retract it! With reason does the Wise Preacher compare the slanderous tongue to a venomous serpent: "If a serpent bite in silence, he is nothing better than backbiteth secretly."³

¹ Peccavi, tradens sanguinem justum.—Matth. xxvii. 4.

² Quid ad nos? tu videris.—Ibid.

³ Si mordeat serpens in silentio, nihil eo minus habet, qui occulte detrahit.—Eccles. x. 11.

Some serpents bite so quickly, that one hardly feels the fatal wound at first; in the same way a slanderous tongue inflicts a fatal wound on a man's good name, without the sufferer being able to tell how, or by whom, he is injured. There are serpents so venomous that, once their poison is infused into the blood, nothing but amputation of the injured limb will save the person whom they have bitten. The same may safely be said of slanderous tongues. Once they have poured out their venom, it is almost impossible to heal the wound they have inflicted, that is, to restore the reputation they have ruined. Moses, in order to convince King Pharaoh that he was sent by the true God, threw his rod on the ground, and it was instantly changed into a serpent; but when he took the serpent into his hand, it became a rod again. Pharaoh's magicians tried their skill in the same way, but not with the same success; they changed their rods into serpents, but with all their art, they could not change the serpents back into rods. There you have a specimen of your art, O slanderous and evil-tongued people! By your uncharitable talk, you cause your neighbor to lose his good reputation, and to appear in the eyes of others like a loathsome serpent; but you are utterly unable to restore the good name you have taken away, and to make full reparation for the injury you have done his honor. Such is the case; and therefore the Holy Ghost warns us by the wise Ecclesiasticus to be careful to avoid the vice of slander: "Take heed lest thou slip with thy tongue, and thy fall be incurable unto death."¹

What is he then to do, my dear brethren, if there be any such here present, who knows that he is guilty of having inflicted a serious injury on his neighbor's character? On the one hand the sin will not be forgiven him, unless he is firmly resolved to make full reparation for the wrong he has done, as soon as possible; on the other hand, as we have just seen, the difficulty of making this reparation verges almost on the impossible, when the evil report has once been spread abroad. What hope of salvation then can there be for such a man? Must he despair? Must I say to him what Father Alphonsus de Castro once said to a nobleman, who accused himself of having said publicly in company that he had sinned with a certain noble lady, whose name he mentioned, although what he said was quite false, as history avers? "Away with you! You are

Still, no one need despair of salvation.

¹ Attende, ne forte labaris in lingua. . . . et sit casus tuus insanabilis in mortem.—Ecc. xxviii. 30.

lost!"¹ said the confessor to him, knowing well that the nobleman could never bring himself to retract his own words in the same company, and to confess, even on oath, that he had told a lie; and the event proved that the confessor's fears were justified. Must I, too, launch forth the same thunderbolt against all slanderers, and say to each one of them: away with you! You are lost! Your confession will not avail you! there is no help for you? No; things have not gone so far as that yet. If you are quite certain that you have injured your neighbor's honor, and injured it seriously, and that you knew that you were doing wrong when you were speaking against him; then you must relate the whole matter, with all its circumstances, to an experienced confessor, who is able to advise you, and he will tell you what to do, and will help you out of the difficulty.

The first circumstance which frees from the obligation of making reparation.

Meanwhile, as far as the injury done to your neighbor's honor is concerned, I must tell you, in order to relieve your mind somewhat, and to give you a little consolation, that there are many circumstances in which we are not obliged to make reparation for the injury which we think we have done our neighbor's honor (mind, my dear brethren, that I am speaking of the injury done to his honor alone; for it is a different thing altogether, with regard to the material loss we may have caused him). In the first place I am not bound to make reparation if I have just reasons for thinking that they, who heard me speaking ill of my neighbor, did not believe me, or did not look on what I said as dishonorable to him. Sometimes, too, there are people to be found, who are publicly known as being apt to say anything that comes into their minds, without any regard for the truth: no sensible man would believe what such people say. Again, when they who are under the influence of violent anger utter all sorts of calumnies against their opponents, in such a way, that it is evident they are speaking out of the bitterness of their hearts, out of hatred and vindictiveness, it is clear that no sensible man will believe what they say. Or if a person speaks ill of another before people who, whether through simplicity or through wickedness, think little of the vice that the other is accused of, and look on it as no dishonor; or if our neighbor's character is impugned in the company of pious people, who, as good Christians, ought to put the best interpretations on everything they hear, and therefore refuse to believe anything prejudicial to another's good name; in all these cases, there is no

¹ *Reprobus es; facesse!*

doubt that he who has spoken ill of his neighbor is guilty of sin, but, as a general rule, he is freed from the obligation of making reparation. And why? Because he has not really injured his neighbor's honor in the estimation of those who were listening to him. A thief wishes to steal; to that end he places the ladder against the window of a house, climbs in during the night, and breaks open the chest, but finds nothing, so that he has to go back empty-handed. He has committed a theft in desire and intention, and has therefore sinned grievously against God and his neighbor; but he is not bound to restitution, because he has not actually stolen anything, or injured any one's property. And so it is, too, with those who, through wantonness, wickedness, hatred, or talkativeness, try to injure their neighbor's character; they commit a grievous sin; but since, under the circumstances mentioned above, no one believes what they say, they have not really injured their neighbor, and are therefore not bound to make reparation.

Secondly, I am not bound to make good my neighbor's injured character, if he of whom I have spoken uncharitably has publicly justified himself and proved his innocence, or has otherwise regained his good name in that particular matter in which I have spoken ill of him. Thus, it often happens that a servant, a man of business, or an official is accused of some grievous violation of duty, although afterwards his innocence is clearly proven; in a case of that kind I am not bound to make further reparation; just as a thief is not bound to make restitution if the lawful owner has succeeded in getting possession of his property again. Thirdly, if I have revealed a secret and disgraceful crime of my neighbor, and the same vice afterwards comes to be publicly known, not through me, nor through those to whom I revealed it, but in some other way, I am freed from the obligation of making reparation; because he is publicly dishonored, and has thus lost his right to his good name. Much less am I bound to make reparation, if his crime was already known to only a small number of people; because he had already lost his good name before I spoke of him. Fourthly, suppose that two women or two sworn enemies are quarrelling; they growl and snarl at each other like dogs; they hurl at each other all the abusive epithets they can think of, without caring whether they are true or false, and thus they publicly disgrace themselves before a crowd of people. The question now is, what are they to do, to restore each other's good name? This theologians

Second,
third, and
fourth cir-
cumstances.

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generally answer by saying, that they sin grievously by using contumelious expressions towards each other; but since they both suffer the same amount of injury, neither is bound to make reparation to the other.

Fifth, sixth,
seventh,
and eighth
circumstan-
ces.

Fifthly, if a long time has elapsed since the slander was uttered, so that there is a moral certainty that it has fallen into oblivion, and that no one thinks of it any longer, I am freed from the obligation of making reparation; for when people forget the slander, they are as if they had never heard it, and time itself has restored my neighbor's injured character. Nay, in a case of that kind, I am bound to keep silent, so as not to remind people of what they have forgotten, and to avoid doing my neighbor further harm by my efforts to make reparation to him. Sixthly, I am freed from this obligation, if I foresee certainly that all my retractations, excuses, praises, and other means that I am ready to make use of, will have no effect, and that people will put no faith in them. Again, I am excused if I cannot make reparation without endangering my life. The same is to be said, if they to whom I have spoken ill of my neighbor are dead, or have gone away to such a distance that I cannot retract my words in their presence, and that the fact of their knowing what I told them can no longer be prejudicial to my neighbor. Seventhly, if I have not committed a sin before God by my uncharitable talk, as is generally the case with pious people who inadvertently let fall a word now and then, that is injurious to their neighbor, theologians generally say that I am not bound in that case to make reparation, if I cannot do so without grave inconvenience, unless I have publicly told a lie against my neighbor, in which case I am bound to retract it. Meanwhile, every one who is in the habit of speaking thoughtlessly of the faults of others, is bound under pain of sin to correct that bad habit, and to restrain his tongue. Eighthly, I am freed from the obligation of making reparation, if he whom I have slandered renounces his right (supposing that he can conscientiously do so) and does not exact any retraction from me. As far as I am personally concerned, my dear brethren, if any one has spoken ill of me, I forgive him from my heart, and he need not go to the least trouble to make reparation, provided what he has said is injurious to my personal honor alone, and not to the holy Order to which I belong. Finally, there is no obligation to make reparation, if it is morally impossible for me to make it, and to restore my neighbor's good name; thus, as in the case I men-

tioned already, if I have published another's secret crime, and it is now known to a number of people, generally speaking, it would be morally impossible for me to find out all who have heard of it, and to restore my neighbor's good name in the estimation of every one of them; so that I must be satisfied with speaking well of him whenever I can, especially before those in whose presence I first spread the bad report about him. And since I cannot restore his character fully, I must all the more deplore the sin I have committed, because my mischievous tongue has done my neighbor an injury, that I am now quite unable, though ever so willing, to make reparation for.

From all this, my dear brethren, it is evident that we must carefully avoid speaking ill of our neighbor, and that, if we wish to save our souls, we must restrain our tongues whenever his faults and failings are made the subject of conversation in our presence. That is the reason why I am now speaking on this subject for the second time; namely, that we may have a deep and lasting horror of a sin that is so grievous, and so difficult to atone for. "Take heed," is my final warning, in the words of the Holy Ghost, both to you and to myself, "take heed lest thou slip with thy tongue, and thy fall be incurable unto death." Ah, keep a guard on your tongue, that it may not lead you to a mortal fall, from which you can never properly rise again! Yes, I will profit by this warning in future (each one of you, my dear brethren, can repeat mentally with me what follows by way of conclusion.). Woe to you my tongue if you should betray me into uttering a word against my neighbor! With my own teeth will I take vengeance on you! Dear Christians, with whom I shall afterwards enter into conversation, I beg of you, one and all, if you hear a single word escaping me against my neighbor's honor, admonish me at once freely, and tell me to hold my tongue, and not to speak in that way, no matter what confusion you put me to by doing so.

And Thou, O Jesus, who hast said: "Forgive and you shall be forgiven,"¹ if I have often, through malice, hatred, envy, or thoughtlessness spoken against the honor of my brethren and sisters, and against the charity I owe them, and if the evil has already gone so far (as is, alas, only too often the case) that I cannot now make full reparation for it; what am I to do? I have no resource left, but with heartfelt sorrow to beg Thee and my neighbor to forgive me. Yes, O Lord, I am sorry! All you

Therefore we must be very careful not to speak ill of others.

Conclusion and prayer to God for pardon of the sins committed by speaking against our neighbor's character.

¹ Dimittite, et dimittimini.—Luke vi. 37.

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whom I have offended in this way, forgive me, for God's sake, for the sake of Him to whom we pray daily: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." And I, O Lord, lay at Thy feet, and give over to Thee all the reparation that may perhaps be due to me from those who have assailed my good name; I forgive them from my heart, and demand no restitution from them. But do Thou forgive the sins that I have committed in this way against my neighbor; I beg of Thee to do so, by the bitter gall wherewith Thy sacred tongue was tortured on the Cross, in order to atone for and to correct the sins of our tongues; and I implore of Thee to keep a restraint on this slippery tongue of mine, that I may never again fall into sins that are so grievous and so difficult to atone for. I will do my best to guard against them; do Thou help me. Amen.

SIXTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE MANIFOLD WAYS OF DEFAMING OUR NEIGHBOR'S CHARACTER, AND ON THE EXCUSES THAT ARE GENERALLY MADE FOR THIS SIN.

Subject.

1. Injuring the good name of others is a very common sin, and it is committed in many different ways. 2. It is a sin that is thought little of, and that people try to excuse in different ways.—*Preached on the seventh Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

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

Introduction.

Those false prophets, who are dressed in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves, are like those detractors and calumniators, who, with smiling countenances and every outward show of friendship, outrage Christian charity in their conversation, and take away from their neighbor the best and most valuable thing he has, that is, his good name. I have already spoken of the malice of this sin, and the difficulty of atoning for it. Ah, dear Christians, beware of those false prophets, those

ravening wolves, and pay no attention to what they say! "By their fruits you shall know them." You will find out what they are, by what they talk of; but you will be compelled almost to avoid society altogether, if you wish to keep away from those who malign their neighbor; so common is this vice, and so little do people generally make of it! There you have the subject and the division of this instruction.

Plan of Discourse.

Injuring the good name of others is a very common sin, and it is committed generally in many different ways; the first part. It is a sin that is thought little of, and that people try to excuse in different ways; the second part. These excuses are of no avail. Both parts will be in the form of a catechetical instruction.

O Divine Master, teach us to understand the wickedness and danger of this vice, that we may always be on our guard against it! This we beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary Thy mother, and of our holy angels guardian.

There are many forms of illness that the human body is subject to, which can cause it to die a natural death; but human ingenuity has also invented many ways of depriving people of life by violence, and it is still occupied in devising others. Into how many different forms are not steel and iron wrought for that purpose? Knives, halberds, swords, spears, axes, javelins, and darts are all deadly weapons with which one can cut and pierce both near and at a distance, so as to destroy life at once. The art of gunnery can hardly be carried to greater perfection. What an enormous weight can be hurled to a distance by cannons and mortars! What fearful havoc is caused by mines, bombs, and hand-grenades! How many are shot down by pistols and muskets, as if death were too slow otherwise, and had to be urged on to seize his prey!

There are many ways of taking away a man's life.

Still, my dear brethren, I know not but that slanderous tongues have nowadays still more numerous ways and instruments of depriving others of their moral life, that is, of their honor and good name. St. Thomas reckons up eight chief ways in which the fair fame of others may be attacked; and it is a rare thing to find one who does not sin in one or other of them. The first is, when one falsely relates something bad and disgraceful of another. This is the worst form of defamation of another's

Still more numerous are the ways of taking away one's moral life, that is, one's good name; first, second, and third ways.

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character; because, besides the injury it inflicts on the fair fame of one's neighbor, it has also the malice of a grievous falsehood, which it is exceedingly difficult to make proper atonement for. The second is, when one relates something bad of another that is true indeed, but is not yet publicly known; that is a sin that violates flagrantly the right that every one has to his good name, as long as his faults are secret. The third is a common trick of slanderous tongues, and it consists in making a great crime out of a small fault, and in always causing it to appear far worse than it is in reality. For instance, a man happens to be guilty of some slight breach of trust, or to be caught in the act of committing a trifling theft; he is at once put down as a thief. He who has once been guilty of a sin of impurity is spoken of as being completely addicted to that vice. He who happens, unintentionally, to take a trifle too much drink is at once set down as a drunkard. In the same way, too, if a man lets fall a word inadvertently against his neighbor, he is considered a slanderer. All that is very wrong; there is a great difference between committing a sin once, and being in the habit of committing it. As the saying goes, one swallow does not make a summer. He who has told one lie does not deserve to be called a liar; he who has once given way to anger must not therefore be called a passionate man. Servants are especially apt to sin in this way by talking of what goes on in the house, and attributing to a whole family a fault of which one member alone is guilty. For instance; the master alone has the habit of cursing and swearing; but the servants make it appear that the whole family is addicted to the same habit; it is fearful, they say, to be in that house; there is nothing but profane language heard in it from morning till night; there can be neither luck nor grace in a house like that, etc. Thus the whole family is suspected of being given to using bad language. The mother alone may be rather too indulgent to her children or to one of them; oh, the servants say, there is no Christian training in that house; the children can do as they please; nobody pays the least attention to them; thus the whole family is made to suffer unjustly. The wife alone may be of a sour, quarrelsome disposition, so that she is very severe with the servants when they do anything wrong; oh, the latter say, there is neither peace nor rest in that house; I cannot stand it for another year. Evil tongued people that you are! why must strangers know what goes on in the house? And if you are bent on defaming your

neighbor's character, at least let the innocent go free, for they are not to blame for the faults you speak of.

A fourth and still more wicked manner of injuring the character of others consists in attributing wrong motives and intentions to them. As I have elsewhere explained, these motives and intentions are supposed to be gathered with sufficient certainty from a person's least movement, from his words, his actions, his behavior, and even his dress, so that they can be made the subject of conversation. See, these evil tongued people say, how often that young man, that young woman, that neighbor, that priest goes to that house; he or she cannot mean any good by it; we can easily imagine what goes on there. That person is very generous in giving alms to the poor; but we know why; he does not always do it for God and his soul's sake. That wife, that daughter, always appears at church in grand style; it is something else besides devotion that brings her there. I lately heard those two young people talking together, and I knew by their laughter what was going on. Did you not notice how so and so behaved, when that person came into the room? I can easily guess what he was thinking of. One can know by merely looking at that man, that he is not good. And in the same way even works of piety are falsely interpreted, and are made to appear vices. Now is it not real diabolical malice thus to judge from uncertain outward signs of a man's inward disposition, which is known only to himself and to God, and to make them the subject of talk? Still, it is unfortunately only too common a vice amongst scandal-mongers, who are constantly busying themselves with and criticising the affairs of other people.

The fourth way.

The fifth manner of maligning one's neighbor is still more common, and it consists in not speaking directly from one's own experience against the character of others, but in relating what one has heard to their disadvantage. Thus people say: I have heard so and so of that person on good authority; queer things are said of him; he is accused of having committed this or that crime. This is one of the most venomous kinds of defamation. because they who hear it believe that it is publicly known, and they will therefore have no hesitation in spreading it farther, so that it is the same as if one were to make known his neighbor's disgrace in every country, by sending the news of it in letters through the public mails. Sixthly, I injure my neighbor's character by confirming a report that is prejudicial to him; thus, a person remarks to me that he has heard something bad about so and so,

The fifth and sixth ways.

but that he does not know whether to believe it or not. Oh yes! I answer, I too have frequently heard the same thing. In that way I confirm the report, and strengthen the bad opinion that he whom I am talking to has of my neighbor. Or, by contradicting and endeavoring to disparage what is said in praise of another, as people often do through hatred, envy, or pride; thus something praiseworthy is related of one who is absent; oh, I say, with evident marks of displeasure, you do not know the man as well as I do; otherwise you would not talk in that way of him, and you would soon change your opinion; or else, I am surprised indeed to hear that of him, I did not think he was capable of behaving so well; now I see that, as the fable says, a tortoise may catch a hare; or else I say, it is not true; people praise that man without reason, and the half of it is gross flattery; or else, so say those who are dependent on him, and who wish well to him; but I know better what sort of a man he is.

The seventh, eighth, and ninth ways.

Seventhly, I can injure my neighbor's honor, and that grievously, by keeping silence; thus, when he is praised, I say nothing, although, as all those who are present know, I am well acquainted with him; or else I assent to what is said, in such a way as to show that I believe quite the contrary; or I answer somewhat in this style: I dare not say all I know; I do not wish to speak ill of any one; I want to leave every man to himself; God forbid that I should malign my neighbor. In this way a deeper wound is sometimes inflicted on another's good name, than if the fault of which he is guilty were told out plainly, because those who are present imagine him to be guilty of some far more grievous offence, which I do not wish to speak of. Eighthly, I can injure my neighbor's fair fame by outward signs; for instance, certain vices are spoken of without any one being directly accused of them; I press my neighbor's foot, or his arm, or make some other sign to show that I know him to be guilty. Even during a sermon, when a certain case is explained, if I look or smile at a certain person, with such an expression as to make it evident that I am referring to him what the preacher is saying, it is the same as if I said out openly: that suits you, there is something for you. I sin in the same way by remarking after the sermon, that so and so got his share to-day; it is a pity that certain persons were not present, as they might have heard something that would do them good. Further, one can defame his neighbor even when giving good advice; thus parents sometimes say to their children: see, my son, you must not be like

that other boy; people say so and so of him; nor like our neighbor, who has spent all he has on drink; nor like that other person, who is suspected of theft and has lost all credit in consequence. Be careful, my daughter, to avoid the fate of that other girl, who allowed herself to be so shamefully betrayed; do not make yourself as common as that young woman, who talks to every one. In God's name! what have those examples to do with your warning? Can you not admonish your children to avoid vice and to practise virtue, without at the same time revealing the faults of others, and injuring their good name?

Finally, the character of another may be injured even by praising, or pitying him. Olaus writes of some dealers in the black art, who had the power of bewitching little children by praising and caressing them. Oh, they would say to the mother, what a beautiful child you have in your arms! and at once the child would commence to waste away until at last it disappeared like a shadow, and no one could tell what became of it. Slanderous tongues are skilled in a similar art. In order to give mere force to the poison wherewith they intend destroying their neighbor's reputation, they first commence to praise him. Thus they say: such a one is a good, sensible, and honorable man, and he is esteemed by all who know him; I cannot understand how he could have committed himself so shamefully in that matter. What a pious, holy person that is! who would think that he would have acted in that way! I am sorry for that man; if he had not that fault, he would be a splendid character, etc. Is not that ruining a man's honor by dint of praising him! Nay, says St. Bernard, this vice is so subtle, that even pious people often inflict grievous injury on their neighbor's fair fame, under the appearance of charity and a holy compassion. "You may see them" he says, "uttering slanderous words with troubled countenances."¹ Alas, they sigh, I am sorry to hear such things of the poor man! He is one of my best friends. I wish he had not gone wrong. If he had only followed my advice! How often have I not warned him to be more careful! In that way things are often made public, that no one was aware of before, by the person who thus gives expression to his or her pity.

And who would not believe what such people say? They must be persuaded of the truth of it, or they would not be so loud in their expressions of charitable compassion. These, according to St. Augustine, are the tongues from which David

The tenth way.

Which is the most crafty way of defaming another.

¹ Videas vultu mœsto emitti maledictionem.

prayed to be freed, when he said: "Deliver, O God, my soul from the sword; my only one from the hand of the dog."¹ But why should David, who had killed with his own hand a fierce lion, fear the bite of a dog? Yet, my dear brethren, a raging lion is sometimes less to be dreaded than a crafty dog. And why? Because, when you see the lion coming, you run away, or try to defend yourself; but there are dogs that will come up to you in quite a friendly manner, without barking, and before you know what they are about, they have bitten you. In the same way, if I hear a man talking out boldly against his neighbor, I think at once that he is influenced by hatred, envy, anger, or malice, and I am inclined to put little or no faith in what he says; he is a raging lion. But he who first speaks in praise of his neighbor, and then, with sighs of apparent pity, relates something injurious to his honor, is like the cunning and treacherous dog; I cannot defend myself against the bad opinion he inspires me with about my neighbor; I have good reason for believing that what he says is true, and thus the honor of my neighbor has received a mortal wound in my estimation.

Injuring the character of others is a very common sin.

Ah, my dear brethren, how many ways have been invented of injuring the character of others! And that alone should suffice to convince you that there must be a great number of people in the world who are addicted to this vice; some through wickedness, others through hatred and spite, and others again through sheer love of talk. With reason does St. Jerome say that "there are very few who are altogether free from the vice of speaking injuriously of their neighbor;"² for it is such a subtle and treacherous vice, that even they who have been so fortunate as to have conquered all other vices, are at length caught in this last snare of the devil, defaming their neighbor, and that, too, without fear or shame. Why is this? In my opinion, it is because people are accustomed to look on it as no great harm to speak ill of others, so that they try in every possible way to excuse it from sin; or rather they do all they can to prevent themselves from being considered slanderers. But their excuses are of no avail, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

The first excuse, why many con-

God forbid that I should slander my neighbor, or bring disgrace on him! I have certainly told some things about him, that are

¹ Erue a framea, Deus, animam meam; et de manu canis unquam meam.—Ps. xxi. 21.

² Pauci admodum sunt, qui detractatione renuntiant.—S. Hieron. Ep. 14. ad Melan.

not to his credit; but I did not speak out of hatred, anger, or envy; I had not the least wish to injure his good name; what I said came in the ordinary course of conversation, and my only object was to pass away the time. This is generally the first and at the same time the lamest excuse of all. There is no doubt that most of the harm to the good name of others is done in that way. People must have something to talk about, and they bring under discussion a person who is absent, and tear him to pieces, as if they could find no more interesting subject of conversation than that. If you cannot talk of anything else, you should hold your tongue, and hear what the others have to say. You maintain that you had no bad intention; but what has that to do with it? In any case, you have injured your neighbor's reputation by your wicked talk. If I spoke of your faults and failings to others, would you be satisfied if I told you afterwards that I had no bad intention in doing so, and that I was only helping to keep up the conversation? If a thief steals your money in your absence, and then tries to excuse himself by saying that he had not a bad intention in what he did, that he was only trying to pass away the time, and that, as the opportunity offered, he availed himself of it; would you be satisfied with that? I do not and cannot believe it. In the same way, your intention does not excuse you, when you have actually injured your neighbor's honor by your talk.

There are others who have slandered their neighbor with a really bad intention, and they allege a still more frivolous excuse, that shows them to be very ignorant; others, they say, have spoken badly of me, and no one can blame me if I pay them back in their own coin. What nonsense! He who has taken away your good name has certainly done very wrong, and, if what he has said was not before publicly known, he is bound in conscience before God to make reparation; but it is not lawful for you on that account to commit a similar sin. Did you ever hear or read that it is lawful? Is that the teaching of St. Peter, who says in his first Epistle: "Not rendering evil for evil, nor railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing; for unto this are you called, that you may inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile."¹ Yes, you

sider
slandering
as not sin-
ful.

The second
excuse.

¹ Non reddentes malum pro malo, nec maledictum pro maledicto, sed a contrario benedictentes; quia in hoc vocati estis, ut benedictionem hereditate possideatis. Qui enim vult vitam diligere, et dies videre bonos, coerceat linguam suam a malo, et labia ejus, ne loquantur dolum.—I. Pet. iii. 9, 10.

think, but there are few who observe that. I know there are; and so much the worse! There are precepts enough of that kind in the Christian law and in the gospel of Jesus Christ, that very few pay any attention to, and for that very reason there are few who lead a Christian life as they ought, and the saying of Our Lord is true, that "many are called, but few chosen." That man, you say, has taken away your good name. But what then? Do you regain your good name by injuring his? By no means, for in addition to the loss that he has caused you, you will now be looked on as one who is so possessed by the spirit of revenge that he is unable to master it, and has therefore slandered his neighbor. That is a fine name for you to gain, is it not? But supposing even that you could regain your reputation by injuring his, who has made you judge in your own cause? God has appointed superior authorities to whom you may have recourse, if you want your wrongs redressed; but if you seek to redress them in an unlawful manner, He will have to punish you for so doing.

The third
excuse.

But I am certain of what I said; I saw it with my own eyes, or I heard it from one who would not tell a lie. This is the third excuse; and they who allege it betray themselves by openly declaring that they are guilty of defaming their neighbor. You say you have seen it, or heard it from a trustworthy person, and therefore that you know it to be true. Does that give you a right to reveal your neighbor's dishonor to one who has not yet heard of it? Hear what St. Thomas says: "a detractor is one who speaks, not against the truth, but against his neighbor's character."¹ It is true that he who falsely attributes a crime to his neighbor is guilty of a greater sin, called calumny; but he who makes known a private crime of his neighbor is guilty of the sin of detraction. Not only the Gospel law, but the light of reason alone, which teaches us not to do to others what we do not wish them to do to us, is sufficient to show how futile that excuse is. If your mother, or sister, or wife, or daughter, had done something disgraceful, and some one of the neighborhood comes to know of it, would you be satisfied if he were to relate it to others, and to spread it about the town, simply because he is certain of what he says? Certainly not; and why then do you try to justify yourself by the same idle excuse?

Fourth and
fifth ex-
cuses.

I was not the first to speak of it, it had already been made known by others. Such is the fourth excuse. And if you are not

¹ Detractor vocatur, non quia de veritate, sed quia de fama proximi detrahit.

the first who has committed the sin of detraction, but the second, third, fourth, fifth, or sixth, then, although you are not the spring from which the stream of defamation flows, yet you are the channel by which it is spread about. It was already known, and had become public talk. Such is the fifth excuse. But very often people only imagine that; they hear a thing from two or three individuals, and at once jump to the conclusion that every one knows of it. In that way you can easily make a thing public, which was before known only to a few. Even if it were public talk, you still act, and it can hardly ever be otherwise, against Christian charity, by reminding others of your neighbor's dishonor. It is the great God Himself who is really offended by the sin that the latter has committed; perhaps He has forgiven that sin already, because your neighbor has repented of it; and if so, He will never remember it for all eternity, as He Himself has expressly promised by the Prophet Ezechiel: "But if the wicked do penance for all his sins, which he hath committed, . . . I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done."¹ Why should you, who have not been offended by your neighbor, try to keep alive the memory of his sins. And very often, by doing so, you sin against justice; for it may happen that the fault you speak of has been forgotten through lapse of time, or that your neighbor has, by amending his life, regained the good name he had lost by that fault. To speak of it again is therefore not only contrary to Christian charity, but also to justice; as if, for instance, I were to say in the presence of others: the grandfather of such and such a one was publicly executed as a thief, in such a country; or, his grandmother was burned as a witch.

The sixth excuse consists in saying that they were only common, low people who were defamed. Common, low people! Their souls are just as precious, and perhaps more beautiful than yours, in the sight of God; they may be as great before Him, as any king or prince in the world; and do you dare to take away their good name? People of lowly condition are often most sensitive in what concerns their honor; they are not blessed with riches and worldly wealth, but they do not on that account wish to part with their good name. It would be another matter if they belonged to the lowest dregs of the populace, who have already lost their good name, or who do not care to possess one;

Sixth and seventh excuses.

Si autem impius egerit penitentiam ab omnibus peccatis suis, quæ operatus est, . . . omnium iniquitatum ejus, quas operatus est, non recordabor.—Ezech. xviii. 21, 22.

386 *Manifold ways of Defaming one's Character.*

for where no honor is, honor cannot be taken away. But since I cannot be always certain that this is the case, it is a dangerous thing to say anything bad even of these, particularly if it is hitherto unknown. There are others, again, who maintain that what they said of their neighbor was of no consequence, as it was only a slight fault of his they spoke of. Well, if so, then you have committed a small sin; and is that of no consequence? But in this matter we must not ask whether the fault spoken of is great or small in itself, but whether we notably injure our neighbor's good name and reputation by speaking of it. By disclosing even a venial sin of another, we can inflict a grievous wound on his honor, according to his position and station. For instance, if I say of a priest who has hitherto been looked upon as very pious and perfect, that he is a liar, or a sensual, worldly man, I injure his character grievously, because he is sure to lose the esteem of others on account of what I say. On the other hand, if I said of a soldier that he fought a duel, or blasphemed, or got drunk, etc., these, although they are grievous sins, would occasion little, and sometimes no loss at all of honor to him. And why? Because among people of his class such things are not reckoned disgraceful, and are often even made a boast of. The same is to be said of other vices which in some countries, among people of a certain position, are no longer looked on as disgraceful; thus, in Germany, to say of an ordinary layman that he was drunk, could hardly be a grievous detraction; for who would think anything of that? Alas, that I should have to say so! There is another reason also why it is dangerous to speak of even the small faults of our neighbor; because, as experience proves, the story is carried from one to another, and something is added to it each time, until at last it grows into a serious detraction; just as, when in winter you roll a small ball of snow from the top of a mountain, it continues to increase in size until it reaches the bottom.

Eighth and
ninth ex-
cuses.

I told it to only one friend in strict confidence, and begged of him not to say a word to any one about it. Such is the excuse that many allege; but what a vain one it is! If what you did was lawful, your friend has the same liberty, and he can tell it in strict confidence to a third, the third can tell it to a fourth, and so it goes on; for why should they have less freedom than you? and thus your neighbor loses his good name with many, without any sin being committed by those who took it away. The raindrops fall first on the roofs of the houses, and then into

the guttering, whence they are carried into the sewer; there they unite and flow in a stream along the street. So it is with detraction; it is carried from one to another; each one relates it in confidence; listen, my friend, he says, and I will tell you something, but you must keep it to yourself. And before you have time to look around, the secret is made public. But, you add, he to whom I have told it in confidence is a pious, prudent, sensible, and God-fearing man, there is no fear of his speaking about it. Even if that is the case, do you look on it as a small matter to deprive your neighbor of the esteem of such a man? You think it a greater honor to be held in respect by a sensible and pious man, than to enjoy the esteem of a hundred people of indifferent character; so that by injuring your neighbor in the eyes of one good man, you cause him more suffering, and do him a greater wrong, than if you had maligned him to a hundred people of a different stamp.

But, some will ask, may I not complain to my friend, and say to him: so and so has wronged me, or robbed me; he will not restore what belongs to me; he has led my child astray? No, I answer; you may not speak in that way, while the matter is still unknown. Why should your friend know of it, when it is not in his power to help you? And, you ask again, can I not then warn my neighbor, or my good friend, so that he can protect himself and his children from harm, when I know privately that there is reason for him to be on his guard? For instance, I say to him: keep your eye on that servant, I have noticed that he is not always to be trusted; do not allow your son or your daughter to go into that house; there is nothing good to be learned there, as I know well. If a person asks my advice as to whether he should engage that servant, marry that person, or lend money to a certain individual, may I not give him my opinion, and say to him, if I know that such is really the case, because I have seen or heard it: that person is not suited to you, I would advise you to have nothing to do with him or her? Oh, that is a different matter altogether; the sin of detraction consists in unjustly making known the private faults of our neighbor; but in the instances mentioned you have a just reason for speaking of them, and you do so, not with the intention of defaming your neighbor, but solely through a good and upright desire of putting your friend on his guard. There is not the least doubt that what you do is quite lawful; but you must be careful not to say more than is necessary, and to see that it is

A few questions are answered.

kept secret. Again, is it not lawful to speak ill of one in a general way without mentioning his name? That depends; if there is no danger of any one being suspected, there is no detraction; otherwise it would be unlawful to speak in that way. Thus it would not be right for me to say: a religious belonging to that Order, that monastery, or a member of that family has sinned in such and such a way, etc. For thereby the whole Order, or monastery, or family would be disgraced, and be looked on with suspicion, and besides, people would be curious to know who the culprit is. In a word, it is always dangerous to speak of the faults of others.

Conclusion
and warn-
ing against
this sin.

Therefore let each one of us make a firm, unalterable resolution with St. Augustine, that nothing which is in the least prejudicial to our neighbor's character shall ever be mentioned by us, either in few words, or in many, or by signs, or gestures; we must not inquire whether a certain thing is grievously or slightly injurious to another, nor whether a certain fault is private or public; it ought to suffice to know that to speak of such things is contrary to the charity we owe our neighbor, whom we are bound to love as ourselves. Therefore, O God, I will not interfere with any one, that I may study earnestly to be in Thy sight what Thou wishest me to be! I shall keep my tongue in check by the thought of that strict judgment, in which Thou wilt ask me what I have done myself, not what others have done. Therefore I beg of Thee with Thy servant David: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and a door round about my lips;"¹ that I may never say anything but what is to Thy honor and glory, and that, when I have to speak of others, I may only speak in their praise, for with them I hope and desire to praise and glorify Thee forever. Amen.

SIXTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

ON THOSE WHO HEAR UNCHARITABLE TALK.

Subject.

1. How they sin who deliberately listen to uncharitable talk.
2. How they must act, who hear such talk against their will, so as not to sin.—*Preached on the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost.*

¹ Pone, Domine, custodiam ori meo, et ostium circumstantiæ labiis meis.—Ps. cxl. 3.

Text.

Surdos fecit audire, et mutos loqui.—Mark vii. 37.

“He hath made both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.”

Introduction.

O dear Lord, Thou hast restored speech to the dumb, and hearing to the deaf; still easier would it be for Thy Almighty power to render dumb those who have the gift of speech, and deaf those who can hear! Yet I will not and dare not ask Thee to work a miracle of that kind, and to make any one deaf and dumb; but I do wish that many were for a short time unable to speak, or to hear; nay, there are not a few whose souls would profit much if they were deaf and dumb, so many sins do they commit by speech and hearing. Would it not be better for those talkative people to be altogether dumb, than to injure or destroy their neighbor's honor and good name by their wicked tongues? Would it not be better for those curious ears to be completely deaf, than to listen with pleasure to uncharitable talk? Certainly it would be much better for them to lose tongue and ears, than to lose their souls. I have already said enough, my dear brethren, of those who sin in this exceedingly dangerous matter by talking against others; may God grant that what I have said may help them to amendment in that respect! They who listen to such uncharitable talk must now have their instruction; for they must know whether and how they commit sin, and how they ought to behave under such circumstances. These two points I will explain in this instruction, and thus make an end of this subject.

Plan of Discourse.

How they sin who deliberately listen to uncharitable talk; that I shall explain in the first part. But when they hear such talk against their will, how are they to act, so as not to sin? That I shall explain in the second part. Tongues, be careful never to injure any one by uncharitable talk! Ears, keep yourselves closed to such talk! Such shall be the conclusion.

That we may take it well to heart, and fulfill it, do Thou, O Jesus, preach to our ears and hearts, to which end we beg Thy light and grace through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

According to the old saying, the receiver makes the thief; if Uncharitable talk is so

common,
because
there are so
many who
are willing
to listen to
it.

there were no one willing to buy stolen goods, no one would have the opportunity of offering them for sale. Much more does this saying hold good on the subject of which I am now speaking: for if no one were willing to listen to uncharitable talk, slanderous tongues would soon be reduced to silence, and in a short time an end would be put to this detestable vice. But, alas, as St. Paulinus says, what cannot be sufficiently deplored is the fact that there are only too many who are ready to listen to slander against their neighbor. "Therefore," he says, "this vice is so common, and so many are subject to it, because nearly every one is willing to encourage it by listening."¹ There are few who have such courage and zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, that, like St. Chrysostom, they would venture to put a stop to an uncharitable discourse, if commenced in their presence, or even to go away, or at least to testify their displeasure at it; much less to say out boldly: if you have anything praiseworthy to tell me of the absent person I will listen to you with pleasure; but I do not want to hear anything prejudicial to my neighbor's honor and good name; or else to say: what is it to me, that so and so has acted in that way, that that man is a usurer, that servant stupid, that merchant unjust; that that woman is given to idleness, that young girl to vanity, that young man to drunkenness and impurity? We have not to look after the shortcomings of others, but our own, for which we shall be responsible at the judgment-seat of God. O holy St. Chrysostom, would, that we all had that courage and constancy! How soon would not slanderous tongues be silenced! But that is generally where the fault lies. People listen to them, and listen to them with laughter or smiles of approval. Some do so through hatred and envy, which they secretly nourish in their hearts against those who are spoken ill of; others, who are subject to the same vices, listen because they are glad to find that they have companions in their wickedness; others again listen because it fills them with a vain self-complacency to find that they are better than their neighbors, in as much as they are not subject to the same vices; human respect makes many listen, for the sake of pleasing the person who is talking uncharitably; and finally, the greater number of listeners are attracted by curiosity, for they wish to hear something new, so as to be able afterwards to relate it to their friends.

¹ Hoc ideo malum celebre, et ideo in multis fervet hoc vitium, quia pæne ab omnibus libenter auditur.—S. Paulin. Ep. 14. ad ca.

And the malice of the sin committed by all those who listen deliberately to uncharitable talk consists, first, in this, that they give the slanderer the occasion of committing sin, and approve of and encourage him therein, by listening with pleasure, instead of preventing him from offending God. "If," says St. Jerome, "you listen to a detractor with pleasure, you encourage him in his detraction; he strikes the spark, you prepare the hearth on which the fire is to burn." Two demons, says St. Bernard, are present in every company where a conversation is carried on about the faults and failings of the absent; the detractor, who speaks, has a demon in his mouth, who moves his tongue and helps him to go on talking; the listeners have each a demon in their ears to keep them open, so as to hear the conversation with pleasure. Both parties commit sin, as all theologians agree; but which of them commits the greater sin, St. Bernard does not venture to decide. Hear what he writes to Pope Eugenius: "Whether it is more damnable to detract, or to listen to detraction, I cannot easily determine."² The first sins by injuring his neighbor's honor and good name in the estimation of the listener; the latter sins, because he gives the former occasion to continue the uncharitable conversation. Such in effect was the answer once given by a sensible man to a certain tale-bearer, who came and told him that his enemy had said something against him. If my enemy, said the former, had not found in you a ready listener, he would not have ventured to make so free with my good name; therefore, if either of you has committed sin by that conversation, it is you certainly who are most to blame for it.

The malice of listening to such talk with pleasure consists, first, in giving an occasion for slander.

Besides that, the listener shares in the guilt of the sin committed by the detractor; for, as the law of Christian charity and justice forbids me, under pain of sin, to injure my neighbor's reputation in the esteem of others, it binds me also to keep a good opinion of him as long as I can; so that, as long as his fault is private, and not publicly and certainly known, I do him wrong, if I form a bad opinion of him. But that is exactly what I do, when I listen with approval to an uncharitable conversation. Nay, it may happen sometimes that the detractor himself commits only a small sin, or even no sin at all, through ignorance or inadvertence, since he has not the least intention of injuring his neighbor's good name by the remarks he makes; while the

Besides, the listener partakes in the sin of the detractor.

¹ Si vultu hilari audis detractorem, tu illi das fomitem detrahendi; ille ignem excutit, tu substernis igniartum.

² Detrahere aut detrahentem audire, quid horum damnabilius sit, non facile dixerim.—S. Bern. l. 2. de con. sid.

listener, who knows and adverts to the unlawful and uncharitable character of the conversation, offends God grievously.

A still greater sin is committed by those who, by asking questions, etc., give occasion for detraction.

Now, if this is true of all those who listen to such conversation with pleasure, how grievously do they not sin, who, by asking questions, directly furnish others with the occasion of speaking against their neighbor? How grievous the sin must be that is committed by those inquisitive people who are always meddling with the affairs of others, and who never rest until they find out everything that is going on? There are certain hunting dogs, whose only business it is to find out where the game is, and then to bark as a signal to the huntsman, who immediately comes and shoots the game. They who are so fond of prying into their neighbor's faults and defects, are like those dogs, and, according to the words of the Holy Ghost by the Wise Man, "he that seeketh after evil things shall be oppressed by them."¹ They ask all kinds of questions, and fish for information in every possible manner, until they find out what goes on in that house, that family, that street, or between those friends and relatives; but if they hear anything good and praiseworthy of another, they pay no attention to it, for it is not that they are looking for. Pliny, writing of trees and plants, says that there are certain plants that are good for nothing but to make brooms of.² The same may truly be said of those prying people; they are good for nothing but to sweep up filth and impurities, that is, to find out their neighbor's faults and failings. Thus, for instance, they say in the course of conversation: there is a queer report about so and so; have you heard anything about it? I wonder what it can be. Or if any one inadvertently lets fall a hint against his neighbor's character, they are not satisfied until they have found out the whole affair. Go on, they say; tell me all about it; you need not be afraid that I will speak of it; I will tell you afterwards why I am so anxious to hear it, etc. Or they begin to praise some one who is absent, in the presence of a person who, as they know, cannot bear him, their object therein being to induce that person to talk against the other's character, and to say things about him that he otherwise would never have thought of.

The worst amongst those are they who try to get such in-

The worst of these meddling people are they who, with apparent friendliness, ask servants and little children all kinds of questions about what goes on at home. How are you getting on? they say; are you satisfied with your situation? Have you not a

¹ Qui autem, investigator malorum est, opprimetur ab eis.—Prov. xi. 27.

² Scapis tantum natu.—Plin. l. 16. c. 26.

very good master or mistress? Who was at your house yesterday? What was he doing there? and so they go on, until the unsuspecting child or the discontented servant tells them everything they wish to know. "What do I gain," asks St. John Chrysostom, "by knowing that my neighbor is a bad man? Is it not on the contrary a great evil and loss to me to have found that out?"¹ For I have caused those whom I have questioned to commit sin, and I have committed sin myself by my curiosity; because, as it is unlawful to make known the private faults of another, so also it is sinful to try to find out what those faults are. The servant or the child commits a mortal sin against charity and justice by relating anything that is apt to bring grievous dishonor on the family; and of course I commit a much more grievous sin by being the occasion of their offending God. You are guilty of theft, whether you yourself steal your neighbor's property, or encourage another to do so; nay, your sin in the latter case is worse, on account of the additional guilt you incur by leading another into sin; so that, if I give occasion to another to injure my neighbor's good name, I am bound in conscience to make due reparation. That is all I gain by my impertinent curiosity. Is it worth my while then, to go to such trouble to find out the concerns of others, although I have in reality no business to meddle with them?

formation out of innocent children and servants.

Ah, my dear brethren, as the Holy Ghost warns us by the wise Ecclesiasticus, "hedge in thy ears with thorns, hear not a wicked tongue."² You should not listen to it, and much less should you give it occasion to speak. But, you will ask, who can avoid hearing uncharitable talk? He who wishes to do that, would have to shut himself up in his room, and never go out; for, in spite of ourselves, we are often obliged to listen to things that are injurious to our neighbor's character, and there is no chance of making uncharitable people hold their tongues. What is then to be done under such circumstances, so as not to sin against God or my neighbor? This question I will answer in the

Exhortation to be deaf to all uncharitable talk.

Second Part.

I acknowledge that, since it is such a common thing in the world to talk about the faults and failings of others, no matter how careful we are, we can hardly avoid hearing some talk of that kind; and therefore, as I said in the introduction, I could

It would be very desirable that we were all deaf when uncharitable talk begins.

¹ Quod mihi lucrum, si didicero, quod ille sit improbus: Nonne maximum nocumentum ex hoc et extrema jactura?

² Sepi aures tuas spuiis, linguam uequam noli audire.--Eecl. xxviii. 28.

wish that we were often deprived of hearing for a time, or that we had that special grace which, as Cassian writes, was conferred on the holy Abbot Machetes. This holy man was filled with joy whenever he was present at a conversation about God and holy things, and no one listened with more attention, or spoke more eloquently than he. And if some indifferent matter, that was neither good nor bad in itself, was spoken of, merely for the purpose of innocent recreation, and to the glory of God, there was no one who could contribute more than he to the general amusement; but if a single word was let drop that in the least affected his neighbor's good name, he at once fell into a deep sleep, and could not be awakened until the uncharitable conversation had ceased. Those who knew the holy man used frequently to test this gift of his; if he were walking, or working, or otherwise so engaged that sleep under ordinary circumstances was impossible, they would commence to talk about their neighbor, and the Abbot at once, no matter what he was doing, would fall asleep. I could wish, I say, that a similar grace were given to those inquisitive people, who are inclined to fall asleep when anything holy and profitable to their salvation is spoken of, but who are all attention when anything is said against their neighbor's good name. I could wish that Christian charity would work a similar miracle on all those who happen to hear uncharitable conversation unexpectedly. But my wish is in vain; as long as we have ears, and they are in a healthy state, so long must we hear whatever sound is made, whatever words are pronounced aloud near us.

What to do
in order not
to sin by
listening.

What are we then to do when an uncharitable conversation is commenced in our presence, against our will? The Holy Ghost tells us that, my dear brethren, in the words I have already quoted, "hedge in thy ears with thorns." By thorns, which pierce and wound, are here meant the fraternal admonitions and reproofs we should administer to those who speak against our neighbor's character, in order that they may cease talking uncharitably, and that we may have no part in their sin. But, you may ask, are we then always bound in conscience to administer a reproof of that kind? Certainly, I answer; but we must do it very modestly, and in different ways according to circumstances. This reproof may be given by words, or by silence, or by mere signs. For he who speaks against his neighbor's character is either one of your own household, over whom you have authority; or he is a stranger, but of lowlier condition than

you; or he is your equal; or, finally, of superior condition.

If he is subject to you, then there is no doubt that you are bound to use, for the honor of God and your neighbor, the authority that God has given you, and to command the detractor to hold his tongue. This obligation especially concerns fathers and mothers, who hear their children or servants speaking ill of others; because they are, as I have elsewhere proved, bound in conscience to look after the spiritual welfare of the members of their households. If I saw a thief breaking into another man's house, although the latter is a perfect stranger to me, and I could prevent the robbery by a few words, but refused to speak them, there is no doubt that I would act against the law of Christian charity; much more grievous, then, would be my violation of that law, if I allow another to rob my neighbor of his good name, although I could prevent him from doing so by a few words.

If the detractor is subject to our authority.

But if the detractor is not subject to you, although he is of lower condition than you, the law of fraternal correction binds you; but you must administer the reproof in a friendly and courteous manner. For instance, you might say: let us talk of something else; I know you have no bad intention, still, there is always danger in speaking of such things, as one is apt to say what he will be sorry for afterwards; and so on. If the detractor is equal to you in condition, you are not always bound to correct him in that manner; but you must try to put a stop to the conversation in such a way as not to offend him. Thus, if I were present at such a conversation, I might excuse the person spoken of and say: at all events he is an honorable man, she is a respectable lady, etc.; we must not believe everything that people say; there is so much of that kind of talk going about, that one can hardly know whether it is true or not; if everything that people say were true, we should be all thieves and rogues. Or I might say: we have all our faults, what is the use of talking of those of others? And perhaps the best way of all would be to speak of something else to whoever is next to me, so as to turn the conversation into another channel; for instance, I might ask what news there is in the papers, whether the war between England and Spain will likely come to an end soon, and so on, no matter whether my question chimes in with the conversation or not. Again, if the uncharitable talk is carried on at table, I might say: oh, what is the use of us sitting here like this? Let us fill our glasses again; and so I might begin to make a noise or to provoke the others to laughter; and although

If he is of lower or of equal condition.

he who was speaking may notice that I am interrupting him, it is no matter; for, if he is a sensible man, he will acknowledge afterwards that I have acted rightly. Plutarch writes that Alcibiades, who was a very wise man amongst the ancient Greeks, when he heard that some people were spreading bad reports about him, cut off the tail of a very fine dog that he had recently bought, and allowed the animal to run about the town in that state. Some of his friends were very much displeased that a man of his wisdom should play such childish tricks; but Alcibiades told them that his only object was to give the people something to say about his dog, that they might hold their tongues about himself. "Let them speak," he said, "about Alcibiades' dog, as long as they cease to tear Alcibiades himself to pieces."¹ From this we may see that every one who loves his neighbor as himself, may easily interrupt and change an uncharitable conversation, by suggesting some other topic, no matter what. Thomas More, the English Chancellor, was well skilled in this art; whatever company he happened to be in, if the talk was turned on the failings of others, he would at once interrupt it, and make some such remark as this: every one can say what he pleases, as for me, I maintain that this house is very well built, and that the architect knew his business well.

If he is
of a higher
condition.

Finally, if the detractor is of a higher position than you, what are you to do? It would hardly become you to admonish or correct him; and if you try to interrupt the conversation, you must do it very delicately and cautiously; otherwise that plan will not be successful. A good way might be to absent one's self a while from the company, if it can be done without attracting notice, until the uncharitable conversation is at an end; but very often that cannot be done. What course is then to be adopted? Naturalists tell us that the dolphin hears, although he seems to have no means of hearing, as he has no ears. That is just what one must do, when his superior commences to talk uncharitably of others; he must act as if he had no ears; that is, he must not show by his outward behavior, or by the least sign, or word, or by laughing or smiling, that he takes pleasure in such conversation; but he must sit quite still and silent and serious, so as to let every one see that it is very displeasing to him. "The north wind driveth away rain," says the Holy Ghost by the Wise Man; "so doth a sad countenance a backbiting tongue."² Such is also

¹ Loquantur de cane Alcibiadis, modo Alcibiadem desinant lacerare.

² Ventus aquilo dissipat pluvias, et facies tristis linguam detrahentem—Prov. xxv. 23.

the meaning of what St. Jerome says: "if you listen to a detractor with an averted and serious countenance, he will learn not to be too ready to say what he knows is not heard with pleasure;"¹ for, as no one goes willingly into a house in which he knows he is not welcome, so no one will care about protracting a conversation that he knows to be displeasing to those who are listening. "If you act otherwise," continues St. Jerome, "you show yourself to be either a false brother, or a cowardly friend, to the person whose good name is attacked."² St. Augustine was such an enemy of all uncharitable discourse, that he caused a tablet with the following inscription to be inserted in the wall over his table, so that all might be able to see it: "He who takes pleasure in speaking ill of the absent, must know that he dare not present himself at this table."³ It happened once, as Possidonius relates, who was present on the occasion, that several bishops were at table with Augustine, when some of them forgot the inscription on the tablet, and began to speak rather freely of the absent; but Augustine at once reprovèd them. "My brethren," said he, "either the tablet must be taken away, or you must change the conversation, or else I will go to my room."⁴ It is related of John the Almoner, Patriarch of Alexandria, that if he heard any one speaking ill of others, he reprovèd him gently, or else changed the conversation; if, in spite of this, the other continued the uncharitable conversation, John kept silence, but he wrote the man's name down in a book, and when he had left, told his servant never to admit him again. There can be no doubt of the truth of what St. Jerome says, "where there are none to listen, there will be none to detract."⁵ "Happy he," says St. Paulinus, "who so arms himself against this vice, that no one will dare to speak ill of others in his presence!"⁶

Finally, if we, against our will, hear something bad, that we did not know before, against our neighbor, how are we to act? "Charity covereth all sins,"⁷ is the warning given us by the Holy

We must not be too ready to believe detraction, when we hear it.

¹ Quodsi facie subtristi et aversa detractorem audias, discet ille non libenter dicere, quod didicerit non libenter audiri.

² Sin aliter agis, ostendis te illius, cui detrahitur, aut falsum fratrem, aut timidum amicum esse.

³ Quisquis amat dictis absentum rodere famam, Hanc mensam vetitam noverit esse sibi.

⁴ Domini fratres! aut illa tabula refigenda est, aut vos sermones istos desinetis, aut ego ad cubiculum facesso.

⁵ Ubi desunt audientes, non inveniuntur detrahentes.—S. Hieron. ad cel.

⁶ Beatus est, qui ita se contra hoc vitium armavit, ut apud eum detrahere nemo audeat.

⁷ Universa delicta operit charitas.—Prov. x. 12.

Ghost. If any one speaks ill to me of a dear friend of mine, I at once think to myself that what he says is not true. And this should be the first effect of Christian charity; namely, not to be too ready to believe the uncharitable things that are said of others, according to the admonition of the wise Ecclesiasticus: "believe not every word."¹ Remember that there is no doubt that plenty of talk of the kind is carried on almost everywhere, and therefore do not let anything you hear interfere with the good opinion you have of your neighbor. Besides, it is a gross injustice to judge and condemn one who is absent, and who cannot defend himself. "We must hear the other side,"² is a well-known axiom of jurists, whenever an accusation is brought forward against a third party. But if the authority of the detractor, or the proofs he brings forward, force me to believe that my neighbor has done wrong, then, according to the law of Christian charity, I must put the best interpretation on everything, and excuse my neighbor, in thought at least, since I cannot be sure that his intention was bad; or, at all events, I must have a heartfelt compassion for him, since his good name is thus torn to pieces. Imagine you see a number of dogs surrounding a hare, and tearing it to pieces; your own natural instincts will incline you to pity the poor animal, although it is only a dumb brute; should you not then feel pity for your poor brother or sister in Jesus Christ, with whom you hope one day to enjoy the happiness of Heaven, when his or her good name is so ruthlessly attacked by wicked tongues?

Much less should we speak of it afterwards, but rather keep it secret.

Another thing the law of Christian charity requires from all who hear uncharitable conversation, and that is, that they keep it to themselves, and do not speak of it afterwards. The wise Ecclesiasticus, after having warned us to hedge round our ears with thorns against detractors, adds: "and make doors and bars to thy mouth,"³ so that what you have heard may not escape you again. "Hast thou heard a word against thy neighbor," he says elsewhere, "let it die within thee, trusting that it will not burst thee."⁴ Be not like those talkative people who imagine they must choke, if they do not at once tell to others everything they hear. "At the hearing of a word, the fool is in travail, as a woman groaning in the

¹ Non omni verbo credas.—EccI. xix. 16.

² Audiatur et altera pars.

³ Et ori tuo facito ostia et seras.—EccI. xxviii. 28.

⁴ Audisti verbum adversus proximum tuum? commoritur in te, fidens, quoniam non dirumpet.—Ibid. xix. 10.

bringing forth a child. As an arrow that sticketh in a man's thigh, so is a word in the heart of a fool."¹ - No, you must not be like that; "hast thou heard a word against thy neighbor, let it die within thee." You will notice, my dear brethren, that Ecclesiasticus does not say that you must keep the word you have heard against your neighbor locked up in your breast like a malefactor in prison; but you must let it be like a dead man in the grave. And why? Because the prisoner, no matter how carefully he is guarded, may find an opportunity to escape; but a dead man, even if his grave were opened, could not come forth; his body must remain where it was placed. A prisoner may show himself to others by looking out at the window, or at least he can make his voice heard; but a dead body is unable to do either; it has neither life nor speech. Therefore the detraction we have heard must remain buried within, not like a prisoner in his dungeon, but like a dead body in the grave. Let it die within thee, so that you must not reveal it by the least sign, nor complain about it to your friends, as many are in the habit of doing. Oh, they say, how disgusted I was to-day! I was in company with so and so, and they commenced to talk about such and such a one, and to tear him to pieces so unmercifully, that I wished I had remained at home. No, I say again; "hast thou heard a word against thy neighbor, let it die within thee."

I conclude this subject, my dear brethren, by reminding you again of the warning of the Holy Ghost, and begging of you, for Christ's sake and your eternal salvation, "keep yourselves therefore from murmuring, which profiteth nothing, and refrain your tongue from detraction."² Guard against that dangerous vice of speaking ill of others, which it is so easy to fall into, and so difficult to cure; and let us all agree unanimously, for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, to do our best to put a stop to that sin which is the cause of such ruin. And how are we to do that? We must never speak of the faults and failings of the absent, and thus we shall also put a stop to the sins that others might commit by listening to uncharitable conversation with pleasure, as I have already explained; we must avoid the society of those whom we know by experience to be given to that kind of talk; and if we happen to hear any of it, we must, with a holy

Conclusion and exhortation to avoid all detraction, either by speaking or listening.

¹ *A facie verbi parturit fatuus, tamquam gemitus partus infantis. Sagitta infixæ femo: carnis, sic verbum in cordi stulti.*—Ecl. xix.11, 12.

² *Custodite ergo vos a murmuratōne, quæ nihil prodest, et a detractōne parcite linguæ.*—Wis. i. 11.

zeal, and laying aside all human respect, do what we can to put a stop to it, either by administering a fraternal reproof, or by testifying our displeasure by our silence.

Resolutions
and means
to carry
this into
effect.

For my part, the thought of the strict judgment of God shall place in future a curb on my slippery tongue, so that I shall never again offend in this way, by the least word, that judgment at which I shall have to give an account, not of what others have done, but of what I have done myself. That terrible trumpet-call, "Arise ye dead, and come to judgment," which is to summon me and others forth, out of our graves, before the judgment-seat of Christ, shall be as a door and a bolt to my ears, so that I shall not desire to know anything about my neighbor's faults and failings, until the Judge of the living and the dead is pleased to make them public, in the sight of Heaven and earth. And you, from whom I may in future hear anything against my neighbor's good name, do not think the worse of me if, according to my obligation and the law of Christian charity, I interrupt your conversation and disapprove of it. It is for the good of your own souls to be prevented from indulging in such dangerous talk, and committing a sin against charity; and it is for my own salvation that I will disapprove of that sin, and refuse to have any part in it. My soul is far too dear to me, for me to lose it in such a miserable way, and I love my God too well to transgress His law; for I wish to do His holy will under all circumstances, and to love Him constantly with my whole heart. So it shall be, O God worthy of all love! Give me Thy grace thereto. Amen.

ON CURSING AND SWEARING.

SIXTY EIGHTH SERMON.

ON THE DEPRAVITY OF CURSING.

Subject.

1. Cursing and swearing are a foolish and hellish kind of language, that is highly unbecoming a Christian. 2. Of all wicked language, it is that which gives the most scandal.—*Preached on the sixth Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Haec locutus sum vobis, ut non scandalizemini.—John xvi. 1.
“These things have I spoken to you, that you may not be scandalized.”

Introduction.

We have seen in the sermon of last Sunday, that there are many Christians who do not really wish that their prayers should be heard. But would to God, my dear brethren, that this were the greatest fault! For, what a shameful, hellish kind of prayer is in daily use even amongst those Christians, who, while others are praising God, and imploring his blessing, have their mouths filled with imprecations, and seek to draw the divine malediction down on earth. To-day I must endeavor to oppose the Word of God to that abominable language, which is unfortunately so common among all classes of people, and is such a fruitful source of scandal; so that they who are still free from this vice may not be influenced by the bad example of others, nor learn to speak in the same wicked way; thus, as Christ says in to-day's gospel, “these things have I spoken to you, that you may not be scandalized,” and that they who are already addicted to this bad habit may at once correct it.

Plan of Discourse.

Cursing and swearing are a foolish and hellish kind of language, that is highly unbecoming a Christian, as I shall prove in the first part. Of all wicked language, it is that which gives the most scandal, as I shall prove in the second part.

I could wish now that my voice were like thunder, and my words like lightning, not to curse and swear, but to banish that horrible vice to the abyss of hell, whence it came. Thou, O my Lord and my God, canst effect this; for Thou hast said by Thy Prophet Sophonias: “Then I will restore to the peoples a chosen lip, that all may call upon the name of the Lord.”¹ Enlighten our understanding, we beg of Thee through the merits of Thy Mother Mary and the holy angels who are always praising Thee in Heaven, that we may learn how detestable the vice of cursing is, and may labor with a holy zeal to extirpate it.

We know by a man's language what country he belongs to.

By the language that a man speaks, we generally know what country he belongs to; if we hear a stranger speak Spanish and nothing else, we conclude that he is a Spaniard; if he speaks nothing but Italian, we know that he is a native of Italy. If he speaks French, we know at once that he is a Frenchman; whereas he who answers him in good German, is no doubt a German. When Peter was in the hall of Caiphaz the high-priest, in spite of all his protestations to the contrary, he was at once known to be a disciple of Christ, and was convicted of a lie; for the servant said to him: “even thy speech doth discover thee,²” and betrays thee at once as a Galilean.

The language of the country of the elect is the praise of God.

Now, my dear brethren, you can draw the conclusion yourselves. If you wish to know what country many Christians belong to, you have only to notice the language they speak; from that you will find out where they come from, where they were born and bred, and what country they belong to. I do not allude now to England or the Netherlands, or any other country here on earth; but you can find out in the way I have mentioned whether they belong to the land of the angels above, or to that of the demons below; to Jerusalem, the peaceful city of the elect of God, or to Babylon, the city of confusion, where lost souls dwell; to Heaven, or to hell. Do you wish to try the plan I have suggested? You will find it an unfailling one. Take notice, I say, of the language they use. St. John, who often

¹ Tunc reddam populis labium electum, ut invocent omnes in nomine Domini.—Soph. iii. 9.

² Et loquela tua manifestum te facit.—Matth. xxvi. 73.

heard it, describes the language of the angels and saints in Heaven, as we read in the Apocalypse. "And I beheld and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the number of them was thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: the Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive power, and divinity, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and benediction I heard all saying: To him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, benediction, and honor, and glory, and power for ever and ever."¹ And all that stood around said, Amen. In the fourth chapter he tells us that he heard the same language from the four and twenty ancients, and the four living creatures. "And they rested not day and night, saying: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty."² We read in the seventh chapter how he saw the elect: "I saw a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne; and they cried with a loud voice, saying: Salvation to our God who sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb."³ "After these things," he says in the nineteenth chapter, "I heard as it were the voice of much people in Heaven saying: alleluia, salvation, and glory, and power is to our God."⁴ "And a voice came out from the throne, saying: give praise to our God, all ye His servants; and you that fear Him, little and great. And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of great thunders, saying, Alleluia. Let us be glad, and rejoice, and give glory to Him."⁵ Thus, my dear brethren, you see that the language of the angels and the elect in Heaven consists in praising, honoring, and blessing God.

And what sort of a language do the wicked speak in hell? The language of the

¹ Vidi, et audivi vocem angelorum multorum in circuitu throni; et erat numerus eorum millia millium, dicentium voce magna: Dignus est Agnus, qui occisus est, accipere virtutem, et divinitatem, et sapientiam, et fortitudinem, et honorem, et gloriam, et benedictionem . . . omnes audivi dicentes: Sedenti in throno, et Agno: benedictio, et honor, et gloria, et potestas in sæcula sæculorum.—Apoc. v. 11, 12, 13.

² Requiem non habebant die ac nocte, dicentia: Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus Dominus Deus omnipotens.—Ibid. iv. 8.

³ Vidi turbam magnam, quam dinumerare nemo poterat, ex omnibus gentibus, et tribubus, et populis, et linguis, stantes ante thronum, et clamabant voce magna, dicentes: Salus Deo nostro, qui sedet super thronum, et Agno.—Ibid. vii. 9, 10.

⁴ Post hæc audivi quasi vocem turbarum multarum in cœlo dicentium: Alleluja: Salus et gloria et virtus Deo nostro est.—Ibid. xix. 1.

⁵ Et vox de throno exivit, dicens: Laudem dicite Deo nostro, omnes servi ejus, et qui timetis eum, pusilli et magni. Et audivi quasi voce turbæ magnæ, et sicut vocem tonitruorum magnorum, dicentium: Alleluja. Gaudeamus et exultemus, et demus gloriam ei.—Ibid. 5, 6, 7.

country
of the re-
probate is
cursing and
blasphemy.

Quite a different one from that of Heaven. They howl like dogs in their rage; they gnash their teeth with anger; they curse the hour of their birth; they curse their fathers and mothers, the God who created them, the devils who torture them, and the companions of their misery with whom they must live in eternal hatred and enmity. Such is the language of hell, and it consists of nothing but curses, imprecations, and blasphemy. "He put on cursing like a garment," says David, speaking of the reprobate, as the commentators assure us, "and it went in like water into his entrails, and like oil in his bones. May it be unto him like a garment which covereth him, and like a girdle with which he is girded continually,"¹ so that nothing can fall from his lips but cursing. Therefore, at the last judgment, the reprobate will receive from Jesus Christ, when He is passing sentence on them, no other title but that of accursed: "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire;"² there you can curse as much as you will.

Therefore
the peace-
ful, who
bless God,
are fellow-
countrymen
of the elect
in Heaven.

Now I would have no difficulty in deciding, if I were asked to do so, what country men belong to, and what sort of people they are. If I find a patient, peaceful, and meek Christian, who, like his Lord and Master Jesus Christ, never allows a biting word to fall from his lips; who, like the patient Job on the dung hill, does not sin with his lips when bearing the troubles and trials of life, but is always satisfied with the will of God, and repeats in his heart that song of praise, "blessed be the name of the Lord;"³ who, if he hears others talking wickedly, answers them mildly, like the elder Tobias, "speak not so; for we are the children of saints, and look for that life which God will give to them that never change their faith from Him;"⁴ who, with St. Paul, can say truly, "we are reviled, and we bless; we are persecuted, and we suffer it; we are blasphemed, and we entreat;"⁵ if I find, I say, a man of that kind, and you ask me what country he belongs to, I can say without further inquiry that his tongue betrays him; the beautiful language he speaks makes it evident that he belongs to the country of the

¹ *Induit maledictionem sicut vestimentum, et intravit sicut aqua in interiora ejus, et sicut oleum in ossibus ejus. Fiat ei sicut vestimentum, quo operitur, et sicut zona, qua semper præcingitur.*—Ps. cviii. 18, 19.

² *Discedite a me maledicti in ignem æternum.*—Matth. xxv. 41.

³ *Sit nomen Domini benedictum.*—Job i. 21.

⁴ *Nolite ita loqui, quoniam illi sanctorum sumus, et vitam illam expectamus, quam Deus daturus est his, qui fidem suam nunquam mutant ab eo.*—Tobias ii. 17, 18.

⁵ *Maledicimur, et benedicimus; persecutionem patimur, et sustinemus; blasphemamur et obsecramus.*—I. Cor. iv. 12, 13.

angels, the kingdom of the elect, the dwelling-place of the children of God; in a word, to Heaven.

But if, on the other hand, I find one (and I will not have far to go to look for him; for unfortunately the streets, and lanes, and houses, and rooms, are full of them) who at the least word of contradiction, or if a dog howls, or his horse or his ox refuses to go the right way, or if his work is too hard, or an undertaking fails, or his servant is not ready at once when required, or his son or daughter does not obey even the least sign of his, or when there is any difference at home between husband and wife, or when the least inconvenience has to be borne;—if I find one who on such occasions has his mouth filled with curses, May the devil take you! May the lightning strike you dead! Go to the devil! Plague take you! May you break your neck! (Forgive me, innocent souls! I do not wish to teach you to curse, and you have only too many opportunities otherwise, of hearing such expressions), what am I to think of a man who uses language of that kind! Ye angels, who are always with us, what do you think of it? Did that man learn such language from you? Oh no, they will answer; he is no countryman of ours; we know him not; his wicked speech betrays him. “You are of your father the devil,”¹ said Christ formerly to the Pharisees; and the angels might say the same thing nowadays to those who are addicted to cursing; for it was the devil who taught them that wicked habit.

The demons themselves approve of that hellish kind of language; these are our pupils, they say; they have acquired as great skill in speaking as the reprobate do in hell; so that, if we were even to forget our own language, we might learn it from them, when they come to us; we are always ready to dance to music of that kind. The devil was once seen sitting at the open window of a house, holding in one hand a long sheet of paper full of notes, while with the other he kept on beating time like the leader of an orchestra, laughing all the while and showing signs of extraordinary joy, and crying out, “well done! Bravo! go on!” What was going on in the house? There were four people living in it, who were adepts in cursing, the husband and wife, the son and the mother-in-law. There was nothing to be heard from them, from morning till night, but oaths and imprecations. They had just begun breakfast, and because the son was too greedy, and had taken too much on his plate, the mother

But they who are given to cursing are fellow-countrymen of the reprobate in hell.

At which the devils rejoice; shown by an example.

¹ Vos ex patre diabolo estis.—John viii. 44.

cried out to him: "may the first bit you eat choke you!" The father followed suit, saying, "plague take you;" and last of all came the mother-in-law, who wished that he would swallow a thousand devils. This was the music that so delighted the evil spirit, that he could not help expressing his joy, and doubtless he considered that he had secured four skilled musicians for his hellish orchestra, which always played tunes of that kind. Alas, how many Christian houses there are in which, if we could see the devil in visible form, we should find him exulting with joy at the cursing and swearing that are continually to be heard therein!

Therefore they bear about them a mark of reprobation.

Unhappy wretches that you are! It is only too easy to see what country you belong to! You may be as pious and holy as you like in other respects; you may visit the churches, and pray, and sing the praises of God like angels; but you will be none the better for it; there are too many false notes in your attempts at heavenly music; you speak the language of the angels too badly to deceive any but men; God you cannot deceive thereby. You evidently learned a far different language, so that, no matter how you act in other respects, I say to you as the servant said to Peter: "Surely thou also art one of them; for even thy speech doth discover thee."¹ Truly you are of the number of the reprobate, for your speech shows that you belong to hell. There is not the least doubt that, just as they who are always blessing and praising God are written in the Book of Life, according to the testimony of David, "such as bless him shall inherit the land,"² so, on the other hand, they whose mouths are filled with oaths and curses are surely marked as being of the number of the reprobate, according to the testimony of the same Prophet, "such as curse him shall perish."³ Thus your sentence is already pronounced, and you yourselves have ratified and confirmed it, since your wicked tongues prove that you are fellow-countrymen of the damned, companions of demons, and precursors of Antichrist; your speech doth discover you:

From this we see that cursing is utterly unbecoming a Christian.

How shameful! How disgraceful for a reasoning being, a Christian, a Catholic, a brother and member of Jesus Christ, redeemed by the precious blood of the meek Lamb, and an adopted child of God, to accustom himself to the use of such hellish language; to speak as the damned do; to make him-

¹ Vere et tu ex illis es, nam et loquela tua manifestum te facit.—Matth. xxvi. 73.

² Quia benedicentes ei hereditabunt terrain.—Ps. xxxvi. 22.

³ Maledicentes ei disperibunt.—Ibid.

self the comrade of devils, and to bear about the evil spirit constantly in his heart, in his mouth, and on his tongue! What a shame, what a disgrace that is! Is that then the end that we are to work for, although God has created us for the sole purpose of praising, blessing, honoring, and loving Him? Is that the wish that we daily send forth to God in Heaven, when we say the Lord's prayer: "Hallowed be Thy name"? Does that diabolical language harmonize with the solemn promise we made to God in Baptism as Christians, to renounce forever the devil and all his works, and to devote ourselves, body and soul, and tongue especially, to the praises of God? The first member of the body that God takes possession of in Baptism is the tongue; for when a child is brought to the church to be baptized, the priest does not at once pour the water on its head; no, he first places the blessed salt on its tongue, to show that he whose name is enrolled among the servants and followers of Christ must use his tongue only to praise God, and to promote the divine glory. And must this consecrated tongue be now so shamefully dishonored, by being used for cursing and swearing, and by being lent to the devil to speak his language? And God, who takes such care of His servants, that He has promised to consider as done to Himself, what is done to the least of them, must He now hear His adopted children calling down imprecations on each other's heads, worse than Turks and heathens, and dishonoring Him more than even the demons and lost souls in hell do by their curses and blasphemies?

If I heard a Turk or a heathen cursing and swearing at his neighbor, I should be horrified, and should think that such language is unfit for a reasoning being to use; yet at the same time I should have to admit that it is to a certain extent excusable before God in a blind idolater. "For if my enemy had reviled me, I would verily have borne with it;"¹ as the Lord Himself says by His servant David. But you, O Christian, My well-known friend, you who were born in the house of God, in the true Church of My Son, you who are fed at the Sacred Table with the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, which so often touch your tongue, you who are bound to have one heart with the Heart of Jesus; you, I say, O Catholic Christian, whom I have bound to My service as with cords, by heeping on you, in preference to so

Who is a
friend and
a child of
God.

¹ Quoniam, si inimicus meus maledixisset mihi, sustinuissem utique. Tu vero, homo unanims, dux meus, et notus meus, qui simul mecum dulces capiebas cibos.—Ps. liv. 13, 14, 15.

many others, countless benefits; you whom I have placed amongst the people whom I call "a chosen generation, a kingly priest-hood, a holy nation, a purchased people;" whom I have purchased to the sole end, "that you may declare His virtues, who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light;"¹ you to make common cause with the demons and the reprobate, to help to spread the language of hell through the world, and to utter curses and imprecations against My creatures; that I find altogether intolerable. You act like a dog that barks at and bites the child of its master, at the very moment in which the latter is giving him a piece of bread. Christians! what do you mean by using such abominable language? Are you then so anxious to belong to the reprobate, even before your time comes to join them? Are you firmly resolved on going to hell? Then wait at all events until you die. You will then be able to swear and curse, and blaspheme for all eternity, and will not that satisfy you? Why then should you be so anxious to anticipate in this life the miserable state of eternal damnation? Ah, would to God, my dear brethren, that we could banish out of the whole land all who are addicted to this evil habit, so that our ears would no longer be offended by hearing such abominable language amongst Christian people! But what am I saying? I am afraid, if we did so, not half the people would be left in the country, so common is this vice! And where could they be sent to? Some special place should have to be created for them, because the whole world is full of them. And this is what is most to be deplored in this evil habit of cursing and swearing; that, namely, it is increasing daily, and infecting souls that were hitherto innocent. Therefore I say that this vice gives almost more scandal than any other sin of the tongue, as I shall now prove in the

Second Part.

Cursing gives more scandal than any other kind of bad language, because most people are inclined to imitate it.

In the strict sense of the word that language is called scandalous, which gives or can give others an occasion of sin. Now I firmly believe that, although there are other sins of the tongue which are far worse and more sinful in themselves, yet there are none which give more occasion to evil than the sins of cursing and swearing. I must acknowledge that impure talk is a real poison and a contagious pestilence; yet there is this to be said

¹ Vos autem genus electum, regale sacerdotium, gens sancta, populus acquisitionis, ut virtutes annuncietis ejus, qui de tenebris vos vocavit in admirabile lumen suum.—I. Pet. ii. 9.

for it, that it puts itself to shame and destroys its own influence for evil; because he who has even a remnant of decency left must blush for shame if he hears such conversation; thus very often the silence of those around him closes the mouth of the impure man, and puts him to shame, so that conversation of that kind cannot be carried on always openly in town or country. But who does not see and experience daily how quickly cursing, no matter how horrible it is, is learnt? The young learn it from the old, and that without shame or scruple, and without any one being astonished, much less shocked at it. Wherever you go, from morning till night, you may hear horrible imprecations from the soldier on guard, the peasant in the field, the tradesman in his workshop, the boys in the streets, and shopkeepers at their business. So common is it, that people are ashamed of it no longer, and it is considered as something to be proud of, when one is a master in the art of cursing. To such an extent has the evil increased, that it is no longer looked on as sinful, or as sufficient matter for sorrow and repentance, much less for a purpose of amendment. I have done nothing, people say, but cursed a little; and who can help that? Did it happen every day? asks the confessor. Oh yes, is the answer. And is there nothing else? No, nothing else. Alas, is not that enough? Far too many sins have you thereby committed. And yet many a confessor has to puzzle himself, and get all his theology together, and take different circumstances into consideration, before deciding that he has sufficient matter for absolution for the one sin of cursing only, although there is no doubt that in itself it is matter enough. And why so? Because the habit is of such long continuance; it has lasted from youth upwards; it has so often been made matter for confession, and there is no sign of amendment yet, nor is there much hope of amendment in future. So little is made of it, that it has become general and common all over the country.

Even little children, (and who would believe it, if he had not experience of it?) almost before they are able to speak plainly enough to ask for a piece of bread and butter, and certainly before they know how to make the sign of the Cross, or to say the "Our Father," sometimes know how to curse and swear, and, when they get into a passion, to call down all sorts of imprecations on those who vex them. Pliny writes that a child was once born in Rome with all its teeth perfect, and that the people were thunderstruck at this prodigy, and looked on it as a bad omen.

Even little children.

But what was there to wonder at? Nowadays enough children of that kind come into the world, who have sharp teeth on their lips and tongues even before they have the full number of teeth in their upper and lower jaws, and who know how to curse long before they have learned their prayers. Nay, what an abominable and fearful sin! sometimes they curse their own parents, or at least give vent to their anger against them by secret murmurs and ill wishes. But after all, that is not surprising; the poor children hear nothing else at home. Their fathers curse, their mothers curse, their brothers and sisters, and servants, and neighbors curse; in a word, they hear nothing else. What then can the poor little ones do, but talk as they hear others about them talking, the whole day long? If my father and mother speak that way, they think, and my brothers and sisters, and every one else in the house, there cannot be any great harm in it; it must be a common way of speaking amongst people. So that those young lambs follow the rest of the flock without shame or scruple, firmly believing that they are doing right. I remember well how it was with many of my school-fellows in my young days. During the school term, the fear of the rod kept them quiet, so that they did not dare to curse or swear, at least openly, through fear of being reported and punished; but when the holidays came on, then the cursing commenced; they used to set to and vie with each other in profanity, and it was looked on as a disgrace not to be able to curse as well as grown-up people. One wished to be as good as the other, and thus to show that he was no longer a child, and that he was at liberty to say what he pleased.

Therefore
woe to those
who curse,
on account
of the scandal
they
give.

See, my dear brethren, to what an extent this abominable language prevails. So general is the scandal given by wicked and profane tongues, that this vice is no longer looked on as shameful and is left as a legacy to one's children and children's children, and is thus handed down to posterity. With reason does the prophet David compare such foul-mouthed people to open sepulchres, from which an effluvia arises that poisons the atmosphere around. "Their throat is an open sepulchre," he says; "with their tongues they acted deceitfully; the poison of asps is under their lips." And of whom does he say this? Of those whose "mouth is full of cursing and bitterness."¹ Ah, dear Saviour, proclaim again unceasingly to all

¹ Sepulchrum patens est guttur eorum: linguas suis dolose agebant; venenum aspidum sub labiis eorum. Quorum os maledictione et amaritudine plenum est.—Ps. xlii. 3.

those who are addicted to cursing and swearing, that woe Thou hast denounced against the "man by whom the scandal cometh!" A twofold woe to him who by his profane tongue helps to introduce and spread the scandal in a community! For if in the judgments of men he is looked on as an incendiary who, by not watching his own fire carefully; is the cause of a wide-spread conflagration; how will it be with him who is caught in the act of setting fire to other people's property? But that is what those foul-mouthed people do every day. They are not satisfied with uttering curses themselves; they must teach innocent souls to follow their example, and thus they spread the inextinguishable fire of a bad habit, not only in their own families, but in the whole neighborhood. Woe to them when their angry Judge will call them to account, and inflict vengeance on them for the souls they have stolen from Him, and made the prey of hell!

And woe, twenty times woe to you parents, fathers, and mothers, who are given to cursing and swearing! Every time you make use of such bad language you commit not merely one sin, but as many sins as there are children or servants listening to you, who thus learn from you to speak in the same hellish manner.

Woe especially to parents who have the habit of cursing.

Ah, parents, woe to you, I say again, whether you are in earnest, or not, with your curses and imprecations! You should, at all events, remember that you are the occasion of much sin to others. Think of this, I implore you, and think of it often; this one consideration alone, of the harm you do those under your care, should make your hair stand on end with horror. Poor unfortunate children, how I pity you when you are taught such lessons by your own parents; when those who have given you temporal life deliver you over to eternal death! Is that the example, O Christian parents, that you must give your children, in order to encourage them to fear God and to practise virtue? God has entrusted them to you as His own beloved children by adoption, and He has laid on you the strict obligation of bringing them up with the greatest care for His honor and glory, and of teaching them how to know, praise, and bless God, and how to fear and love Him above all things; but you, instead of instructing them in this Christian language, teach them daily to use wicked and profane expressions, that they would never dream of using, if they did not hear them from you; you teach them, not to praise and bless God, but to curse and swear. God has entrusted your children to you, that by your teaching, and good

example, and careful training you may bring them up to dwell in the land of the angels, in the eternal kingdom of Heaven, there to praise and bless their Creator forever; but you prepare them from their very cradles to become companions of demons in the land of lost souls, where they will curse and blaspheme their Creator forever. You teach them the language of hell, even before they are sent thither. What a fearful account you will have to render! If it is better for him who gives even the least scandal to have a mill-stone tied round his neck, and to be sunk in the depths of the sea, as Christ Himself, the Infallible Truth, says, what an abyss must yawn to receive you, who hang a stone of scandal round the necks, not of strangers who have nothing to do with you, but of your own children and children's children, to whom you hand down as an heir-loom the hellish habit of cursing and swearing!

An eternal
malediction
is in store
for those
who have
the habit of
cursing.

Innocent Job! in the midst of the most fearful trials, thou didst not once sin with thy lips, as the Infallible Truth testifies of thee: "In all these things Job sinned not by his lips, nor spoke he any foolish thing against God;"¹ and yet thou didst fear that thy tongue would condemn thee before thy Judge: "If I would justify myself, my own mouth shall condemn me."² Alas, what reason they now have to fear that condemnation, whose tongues are always uttering profanity and imprecations! What will become of them, and of those, too, who by their pernicious example drag others on to imitate their own bad habit? But there can be no doubt of it; their own impious mouths will condemn them, and although they may be able to justify themselves in other respects, their sentence is already pronounced by the Prophet David: "He loved cursing, and it shall come to him."³ He need not trouble himself about it; what he loves shall fall to his lot, when that terrible Voice shall thunder forth in the valley of Josaphat: "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels;"⁴ that is, for those who take sides with the devil during their lives. Then will he look for a blessing, but will not find one for all eternity. "He would not have blessing, and it shall be far from him."⁵

¹ In omnibus his non peccavit Job labiis suis, neque stultum quid contra Deum locutus est.—Job i. 22.

² Si justificare me voluero, os meum condemnabit me.—Ibid. ix. 20.

³ Dilexit maledictionem, et venit ei.—Ps. cviii. 18.

⁴ Discedite a me maledicti in ignem æternam, qui paratus est diabolo et angelis ejus.—Matth. xxv. 41.

⁵ Noluit benedictionem, et elongabitur ab eo.—Ps. cviii. 18.

Ah, my dear Christians, let us not deserve such a terrible curse! Conclusion to avoid cursing and to correct the habit of it. If any of us here present have been guilty of cursing, let us give it up once for all by a good confession and a firm purpose of amendment. But those who are still in the habit of indulging in profane language I address in the words of Tobias already quoted: "Speak not so, for we are the children of the saints." Give up that foul and unseemly language; remember that we are Christians, children of God, brethren and co-heirs of Jesus Christ, and that we belong to the society of the saints in Heaven. Do not allow the devil to boast of having set up in Christian houses a place where he can enjoy himself, and of being invoked by the children of God more frequently than they invoke their God and Creator. I beg of all who have any authority, for the sake of that honor and glory that we owe to God, and of their own souls, to unite together in a holy bond, and show that they are true Christians, by doing all in their power to stamp out that vile and unchristian language which is so prejudicial to the divine honor. This can and, with the help of God, will be done, if superiors keep a watchful eye on their subjects, masters and mistresses on their servants, and parents on their children, and if they are determined to allow none of those under their care to use profane language, and not to permit any fellow-countryman of the demons to enter their houses. Besides that, they must put a stop to cursing by sharp reproof, threats, and punishment. If you cannot stop it in any other way, do what St. Chrysostom advises, "strike the profane man on the mouth, and sanctify your hand by the blow."¹ As St. Francis Regis was once crossing the market-place on his return from a sick-call, he heard some women quarrelling and cursing each other in fearful fashion; filled with a holy zeal, he stooped down and, taking up a handful of mud, flung it with all his force at the mouth of one of the women, so that he forced her to hold her tongue. Turn out of your houses the servants who refuse to give up that bad habit. Thus, by fulfilling that obligation which binds under pain of sin all you who are superiors, you will in a short time make your homes the dwelling-places of angels, in which nothing that savors of hell will be heard, and in which the only language used will be that of the angels; thus you will begin to do here, what we all hope to do in eternity in the heavenly Jerusalem, where we shall constantly sing Alleluia, praised and blessed be God for ever and ever. Amen.

¹ Contere os ipsius, et manum tuam percussione sanctifica.

SIXTY-NINTH SERMON.

ON THE MALICE OF CURSING.

Subject.

1. Cursing is a sin, and in itself a grievous sin. 2. It is a grievous, and at the same time a most injurious sin.—*Preached on Pentecost Sunday.*

Text.

Audivimus eos loquentes nostris linguis magnalia Dei.—Acts ii. 11.

“We have heard them speak in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.”

Introduction.

A teacher like that can make very skilful orators in a short time. To-day the Apostles of Christ, who were hitherto afraid to open their mouths, begin all at once to speak in divers tongues. What is this? cried out the Jews and heathens in astonishment. Are not those who are speaking all Galileans? And yet each one of us hears them speak the language of our own countries. A teacher like that can make very holy orators in a short time. The Apostles used to speak in a far different style; Our Lord had to bear with their murmurs and complaints, their quarrels and strifes as to who was the greatest among them. Nay, they even lent their tongues to the demon of cursing when they asked Our Lord that fire should be sent down from Heaven to consume the city that had refused to receive them: “Lord,” they said to Him, “wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from Heaven and consume them?”¹ Peter had even sworn that he knew not Our Lord; “he began to curse and to swear that he knew not the man.”² But now all of a sudden we hear nothing from them but the praises and wonderful works of God. “We have heard them speak in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” And what wonder was it after all? They were filled with the fire of divine love, and they could not speak but as the Holy Ghost inspired them. O Divine Teacher! Holy Spirit! Descend upon us also, and

¹ Domine, vis dicimus, ut ignis descendat de celo, et consumat illos?—Luke ix. 54.

² Cœpit detestari, et jurare, quia non novisset hominem.—Matth. xxvi. 74.

change the tongues of the perverse world! How many different kinds of speech may we not hear nowadays, which are inspired not by Thee, but by the spirit of evil! My dear brethren, I am alluding now to that wicked language against which I began to speak last Sunday, and mean to speak to-day too; it is an abominable and, alas, at the same time a common language, known to great and small alike; namely, the wicked habit of cursing and swearing on the least provocation; it is a language which is altogether opposed to the Holy Ghost, who is a Spirit of patience, meekness, peace, charity, and union; and he who is accustomed to use that language can be certain that he is not ruled by the Spirit of God, but by the spirit of evil; for it is the scandalous and hellish speech of the reprobate, as I proved in the last sermon. Still, because it is unfortunately so common, people make little of it, and look on it as one of those every-day faults, which do not merit much attention. Therefore, although they accuse themselves of it in confession, they do not make earnest efforts to amend; whereas if they looked on it as a great sin, they would hardly indulge in it so freely. To correct this false opinion, I shall now show that it is really not a trifling vice, and therefore he who is guilty of it must, in order to make a good confession, sincerely repent of and amend it.

Plan of Discourse.

Cursing is a sin, and in itself a grievous sin; as I shall show briefly in the first part. It is a grievous, and at the same time a most injurious sin; as I shall prove in the second part.

O Holy Ghost, give strength and efficacy to my words by Thy grace; we beg this of Thee through the merits of Thy Virginal Spouse Mary, and of our holy angels guardian.

That cursing is a sin, in spite of the fact that many think little of it, is so evident a truth, that it would be a waste of time to prove it. And what kind of a sin it is the infallible word of God shows clearly by the holy Apostle St. Paul, when he warns the Christians at Rome: "Bless them that persecute you; bless and curse not;"¹ and the reason of that warning he gives afterwards in his Epistle to the Corinthians: "Do not err," be sure you do not deceive yourselves on this point; "neither idolaters, nor adulterers, nor the effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor railers shall possess the kingdom of

Proved from
Scripture
that cursing
is a grievous
sin.

¹ Benedicite persequentibus vos: benedicite, et nolite maledicere.—Rom. xii. 14.

God.”¹ From these words of the Apostle, St. Thomas and all theologians conclude that cursing in itself and of its own nature must be a mortal sin; for it is reckoned amongst those vices that are certainly grievously sinful, such as idolatry, adultery, theft, drunkenness, and so on; and in any case, since the Apostle says that it excludes from Heaven, it must necessarily be a mortal sin, unless the smallness of the harm that one wishes his neighbor thereby, or inadvertence, or surprise of passion, which deprives the will of its proper freedom, excuses it and changes it into a venial sin.

It offers a
grievous
insult to
God.

And to come to the root of the matter, if we consider the insult offered to God by cursing, and the harm it does Christian charity, who will dare to say that it is only a venial sin? Hear, O profane man! you wish, through anger and displeasure against your domestics, through envy against your neighbor, through hatred and vindictiveness against your enemy, that he should break his neck, or die suddenly, or be struck by lightning, or be possessed, or carried off by the devil, and so on; you know better than I what your favorite curses are; but do you know what guilt you incur thereby in the sight of God? You arrogate to yourself the office of judge, which belongs to Him alone; for you pass sentence on your fellow-man, and desire that the evil you mention should befall him. But this is not the worst, although it is bad enough. What office do you then leave to your God? I tremble for you, when I think of it. I am almost stricken dumb with fear and horror, before I dare to say what it is. You make the Lord God your executioner, who is to carry out the sentence you have pronounced, and to inflict on your neighbor the punishment you have invoked on him, because you are unable to inflict it yourself. And yet you say that cursing is a venial sin, and that it need not be made much of? But perhaps you think I am too severe, and that I am merely putting forward an opinion of my own. Hear what St. Augustine says, from whom I have taken that opinion: “It is certain that the judge does not put a malefactor to death; he says to the executioner, slay; and the latter fulfils the command. And you, when you say to the Lord, slay my enemy,” strike him dead, or let the devil carry him off, “you make yourself judge, and ask God to be the executioner.”² What an insult to the great God! what pre-

¹ Nolite errare: neque idolis servientes. neque adulteri, neque molles, neque fures, neque avari, neque ebriosi, neque maledici regnum Dei possidebunt.—I. Cor. vi. 9, 10.

² Certum est, quod iudex homo per se ipsum non occidit; iudex dicit: occide, et tortor occidit. Et tu, quando dicis Domino: occide inimicum meum te facis iudicem, et Deum queris esse tortorem.—S. Aug. Serm. 1. de S. Steph.

sumption on the part of a miserable mortal! and yet you imagine that your cursing is only a small fault! You have been guilty of it times without number, perhaps from the moment you were first able to speak, and you have felt neither shame nor scruple on account of it; you are still guilty of it every day, when things do not go according to your wish; do you think it a small sin to act thus insolently towards the Almighty, and to transgress so flagrantly the first and most important commandment, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God," and honor Him with all thy heart?

Besides that, is it a small sin to act in direct opposition to that other fundamental law, which, according to the words of Christ, is like to the former, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself?" This love you violate, and grievously, when you curse your neighbor and wish that some great misfortune, such as sudden death, or being carried off by the devil, the bare thought of which happening to yourself would make you quail, should befall him. Merely to rejoice in secret at your neighbor's grievous misfortune, the mere wish that some serious calamity should happen your greatest enemy, that is already a grievous sin against the charity we owe to all men, a truth that no one has as yet ever doubted. How can it then be a lesser sin to say openly to your neighbor that you desire that the evils you wish him in your angry and vindictive heart should really come upon him?

And is grievously injurious to fraternal charity.

There is a question amongst theologians as to whether or not it is lawful to curse the devil. A simple-minded man might be inclined to laugh at this, and to wonder that learned men should puzzle their brains and waste their precious time in solving such a useless question; for, he would think, the question answers itself; what can it matter to the evil spirit, who, as our greatest enemy, seeks only our destruction, whether we curse him or not? He is already accursed, and will remain so forever. But hear what theologians say about it. In the first place, they maintain, the devil may be considered as a creature, and as one who possesses a created nature; secondly, he may be considered as the cause of many natural evils and misfortunes, which God permits him to afflict us with, as for instance when, as people say, he brings on storms at the desire of wizards and dealers in the black art; thirdly, as a torturer who is incessantly occupied in tormenting the reprobate in hell; and fourthly, as a wicked spirit, rejected by God, hardened in wickedness, and filled with a bitter, unrelenting hatred of God and of our souls. Now the

It is not even lawful to curse the devil.

answer to the proposed question is this: if the devil is cursed in this last named sense; if, for example, one were to say: away from me, accursed spirit! cursed be your evil suggestions! no sin would be committed, and such expressions would sometimes be even praiseworthy and advisable during temptations, because then one curses his wickedness and the snares he lays for souls, or at all events approves of and ratifies the curse already pronounced against him by God. But considering him in the three other capacities mentioned, it is not lawful to curse even the devil, as he is a creature, possessing a created nature, and St. Thomas says, “a curse uttered against a creature, as such, attacks God himself;”¹ nor is it lawful to curse him as the cause of temporal misfortunes, calamities and sickness, and much less as a tormentor of lost souls. And why? Because, just as the malefactor must not curse the executioner who stands with drawn sword ready to cut his head off, inasmuch as the latter acts by the authority of the judge, and fulfils the sentence pronounced by the justice of man, so it is not lawful to curse the devil, who sometimes, by divine permission and arrangement, punishes men on earth, and who tortures the wicked in hell as the executioner of the divine justice.

How much more unlawful, then, to curse a human being!

Now, if that is the case, my dear brethren, if it is not lawful to curse even that most wretched and wicked spirit, who is the cause of so much evil in the world, and who seeks to ruin our souls eternally, then I am necessarily forced to conclude that it is still less lawful to curse the earth, or the work we have to do, or the dumb beasts we make use of, although that sin is committed often enough through anger and impatience; because these things are harmless creatures of God, and cannot do us any injury, since they have not reason. What a terrible sin it must then be to curse a reasoning being like ourselves, who has been ransomed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, who is a Christian, a brother of Christ, an adopted child of God, and an heir to the kingdom of Heaven, and whom we are bound to love as ourselves! What a terrible sin it must be to call down imprecations on one's own domestics and children, on one's wife or husband, and, most terrible of all, on one's own father or mother! What a fearful sin it is, I say, no matter what annoyance they may cause us! For, wicked as a human being may be, still he is not a devil; he still has a claim to and a hope of Heaven; and even if he were a devil, it would not be lawful to curse him. No, I repeat, in the

¹ *Maledictio creaturæ, in quantum creatura est, redimat in Deum.*

words of St. Paul, "do not err;" do not deceive yourselves, nor flatter yourselves with the belief that cursing is only a small matter; "railers shall not possess the kingdom of God." Therefore it is manifest that a wilful, deliberate, and grievous imprecation is a mortal sin. And it is equally manifest that it is a most injurious sin, as I shall show in the

Second Part.

The habit of cursing, which is so common, is injurious to him who is guilty of it, to him against whom the curses are uttered, and even to the whole community in which such a wicked habit prevails. The first proposition follows necessarily from what we have already seen; because he who curses deliberately and grievously forfeits his right to Heaven and condemns himself to hell. Is not that harm enough? Yet it is an effect common to every mortal sin, although not produced in the same way. Oh ye proud, avaricious, unjust, unchaste, vindictive, gluttonous, and intemperate sinners, how foolish you are to renounce your God and the eternal joys of Heaven, and to choose hell with its unending torments for the sake of a breath of honor, a miserable temporal profit, a momentary, brutish pleasure, a vain point of honor, or a sensual gratification! Yet in some respects you have more to excuse you than those who are given to cursing. And why? Because you have, at least in imagination and in outward appearances, some profit and advantage from your sin; you have the money you desire, or the sensual gratification, or the honor, or satisfaction you seek for; and to our weak and perverse nature these things seem desirable, especially under the pressure of temptation or occasion, which draws us on with a gentle violence, dims the light of reason, and gains the consent of the will, which is already inclined to evil, so that even the wisest, humblest, and holiest men have sometimes yielded to such pressure. When you are burning in the flames of hell (Oh, woe to you if it should come to that!), you can at least look back on your lives, and assign the cause of the torments you are suffering. You may think, although it will be a poor consolation for you, that, if you are burning in those fierce flames, if your flesh is tormented unceasingly, it is because you have sinned against the divine law, and defiled your body by indulging in sensual pleasures. If you are made a laughing-stock of demons, you know that it is because you have tried by unlawful means to gain honor and authority amongst

Cursing is most injurious to him who is guilty of it.

men while on earth. If you are condemned to eternal poverty and misery, it is because you used unjust means to acquire wealth, that you might enjoy the comforts of life. If you now gnash your teeth in rage and despair, it is because you insisted on taking revenge on your enemies. If you now suffer the pangs of hunger and thirst, if for all eternity you will not have even a drop of water to cool your tongue, if your food is sulphur and your drink serpents, it is because you sinned grievously by gluttony and drunkenness. Thus, at all events, you know for what you sinned and deserved hell; you have, as the saying is, something for your money. Such was the answer that Abraham gave to the rich glutton, when the latter cried out to him: "Have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, to cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." "Son," was Abraham's reply to him, "remember that thou didst receive good things in thy life-time, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." ¹

without
being of the
least use to
him.

But you, who sin so often every day by curses and imprecations, what will you have to say for yourselves in hell fire, except that you have sinned, and nothing more? For what profit, or pleasure, or honor, do you gain by cursing? None at all, as you must acknowledge. Like mad dogs, you attack your fellow-men in your anger, and thereby poison your own blood, and fill your entrails with bitter gall. This is the pleasure, the joy, the delight you find in cursing; and what have you gained by it? When you have exhausted your profane vocabulary, you are less masters of the passion that caused you to use it, than if you had acted or spoken with Christian meekness and patience. Is your pain or your trial lessened by your wicked language, or have you been relieved from the pressure of misfortune? Your sufferings are just the same as before; you have the same trials, the same calamities to bear. Nay, they are worse than before; because those whom you have cursed in your anger have answered you in the same wicked strain, and thus increased your bitterness. This is the profit, this the advantage you have gained! And in addition to that you have, like other sinners, condemned yourselves to hell, where you will one day have to acknowledge that you have simply exchanged one suffering for

¹ Miserere mei, et mitte Lazarum, ut intingat extremum digiti sui in aquam, ut refrigeret linguam meam, quia crucior in hac flamma. Fili, recordare quia recepisti bona in vita tua, et Lazarus similiter mala: nunc autem hic consolatur, tu vero cruciaris.—Luke xvi. 24, 25.

another, nay, that you are suffering eternal torments there, because you suffered temporal trials here. O foolish sinners, who seek hell in that way!

Besides the great injury you do yourselves, there is also that which you inflict on those you curse. In the Book of Leviticus we read the command given by God: "Thou shalt not speak evil of the deaf;"¹ that is, thou shalt not curse them. And what merit have the deaf in the sight of God, that He should have published a special law in their favor? They cannot even hear the curse, nor know whether they are praised or abused. Talk to a deaf man, and pay him all sorts of compliments with a smiling countenance, and then, without changing your expression, abuse and curse him in the vilest terms, after the style of the old comedies; he will think you are complimenting him all the time, and will bow and scrape in his best style in acknowledgement to you. It seems then as if it can do a deaf man no harm to curse him, and yet God has expressly forbidden it. Why, my dear brethren? We must understand this command in a moral sense, so that its first meaning is, you must not curse any creature that has neither sense nor reason, as they do who, for instance, curse the cards or the dice when they are unlucky at play (and I wish that I could say of the habit of gambling what Our Lord said on the Cross at the termination of His Passion, "it is consummated:" there is no more of it!), and, when things do not go as they wish, give vent to their ill-feeling by cursing their work, the weather, or their dog, their ox, or their horse. And why, asks St. Thomas, do you curse those creatures? They do you no harm; they are not to blame for causing you annoyance. They are deaf creatures, and do not understand, so that when you curse them, you ill-treat and do them wrong.

He wrongs
the crea-
tures he
curses.

In the second place, by the deaf are understood those who bear most resemblance to people who are devoid of hearing, such as little children, and those who are morally deaf, such as obstinate servants, disobedient sons and daughters, and others who refuse to listen to good advice. Now there are some masters and mistresses who, if their servants do not at once obey their least sign, curse them in a most fearful manner. There are parents even, who curse their little infants when the latter are restless at night. And how foolish they are in doing so! Because all these are deaf creatures, and cannot understand what is said to them. Finally, all men, no matter who they are, are deaf as far as curs-

And the
human
beings to
whom he
wishes evil.

¹ Non maledices surdo.—Levit. xix. 14.

ing is concerned, for they pay little attention to it, and look on it as a blank cartridge, that merely makes a noise, but cannot hurt them. Yet God commands us not to curse the deaf. And why? I ask again. If people pay no attention to it, it cannot do them any harm. No matter; the curse may have a bad effect on them, and injure them. This is what God Himself says by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "give not to them that ask of thee room to curse thee behind thy back," to wish evil to thee, even in thy absence! "For the prayer of him that curseth thee in the bitterness of his soul shall be heard; for he that made him, will hear him."¹ Thus you see, my dear brethren, that, although the words and evil wishes of him who curses his neighbor are not able to bring down misfortune or calamity upon him at once, yet very often God hears the curse, and allows the misfortune to befall the person cursed, in order to show how He abhors that hellish language, and how He wishes to deter all men from the use of it.

The curses of parents against their children have a special efficacy.

The curses of parents against their own children have received from God a special efficacy, as we learn from Ecclesiasticus: "The father's blessing establisheth the houses of the children; but the mother's curse rooteth up the foundation."² God allows that, in order to confirm and ratify the authority of parents, whom He has placed as His viceroys over their children, to inflict on the children the punishment they deserve for having provoked their parents to anger by obstinacy, disobedience, and want of filial love, and also to punish the parents themselves by the grief and affliction they feel at seeing that their curses are not without effect. If we were able to trace those effects, and to point to the evils and misfortunes that the curses of parents bring down on their children, we should behold many a sad and lamentable sight.

Proved by examples.

We should see how ten children were so affected by a constant trembling of the body and chattering of the teeth, that it never left them day or night, sleeping or waking; and St. Augustine tells us that he himself saw those children in his own episcopal city. How were they reduced to such a miserable plight? By a single curse. Their mother, a widow, had to suffer a great deal of annoyance from them on account of their obstinacy; on one

¹ Non relinquis quærentibus tibi retro maledicere: maledicentis enim tibi in amaritudine animæ exaudietur deprecatio illius; exaudiet autem eum, qui fecit illum.—Ecl. iv. 5, 6.

² Benedictio patris firmat domos filiorum: maledictio autem matris eradicat fundamenta.—Ibid. iii. 11

occasion, when they were running boisterously about the room, she lost patience with them, and cursed them, saying: may you never have rest or repose your whole lives long. Hardly had the words left her mouth, when her wish was fulfilled; they began at once to tremble and shake all over their bodies, so that they became a terrible example to the whole country. We should see children dragged out of their houses and devoured by wolves, as another mother saw her little daughter, a child of eight years, seized by a fierce wolf, that carried her off to its cave to be devoured by its young, because the mother, whenever she was angry with her child, used to say to her: may the wolves devour you! We should see children becoming possessed by the devil, so that they had to be bound with chains, as Surius relates, in the life of St. Zenobius, of a mother who cried out to her two sons, because they would not stop dancing about the house: dance, until the devil dances in you! In a moment the evil spirit, who is only too ready to come, even without being invited, took possession of them, and they became raving mad, so that chains enough to bind them could hardly be found. The same author tells us of a little girl, who, having been beaten by her mother because she had broken a pitcher, refused to come to table when her mother called her. Come here and sit down, said the mother; but the girl, in a sulky humor, turned her back and refused to obey; well then, said the mother, stay where you are, and eat until you swallow the devil! At once an enormous fly came buzzing about the room, and though it was driven off repeatedly, yet it returned again, and as the child opened her mouth to eat the first bit, it entered into her, and she was thereupon possessed by the devil. Our Father Drexelius gives countless similar examples in the 26th chapter of his work "Orbis Phaëton." So true is it that a parent's curse "rooteth up the foundation."

O children, learn from this how you should honor, fear, and love your parents! See that you never give them occasion for anger by disobedience or obstinacy; especially when you know that they are in the habit of cursing. But you, fathers and mothers, to you I must again deliver a special warning; avoid that wicked and dangerous language by which, instead of benefiting your own souls and the souls and bodies, too, of your children, you do them the greatest harm. Yes, you say, but I have often cursed my children, and I have never seen any bad effects follow. What? Is it then your intention to go on curs-

Thus children and parents are both punished.

ing until your bad wishes in regard to your children are realized, so that your sorrow and repentance for the evil you have caused will come too late? O my God, if every curse were at once fulfilled, what would become of us all? Hardly one of us but would have a broken neck, or would be struck by lightning, or would be given over to the devil! It is through Thy goodness, O God, that Thou dost not always hear our curses! But what do you mean by that excuse? Do you know perhaps what are the hidden decrees of divine Providence? Who knows what secret and to us as yet unknown evils have been caused by your imprecations? If your children are sickly and delicate, or disobedient, or obstinate, or wicked, so that they cause you daily annoyance, is not that punishment enough? And it is perhaps the punishment and the effect of the curses you have so often uttered against them from their very cradles up to the present day. "Their children wicked, their offspring is cursed,"¹ says the Holy Ghost in the Book of Wisdom; as if He wished to say: the mouths of the parents are always filled with imprecations; what wonder is it then, that a curse should fall on the children? "Their offspring is cursed."

The habit of cursing is injurious to a whole community.

But I have spent too much time talking of parents, my dear brethren; cursing is injurious not only to children and to others against whom it is uttered, but also, so widely does the evil extend, even to the innocent. The punishment it draws down spreads insensibly over the whole neighborhood, or town, or community, or country in which the detestable habit prevails. Therefore the Psalmist says of those who are addicted to it: "The poison of asps is under their lips;"² a poison that destroys everything it touches, and inflicts deadly wounds that are unnoticed at first. We are sometimes surprised that one country is less blessed by God than another, and that it is punished more severely by wars, pestilence, and famine. But if we take the trouble to trace those evils to their source, we shall find what they are to be attributed to. Emperors even have traced some calamities to the prevalence of certain vices. "Famine, earthquakes, and plagues afflict a country on account of blasphemy."³ I have no hesitation in saying that many parts of Germany feel the pressure of the hard times, on account of the prevailing habit of cursing. For what grace or blessing can be expected in a

¹ Nequissimi filii eorum; maledicta creatura eorum.—Wis. iii. 12, 13.

² Venenum aspidum sub labiis eorum.—Ps. xlii. 3.

³ Propter blasphemus et fames et terræ motus et pestilentia fiunt.

house, a town, or a country in which all, great and small, young and old, men and women, have their mouths full of imprecations? Therefore St. John Chrysostom (O golden-tongued orator! would that thou wert here in my place in this pulpit, to impress thy advice on all here present!) advises all those who hear any one cursing, to stop him at once, because he may otherwise be the cause of some general misfortune. "Let us stop their mouths," he says, "and close those poisonous fountains, that the city may be relieved from the evils which oppress it."¹ Woe to those families in which there is any one addicted to this most injurious vice! Thus, my dear brethren, we see that cursing is the cause of many and grievous misfortunes. I know well the empty excuse that people bring forward to try to lessen their guilt: I have no bad meaning in what I say; I curse only to frighten others; I do not think of what I am saying when I am in a passion; I curse only through habit, and I am sorry for it afterwards; and so on. But all these lame excuses have nothing to do with the matter; much less do they make cursing lawful or innocent. I will speak more particularly of them on another occasion.

I conclude with the words of St. Paul, already quoted, "Bless, and curse not."² Let us all unanimously resolve, once for all, to give up that shameful, scandalous, diabolical, and most injurious habit; and let us determine to avoid and to repent of that sin which brings neither profit nor pleasure, and is the cause of great harm. If we are bent on losing our souls, let us, at all events, not lose them for the sake of such a wretched and profitless vice. O dear Lord and God, we do not wish to lose our souls; we desire, and will do our best to come to Thee in Heaven, and therefore we are sorry for all our sins, and especially for the sins that we have so often committed by the shameful habit of cursing. Pardon us, O Lord! and do not allow the innocent to suffer on account of this vice of ours. If Thou art resolved to punish, Thou hast now prostrate at Thy feet those who, with contrite and humble hearts, acknowledge their guilt! We sincerely promise to amend our lives. Do Thou, O God of goodness and mercy, confirm this resolve of ours, for Thou art the only one who can rule and govern our tongues, those slippery members which, as St. James says, no man can keep in check by his own unaided power. Give us all then the grace to use our tongues in

Conclusion
and resolution
to
amend this
injurious
habit.

¹ Obstruamus eorum ora, et tamquam fontes mortiferos occludamus, ut penitus evanescant mala, quæ civitates comprehenderunt.

² Benedicite, et nolite maledicere.—Rom. xii. 14.

blessing, and to Thy honor, praise, and glory, and instead of cursing our fellow men when they cause us annoyance or injury, to learn to say with Christ our Saviour, "Peace be with you;" instead of cursing animals and senseless creatures, to say, go in God's name; instead of cursing in trials and difficulties, to say, "Thy will be done; blessed be the name of the Lord;" and instead of all cursing and swearing, which is the language of the reprobate in hell, to accustom ourselves now to speak the language of Thy elect, which consists in nothing else but loving, praising, and blessing Thee, O great God, worthy of all love, with Thy holy angels, forever. So shall it be! Praise be to Jesus! Amen.

SEVENTIETH SERMON.

ON THE NECESSITY OF CORRECTING THE HABIT OF CURSING.

Subject.

1. The habit of cursing must be corrected; no excuse to the contrary is of any avail. 2. It can be corrected, for there are means enough of correcting it.—*Preached on Trinity Sunday.*

Text.

Docete omnes gentes, baptizantes eos in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.—Matth. xxviii. 19.

"Teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Introduction.

According to the command of Our Lord Jesus Christ, all apostolic functions in His Church must begin in the name of the Blessed Trinity. "Teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Nearly all the Sacraments are administered in the same name. "I confirm thee with the chrism of salvation in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," such are the words the bishop uses in conferring Confirmation. When the priest is giving absolution in the Sacrament of Penance, he says: "I absolve thee from thy sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The same name is invoked at the beginning of Mass, and at the beginning of a sermon. All Christians make the sign of the Cross in this name when

they pray; and, according to the exhortation of St. Paul, all the thoughts, words, and actions of every day of our lives should be sanctified by this most holy name. But, alas, how perverse the Christian world is in this respect nowadays! For once that we hear the name of God, we hear that of the devil twenty, a hundred times. There are many Christians of whom we have good reason to believe, at least if we consider the language they use, that they begin and end all their actions in the name of the devil, so accustomed are they to make use of curses and imprecations. I have shown last Sunday, my dear brethren, that the imprecations in general use are sinful, and, when they express a deliberate wish that a serious evil should befall another, are in themselves grievously sinful. I will now repeat the subject of last Sunday's sermon, and also summarize the preceding sermon for the benefit of those who were not present at it. Cursing is a grievous sin, because it implies a serious violation of the law of Christian charity, which forbids us even to wish evil to our neighbor in thought, not to speak of giving expression to such a wish by using towards our neighbor offensive and injurious language; and because it offers a grievous insult to God, who is thus asked, as it were, to act the part of an executioner, and to inflict on the person against whom the curse is uttered the evil mentioned therein. Cursing is great folly and wickedness, for it is the language of the demons and the reprobate in hell. It is a sin that gives much scandal, for it is learned very easily, and is committed without shame or scruple by young and old. It is a most injurious sin, because it brings none of the profit, or honor, or pleasure, which is to be derived from other vices; its only cause is wickedness; its only fruit is the pains of hell, along with the harm done the person who is cursed, nay even the whole community. Yet they who are addicted to this habit bring forward all kinds of excuses in order to show that cursing is either harmless, or that, at all events, it is only a small fault, or that, through long continued habit, it is impossible to correct it. Those excuses I shall now refute, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

The habit of cursing must be corrected; no excuse to the contrary is of any avail; the first part. It can be corrected; for there are means enough of correcting it; the second part. They who are free from this vice may apply what I am about to say to any bad habit to which they are addicted.

O Most Holy Trinity, give strength and efficacy to my words by Thy grace; this I beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary and our holy angels guardian, so that in future, instead of swearing and cursing, we may always have Thy holy Name on our lips with the greatest reverence.

It is a common thing for people to try to excuse and palliate sins.

To palliate sin, to excuse our misdeeds, and to try to make ourselves appear innocent, is an art in which we are all skilled, and which we have inherited from our first parents. "Where art thou?"¹ said the Lord to Adam, after the latter had eaten the forbidden fruit and incurred the punishment of death. How didst thou dare to touch that tree? Didst thou not know that it was forbidden thee to eat of its fruit, under pain of eternal damnation. Alas, answered Adam, I could not help it; "The woman whom Thou gavest me to be my companion gave me of the tree, and I did eat."² Thou then, O woman, art the cause of the transgression? "Why hast thou done this?"³ But, she answered, I am not to blame; "the serpent deceived me, and I did eat."⁴ If the serpent had been allowed to speak, there is no doubt that he would have made a still more plausible excuse. That is the way in which the children of Adam and Eve still try to excuse nearly all their faults. "We say," writes the philosopher Seneca of the Rome of his day, and the same words might be applied to many countries in our own time, "we say: I am not proud; but I cannot live otherwise in Rome."⁵ A woman comes up dressed far above her condition; see, exclaims the philosopher, how proud that woman is; she dresses in a more costly style than her means allow. O no, is the answer, she is not proud; she is only conforming to the prevailing fashion. A certain individual spends large sums on banquets and entertainments; what a spendthrift he must be! Nothing of the kind, he says; "living in the city puts me under great expense;"⁶ I must do what others of my standing do. A young man wastes his time in idle amusement, drinking, gambling, and other excesses; is the city to blame for that? "It is not my fault," he will say; "my youth is my excuse."⁷ Thus, concludes Seneca, we always try to shirk the

¹ Ubi es?—Gen. iii. 9.

² Muller, quam dedisti mihi sociam, dedit mihi de ligno, et comedi.—Ibid. 12.

³ Quare hoc fecisti?—Ibid. 13.

⁴ Serpens decepit me, et comedi.—Ibid.

⁵ Dicimus: non ego ambitiosus sum; sed Romæ aliter vivi non potest.

⁶ Non ego sumptuosus sum; urbs ipsa magnos sumptos exigit.

⁷ Non est meum vitium: ad adolescentiam hoc fecit.

blame; "and therefore it is very difficult for us to be cured, because we do not know that we are ailing, and the evil from which we suffer is not outside, but inside of us."¹

This is the great mistake made by those who are given to cursing and swearing. It is not my fault, they say, like the people mentioned by Seneca; I cannot help cursing; my household affairs, my neighbors, the people with whom I have to deal, they are to blame for it. That surly and drunken man, that idle, talkative woman, that ill-reared son, that disobedient daughter, that obstinate servant, who causes me such annoyance, that troublesome neighbor, who is such a torment to me; these are the people who drive me to curse and swear; and in fact I cannot get on without it. Oh no! your excuse is not worth anything; it cannot hide your wickedness. You should strike your own breast, and say, "through my fault, through my most grievous fault!" The only cause of the wicked language I use is my impatience, which prevents me from bearing the least contradiction; my pride and obstinacy, which make me insist on having the last word; my angry and revengeful disposition, which is aroused at the least opposition; my envious heart, which is filled with bitterness at anything that displeases me in the least. "The evil from which we suffer is not outside, but inside of us."

Especially the sin of cursing; and first, they try to put the blame of it on others.

It is true, say others, that I am to blame; but God forbid that I should be guilty of a mortal sin by cursing! I do not mean what I say. Sometimes, through anger or impatience, I say: may the devil take you! may you be struck dead on the spot! and so on; but I do not really wish that evil should happen the person to whom I am speaking. I talk in that way only to frighten my children when they are disobedient, or to let my servants, or others who annoy me, see that they must amend their behavior towards me. Do you mean to persuade me, then, that your cursing and swearing is to the glory of God, inasmuch as you wish to correct your neighbor's faults thereby? Doubtless you expect a great reward from God for what you have done, and when you confess at the judgment-seat that you have cursed your neighbor, your glory in Heaven will be considerably increased? Still I hardly think that you can expect to have your wicked language written down in the Book of merits. You maintain that you are not in earnest, and that you do not

The second excuse, I do not mean it in earnest, is refuted.

¹ Et ideo difficulter ad sanitatem venimus, quia nos ægrotare nescimus. Non est extrinsecus malum nostrum; intra pos est.

mean what you say when you curse; but who can believe that, especially when, as you admit, you curse your neighbor through anger and impatience? Your limbs tremble with passion, anger is written on your forehead and appears in your countenance, while a storm of imprecations proceeds from your mouth. Who, I ask, can believe that you are not in earnest then, that the evil wishes you utter are not meant earnestly, and that you do not intend to do any more than frighten the person you are speaking to? No, my good friend, your excuse is worth nothing.

Even if it were true, it would still be unlawful to curse.

Besides, whether you mean it or not, is it lawful for you to use such scandalous and hellish language? If I can say with truth that it is not my intention to excite others to sin by talking immodestly to them, and that my only object is to amuse them, is it right for me, in spite of that, to indulge in such unseemly conversation? No one will dare to maintain that. And do you think that the proper way to correct your children and servants is to curse and swear at them? Did you ever find that it did them any good? The fact is, they pay very little attention to it, for they are too much accustomed to it from you. You put up a straw figure in the field as a scarecrow to frighten the birds away and prevent them from eating the seed you have just planted; for a few days the birds will be afraid of it; but when they see that it cannot move from the place in which you have put it, they lose all fear, and when they have eaten their fill, they actually come to roost on the straw figure itself. No, your cursing will do your children no good; it will only make them more obstinate, disobedient and wicked; for they will think to themselves: if my parents are so godless as to curse and swear in that way, I am not bound to have any respect for them. The only fruit of your vile language will be the scandal you give them; because they will learn from your example to curse and swear as wickedly as yourself. Again, if your children or domestics excite you to anger and offend God by their misconduct, you should be all the more careful to abstain from cursing them. And why? Because they are then more apt to feel the effect of your curse, and to be punished by God, who, as we have seen in the last sermon, very often hears and gives effect to the maledictions of parents against their children. Damp wood, when laid on the fire, takes a long time to burn; but dry wood flames up at once. So it is with human beings; wicked children already deserve to be punished by God; if then their parents curse them, there is nothing more wanted to have the punishment

inflicted. There are certainly means enough to correct the faults of your children and servants in a Christian manner. Why should you have recourse to such a detestable means as that, which only makes them worse? Your excuse does not exculpate you in the least.

In most cases, say others, I curse and swear through inadvertence and habit, because I have been so long accustomed to imitate the language of other men; or else the curses escape me when I am in a passion, and I am sorry afterwards for it. Now I do not wish to make your guilt worse than it is in reality; I know that when a person, after having long been accustomed to use such wicked language, is sorry for having acquired such a bad habit, and (pay attention now to what I am saying!) does all in his power to correct and overcome it, but, in spite of all his efforts, breaks out into a curse now and then through force of habit and without adverting to what he is doing, when something suddenly occurs to vex him; I acknowledge, I say, that in such a case he could be excused from sin through a want of free will, according to the words of Ecclesiasticus: "There is one that slippeth with the tongue, but not from his heart;"¹ or else, at the farthest, he is guilty of a venial sin. But to curse through habit without making serious efforts to amend, and to continue in that habit makes, I say with St. Thomas, the sin greater, more deserving of punishment, and less to be excused. A thief is convicted and sentenced to the gallows; hear how cleverly he excuses himself: Sir, he says to the judge, do not be so severe on me! Grant me my life this once! I acknowledge that I am guilty of the theft; but I committed it through sheer habit, for I have been accustomed to steal from my youth upwards. Oh, the judge would answer, that makes your case still worse; I would recommend you not to urge your excuse, lest, instead of being hanged, you may be broken alive on the wheel. The same principle may be applied to your long continued habit of cursing. If you were to utter an imprecation now and then, inadvertently, it would not be so bad; but when you bring forward the force of habit, as an excuse, you betray yourself and manifest your guilt to its full extent.

Third excuse: I curse through inadvertence.

I curse, another says, but it is nearly always in the heat of passion. And are you blameless therefore? If you beat your wife and children savagely when you are in a passion, do you not sin seriously against Christian charity and justice? No

Fourth excuse: I curse through anger.

¹ Est qui labitur lingua, sed non ex animo.—Eecl. xix. 16.

doubt, it may be that, as theologians teach, a sudden fit of anger surprises the reason and lessens the amount of advertence, and consequently the guilt of the sin. Nay, sometimes the anger is so violent that in the first moment of its fury it interferes with the freedom of the will, and therefore no sin is committed. But when the anger and the cursing it gives rise to are habitual, you will never persuade a sensible man that you do not advert to what you say. You are bound to control your anger. "Be ye angry and sin not!"¹ is the command that God gives us by the Psalmist David; be angry if the occasion requires; but do not sin in your anger.

Fifth ex-
cuse: I am
sorry for it
afterwards.

But no sooner has the curse escaped my lips, than I am sorry for it at once. That is quite right; still you have wished evil to your neighbor. I am sorry from my heart for all the sins I have committed; but unfortunately they have been committed all the same. Certainly, by a supernatural sorrow and repentance I can wash out my guilt and obtain pardon of my sins in the sight of the good and merciful God; yet I never can get rid of the fact that I have committed them. The same sorrow is to be found, with regard to any other vice, in all those who still have a conscience and who wish to save their souls; when their anger is over, their passion cooled down, their desire for revenge satisfied, and their wicked passions gratified, then they are sorry for what they have done; yet there is no doubt that they have committed sin by yielding to their evil inclinations. You have killed a man, and you are very sorry for what you have done, when you see his dead body lying at your feet; are you therefore not guilty of murder? You roll a huge stone from the top of a mountain and when it is in full career downwards, you repent of what you have done; can you stop the course of the stone by calling out to it? By no means. In the same way, as theologians teach, the sorrow felt afterwards by those who curse others, especially their own children or dear friends, proves that they know now how wickedly they have acted; but it is not always a sign that they had not the same knowledge when they were actually cursing in their anger, or that they did not really mean what they said. Therefore, Christians, do not seek to excuse yourselves, or to palliate that abominable habit by such frivolous pretexts! You should rather devote all your efforts to using the proper means to get rid of that habit, and to banish it out of every Christian community. Without discussing the matter any fur-

¹ Irascimini, et nolite peccare.—Ps. iv. 5.

ther, it is clear that cursing cannot be excused from sin, that the habit of it must be amended, and that there is an obligation to that effect under pain of sin. But how am I to do that? some will say; I have become so accustomed to cursing, that I cannot give it up now. Still you can do it, if you go the right way to work, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

I must acknowledge that it is a very difficult thing to give up at once a bad habit that one has been accustomed to for a long time; for it becomes a second nature and offers a kind of violence to the reason and the will. St. Augustine, who speaks from experience, calls it another nature, that has been, as it were, welded and riveted on to us.¹ The Holy Ghost, in the Sacred Scripture, seems to consider it a most wonderful thing for a sinner to give up the evil to which he has been long accustomed. "If the Ethiopian can change his skin, or the leopard his spots, you also may do well when you have learned evil."² This is the worst punishment that God inflicts on the hardened sinner, namely, to allow him to become so obdurate, that he despairs of being able to amend. And that punishment is inflicted especially on those who are given to cursing; "for the spirit of wisdom is benevolent, and will not acquit the evil speaker of his lips;"³ as if to say: the Holy Spirit of God is a spirit of goodness and mercy, and for that very reason, He will not save the man who is given to cursing from the evil habit he has learned in his youth and continued in his old age, but will allow him to carry it down to the grave without repenting of it, so that he goes to hell, where he can curse for all eternity with the other reprobates. "He loved cursing and it shall come unto him."⁴

It is very difficult to give up the habit of cursing.

I call as witnesses of the truth of this you who are given to this wicked habit. Have you found any improvement in yourselves in this respect for years past? Must you not acknowledge the truth of what St. Augustine says, "you did it yesterday, you will do it to-day."⁵ "For the last two, four, six, ten years, or longer, you have been in the habit of cursing, and you are as bad this year as ever you were. You have confessed it hun-

As experience teaches.

¹ Secundam et quasi affabricatam naturam.

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

³ Benignus est enim spiritus sapientiæ, et non liberabit maledicum a labiis suis.—Wis. 1. 6.

⁴ Dillexit maledictionem, et venit ei.—Ps. cviii. 18.

⁵ Fecisti heri; facturus es hodie.

dreds of times, but there is no sign of improvement yet; you will confess it again, and I am afraid you will be no better. Each time, you will say, I have cursed, I am sorry for it; I will never do it again; but all to no purpose. He who has learned French, and no other language, in his youth, will afterwards have great difficulty to speak German, no matter what efforts he makes, so as to conceal all traces of a French accent. He who has acquired the habit of cursing in his youth, although he may now and then praise and bless God, will hardly be able to prevent himself from cursing, when anything occurs to annoy him. Therefore you, children, should be very careful not to fall into this habit, for if you do, it will stick to you for a long time.

Still it is possible, if one makes use of the proper means.

But what am I saying now? I wished to persuade you to overcome this habit, and, instead of doing that, I seem rather to agree with one of the excuses you brought forward, namely, that you cannot correct it. My dear Christians, that is not my meaning. No matter how difficult it is to give up a bad habit of long standing, yet it is not impossible; otherwise you would not commit sin by continuing to curse, because God does not require impossibilities from us. It is almost an impossibility, naturally speaking, to stop a runaway horse, when he is in full gallop; but if you can put a strong bridle on him, or throw something over his eyes, you will manage it easily enough. In the same way it is next to impossible to restrain from cursing a tongue that has been habituated to it, as long as you allow that tongue to talk freely what it has learned. You must bridle that slippery member; you must do violence to it, and use the proper means, and you will, with God's help, get the better of your bad habit.

First means: to consider what one loses by cursing.

If your sovereign, through zeal for the glory of God, and to put an end to cursing amongst his subjects, were to make a law that every one who curses must put a ducat in the poor-box each time; and if you knew at the same time that there were spies scattered over the country to see how the law was observed, and that every time you violated it, you would be fined a ducat, would it be impossible for you then to give up the habit of cursing? Not at all; and indeed a fine of a penny would be enough to induce you to conquer it immediately. I have not the least doubt that you would soon become exceedingly careful, that you would make a firm resolution every morning not to give way to cursing during the day, at least in presence of

others, and that you would bite your tongue off almost, rather than allow it to indulge in language that would cost you so dearly. And why can you not make just as firm a resolution now? Ah, great God, Thou hast published Thy command to all the world by Thy Apostle St. Paul: "Bless, and curse not."¹ And what punishment hast Thou threatened to inflict on those who violate it? Perhaps a fine of a ducat? Ah, listen to the words of the Apostle: "railers shall not possess the kingdom of God;"² they will be condemned to hell for all eternity. And still it appears to us almost an impossibility to conquer the habit of cursing! O you, who are addicted to this evil habit, what are you thinking of? The dread of being fined by an earthly superior, whose laws you may often transgress without his knowing anything of it, is enough to put you on your guard, to restrain your tongue, and to cure your wicked propensity; but the fear of offending God, from whom you can conceal nothing, who is present everywhere, who knows all your thoughts, words, and actions, and who threatens you with the loss of Heaven and the eternal pains of hell if you disobey Him; that fear, I say, is not able to make you give up the habit of cursing! But you do not think of such things, and therefore you continue in your wicked ways, without any attempt to amend. The first means then of correcting the habit of cursing is to remember the severe punishment it entails.

Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Saviour, seems to have given us other means also, when he cured the dumb man, as we read in the Gospel of St. Mark: "Taking him from the multitude apart," says the Evangelist, "and looking up to Heaven, he groaned, and said to him: Ephphetha, which is: be thou opened; and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke right."³ Mark these words, you who are given to cursing; Christ looked up to Heaven, and sighed to His heavenly Father. If you are in earnest in your efforts to curb your wicked tongues, and to speak right in future, lift up your eyes to Heaven, and let your humble sighs and prayers ascend to the throne of God; for it is from Him that you must seek the help that you would in vain look for elsewhere. This is the advice that St. Augustine gives you: "If no man can tame the tongue; then we must have recourse to

Second means: humble prayer to God.

¹ Benedicite, et nolite maledicere.—Rom. xii. 14.

² Neque maledicet regnum Dei possidebunt.—I. Cor. vi. 10.

³ Apprehendens eum de turba seorsum, et suspirans in caelum ingemuit, et ait illi: Ephphetha, quod est adaperire; et solutum est vinculum linguae ejus, et loquebatur recte.—Mark vii. 23—5.

God, who can tame it.”¹ If, according to St. James, no man on earth can keep his tongue in order, what are we to do? Must he who is given to blasphemy, to cursing, to detraction, despair of amendment? By no means; for, if there is no one on earth able to tame the tongue, there is One in Heaven who can do it; to Him we must fly for help, and beg of Him to keep our tongues in check. What means did the Apostles and disciples of Christ employ in order to receive the Holy Ghost and with Him the courage to sound the praises of God, although before they were afraid to open their mouths, and had on one occasion so far yielded to the spirit of cursing, that they asked Our Lord if they might not call down fire from Heaven on the city that had refused to receive them. “Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from Heaven and consume them?”² Whereupon Our Lord reproveth them: “and turning He rebuked them, saying: you know not of what spirit you are; the Son of man came not to destroy souls, but to save.”³ On a former occasion Peter had cursed and sworn that he knew not the man; now he can do nothing but praise and bless God, and publish His wonderful works, so that the people cried out in astonishment: “we have heard them speak in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.”⁴ How did such a wonderful change come over the Apostles, as far as their tongues were concerned? It was the effect of their united and constant prayer; for they remained together in Jerusalem, praying to God and expecting strength from on high; all these were persevering with one mind in prayer.⁵ Do I wish then, instead of a cursing tongue, to have one inflamed with the Holy Spirit of God? Then I must resolve every morning to avoid cursing during the day; and since I know how weak I am and how powerless to amend my bad habit, I must with childlike confidence beg of God to help me and to free me from that evil habit; and at the same time I will ask my guardian angel to remind me of my resolution whenever a sudden fit of passion is likely to provoke me to act against it.

Besides praying, I must also endeavor to co-operate actively with the grace of God. Here again we can learn from what Our

Third
means: to
impose a
penance on
one's self.

¹ Si linguam nullus hominum domare postest, ad Deum confugiendum est, qui domet linguam nostram.—S. Aug. Serm. 3, de verb. Dom.

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

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

⁴ Audivimus eos loquentes nostris linguis magnaalia Dei.—Acts ii 11.

⁵ Hi omnes erant perseverantes unanimitè in oratione.—Ibid. i. 14.

Lord did, when He cured the dumb man; "He put his fingers into his ears, and spitting, He touched his tongue, and said to him, ephphetha, which is, be thou opened."¹ Oh, if all who are addicted to this evil habit would frequently command their tongues sternly and sharply, and enforce their command by a penance which they have asked their confessor to impose on them to that end; for instance, if they said: I command you to abstain from cursing, or otherwise not to touch a drop of wine the whole day, or not to eat meat, or to fast in the evening, or to give a certain alms to the poor, or to say a rosary, and so on; I am certain that the bad habit would soon be eradicated, and the tongue would be kept under due restraint. The threat of the rod, and the recollection of the pain it causes, are enough to make the most disobedient child submissive; the whip, well applied once or twice, can tame the most fiery horse; much more then will a severe, self-imposed penance help a reasoning being to abstain from evil. Only try it; it will certainly help, and when the good God sees that you are really in earnest in your efforts to amend, He will not refuse to help you with still more powerful graces.

Pennequin, in his treatise on Divine love, tells us of a soldier who was wont to curse most fearfully whenever he got into a passion. His confessor imposed on him as a penance that, as often as he gave way to this habit, he should prostrate himself and make the sign of the Cross with his tongue on the ground. The soldier performed his penance very exactly, and thereby saved, not only the life of his soul, but also that of his body. For, on one occasion, he got into a quarrel with some of his companions, and, as usual in his excitement, he mentioned the name of God blasphemously; remembering, however, the penance imposed on him, he at once threw himself on the ground and made the sign of the Cross; while he was thus occupied a bullet, just shot from a musket, passed over him so close as to tear the coat from his back, but without inflicting the least injury to his person. Recognizing in this an evident interposition of divine Providence in his favor, and a fruit of his obedience in performing his penance, he completely gave up the habit of cursing.

O Christians, let us imitate this soldier, if we are conscious of being addicted to cursing, or to any other sins of the tongue, and punish ourselves for the faults we commit by some self-imposed penance! In that way we shall show that we are in ear-

Shown by
an example.

Conclusion
and exhortation
to have recourse to
similar
penances.

¹ Misit digitos suos in aurículas ejus et exspuens, tetigit linguam ejus, et ait illi: Ephphetha, quod est: adaperire.—Mark. vii. 33, 34.

nest about amending our lives, and that we are not like those who accuse themselves hundreds of times in confession of having sworn, and yet show not the least sign of improvement. What kind of sorrow they can have, and, therefore, what good absolution does them, you can decide for yourselves. But is it likely that a thief is forgiven his sins, if he continues to steal every day? Perhaps you may find those penances too severe? Yet can we do any less? should we not by right do a great deal more, when there is question of the glory of God, the salvation of our souls, the gaining Heaven, and the escaping hell? We may be long accustomed to a certain kind of food or drink, but if we find that it is dangerous to our health, we give it up at once. The man who has the habit of idling his time, or gambling, renounces it as soon as he sees that his income begins to suffer by it. Can we not then make a little effort for God's sake, and for the salvation of our immortal souls? Or, rather than do violence to our tongues here on earth, do we prefer to have to bite them in pieces in hell, through rage and despair? as St. John says in the Apocalypse: "And they gnawed their tongues for pain, and they blasphemed the God of Heaven, because of their pains and wounds."¹ For the words of St. Paul remain true: "Railers shall not possess the kingdom of God."

Resolution
to amend.

Ah, may God preserve us from the folly and madness of losing our souls for the sake of cursing and indulging in a vice that can bring us neither profit nor pleasure! Let us all now make up our minds, once for all, to give up that hellish language! This very day our amendment shall begin, and we shall continue it to-morrow and every day of our lives. Do Thou, O Holy Ghost, who didst inspire the Apostles of Jesus Christ with what they had to say, and didst make their tongues able to speak nothing but the praises of God; do Thou strengthen, with Thy holy fire, and with Thy powerful grace, this resolution! Tame and purify our vicious tongues, that the language of hell may never be heard among Christians, and that all our thoughts, words and actions, may begin and end in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

¹ Et commanducaverunt linguas suas præ dolore, et blasphemaverunt Deum cœli præ doloribus et vulneribus suis.—Apoc. xvi. 10, 11.

ON OTHER SINS OF THE TONGUE.

SEVENTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON THE IMPURE TONGUE.

Subject.

Of all wicked tongues, there is none which sows more cockle, to the destruction of souls, than the impure, immodest tongue. Therefore every one who wishes to avoid being led into the vice of impurity should be especially on his guard against those enemies of his soul who speak impurely.—*Preached on the fifth Sunday after Epiphany.*

Text.

Venit inimicus ejus, et superseminavit zizania in medio tritici.—Matth. xiii. 25.

“His enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat.”

Introduction.

Who ever heard before of weeds being sown on cultivated ground? You husbandmen, what do you say to it? Did you ever try it? No, you answer; it is not necessary to sow weeds; they grow of themselves, and far quicker than we wish. It must have been a wicked and envious man, who did a thing like that. What we read in the parable of to-day's gospel, my dear brethren, happens only too often amongst us, to the great injury of souls. We know and experience what a number of weeds grow up in us without any labor on our part; I mean the many temptations and solicitations to evil that come from our own wicked propensities and inclinations, and that strive to cause the eternal ruin of our souls, especially in the matter of impurity; and yet there are wicked, malicious men, who deliberately sow cockle, for the still greater ruin of souls, by placing impure objects before

the eyes of others, by betraying them into sin through bad example and by impure conversation; so that they who wish to preserve chaste hearts, cannot be sufficiently on their guard. Against these latter enemies of souls, as they are the most shameless foes of holy purity, I mean to speak in this sermon.

Plan of Discourse.

Of all wicked tongues, there is none which sows more cockle to the destruction of souls, than the impure, immodest tongue. Therefore every one who wishes to avoid being led into the vice of impurity must be especially on his guard against those enemies of his soul who speak impurely.

Incarnate Son of God, we beg of Thee, through Thy Virgin Mother Mary and Thy angels, who continually praise Thee, stop all chaste ears, that they may never hear any unchaste language, and cleanse our tongues, that they may be used only to praise Thee.

No wicked tongue leads to greater sin than the impure tongue.

The ranker a weed is, and the deeper it takes root, the more does it spread itself over the ground, and therefore the greater, too, is the mischief done by sowing a weed of that kind in cultivated ground. In the same way, the more wicked a vice is, the deeper and quicker it takes root in the soul, and the more difficult it is to eradicate it afterwards; so also the greater the injury done to the soul by him who deliberately betrays another into a vice of that kind, or brings him into the occasion of it. You, who are given to cursing, which is, alas! so common, and who daily use that hellish language towards each other, what harm you do souls, and what maledictions you bring down on yourselves! Yet the chief harm is done to your own souls, which you ruin eternally; you cannot injure the innocent by all your curses and imprecations, unless God sometimes, by allowing your curses to take effect, sends them a punishment they have otherwise merited; and that He is especially wont to do, when parents curse their children, as I have elsewhere explained at length, when speaking of that wicked language. You perjurers, who so often give yourselves up to the devil by swearing false oaths, whom do you injure but yourselves? You may now and then cause your neighbor to suffer temporal loss; but you cannot hurt his soul. Uncharitable and slanderous tongues, that are given to speak of the affairs of others, and to criticise their faults, you are truly wicked and dangerous tongues; yet you attack only the good name and reputation of others; you

cannot, with all your uncharitable talk, so injure them, as to make them worse in the sight of God than they are. Tale-bearing tongues, who secretly carry stories from one to another, relating to one what another has said or done against him; how often do you not cause enmity and strife between husband and wife, brothers and sisters, parents and children, friends and relatives! Yet you cannot directly hurt their souls. Blasphemous tongues, I shudder when I think of you! You vent your anger against God and His saints, when you speak slightly and disrespectfully of them; yet the only effect your wicked language has on the minds of others is to fill them with fear and dread, lest a thunder-bolt should fall from Heaven and strike you dead on the spot. Impure tongue, you are almost the only one among all vicious tongues, that is not satisfied with destroying your own land, with bringing eternal damnation on your own soul, but you must also sow in the ears and hearts of those who listen to you the cockle, which it may take them a lifetime to eradicate; for by your impure discourses you lead many innocent souls into the greatest and most dangerous vices.

And you lead them, in fact, into that abominable vice which destroys the image of God; into that vice which, if it once becomes habitual, takes away the human heart from God, whom it should love above all things, and degrades it to the level of the unreasoning beast; that vice which so blinds the understanding, and hardens the will in sin, that it requires miracles and prodigies of grace, so to speak, to bring such a sinner to true repentance and amendment; that vice which alone opens out the broad way that leads to the commission of all kinds of sin without fear or shame, and multiplies them without number, so as to compass its ends; that vice which excites the just anger of God more than any other, so that it has often drawn down severe punishments on the world; that vice to which we, poor mortals, are already strongly inclined, so that the most of those who are lost, are lost on account of it, as St. Remigius does not hesitate to assert: "With the exception of little children, few are saved, on account of the vice of impurity."¹ See now into what an injurious, dangerous, and abominable vice you lead innocent souls by the filth that you mix up in your conversation.

The Holy Ghost, by the Prophet David, compares such tongues to open sepulchres: "Their throat is an open sepulchre;"²

For it leads to the vice of impurity.

Therefore it is compared to a foul sepulchre.

¹ *Exceptis parvulis, propter carnis vitium pauci salvantur.*

² *Sepulchrum patens est guttur eorum.—Ps. v. 11.*

and immediately after He calls on the justice of God to take vengeance on them: "Judge them O God."¹ Your throats are open graves, from which such a pestilential effluvia comes forth, that it must infect the souls of all present. For the heart is so closely connected with the sense of hearing, that what enters in at the ears, at once knocks at the door of the heart, while our imagination and understanding are like a mirror that represents every object placed before it; and, therefore, all the filth that impure tongues pour into the ears is represented in the hearts and imaginations of the hearers, and if these latter think of it with deliberate pleasure, they commit a mortal sin. Nothing is so dangerous and so liable to lead to sin, says St. Paul, as wicked conversation: "Be not seduced; evil communications corrupt good manners."² They are like a consuming canker, as he writes to his disciple Timothy: "Shun profane and vain babblings; for they grow much towards ungodliness; and their speech spreadeth like a canker;"³ that is, they creep through the ears into the heart, and keep gnawing at it until they get it to consent to a sinful pleasure. All wicked conversation, and even unspiritual and vain talk has that effect. What mischief then must not be caused by impure tongues in the human heart, which is already of itself prone to sensual indulgence? Hence theologians agree generally in saying that it is hardly possible for any one to talk impurely in company without committing a mortal sin. "There is no one who doubts of this;" adds St. Antoninus;⁴ either on account of the scandal given by such discourses, especially when the hearers are still innocent, or on account of the danger of consenting to a bad thought about the impure subject that is spoken of. And what is said of impure conversation is also to be understood of impure songs, which are all the more dangerous than mere conversation, as they are more apt to fill the heart with their poison, to inflame the imagination, and to fix the subject more strongly in the hearer's memory.

And yet, alas, how common such songs and such conversation are in the world nowadays! In society, in drinking-houses, in public promenades and gardens, in workshops and dancing-houses, in the midst of all kinds of amusements, in the public

There are many wicked people who lead souls astray by impure songs and conversations.

¹ Judica illos Deus.—Ps. v. 11.

² Nolite seduci, corrumpunt mores bones colloquia mala.—I. Cor. xv. 33.

³ Profana autem et vaniloquia devita; multum enim proficiunt ad impletatem, et sermonum ut cancer serpit.—II. Tim. ii. 16, 17.

⁴ De hoc nulli dubium est.

streets, nay, even in churches and places consecrated to God, wherever any one is to be found who indulges in an impure passion, there that disgusting language may be heard, mixed up even in what would otherwise be a becoming conversation, and sustained by all sorts of veiled allusions and similes. It seems that people imagine they can have no pleasure, nor amusement, and cannot carry on an entertaining conversation, without bringing in those filthy topics. Like unclean swine, they delight in wallowing in the mud; they are not satisfied, like other animals, with merely touching it with the soles of their feet; they must roll their whole bodies in it. There are even parents to be found, says St. John Chrysostom, who not only use such filthy language in presence of their innocent children, but actually encourage them to sing unchaste songs; whereby the children lose all sense of modesty, even before they understand the meaning of the words they use, and when they grow up they listen without shame to things that would otherwise have brought a blush to their cheeks.

What a disgrace that is! continues St. Chrysostom; we have received our tongues for the sole purpose that we may use them as instruments to praise God, to thank Him, to adore Him, and to publish His praises; yet we misuse those noble members, that have been created for such a noble end, to turn souls away from God, and to lead them into sin by impure conversation. And our tongues are so often touched and moistened with the sacred, virginal, and spotless flesh and blood of Jesus Christ! "Is it right, brethren," says St. Augustine, "that the mouth of a Christian, into which the body of Christ enters, should give utterance to a lewd song containing a hellish poison?"¹ Therefore St. Paul writes to the Ephesians that we must not even name impurity; "but fornication and all uncleanness, let it not so much as be named among you, as becometh saints,"² such as all Christians should be. Even if we were not raised to such a high dignity, if we were not Christians, we should still be ashamed, as reasoning beings, to defile our tongues with such filth. What a disgrace to us! we abstain as far as possible from coughing and spitting in decent company, but we do not hesitate to bespatter those who are listening to us with the mire of our impure tongues.

They are unbecoming a decent man, much more a Christian.

¹ Videte fratres si iustum est ut ex ore Christianorum, ubi Corpus Christi ingreditur, luxuriosum canticum, quasi venenum diaboli, proferatur.

² Fornicatio autem, et omnis immunditia, nec nominetur in vobis, sicut decet sanctos.-- Ephes. v. 3.

Many innocent people are thereby perverted; shown by an example.

I turn away from those foul-mouthed people to express my heartfelt compassion for you, innocent souls. I pity you in truth, since you are daily led astray by unchaste language and songs! How many would still have preserved their innocence and purity, if they had not chanced to hear a wicked word from some partisan of the devil! The devil may plot the ruin of a soul for years, and try all kinds of temptations and suggestions in order to lead it into sin, all to no purpose; but a foul-mouthed man, by one impure song, may succeed in doing in a few moments what the devil could not do after years of labor. Hear what a servant of God once beheld while he was at prayer: two young boys were playing together in a room, and as they were still innocent, they did nothing immodest or unbecoming. The holy man saw countless demons going about, each with a pair of bellows, blowing into the ears of the boys; without doubt that represented the evil suggestions that come from those wicked spirits. After a little while another boy came into the room, and at once all the devils vanished, so that not one of them was to be seen. Certainly, thought the holy man, that must be a saintly youth, whose presence can thus put the demons to flight. But he was grievously mistaken; for God revealed to him that the devils went away, because they knew that the third boy who had entered the room would do more harm by his evil talk, than they could with all their suggestions. And such was really the case; for after a little while the newcomer began, according to his custom, to speak of impure things, at which the two others laughed; and before long they had learned how to desire and to do what they knew nothing of before, and would never have thought of otherwise.

Many are lost thereby; shown by an example.

May God grant, my dear brethren, that none of you here present may have to acknowledge the truth of this from your own experience; that none of you may be still carrying about the seeds of evil which have been sown in your souls by the wicked discourses of your companions! If we could go through the regions of eternal torments, and ask each of the damned what was the cause of his ruin, how many there are who would cry out with fearful imprecations: Accursed be the company that destroyed my innocence in my youth! Accursed be the language I heard from such and such a person, by which I learned evil of which I knew nothing before! You are the cause of the impure life I led, and of the eternal damnation it brought on me! Such would be the cry of that miserable young man of whom Father

Ambrose Cataneus writes; he was brought up in innocence, piety, and the fear of the Lord, but he happened to fall in with wicked companions, who sang impure songs and talked of all sorts of filthy topics in his presence. The poor young man's imagination was excited by what he heard; he could not sleep during the night, so busy was he indulging in wicked thoughts with deliberate pleasure (woe to his poor soul! for even then he was on the road to perdition). He fell asleep at last, but during his sleep he burst a bloodvessel in his chest, and was smothered by the blood that streamed from it. His parents found him lying dead in bed the next morning, and knew not where to go for consolation, unless to his confessor. Be comforted, said the latter to them, you have an angel in Heaven: I know that his is a most innocent soul, and that it cannot now be anywhere but with its Maker in Heaven. But alas, what a grievous mistake the confessor made! As he was preparing to say Mass for the young man's soul, he saw that soul bound with chains, surrounded by fire, and accompanied by two demons, who kept continually blowing into his ears through fiery trumpets, as a punishment for the pleasure he had wilfully indulged in when listening to that impure conversation, and thinking about it afterwards.

My dear brethren, if that hitherto innocent dove was thus thrust down to hell by those wicked birds of prey, who betrayed him into sin by their impure tongues, and hurled him into the jaws of the hellish wolf, what will become of those ruthless murderers of souls? If the hitherto innocent lamb is in eternal flames, do you think it likely that the ravening wolves will enjoy eternal rest? O wicked tongues, what a fearful account you will have to render, not only for yourselves and for the sins you commit by impure conversations, but also for the souls that you have betrayed into sin! Striking was the example given by Our Lord in the public street. He was surrounded by a great crowd of people, when He saw a little child passing by; some say it was St. Ignatius the Martyr, others that it was St. Martial. Christ called the child, took him by the hand, and, as St. Matthew says, "set him in the midst of them."¹ The people were surprised, and expecting to hear something wonderful from Him, they were all attention. Then Our Lord, pointing to the child, said in earnest tones: "He that shall scandalize one of those little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-stone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the

Christ has threatened eternal woe to such tongues.

¹ Statuit eum in medio eorum.—Matth. xviii. 2.

depth of the sea.”¹ Therefore, “Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh!”² Woe, then, to you, unchaste tongues, that scandalize so many innocent souls!

Even confessors must be careful when interrogating young people.

What care even confessors are obliged to use, when interrogating young people! For if the latter accuse themselves of some sin against holy purity, the confessor must rigorously abstain from asking any questions that would be likely to excite their curiosity; so that it is far better that the material integrity of the confession should suffer through inculpable ignorance, than that young people should learn anything that might be dangerous to them. There are even so-called tables of sins in some prayer-books, that should not be placed in the hands of young and innocent people, even when they are preparing for a general confession. If their confessions are imperfect, the confessor will know how to supply what is wanting.

Even grown up people should accuse themselves of sins of impurity in modest language.

Even grown up people, who have frequently sinned against purity, and who have therefore little to learn in the way of vice, should, as spiritual writers teach, declare in very modest words, as far as they can, the nature and number of their sins, and should avoid all coarseness and indelicacy, both on account of the reverence due to the Sacrament, and that they may avoid all danger of renewing their consent to an impure pleasure. Nay, when penitents who have long lived in impurity and, having made a complete and good confession, have sincerely repented, go again to confession, it is advisable for them never again to examine their consciences on their past lives, even if they wish to make a general confession, but to let the past be buried in oblivion; or, if they wish to mention their past sins again (as is often laudably done by those who are accustomed to avoid mortal sin and who wish to excite themselves to contrition), they should do so in a general way only, saying, for instance, I accuse myself of the sins of impurity I committed in my past life.

Teachers and preachers must be very cautious in speaking of this subject.

Teachers and instructors of youth, you too must be very cautious in this respect! If you sometimes, in the books you have to explain to your pupils, come across a word that savors of impurity, say nothing about it; pass it over as quickly as possible, that you may not scandalize innocent ears and hearts! Preachers of the word of God, it is your bounden duty to chastise all vices,

¹ Qui autem scandalizaverit unum de pusillis istis, qui in me credunt, expedit ei, ut suspendatur mola asinaria in collo ejus, et demergatur in profundum maris.—*Matth. xviii. 6.*

² Vae homini illi, per quem scandalum venit.—*Ibid. 7.*

and to explain to your hearers the different ways in which sin may be committed, so that they may more easily avoid sin; but this one vice you must only speak of in a general way, and very cautiously. For my own part, my dear brethren, I must acknowledge that, before I began some time ago to speak of impurity, I debated with myself for a long time beforehand as to whether I should speak of it or not, and I frequently begged of my angel guardian to enable me to speak of such a dangerous subject in the most chaste manner possible, that I might not, as I told you before, wound innocent hearts by the very means I used to deter them and myself from this vice.

From this I argue as follows: if teachers, preachers, and confessors are obliged to be so careful and cautious in the fulfilment of their sacred duties, in which they seek nothing but the glory of God and the salvation of souls; what a fearful responsibility is incurred by those wicked people who wantonly speak of impure topics, and make them the subject of conversation? What an account will have to be rendered by parents who talk impurely in presence of their children, and by servants and all others who, in presence of their companions, or in any society, select unchaste subjects for conversation? Woe to that man, I say, whoever he is! If even in the sacred tribunal of Penance, in which we must confess our sins with contrite hearts, with a true detestation of our past offences, and with a sincere desire and resolution to amend our lives,—if it is so dangerous even there to speak plainly about sins of impurity, what great danger and wickedness must there not be in speaking of this foul vice in company, not with sorrow and repentance, but with laughter and pleasure; not with a purpose of amendment, but with boasting words; not with the intention of being converted to God, but for the sake of amusing one's self and others; not with modest words, but in an immodest and shameless manner? “Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh!”

In truth, if any one is marked for eternal damnation, it is the man who is given to impure conversation. For the divine Judge will only have to condemn him, like the faithless servant in the Gospel, out of his own mouth: “Out of thy own mouth I judge thee, thou wicked servant,”¹ and sentence thee to the punishment thou hast deserved. It is a mark of reprobation, as the holy Fathers unanimously teach, for one to have the habit of returning easily to his former wickedness, and after confession

From this we may see the malice of those who sing unchaste songs and talk impurely in company.

They bear about them a sure sign of reprobation.

¹ De oro tuo te judico, serve nequam.—Luke xix. 22.

to fall again into the same grievous sins. This mark is certainly to be seen in him who is in the habit of speaking impurely, because he always falls back into sin, and bespatters every one he associates with, with his foul conversation. The second mark of reprobation is to love sin, and to find pleasure in it. There is many a one who sins through human frailty; but he knows that he has done wrong, and he is ashamed of and sorry for his grievous transgressions; but the unchaste man, who is given to immoral conversation, glories in his sins; he relates them for the purpose of making others laugh; he actually makes a boast of them; and therefore he has not sorrow, or detestation, or repentance, but affection and love for his sins. The third mark of reprobation is to act as an agent of the devil by leading souls astray, and bringing eternal ruin on the lambs of the fold of Jesus Christ. We have already seen that the impure-tongued man, by his filthy songs and discourses, leads many an innocent soul into sin, takes it away from God, and delivers it up to the devil; so that he will have to pay soul for soul. The fourth sign of reprobation is the habit of impurity. Now it is not a rash judgment to look upon him who is always speaking of impure things as addicted to that vice; for his heart and mind must be a cesspool of filth, since his mouth gives forth the effluvium of unchaste conversation. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh;"¹ and therefore St. Jerome says: "He is not far from committing the act, who delights to speak of it."² The fifth sign of reprobation is the profanation of the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. But what greater indignity can be offered to It, than to allow the tongue on which It is so often placed to wallow in the filth of impure talk! How many ceremonies, prayers, blessings, and anointings the bishop uses in consecrating the fingers of the priest's hand, which are to hold the virginal body of Jesus Christ! But our tongues, when the blessed salt is put on them in Baptism, are already consecrated by God Himself, as altars, patens, and chalices, to receive the sacred flesh and blood of the Son of God. Now, if a person were to take the chalice in which the blood of Jesus has been even once consecrated, and to fill it with filth, the very thought of such an enormity makes us shudder! What a fearful profanation must it not then be, to receive the bread of angels in a mouth or a tongue that is always reeking with

¹ Ex abundantia enim cordis os loquitur.—Matth. xii. 34.

² Non longe est a facto, qui delectatur in verbo.

impurity. Therefore he who is given to unchaste conversation has all the marks of reprobation. Woe then to that man!

But Father, they say, God forbid that we should have a bad intention, when we speak now and then in that way! Our only object is to amuse ourselves and others, and not at all to lead people into sin. Oh certainly, it is an amusement that the devil takes delight in! Your intention cannot excuse you in things that are of themselves scandalous and unlawful. But we are careful not to allow those who are still innocent to hear such conversation; when we speak in that way, we do it among ourselves, in the company of people who know as much about it as we do, so that there is no danger of giving scandal. What? No danger of giving scandal? Do you know what scandal-giving is? It means saying or doing, even with signs, anything that is of a nature capable of leading others into sin, even if it were only a sin of thought. Now, when you talk impurely and describe impure actions, how can they who are listening to you help seeing in their imaginations the abominations that form the subject of your songs or conversation? And in that way, how can they and you help having impure thoughts and desires? Is not that giving scandal? But you say that the people you talk to know as much about it as you do; if so, then you do not strive to kindle a fire where there was none before; but, at all events, you add more fuel to the fire that is already burning, so that it blazes up more fiercely and burns longer. Is not that giving scandal?

But, they say again, we do not speak in coarse terms, like drunken boors in an ale-house. We use polished language, and veil our meaning by allusions and similes, which the innocent do not understand. Truly, shameless as you are, you do not dare to vomit forth your obscenity in decent company without trying to hide its hideousness somewhat. And this is unfortunately a diabolical style of conversation that is much in vogue among ladies and gentlemen of good standing in society. But do you know what I think of it? Such artfully veiled allusions are much more dangerous, scandalous, and abominable than the coarse obscenity of the ignorant boor. And why? I have explained it before. A violent wind sometimes extinguishes a fire, while a gentle breeze fans it into a flame. In the same way, when coarse expressions are used in speaking of impure topics, the respectable man who hears them feels ashamed, and even if he has a secret pleasure in listening, he still tries to look

To no purpose do they excuse themselves by saying that they have not a bad intention.

Veiled allusions and metaphors are the most dangerous kind of impure conversation.

displeased, for the sake of outward decency; thus the other is reduced to silence, and the impure conversation comes to an end. But when similar talk is carried on by means of artful allusions and metaphors, then there is question of showing how clever one is; no one wishes to be looked on as stupid; all join in the laugh, even they who do not know what it is about; one allusion is brought forward after another, and the obscenity is protracted for hours. If an impure subject is spoken of in coarse and plain words, every one knows what is meant, without further study; but when the filth is covered by metaphorical expressions, one has to set his wits to work to find out the meaning of the speaker, and so all sorts of impure images are formed in the imagination, worse sometimes than the speaker intends; the fire of impurity burns fiercer in the heart, and the artful metaphor takes fast hold of the mind. Ah, my God, let me now cease speaking of that abominable conversation, that I may not degrade Thy sacred word! Those devil's preachers will receive, as Thou has threatened, the reward they deserve at the hands of their master!

Conclusion
and exhortation
to avoid wicked
tongues.

Pious Christians, and especially you who are still innocent, if you wish to keep your purity untarnished, then fly, for God's sake, all company in which those wicked people appear, and all companions who say the least word that savors of impurity. If any one tries to lead you into sin by flatteries or caresses accompanied by impure songs or conversation, give him the same answer that St. Francis de Sales gave a shameless woman, who once assailed him in that way. And what was his answer? He spat in her face, and turned away from her. If you are not courageous enough, or zealous enough for the glory of God to do that, then at least show by your manner that you cannot bear to listen to unchaste conversation. The school-fellows of St. Bernardine used to relate of him that his horror of immodest talk was so well known, that if any of them were engaged in it and saw him approach, they would cry out, "be silent, Bernardine is coming."¹ Nor should you forget that God and your holy angel are present, and that they hear the shameful talk that is going on. The fear of God impressed St. Stanislaus with such a horror of impure conversation, that, whenever he heard anything in the least savoring of immodesty, he used to faint away, or to fall into an ecstasy; and this happened so often, that his father, who used to bring him into company in which

¹ Tacete! tacete! Bernardinus adest.

such sinful discourse was carried on for the sake of amusement, had to beg of his friends to abstain from it; otherwise, said he, my little Stanislaus will become rapt in ecstasy to such a degree, that he will fall unconscious to the ground. Christian parents, be careful, I implore you, in presence of your children! Do not, on any account, say the least thing that might tarnish their purity. Look well after your servants, and do not allow them to indulge in any conversation that might teach wickedness to your children. And if any of your domestics has an unchaste tongue, away with him or her at once out of your house! Often think what it is to have immortal souls entrusted to your care, that you may lead them to God; and what a fearful responsibility you incur, if by your negligence they are betrayed into the clutches of the devil. Let us all, my dear brethren, remember the exhortation of St. Paul already quoted: "Let all uncleanness be not so much as named among you, as becometh saints." Let us use our tongues for no other end but that for which our Creator gave them to us, that is, to praise and bless God; and let this be our only business on earth, as it will be our only occupation in Heaven. Amen.

*SEVENTY-SECOND SERMON.**ON THE LOQUACIOUS TONGUE.*

Subject.

They who reveal what they should keep secret, do much mischief, and sin grievously against God and their neighbor.—*Preached on the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Quanto autem eis præcipiebat, tanto magis plus prædicabant.
—Matth. vii. 36.

"But the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal did they publish it."

Introduction.

And so it is generally: we are always anxious to do what is forbidden, and desirous of what we cannot have. In to-day's gospel we read how Christ forbade the people to speak of the miracles they had seen Him work on the deaf and dumb; "but

the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal did they publish it." Yet in this case there was some excuse; everything that was said was for the greater glory of God, and was the occasion of the high esteem in which Our Lord was held by those who heard of the miracles He wrought. "And so much the more did they wonder, saying: He hath done all things well; He hath made both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak." By that prohibition of His, Our Lord wished to teach us not to seek the praise or esteem of men for our good actions, but to keep them secret as far as possible. But, my dear brethren, how many there are nowadays of whom one might say, with real disapprobation of their conduct, "the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal did they publish it," and that too, not to honor God, but to insult Him; not for the sake of any profit or advantage, but merely to do mischief! And who are they? We have already treated of those who are given to cursing, detraction, blasphemy, and other vices of the tongue. But there is another class of sins of the tongue that is generally barely alluded to in sermons, although it deserves to be treated of specially; and I have been long seeking an opportunity of speaking about it; I mean the sin committed by those who divulge secrets.

Plan of Discourse.

Who these are, what mischief they cause, and therefore now grievously they sin against God and their neighbor; such is the whole subject of the present sermon.

Christ Jesus, who didst enable the dumb to speak, teach us how, when, and of what to speak, and also how, when, and of what we are to keep silent. This grace we beg of Thee through the merits of Thy dearest Mother Mary, and our holy angels guardian.

Man has nothing in this world that belongs to him more completely than the secrets of his heart; for, after God, he is the absolute and uncontrolled master of them. He can say that his money belongs to him, yet not in such a way that it cannot be stolen or lost. His lands and gardens and meadows belong to him; but they may be laid waste in war, or destroyed in some way, or be taken from him by an adverse lawsuit. His house belongs to him; but it may be burnt to ashes. He possesses his good name; but that may be torn to pieces, and he is often compelled to bear patiently the calumnies and

The secrets
of a man's
heart
belong to
him alone.

backbiting of slanderous and uncharitable tongues. His bodily health, strength, and beauty, are subject to countless weaknesses and maladies; his memory and understanding become dulled by age; his sight, hearing, and other senses grow less keen as he advances in life. Any exterior actions that he performs alone and in secret he cannot keep from the knowledge of the angels and demons. The secrets of his heart are the only things that belong to him so completely, that no creature in Heaven, on earth, or under the earth can deprive him of them, or make them known against his will. No demon of hell, no angel of Heaven can find out our secret thoughts and knowledge, unless the Creator Himself reveals them, or unless they can be suspected from outward signs; such is the teaching of theologians.

This is the knowledge which God, who calls Himself "the searcher of hearts,"¹ has kept to Himself so strictly, that, with the exception of the few saints to whom He gave the grace of being able to read men's thoughts, He does not reveal the secrets of the human heart even to his dearest friends, or to the angels, the princes of Heaven. And this He does, in order to show us how strict is the obligation He places on every one of keeping the secrets entrusted to him, and that, if this obligation is violated, the sin committed is to be attributed to nothing but the wilful, mischievous loquacity of the person who violates it.

God has reserved to Himself the right to know them.

And, in fact, the well-being of the human race requires that a strong safeguard should be placed on the hearts and minds of men, and that there should be a strict obligation not to divulge the secrets entrusted to one's keeping. For if we could read each other's thoughts, or if we were allowed to speak freely of the secrets committed to us, what disorder there would be in the world! What would become of mutual confidence and fidelity? of honesty? of Christian charity? of justice? of friendship and intimacy? All these would disappear at once. Therefore the Almighty warns us by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "Open not thy heart to every man; lest he repay thee with an evil turn, and speak reproachfully to thee."² You must not speak to every one concerning what it would be lawful for you to speak of; how much more then are you not bound to

And that for the common good.

¹ *Scrutans corda.*—Ps. vii. 10.

² *Non omni homini cor tuum manifestes, ne forte inferat tibi gratiam falsam, et convitiatur tibi.*—Ecc. viii. 22.

keep a strict silence about what you are not allowed to disclose to others? Every one should keep those words of the Prophet Isaias constantly before his mind: "My secret to myself, my secret to myself."¹

Therefore they who reveal secrets act wickedly, and the chief of them are tale-bearers.

Now, my dear brethren, what divine Providence guards so carefully, what the law of charity and justice and the common weal of the human race require to be kept strictly secret, is published by those talkative people, who do not know how to keep their tongues in check. And the chief of these are they who, when they are entrusted with a secret by a well-meaning friend, or are asked in confidence for advice, or have otherwise managed to find out their neighbor's secrets, go and tell what they have heard or learned to the other person concerned. So and so, they say, has said this of you; you think he is a good friend of yours, but you are mistaken; he told me in confidence how he means to act towards you. Or, I happened to find it out by chance; do not let on that you heard anything from me; I could not keep silent any longer about it, and felt obliged to tell you the fearful things that so and so says of you; see that you do not allow him to get the better of you, etc. In the same way they sometimes carry back to the former, what the latter has told them. Such tale-bearers and scandal-mongers have always an evil name in a community, for they sow discord between friends and neighbors, brothers and sisters, parents and children, husbands and wives; and they give rise to secret enmities, hatreds, and envy. People who were formerly on the best of terms refuse to speak to each other, and nourish desires of revenge against each other, without knowing what it was that broke off their friendship so suddenly.

They are the cause of many sins.

Great God, what a sin that is! or rather what a fountain of sins, that are committed when hatred is entertained and fraternal charity ignored! There are some birds of prey so rapacious, that they even steal away fire; when they see a fire burning, they swoop down upon it and carry off some of the blazing fuel; if it gets too hot for their talons, they let it drop, and thus often set fire to houses and farm-yards. Tale-bearers are like those birds; if they see but a single spark, that is, if they can find out anything that another has said or done against his neighbor, they run off at once to tell the latter all about it; for what they have heard seems to set their tongues on fire with impatience, so that they cannot keep quiet; thus they often

¹ Secretum meum mihi, secretum meum mihi.—Isai. xxiv. 16.

kindle a flame of enmity between two friends, that may not be extinguished as long as they live. Long ago the wise Ecclesiasticus spoke of the mischief done by those people: "A man that is wicked in the mouth of his flesh, will not leave off till he hath kindled a fire."¹ St. John Chrysostom compares them to the king's servants who heated the furnace at Babylon with brimstone and tow, and pitch, and dry sticks, so that "the flame mounted up above the furnace nine and forty cubits,"² as we read in the third chapter of the Book of Daniel.

There were people of that kind in the court of King Saul, who, instead of trying to mollify him and appease his anger when they saw that he was hostile to David, whom they knew to be innocent, enraged him still more by their calumnies, so that in his passion he tried to put an end to David altogether. That was what the latter complained of most bitterly after he had allowed Saul to depart from him in safety out of the cave. "My lord, the king," he cried to him, "why dost thou hear the words of men that say: David seeketh thy hurt?"³ See how they have deceived you by their tale-bearing. Theodore Santabarenus, as Baronius tells us, was a tale-bearer too. Wishing to put the newly elected emperor Leo out of the way, he went to him, and warned him, as a true friend, to be on his guard against his father, and therefore never to go hunting without having a dagger concealed on his person, so as to be able to defend himself in case of attack. The young emperor, suspecting no treachery, followed the advice. Santabarenus then went to the old emperor Basil, and advised him to be on his guard against his son, who was plotting to take away his life, and as a proof of that he would find that Leo carried a dagger concealed about his person, when out hunting. The treacherous plan succeeded; the dagger was found and Basil became so enraged that he immediately commanded that his son's eyes should be put out, and that he should be strangled, a sentence that would have been carried into effect, had not Basil's councilors by earnest representations induced him to mitigate the severity of it.

There are plenty of those evil-tongued people to be found everywhere nowadays, who by their tale-bearing cause disunion and enmity between the dearest friends, and the devil might

Tale bearers are to be found in courts; shown by examples.

There are many such people nowadays.

¹ Homo nequam in ore carnis suae non desinet, donec incendat ignem.—EccI. xxiii. 23.
² Effundebatur flamma super fornacem cubitis quadraginta novem.—Dan. iii. 47.
³ Domine mi rex. Quare audis verba hominum loquentium; David quaerit malum adversum te?—I. Kings xxiv. 9, 10.

well say to them what he once said to an old hag who created the bitterest hatred between a husband and wife that had formerly loved each other dearly: "you are far worse and more mischievous than I and all my companions in hell." What terrible curses are uttered in the Holy Scripture against those wicked people! "The whisperer and the double-tongued is accursed; for he hath troubled many that were at peace."¹ Not without reason, then, does St. Gregory count them amongst the children of Belial; for if it is true that, "blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God,"² there is no doubt that they who disturb peace are children of the devil. "Six things there are, which the Lord hateth," which He cannot bear to see in the world, as the Wise Man says in the Book of Proverbs, "and the seventh his soul detesteth,"³ and utterly abhors. And what is that? "Him that soweth discord among brethren;"⁴ that is, as commentators tell us, a tale-bearer who creates enmity and strife among others. Would it not be better for one of that character to be dumb, than to make such a wicked use of his tongue? Ah, my dear brethren, let us carefully avoid all tale-bearing! I have preferred to speak of this vice first, because it is so common, and this sermon will thus be of profit to a greater number. And you, servants, should apply to yourselves in a special manner what I have said, that you may not be too ready to carry stories out of the house in which you are employed; for thereby, besides the detraction you are guilty of, you cause hatred and dissension between neighbors and relatives. And all of us should be careful not to allow a spirit of mean adulation to induce us to run down our neighbor's character in the presence of those whom we know to be hostile to him.

There are others who reveal secrets that they are bound to keep by virtue of their office.

I address myself now to another class of loquacious people who talk too much; and they are those who reveal what they are especially bound to keep secret in virtue of their office, such as judges, lawyers, notaries, and other officials, who speak unnecessarily of what goes on in their consultations, or meetings; saying, for instance: so and so proposed this, and the proposition was accepted or rejected; one man favors this party, another that; the business has reached a certain stage, etc. And

¹ Susurro et bilinguis maledictis; multos enim turbabit pacem habentes.—Eecl. xxviii. 15.

² Beati pacifici, quoniam filii Dei vocabuntur.—Matth. v. 9.

³ Sex sunt, quæ odit Dominus, et septimum detestatur anima ejus.—Prov. vi. 16.

⁴ Eum qui seminat inter fratres discordias.—Ibid. 19.

sometimes those revelations are made to the person about whom or against whom the meetings or consultations have been held. How unjust, how sinful that is! Reason alone is enough to show that it is utterly unlawful, and that it can occasion much evil.

For if that were allowed to go on, no one would have the courage to speak according to his conscience, or to make known his opinion according to his duty. Oh, if one would only be certain that all who are engaged in similar consultations were like St. John of Nepomue, and would rather die than reveal the secrets entrusted to them; if all Christians were at least like the heathen philosopher Euripides, who, when some one said to him that his breath was bad, replied, "I can quite believe it, since so many things have died in my mouth;"¹ meaning thereby that he was very careful never to reveal a secret; if all were as upright as that Metellus who, if any one asked him to divulge a secret, used to answer: "If I thought that my under-garment was capable of doing as you ask, I should tear it off my body and burn it;" if, I say, we were all like that, then indeed would justice be always impartially administered, and much wrong-doing would cease! But as it is, one must think and reflect a good deal before saying yes, or no, and must weigh his words instead of considering the justice of the case in hand. Why? Because one knows not whom to trust; there are spies and traitors everywhere, and every word you speak may be made publicly known almost as soon as you have said it. But who is the traitor? Ah, that is a question not so easily answered! You may ask it often enough, like the Apostles at the Last Supper; but you will be none the wiser. Still the traitor is there. Consequently, if any delicate matter is proposed for consideration, people are inclined to shrug their shoulders, to look at each other, and to say nothing, although they have just cause, and are willing enough to express their opinion; often, indeed, through fear of treachery, they say yes, when, if they spoke according to conscience, they would say no. Thus justice is not observed as God, conscience, and the law require.

So that justice is not observed.

Hence it often happens that an irreparable injury is done. For sometimes, if a good, conscientious Christian gives an honest opinion against some powerful man, he has to suffer afterwards for having done so, when some tale-bearer has carried the story to the person concerned. We read in the Book of Exodus

So that often a grave injury is done one's neighbor.

¹ Ita multa in ore meo computruerunt.

that a remarkable instance of this occurred to Moses. The latter went on one occasion from the court of King Pharaoh, in which he had been brought up by the King's daughter, to visit his countrymen, who were so sorely oppressed by the Egyptians. "He saw their affliction," says the Holy Scripture, "and an Egyptian striking one of the Hebrews, his brethren."¹ This act of injustice seemed intolerable to Moses, and on the one hand his anger impelled him to punish the aggressor, while on the other he was afraid that, if he did so, he might lose favor at court, and involve his brethren in his own punishment. Therefore he looked around carefully to see if any one was watching, "and when he had looked about this way and that, and saw no one there, he slew the Egyptian and hid him in the sand."² Could the thing be done more in secret, my dear brethren? Could any one imagine that it would ever be made known, since the only one present, besides Moses himself, was the Hebrew whom he was defending, and it was to the interest of both of them to say nothing about what had occurred? Certainly, Moses thought that the whole affair was buried with the dead Egyptian; and yet he very soon found out to his sorrow that the contrary was the case. For the next day he went out, and finding two Hebrews quarrelling, he tried to make peace between them; but one of them said to him sulkily, "wilt thou kill me as thou didst yesterday kill the Egyptian?"³ Moses was surprised to hear that any one knew of what had occurred so secretly, and he began to fear for his own safety; "Moses feared, and said: How is this come to be known?"⁴ And let me too ask, my dear brethren, how it could come to be known? It was through the Hebrew whom Moses defended; he related the matter in confidence to a friend of his, that friend told another, and so the story at last came to the ears of the King. "And Pharaoh heard of this word, and sought to kill Moses," who had to fly to save his life; "but he fled from his sight, and abode in the land of Madian, and sat down by a well."⁵ Such was the misfortune in which Moses was involved by a loquacious tongue. If the Hebrew had held his peace, Moses would have had nothing to

¹ Viditque afflictionem eorum, et virum Aegyptium percutientem quemdam de Hebræis fratribus suis.—Exod. ii. 11.

² Cumque circumspexisset huc atque illuc, et nullum adesse vidisset, percussum Aegyptium abscondit sabulo.—Ibid. 12.

³ Num occidere me tu vis, sicut heri occidisti Aegyptium?—Ibid. ii. 14.

⁴ Timuit Moyses et ait: Quomodo palam factum est verbum istud?—Ibid.

⁵ Audivitque Pharaoh sermonem hunc, et quærebat occidere Moysen; qui fugiens de conspectu ejus, moratus est in terra Madian, et sedit juxta puteum.—Ibid. 15.

fear. It is just the same in our own days. There is many an honest man, who means to do his duty to God and to his neighbor by giving a conscientious opinion, and who is ousted out of his position and forced to come down in the world by some mischief-making tale-bearer.

Thus it happens, too, that the greatest and most important undertakings come to naught, and even whole communities suffer; because frequently the prosperity and welfare of a whole province or kingdom depend on certain secrets being strictly kept. Yet it is an unusual thing for a government to be altogether free from traitors. Famiianus Strada, in his famous History of the Netherlands, quotes a letter written by Margaret, then Regent of the Austrian Netherlands, to Philip II., King of Spain, to this effect: Is it possible that among your majesty's privy councilors there are some so imprudent as to make known state secrets, either by word of mouth, or by writing; or so wicked and faithless as actually to declare them to your majesty's enemies? Nearly all the letters I have written to you for the last two years are, I am assured, in hostile hands at the present moment; with what disadvantage to the kingdom, I leave your majesty to imagine. Therefore I beg of you, in future to burn my letters as soon as you have read them." But all Margaret's caution was of no avail; for a certain individual boasted sometime afterwards that everything the King said, whether in public or in private, was made known to him without delay in the Netherlands. So hard is it for one to protect himself against treachery!

What a disgraceful thing that is! The ancient Romans, in making their libations to their idols, used a vessel so constructed that it could not stand upright, and whatever it contained had to be poured out at once. A talkative man is like that vessel; he opens his mouth so often and so wide to talk, that whatever is poured in at his ears flows out at once; he cannot keep to himself a single thing he hears, but must tell it immediately. In the Book of Ecclesiasties we read how the Holy Ghost speaks of such a man: "At the hearing of a word the fool is in travail, as a woman groaning in the bringing forth a child;"¹ and again: "As an arrow that sticketh in a man's thigh, so is a word in the heart of a fool."² He who has an arrow sticking in his body, has no rest until it is pulled out. Tie anything

And even a whole community.

This loquacity is very disgraceful, especially in a man.

¹ *A facie verbi parturit fatuus, tamquam gemitus partus infantis.*—Ecll. xix. 11.

² *Sagitta infixæ femori carnis, sic verbum in corde stulti.*—Ibid. 12.

to the tail of a cat or a dog, and the animal will run about until it gets rid of it. So the loquacious man, when he has heard a secret, is on thorns, until he has told it to some one who will be glad to hear it. In the same chapter Ecclesiasticus says: "Hast thou heard a word against thy neighbor, let it die within thee."¹ This advice is followed in too literal a sense sometimes by talkative people; that is, they deal with secrets, as they would under certain circumstances with one who has just died. Sometimes it happens that when a person is dying, his father, or mother, or the priest alone is present; hardly has the breath left him, when word is sent to his friends and relatives, the church bell is tolled, and the body is laid out for all the neighbors to see. In the same way a secret dies with those loquacious people; that is, they tell all they know about it at once. What a disgrace it is, I repeat, for a man especially, to have so little control over his tongue! No one will trust him in any important business, nor will people dare to speak of any weighty matter in presence of one who has the reputation of not knowing how to hold his tongue, and of being a betrayer of secrets. What a disgrace that is for a man!

Men of that kind are put to shame by women; shown by an example.

People generally say that it is not safe to trust a secret to a woman, for she will not be able to keep it. I know not whether there are any grounds for that saying; but I must say, in defence of women, that there is, at all events, one fact to prove that they are not all untrustworthy. Laertius tells us of a brave woman at Athens whose fame has descended to posterity. She knew an important secret that Hippias, the Tyrant, was very anxious to hear, and that he tried to worm out of her by every possible means, both personally and by his most skilful councilors; he had recourse to flatteries, caresses, promises, and bribes, but all to no purpose; the brave woman kept her secret with the utmost determination. At last the tyrant lost patience, and said to her; I will make you confess all you know; he then ordered the fire and the rack to be prepared in order to extract the secret from her by torture; but the heroic woman said to him: "Do what you will, you will never compel me to say a word of what I cannot disclose without breaking my faith to one who trusted in me;" and thereupon she bit a large piece off her tongue, and spat it into his face: "she spat out her tongue in the tyrant's face that she might not be forced to let out the secret."² The

¹ Audisti verbum adversus proximum tuum? commoriatur in te.—Ecc. xix. 10.

² Linguam in tyranni faciem exspuit, ut exspueret vocem.—Laert. L. 36. c. 5.

Athenians erected a pillar in her honor, with the inscription: "By her virtue she rose superior to her sex."¹ And nowadays we might well add that the heroic silence of this woman puts many a man to shame, and that, too, in a matter in which every one is bound to act a manly part, and not allow himself to be compelled by fear of torments, or through a desire of currying favor with others, or through a spirit of adulation, or through mere talkativeness, to disclose secrets that he is bound as a matter of duty, and often under oath, to keep to himself.

But, I might well say to such people, if you are so fond of hearing your own voices, and find it so hard to hold your tongues, then why do you not speak when duty requires you? Why do you not give your opinion honestly according to conscience and justice? But we might cry out to them as Christ did to the dumb man in to-days gospel, at the top of our voices: "Ephpheta: be thou opened," without getting them to say a word! They are like those dogs that bark at and bite their master's friends, but keep quite still when thieves break into the house. As the Prophet Isaias says, "they are dumb dogs, not able to bark;"² nor do they dare to do so, although their duty requires it. Thieves can prevent dogs from barking in two ways; when they wish to break into a house, they either throw them a big piece of meat, so as to keep them busy gnawing it for some time, or else they have recourse to witchcraft to make them afraid, so that they will not dare to bark. So it is often with those who are bound to see justice administered; they become dumb dogs all at once; their mouths are stopped with a piece of meat, that is, their hands are filled with bribes; or else fear, or human respect, or the dread of incurring some great man's anger, reduces them to silence. Meanwhile, if a good and conscientious Christian speaks out fearlessly according to justice, they cannot keep silence about him; his opinions and judgments are at once made known to him against whom they have been pronounced, and who has the least right to know anything about them. Is that right, or just, or becoming a Christian? Therefore, I say again, if you must speak, speak when your duty requires, and hold your tongues when you cannot speak without doing mischief. If public vices and abuses are to be corrected and abolished; if your servants, or children, or wives require chastisement or admonition, in order to urge them to do good,

They are also dumb and refuse to speak when duty requires them.

¹ *Virtus superavit sexum.*

² *Canes muti, non valentes latrare.—Isa. lvi. 10.*

or to abstain from evil, that is the time for you to speak; then you may open your mouths to some purpose. But when you have pledged your word, or your duty and obligation, or the law of God and justice require you to keep a secret, then is the time for you to be silent; then you must say: "my secret for myself, my secret for myself."

Conclusion
and exhortation
to
speak and
to be silent
at the
proper time.

In conclusion, I wish you and myself the same benefit that Christ conferred on the dumb man, as we read in to-day's gospel: "And the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke right." O my dear brethren, what a beautiful, but rare art it is, to know how to speak properly at all times! Let us try with all possible diligence to learn it, to keep a guard over the tongue, that dangerous member, from which so much evil and sin proceeds daily, and never to say anything against the honor of God or the charity we owe our neighbor. If we are entrusted with a secret; if we see or hear anything privately of our neighbor, which we ourselves would not wish to be made known if we were the persons concerned, or which might be the cause of mischief; oh, then let us rather, like that heroic woman, bite off our tongues, than let the least word fall that might betray the secret! Let us daily beg of God, who alone can govern our tongue: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; and a door round about my lips,"¹ that not a word may proceed from me without being first examined to see if it is such as I ought to speak; so that, for the rest of my life, it may be said of me with truth: "he spoke right." Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the 24th and last Sunday after Pentecost, when the feast of the Presentation of the B. V. Mary is celebrated thereon.

Text.

Beati qui audiunt verbum Dei, et custodiunt illud.—Luke ii. 28.

"Blessed are they who hear the Word of God, and keep it."

Blessed are they who hear the Word of God in sermons, and so keep it in their hearts, that they act and live according to it! Blessed are they who learn, know, and fulfil the law and the holy will of God! Such is the meaning of the words of the text. And may we not also say, blessed are they who hear the word of their neighbor, and keep it? they who keep secrets, and do

¹ Pone, Domine, custodiam ori meo, et ostium circumstantiæ labiis meis.—Ps. cxl. 3.

not divulge them? For on silence in such matters, my dear brethren, a great deal depends; and the neglect of it often occasions much evil and mischief. But how few there are, even among Christians, who deserve to be called blessed in that way! How many talkative people there are, who commit even grievous sin by revealing secrets! Of these, then, who unnecessarily reveal secrets, I intend to speak to-day, for preachers generally merely allude to them in their sermons, although they stand in need of a word of special advice and exhortation. Who those people are, what mischief they do, and, therefore, how grievously they sin against God and their neighbor, such is the whole subject of this sermon. Let us speak when and how we should speak; but also let us keep secret what we cannot lawfully reveal. Give us Thy grace to this end, O God, through the intercession of that Holy Virgin, who, from her child-hood, consecrated herself to Thy service in the temple, and of the holy angels guardian!

SEVENTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON THE LYING TONGUE.

Subject.

1. The habit of lying is a disgraceful and hateful vice in the sight of men. 2. It is disgraceful in the sight of God.—
Preached on the third Sunday of Advent.

Text.

Confessus est, et non negavit.—John i. 20.

“He confessed, and did not deny.”

Introduction.

Of all men, without exception, the Holy Ghost says: “Every man is a liar;” not in the sense that every one must lie, or is accustomed to lie, for all lies under any circumstances are forbidden by God; but the meaning of those words is that all men can lie and knowingly violate the truth. Would to God, my dear brethren, that lying never went farther with us, than the bare possibility, and that what the gospel of to-day says in praise of St. John the Baptist, “He confessed and did not deny,” might be said with truth of us all! Would to God that

the spirit of falsehood had no influence over us! But, alas, what is more common than to violate truth? Most people, in fact, make a habit of it. Yet it is hateful and degrading in the sight of God and of the world, as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

The habit of lying is a shameful and disgraceful vice in the eyes of the world; the first part. It is a shameful and disgraceful vice in the sight of God; the second part. The conclusion will be to inspire us all with hatred and horror of a vice that is detested by God and man.

We expect thereto Thy grace, O Jesus, through the merits of Thy Mother Mary, and of our holy angels guardian.

It is disgraceful before the world for a man to be looked on as neither truthful nor upright.

It is a great honor for a man, even in the eyes of the world, when people can say of him with truth what Jesus said of Nathanael; "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and he saith of him: Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile;"¹ and when he is looked upon as an honest, upright man, whom one can trust without fear of treachery, and whose word can be relied on, because he speaks from his heart. Certainly it is a great thing for a man to have a name like that. And on the other hand, my dear brethren, there is nothing more degrading to a man, in the eyes of all decent people, than to have the name of being false, of acting deceitfully, so that one cannot trust him, or believe what he says. A name of that kind is indeed odious and detestable in the sight of all honorable men!

Lfars deserve that name.

Now the habit of lying is almost the only vice which gives a man that bad name. For a liar means one who has neither truth, nor candor, nor uprightness. But why do I speak of the habit of lying? To be caught in a single falsehood is quite enough to give one that bad name, so that he is not believed afterwards, even when he speaks the truth. If a man has lied to me once, I can never trust him again. He is like that man who, in order to be helped along the street, pretended he had a broken leg; as he was going along, he fell and, by a just dispensation of Providence, actually did break his leg; he cried out lustily for help, but no one came to his assistance; people had found out how he had deceived them, and the only answer they gave him was, "Let those who do not know you, come to your

¹ Vidit Jesus Nathanael venientem ad se, et dicit de eo: Ecce, vere Israelita, in quo dolus non est.—John i. 47.

assistance;" we know you too well to believe in you. Nay, so hateful is the name of liar, that people hardly like to mention it in decent company.

Even they who have the habit of telling lies, and who seldom speak the truth, cannot bear to be looked on as liars. It is considered a most grievous insult to be accused of an untruth; and people often take satisfaction for it by an appeal to arms, for there is many a one who would rather shed his blood and endanger his life, than rest quietly under such an insult. And how ashamed one feels who is convicted of a falsehood! Fathers and mothers, even if you are too indulgent to your children in other things, yet you daily warn them against the vice of lying. Be careful my child, you say, never to tell a lie; woe betide you, if I ever catch you telling an untruth; I will punish you most severely, for he who lies will also steal.

Even amongst liars.

And this is one of the chief reasons why God has forbidden lying as sinful, so that even a jocose lie is never lawful, under any circumstances; that, namely, the social relations of men with each other may not be disturbed. Now these relations could not be maintained at all, if it were ever lawful to lie, because then no one could trust his neighbor, and every one would always be in dread of deceit and treachery; so that there would be an end of mutual trust and confidence. Hence, if the law of God and the law of nature did not prohibit lying, all spiritual and civil authority would be forced unanimously to prohibit it under severe penalties, for the general welfare. In ancient times the heathens, who knew nothing of God or his commandments, used to class liars in the same category as coiners of false money, as far as punishment was concerned. The emperor Claudius, as Spartianus writes, caused the dead body of a certain Pamphilus to be exhumed and to be thrown to the dogs and carion birds, while all the property he left behind was confiscated, and his wife and children were banished, because it had been reported to the emperor that Pamphilus had been a habitual liar. Artaxerxes, King of Persia, having once convicted one of his soldiers of a falsehood, ordered his tongue to be pierced with three nails. The emperor Trajan had deposed the King of Thrace on account of rebellion, and placed the son of the latter on the throne; but because the son once told him a lie, by saying that he was coming home from school, whereas in reality he had been in the garden eating fruit, Trajan, full of anger, took the crown from him again: "you are a liar," he

Therefore it is forbidden by God and man.

said, "and are therefore unworthy to reign; nor is it right that Rome, the mother of truth, should have a lying son."¹

Yet lying is a very common vice.

O Christians! if lying were punished nowadays with equal severity, how many do you think would escape? For, hateful and hated as the name of a liar is, yet that vice is only too common amongst all classes, young and old, great and small; and to most men, especially those who lead worldly lives, we could with truth apply the words of the Prophet Jeremias, "They will not speak the truth; for they have taught their tongue to speak lies."² To conceal one's meaning in every possible way; to utter truth as falsehood, and falsehood as truth; to know how to hide one's feelings, and to speak friendly words with a heart full of falsehood and bitterness; to make grand promises which one has not the least intention of fulfilling; to hide by falsehoods the envy, hatred, vindictiveness, usury, injustice, or adultery, nay even the very lies that one is guilty of; to seek profit by lying in the public prints, in buying and selling; that, says St. Gregory, is the wisdom and prudence of the cunning world. He who is ignorant of this art, who speaks as he thinks, and acts honestly and uprightly in all things, is laughed at as a simpleton and as one who knows not the ways of the world.

Many seek temporal gain thereby, although they generally lose; shown by an example.

Nay, so perverse are people in this respect, that, if a man has a strict regard for the truth in business matters, they consider him as one who can do very little, if anything at all, for himself. Such was the mistaken idea of those two shopkeepers of whom Cæsarius writes; they accused themselves in confession, amongst other faults, of the lies they had told in the course of business. Their confessor reproved them, and exhorted them to amendment; but, Father, said they, if we give up telling those lies, we shall soon be reduced to beggary; you do not understand our business; it is the fashion of the world nowadays to lie and deceive, and if a man sticks to the truth, he cannot hope to make much profit. What? said the confessor, do you wish to violate the truth for the sake of making a little profit? But take my advice and try the other plan for a while; I assure you, you will gain far more by truth and honesty, than by lying and deceit. The two men agreed to this, and promised that in future they would not, at all events, tell a deliberate lie. And they kept their word, too; in consequence of which they at first

¹ Tamquam mendax indignus es regno; nec decet Romam matrem veritatis, habere filium mendacem.

² Veritatem non loquentur: docuerunt enim linguam suam loqui mendacium.—Jer. ix. 5.

lost half their customers; but afterwards, when people found out how honest they were, they flocked to them in such numbers, that in one year the two men made more profit by truthfulness and honesty, than they did before in ten years by lying and deceit. Ah, would to God that all Christians tried the same plan! They would soon find out that more is to be made by upright dealing, than by falsehood. But, however that may be, must not prosperity come from the hands of God? And if so, how can he who offends God by lying expect a blessing on his business?

You know, my dear brethren, what happened to Giezi, the servant of the Prophet Eliseus, who tried to enrich himself by a falsehood? Eliseus had refused the rich presents offered him by Naaman, whom he had cured of leprosy, and Naaman was already on the way back to his own country, when the thought occurred to Giezi that his master was over-scrupulous not to take what was offered him, and that it would not be a bad plan if he were to try to secure something for himself. With this idea he ran after Naaman, who, as soon as he saw him coming, descended from his chariot in token of respect to Eliseus his master, greeted the servant kindly, and asked him what he wanted. "My master hath sent me to thee,"¹ answered Giezi, (count all the lies he told, my dear brethren; there is one of them already, for Eliseus had not given him any such commission.) saying: "Just now there are come to me, from Mount Ephraim, two young men of the sons of the prophets."² (That was the second lie, for there was not a word of truth in all he said.) "Give them a talent of silver, and two changes of garments!"³ (The third lie.) But Naaman was ashamed to give so little; "It is better," said he, "that thou take two talents;" and he forced him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, and two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants, and they carried them before him."⁴ Naaman then continued his journey. Giezi, full of joy at the success of his trickery, returns home; but he little knew what a misfortune was in store for him, nor what a calamity his ill-gotten treasures were to bring upon him; otherwise he would have wept, instead of re-

Proved by
an example
from Scrip-
ture.

¹ Dominus meus misit me ad te.—IV. Kings v. 22.

² Dicens: Modo venerunt ad me duo adolescentes de monte Ephraim ex filiis prophetarum.—Ibid.

³ Da eis talentum argenti et vestes mutatorias duplices.—Ibid.

⁴ Melius est, ut accipias duo talenta. Et cogit eum, ligavitque duo talenta argenti in duobus saccis, et duplicia vestimenta, et imposuit duobus pueris suis, qui et portaverunt eorum eo.—Ibid. 23.

joining. So far he had succeeded; he stored away the silver and the clothes carefully in his house; no one knew anything of his good fortune, and his thoughts were busy about the vineyards he intended to buy, the number of servants he would have, and the choice food he could enjoy every day. Full of those thoughts, he presents himself before his master, who asks him gravely: "Whence comest thou Giezi?" He answered: "Thy servant went nowhither."¹ That was the fourth shameless lie he told. What? said his master, you went nowhere? And who was it that overtook Naaman, and received from him two talents of silver, and two changes of garments? And who is it that has concealed those gifts, brought by two servants, so that I might not see them? "Was not my heart present when the man turned back from his chariot to meet thee?"² This rebuff should have sufficed to put the servant to shame. But the very same reproof is given and repeated to you, O lying Christian, by God and your holy angel guardian, as often as you tell a wilful falsehood! Was not my heart present, says your holy angel, when you uttered that shameless lie? Was not my heart present? says the Almighty God; did I not see how ill your heart accorded with the words you spoke? and you were not afraid to tell a lie in My presence, and even thought to gain something by it? But wait, unhappy man. Your punishment has still to come! And so it was with Giezi, my dear brethren, for Eliseus who knew the deceit he had been guilty of, said to him: "So now thou hast received money, and hast received garments to buy olive-yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants." But see what good it will do you. "But the leprosy of Naaman shall also stick to thee, and to thy seed forever."³ You will become a leper, and your children, and children's children, and all your descendants will be lepers also. Away out of my sight, lying servant, and let all liars take warning by your punishment! Thereupon he turned away, and left Giezi so overwhelmed with confusion that he had not a word to say, "and he went out from him a leper as white as snow."⁴ If God were to punish liars nowadays by afflicting them with leprosy, or some other loathsome disease, doctors

¹ Unde venis Giezi? Qui respondit: Non ivit servus tuus quoquam.—IV. Kings v. 25.

² Nonne cor meum in presenti erat, quando reversus est homo de curru suo in occursum tui?—Ibid. 26.

³ Nunc igitur accepisti argentum, et accepisti vestes, ut emas oliveta, et vineas, et oves et servos, et ancillas; sed et lepra Naaman adhærebit tibi, et semini tuo, usque in sempiternum.—Ibid. 26-27.

⁴ Et egressus est ab eo leprosus quasi nix.—Ibid. 27.

enough could not be found to attend to all the sick. Nor would there be any necessity for them to ask, on entering a house, where the sick person is. The first one they come across, the servant who opens the door, the master and mistress, the son and daughter, all would likely be found to be infected with the disease; and many a doctor would not be a whit better off than his patients. Yes, my dear brethren, there is no doubt, that, if God were to punish lying in that way, there would be a great number of sick people in the world; but at the same time the number of those who are not afraid to lie would decrease considerably. Yet, even if the Almighty, in His merciful goodness, deals gently with us in that respect, there are still greater punishments in store for those who wilfully violate the truth. For if the habit of lying gives one a bad name before the world, that is the least of the ill effects that follow from it. What should most of all deter us from this habit, is the fact that it makes man hateful to God; as we shall see in the

Second Part.

Mortal sin alone is able to draw down the divine anger on the sinner, and to make him hateful to God. Venial sins, although they displease the infinite holiness of God, do not deprive the soul of His favor and friendship, and consequently do not make it hateful to Him. Is it then my intention to class lying amongst mortal sins since I speak of it as making man hateful to God? No, my dear brethren, a lie is in itself but a venial sin, unless it is foreseen to be the cause of a great injury, or of quarrelling and strife, or of grievous harm to our neighbor's honor, or of sacrilege in the holy Sacrament of Penance, and so forth; for in any of those cases one may commit a grievous sin by a trivial lie. Otherwise, when such aggravating circumstances are wanting, a lie is only a venial sin. Yet, we find the Holy Scripture condemning wilful falsehoods so strongly, and so much more vehemently than any other venial sin, that we could almost swear that every lie is a mortal sin and most hateful in the sight of God. Hear what the Prophet David does not hesitate to say to the Almighty: "Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity; thou wilt destroy all that speak a lie."¹ The Holy Ghost speaks very plainly about this matter in the Book of Wisdom: "The mouth that believeth killeth the soul."² And

Lying is condemned in Holy Scripture as a vice specially hateful to God.

¹ Odisti omnes qui operantur iniquitatem: perdes omnes, qui loquuntur mendacium.

—Ps. v. 7.

² Os quod mentitur, occidit animam.—Wis. i. 11.

again the Wise Man says: "A false witness shall not be unpunished: and he that speaketh lies, shall not escape."¹ St. John in the Apocalypse excludes liars from the heavenly Jerusalem: "Without are dogs, and sorcerers, and unchaste, and murderers, and servers of idols, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie."² Away with them! They do not belong to Heaven. And where must they go? "All liars, they shall have their portion in the pool burning with fire and brimstone."³ And what conclusion are we to draw from all this? that every lie is a mortal sin? No; but that lying must be extremely hateful to God, and that he who is in the habit of it, being deprived of special graces by the inscrutable decrees of God, generally speaking, falls into mortal sin and loses his soul.

Because lying is opposed to the truth of God.

The reason of this is, that lying is opposed to truth, which is one of the chiefest divine attributes. David calls the Almighty "The God of truth."⁴ "I am the truth,"⁵ says the Son of God of Himself. "For this was I born, and for this came I into the world, that I should give testimony to the truth."⁶ On the other hand the Holy Scripture calls the devil "the father of lies;" so that he who is in the habit of lying cannot be of God, but of the devil, as St. Ambrose says. "Be careful, beloved brethren," says the Saint, "not to lie; because they who love lying are children of the devil,"⁷ and are opposed to the God of truth.

And is therefore never lawful.

And this is the second reason why it is never lawful to tell even a jocose lie. There is no doubt that it is forbidden, under pain of grievous sin, to take away man's life; yet there are circumstances in which I may do so, namely, if I have to defend my own life against an unjust aggressor, and have no other means of defence except killing my opponent. But not even to save my life would it be lawful for me to tell a lie. There is no doubt that stealing is forbidden under pain of grievous sin: yet under certain circumstances I may, without sin, take what belongs to another, namely, if I am in extreme necessity and have no other

¹ Testis falsus non erit impunitus, et qui mendacia loquitur, non effugiet.—Prov. xix. 5.

² Foris canes, et venefici, et impudici, et homicidæ, et idolis servientes, et omnis, qui amat et facit mendacium.—Apoc. xxii. 15.

³ Omnibus mendacibus, pars illorum erit in stagno ardenti igne et sulphure.—Ibid. xxi. 8.

⁴ Deus veritatis.—Ps. xxx. 6.

⁵ Ego sum veritas.—John xiv. 6.

⁶ Ego in hoc natus sum, et ad hoc veni in mundum, ut testimonium perhibeam veritati.—John xviii. 37.

⁷ Quia omnes, qui amant mendacium, filii sunt diaboli.

means of preserving my life. But it never would be lawful for me to procure necessary sustenance by telling a lie. Lying is like the inside of a kitchen chimney that is blackened by the continually ascending smoke; no matter what efforts are made to whiten it, it is still as black as before. In the same way, no matter what pretexts and excuses are brought forward to make lying appear good and lawful, it still remains unlawful and forbidden under any circumstances. But, you will ask, is lying, then, worse than murder and theft, since the latter are sometimes lawful, but the former never? No, my dear brethren, by murder we mean taking away a man's life unjustly, an act that is always sinful in itself, and can never become lawful; in the same way, theft means taking away another's property unjustly, and it is always sinful, and never can become lawful. Therefore, to take away a man's life or his property unjustly is certainly a greater sin, than to tell a simple lie. What I wish to say is this: under certain circumstances God can give me the right over the life or property of another, and, in fact, He has often given that right to men; so that if I kill a man I shall not be guilty of murder, or if I take away my neighbor's property, I shall not be guilty of theft. On the other hand, God can never give us a right to tell a lie, nor can He counsel, much less command or approve of lying. There are no circumstances in which speaking contrary to one's knowledge and opinion is not a lie and therefore it must always be sinful. "A lie," says the learned Cardinal de Lugo, "is intrinsically evil, and therefore it is amongst the number of those things which are prohibited because they are bad; so that not even God Himself can dispense therein."¹ In spite of His omnipotence, God cannot speak otherwise than according to His knowledge. Such is the general teaching of the holy Fathers and theologians; and it is as impossible for God to say what is not true, as it is for Him to cease being almighty and all-perfect. To assert the contrary is, according to Valenzia, at least rash; Lorca and Turriannus call it false and erroneous doctrine, while De Lugo says it is almost heretical. And as God can never, under any circumstances, make blasphemy or idolatry lawful, so He can never make even the smallest and most advantageous lie lawful. Therefore there should be an end of that idle complaint which is so often heard as a sort of justification for lying, that, namely, one can hardly venture to

¹ Mendacium est intrinsece malum et ex eis, quæ sunt prohibita, quia mala ita ut nec Deus possit in eo dispensare.

deal uprightly, since people are so deceitful, and one cannot know whom to trust. It is true that there is reason enough to complain of the spirit of falsehood that prevails; but we must not allow ourselves to imagine that the prevalence of a vice makes it lawful.

Even if I could thereby prevent a great misfortune.

It is to no purpose, then, that many say, that, by concealing the truth by a trivial lie, one can often do a great deal of good, or avert a great misfortune, or prevent himself or others from being put to public shame; and that under such circumstances lying is lawful, especially when it does no wrong or harm to others. Again, there are some who maintain that they must often tell a little lie in their families for the sake of preserving peace, for if they told the truth, they would give rise to quarrelling, dissension, and hatred, which might be the occasion of many grievous sins. Hear the answer to this objection; it is founded on the principle already laid down. If I, by telling a trivial lie, could put an end to all the wars that devastate so many countries, and are the cause of so many fearful sins, and if I could thereby restore peace to the whole world; even in that case it would not be lawful for me to tell a lie; much less, then, when there is merely question of keeping peace in a household. And if I could save my own life, or that of another by telling a lie, I must, as we have seen already, rather sacrifice my life, or that of my neighbor, than be guilty of the lie; much less, then, is lying lawful merely for the sake of some temporal profit. "It is not lawful," says the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas of Aquin, "to tell a lie in order to save another from any danger whatever."

Or could bring all men to Heaven.

There is no doubt that I am obliged, for God's sake and my neighbor's, to prevent sin whenever I can; but I am not allowed to violate truth for that purpose. What a divine work it is to gain a soul! If it were necessary thereto that all men should sacrifice their worldly goods, their honor, their comfort, their lives even, they should all joyfully make that sacrifice for the sake of gaining one soul for God and for Heaven. What a great gain it would be then, and what reason I should have for attempting it, if it were possible, to convert to the Catholic faith all heathens, Turks, Jews, and heretics, nay, to make all men in a moment sure of their eternal salvation? And yet, if I could do all that by one small lie, it would not be lawful for me to tell that lie; no, I repeat it, that lie would be a sin. Such is

¹ Non est licitum mendacium dicere ad hoc, quod aliquis alium a quocunque periculo liberet.

the decision of the Fathers of the Council of Lateran, which was held under Pope Leo X. And the reason of it is clearly laid down by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans: "Let us not do evil, that there may come good."¹ Suppose, says St. Augustine, speaking against those who maintained that a lie is lawful, if thereby a great good, either of body or of soul, can be procured, suppose that there was in my house an unbaptized child in danger of death; there is no doubt that I am bound to baptize it, so as to save it from eternal loss, to make it a child of God and an heir to the kingdom of Heaven, and for that purpose I am bound to risk my life, and would do so with pleasure; but I have, as I suppose, no water at hand, wherewith to administer the Sacrament, nor can I procure any, unless by telling a lie to the porter, that he may allow me to go out for some; under such circumstances, what am I to do? Must I tell the lie? No; God forbid! I must allow the child to die without baptism and to lose Heaven, rather than knowingly violate the truth. For, what is sinful in itself, can never, under any circumstances, become lawful, even with a most holy end in view. Therefore we are not allowed to lie for the sake of furthering God's honor and glory, nor for the sake of concealing our virtues and good works from men through humility. "When you lie for humility's sake," says St. Augustine, "if you were not a sinner before, you become by lying what you wished not to be."² Let those who imagine that lying is sometimes necessary, make a note of that. I have told lies, they say, but I could not help it. It was for the sake of preventing quarrels at home, or to keep my husband from drinking too much, etc. No; it is never necessary to commit sin, and therefore it is never necessary to tell a falsehood. From this it is evident that there is no excuse for the conduct of those who order or encourage their children or domestics to lie for some trivial reason, telling them to say, for instance, that their masters or parents are not at home, and so forth; or who lie by way of a joke, or for the sake of amusement.

How different is the conduct of sincere servants of God in this respect! For they would rather die than offend God by a deliberate violation of truth. What happened to the holy Bishop and Martyr, Antimus, is well known. During the persecu-

Hence pious servants of God would rather die than tell a lie.

¹ Non faciamus mala, ut veniant bona.—Rom. iii. 8,

² Cum humilitatis causa mentiris, si non eras peccator, antequam mentireris, mentiendo efficeris, quod evitaveras.

tion in the reign of the emperor Maximian, twenty soldiers were sent in pursuit of him; they came to his house, and were received very hospitably by him, but they did not know who he was. When they had eaten and drunk, the holy Bishop said to them: I am Antimus whom you seek. The soldiers were very sorry to hear that, as they were unwilling to make a prisoner of one who had been so kind to them. We will go to the emperor, they said, and will tell him that we looked for Antimus everywhere, but could not find him. No, said the holy man, you must know that a Christian is not allowed either to tell a lie, or to encourage others to lie. Bring me to your emperor, or if you do not wish to bring me, I will follow you, and will rather undergo the most painful death, than allow you to tell a lie on my account. And he went with them, and suffered death bravely for the faith, and in defence of the truth.

They put us to shame, since we often tell lies for some worthless cause.

O Christians, have we not just reason to be ashamed of ourselves! We are guilty of such frequent violation of truth every day; and for what? Are we perhaps in danger of death? Are we threatened with torture? Are we afraid of being dragged to prison and loaded with chains? Ah, even all that we should be ready to endure with joy, rather than offend God by the least sin! And yet, for the sake of some worthless thing, that is not of the least importance, in order to keep up a conversation, or to deceive others, we make a daily habit of telling most barefaced lies. How shall we be able to account for our conduct, when we shall have to appear before that God, who, as David says, will destroy all that speak a lie?

Yet we are not bound always to make known the truth.

But, some one will say, am I then always bound to declare the truth to every one who asks me? By no means, my dear brethren, that is not at all necessary, nor would it be always advisable. For there are circumstances in which I might commit a grievous sin by making known the truth, for instance, if I reveal an important secret, or disclose any thing injurious to my neighbor's good name, or to the charity I owe him, even if I am asked to make the disclosure. It is one thing not to disclose the truth, and another to speak contrary to the truth or to lie; the former I may be often bound to do, the latter can never be lawful. "It is lawful to conceal the truth with prudence,"¹ says St. Thomas of Aquin; and would to God that many truths were kept more secret! How much easier it would be to preserve the peace and union and good name of families, if there

¹ Licet occultare veritatem prudenter.

were not talkative or silly servants who are ready to relate in confidence, to any one who asks them, all that goes on in the household! Therefore, when such indiscreet questions are asked, or when, by concealing the truth, I can prevent sin, or hinder people from quarrelling; I must either hold my tongue, and refuse to answer, or I must go away, or otherwise show that I do not wish to answer, or I must give an evasive reply, or answer in such a way as to leave the other in doubt as to whether I mean yes, or no. Once for all, to speak deliberately against one's knowledge is a lie, and that is never lawful, no matter what advantage may be derived from it.

Therefore I conclude with the words of the Apostle St. Paul to the Ephesians: "Wherefore, putting away lying, speak ye the truth, every man with his neighbor; for we are members one of another;"¹ and we must deal uprightly with each other. "Let your speech be yea, yea; no, no;"² as our Saviour tells us; and speak candidly without deceit, and you will have God as your friend, and men, too, will be your friends, when they know that you are truthful. Therefore, O Lord, with Thy grace we shall resolve, in the words of Thy servant Job, "As long as breath remaineth in me, . . . my lips shall not speak iniquity, neither shall my tongue contrive lying."³ It will be enough for me to know that lying is a sin and offensive to Thy eternal Truth, to induce me rather to die, than to tell a lie even inadvertently. Amen.

Conclusion
and exhortation
to
avoid lying.

SEVENTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON THE SHAMELESSNESS OF THOSE WHO BOAST OF THEIR SINS.

Subject.

He who rejoices at, and boasts of his sins, is the most shameless sinner of all.—*Preached on the third Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Mundus autem gaudebit.—John xvi. 20.

"The world shall rejoice."

¹ Propter quod deponentes mendacium, loquimini veritatem unusquisque cum proximo suo, quoniam sumus invicem membra.—Ephes. iv. 25.

² Sit sermo vester: Est, est. non, non:—Matth. v. 37

³ Donec superest halitus in me, . . . non loquentur labia mea iniquitatem, nec lingua mea meditabitur mendacium.—Job. xxvii. 3, 4.

Introduction.

The difference between the children of the world and the pious servants of God, as far as this life is concerned, generally consists in this, that the former enjoy temporal prosperity and find their happiness therein, while the latter are often visited by severe crosses and trials, so that, as Our Lord says in to-day's gospel, they are made sorrowful. The pious servants of God dread nothing so much as offending the Almighty by a grievous sin; the bare remembrance of their past sins makes them weep and lament. The wicked, and the children of the world, on the other hand, have very little dread of sin; they commit it, without the least scruple, for the sake of some miserable thing, and they rejoice about it afterwards, as the Holy Ghost says in the Book of Proverbs, "Who are glad when they have done evil, and rejoice in most wicked things."¹ Nay, there are some who go to the extent of boasting of their sins, and exulting in them. The lot of the righteous in this life is the result of an all-wise and all-just decree of God, who proves his faithful servants for a short time here below by crosses and trials, that they may rejoice with Him forever in the kingdom of Heaven hereafter; while the prosperity granted to the wicked during this life, and the pleasures they enjoy, are given to them as a kind of reward for their few good works, since they will spend eternity weeping and gnashing their teeth in hell. Thus, when sinners become hardened in guilt, they lose all shame, and actually make a boast of their wickedness. Since I have not yet spoken of this degree of perversity, my dear brethren, I will speak of it now, and I say

Plan of Discourse.

He who rejoices at, and boasts of his sins, is the most shameless sinner of all. Such is the whole subject. O man! have you committed a sin? If so, then keep it to yourself, and declare it with repentant heart in confession. Such shall be the conclusion. As I do not think that there are any of those shameless sinners here present, my chief object is, as you shall see in the course of the sermon, to show you what an abomination sin is, that you may avoid it all the more carefully.

Give us Thy grace thereto, O Lord, through the intercession of Mary and the holy angels guardian.

¹ Qui lætantur, cum malefecerint, et exultant in rebus pessimis.—Prov. ii. 14.

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To boast of a thing which is calculated to make one ashamed in the presence of respectable people, and which one must acknowledge, in his own heart, to be shameful, is a certain, undoubted sign that one has lost all sense of decency, and a man of that kind is seldom to be met with. Consider the different things that the world generally looks on as disgraceful; where will you find a tradesman who boasts of having made a great mistake in something belonging to his handicraft? On the contrary, it will cost you a great deal of trouble, and you will have to use very strong arguments to convince him of a mistake he has really made; and what a number of excuses and explanations he will bring forward to hide or to palliate the error he knows he has committed. Herod, a celebrated orator at Athens, was once delivering an oration in presence of Mark Antony, when he forgot suddenly what he had to say, and had to retire; an accident of the kind is purely natural, and might happen to the most gifted orator, so that it could not be looked on as a disgrace; yet it affected him so much that he shut himself up in his room, refused to see any one, and abstained from all food and drink until he fell into a mortal illness. Sophocles cut his throat because one of his tragedies was only slightly applauded by the audience. Where will you find a malefactor who boasts that he has been banished, or that he has stood in the pillory, or that he has been branded, or that he has stood under the gallows with the rope round his neck? No, people never speak of any disgrace of that kind that may have happened them. When Labienus found that the books he had written were publicly burned by the sentence of the magistrate, he was so much ashamed that he could not bear the light of day, and he buried himself alive in the earth. Where will you find a soldier who boasts of having thrown down his arms before a weaker hostile force, and fled through fear of being wounded or slain? There is no greater disgrace for a soldier than that, and consequently no greater insult can be offered him, than to accuse him of such cowardice. The son of Aemilius Scaurus abandoned his post during a battle; did he boast of it afterwards? By no means; when he recollected what he had done, he was so covered with confusion, that he killed himself with his own sword to get rid of the sense of his shame.

No one boasts of a shameful thing, but he who has lost all shame.

Where will you find a respectable young girl, who enjoys a good reputation, to boast of having lost her purity? How many

Every one hides his

disgrace
carefully.

there are to whom that misfortune happens, because parents are not careful to keep their children from mixing too freely with the opposite sex! But do they boast of their disgrace? No; they do all they can to conceal it, and to prevent others from even suspecting it. Father Segneri says that he knew of a person, who had lost her purity, beseeching her accomplice in guilt to put an end to her life, that she might escape the disgrace that threatened her, and actually taking poison for that purpose; so that, for the sake of avoiding temporal dishonor, she did not hesitate to deprive her unborn babe of eternal happiness, and to hurl herself, body and soul, into hell.

Especially
people of
high rank.

There is no greater dishonor in the sight of the world, than for people of high rank to be publicly humiliated and put to shame. Sesostris, one of the kings of Egypt, once compelled four kings, whom he had taken prisoners, to drag his chariot, dressed in their purple garments, with their crowns on their heads. Edgar, king of England, treated two kings, whom he had overcome in Scotland and Ireland, as slaves, and having caused their heads to be shaved, made them row in his galley, with chains round their necks and feet. Whenever Sapor, King of Persia, wished to mount his horse, the great emperor, Valerian, who was his prisoner, had to stoop down on his hands and knees and make a foot-stool of his body for the king to mount by. What a fearful dishonor for crowned heads, who were formerly served on bended knee! I cannot even bear the thought of the indignities that were thus offered them. Do you think, my dear brethren, that the dishonor, heaped on those kings by the tyrants into whose power they fell by the misfortune of war, was made by them a subject of boasting and exultation? Is it not more likely that it would rather make them pine away with grief? And so it is; shameless is he who is not ashamed of his own disgrace; most shameless of all, he who boasts of it.

He who
boasts of
his sins, is
so shameless
as to look
on his dis-
grace as an
honor.

Now to our subject. A shameless, dishonorable man is the sinner who boasts of his sins; for all the disgrace that we have been considering he looks on as glorious and honorable. For what does committing a mortal sin mean? (I am not speaking now of the malice that a miserable creature is guilty of, who, though he is in need of his Creator at every moment, yet does not hesitate to offend and to rebel against the Great God who is present everywhere; nor of the gross ingratitude of the sinner, who, although he is created, preserved in life, and redeemed by

God, yet makes an evil return for all those benefits; and to have the name of being ungrateful is already disgrace enough!) But one question only I will ask: do you know, O man! what a shameful, disgraceful thing you have done, if you have ever committed a mortal sin?

You have made the greatest and most disgraceful mistake possible in your profession. For you have broken the solemn engagement you publicly made with God in the Sacrament of Baptism, and you have wandered far away from your last end, as far, in fact, as the beautiful Heaven above is from the terrible hell below. And do you boast of that mistake? Like the author whose works were burned by the hangman, you have done a deed that is already condemned by God's justice to eternal fire. Do you make a boast of it? Like the cowardly, run-away soldier, you have thrown down your arms at the first sight of the enemy; that is to say, at the first approach of a temptation, that little children drive away with the sign of the Cross, you have yielded; you have deserted your God, and shamefully taken to flight and sold your soul to the devil! Can you make a boast of such cowardice?

For he boasts of a great mis. take he has made in his profession.

Like an adulteress and one who has lost her purity, you have allowed yourself to be dishonored and disgraced by the devil. For, as St. Augustine says, "every soul is either a spouse of Christ, or an adulteress of the devil."¹ By your spiritual adultery you have brought a monster into the world; for, as the Prophet David says: "Behold, he hath been in labor with injustice; he hath conceived sorrow, and brought forth iniquity."² Do you publicly boast of, and exult in, such a shameful deed as that? Do you look on it as an honor and glory?

Of a spiritual adultery.

Like a malefactor caught in the act, you have been, in presence of God and his angels, publicly expelled from the society of the elect, and have been banished your true country; that is, you have lost your right to your heavenly inheritance; your soul has been branded as an accursed child of the devil; you are actually standing on the gallows with the rope around your neck, and if death suddenly overtook you in the state of sin, you would be hurled at once into the abyss of hell. Do you boast of that?

Of his sentence to eternal death.

Your precious soul, that was formerly in the state of grace, a child of God, a spouse of God, an heir to the kingdom of

And that, too, although be-

¹ Omnis anima aut Christi sponsa, aut diaboli adultera est.

² Ecce, parturit in justitiam, concepit dolorem, et peperit iniquitatem.--Ps. vii. 15.

fore he was possessed of such a high dignity.

Heaven, is now lying under the weight of mortal sin like a slave, stripped and shorn of all its virtues, graces, and merits, loaded with chains, an abomination in the sight of God and His saints, and trodden under foot by the devil, who degrades it under his tyrannical yoke like a beast of burden, and exposes it to the laughter and scorn of the demons; as David says of sinners: "Do not become like the horse and the mule, that have no understanding."¹ Do you boast of such a degrading slavery? Is it possible that such shameless depravity can be found amongst men?

He actually boasts of sin, while others are ashamed even to speak of temptations.

What do you think, innocent, God-fearing souls? How does the very name of a mortal sin affect you? What are your feelings when you are tempted to such a sin, even only in thought? You are ashamed of it, even in the solitude of your own hearts, although no human eye could notice that you were subject to such a temptation; and yet it lasted but a few moments in your imagination, against your will. How frightened and troubled your conscience is, lest perhaps you may have consented to the temptation! How would it be with you, if your friends could see how you are being tempted? Oh, you would fly from them covered with shame; you would not dare to appear before them, lest they should see the hideous thought that is annoying you, although you do not consent to it. Yet there are people in the world who are not merely assailed by temptations in thought and desire, but who actually commit grievous sins, and very often, too, sins that are generally committed in secret, so that no one can know of them but God and themselves; and yet they have neither rest nor peace until they make their crimes publicly known, and boast of them before others. Do you think it true, or even probable, that there are really such people in the world? No; you can hardly imagine it possible for a human being to be so lost to all sense of shame.

Others are ashamed to tell their sins in confession.

And you too, sinners, who have committed many and grievous sins, what are your feelings when you are about to be reconciled to the God whom you have offended, and when, with contrite and humble hearts, you are approaching the sacred tribunal of Penance, there to declare your sins candidly to the priest? What are your feelings? I ask you again. Are you not overwhelmed with anguish? Must you not struggle fiercely against yourselves, before you can make up your minds to do that? Your limbs tremble, a cold sweat breaks out over you, your tongue can

¹ *Nolite fieri sicut equus et mulus, quibus non est intellectus.*—Prov. xxxi. 9.

hardly articulate, and it is only by dint of heroically overcoming yourselves that at length you manage to stammer out your sins. And why, in God's name, are you so afraid? It is only to one man that you declare your sins, and he is bound never to speak of them to any one; he is also inclined naturally to the same sins as yourselves, and perhaps he has committed even worse crimes of the same kind as those of which you have accused yourselves; very often he is an utter stranger, who knows nothing whatever about you; in any case, he has a heartfelt compassion for you, is delighted at your repentant confession, and thanks God for the occasion thus presented him of absolving and freeing a sinner and saving a soul from the slavery of the devil, restoring to it its rights as a child of God and an heir of Heaven; he is a man who never, during his whole life, will breathe a word after confession of what you have told him, either to yourselves or to any one else. Besides, you make your confession in order to get rid of the disgrace in which you were before God and His saints, to recover your honor and good name, and to be freed from your guilt. Why, then, are you so much ashamed? Alas, I am ashamed to disclose my own wickedness! Yes; and I know well that it is that very shame which makes many despair to such an extent, that they spend ten, twenty, thirty, forty years in the greatest anguish of conscience, multiply unworthy confessions and communions, and often die impenitent, so that they lose their souls, rather than declare a single, secret mortal sin, committed in their youth, to the priest who is sitting in the place of God in the tribunal of Penance, and who is full of compassion for them. Foolish souls, how I pity you!

But what do you think of those who are so little sensitive to their own disgrace, that they freely and deliberately declare their secret crimes, not in the confessional, that they may be absolved and saved from hell, but to their companions and associates, and boast of and exult in their wickedness, thus adding to their guilt? Nay, what they are sometimes ashamed to tell in confession, they do not hesitate to talk and laugh about with their companions. Is it possible, I ask again, that any one can be so devoid of shame?

Yes, there are unfortunately only too many who glory in their sins, and take a delight in publishing them, either by their actions, or by their boasting words. Most worldlings publish their shame by their actions, since they look on it as a disgrace to allow others to surpass them in wickedness and wantonness.

But he publishes his sins openly.

Either by acts.

They seek honor and glory in the eyes of the world by their luxuriousness and vanity, by their extravagance in dress, by conforming to unlawful fashions, by adulation and flattery, by frequenting dangerous company, and by impure amusements and conversations. Thus they vie with each other in wickedness and vice. They are ashamed of Christian humility and modesty, of piety and devotion, as a mark of simplicity, unbecoming a man of the world. They are ashamed to say grace before and after meals, or to behave reverently in church, before Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, in whose presence the angels tremble. If they go to confession, no one must know of it; if they approach the Sacred Table, they do so early in the morning, so that no one may see them. If they perform other good works, they do them secretly, not through humility, like pious souls, who seek to hide their good works from the eyes of men that they may be known to God alone, but through pride, and because they are ashamed to be looked on as pious and devout. We read in the Gospel of St. Matthew that Our Lord complained of the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees, who boasted of their fasting by their emaciated countenances, of their alms-deeds by causing them to be trumpeted forth to the world, and of their apparent devotion by putting on an air of piety in the temple: "And all their works they do for to be seen of men."¹ But what will Our Lord think, what will He say, on the last day, of the hypocrisy of our modern Christian Pharisees, who conceal their good works, that they may not, according to their own perverse imaginations, be put to shame before the world; while by the unlawful customs they conform to, and by their dissipated lives, they give unmistakable proof that they know how to live as children of the world, and do not wish to lead Christian lives? What else do they do, but boast by their actions of their wicked and vicious mode of life?

Or by words
and by
relating
their sinful
acts.

But many are not satisfied with this alone. They are so shameless that they glory before others of even their secret sins; they boast of getting drunk themselves, and of having made others drunk. Nothing is more common than to hear them say: what a pleasant evening we had yesterday! So and so does not yet know how he got home; I had to deal with seasoned toppers, but I succeeded in getting them all under the table, etc. Or they boast of an act of revenge that they have accomplished, or intend to accomplish, and thus sin grievously against charity. And in

¹ Omnia vero opera sua faciunt, ut videantur ab hominibus.—Matth. xxiii. 5.

what tones of triumph they speak of their revenge, as if they had done something grand and heroic! At last I have had satisfaction, they say: I have put such a one to public shame, or I have beaten him to within an inch of his life, so that he must still feel what I have given him; such a one is still in my debt; I have not forgotten how he has treated me; my time will come, and then let him look out, etc. They boast of acts of injustice; thus, I made so much money out of that simpleton; if so and so has gained his law-suit, he may thank me for it; if I had not helped him, he would not have had the least chance; one must know how to manage such matters, and so on. I led that person by the nose, until I stripped him of everything. If you want to ruin your opponent, bribe the judge or the lawyer: I always do so; it matters not how you do it, as long as you gain your point. They boast of sacrilegious confessions: I fooled that priest nicely; I made very sure of not letting him into all my secrets. I am afraid of learned people and do not like to trust myself in their hands. I have a capital confessor who lets me do as I please; I may come back twenty times with the same old story, and he never refuses me absolution. They boast of abominable sins of impurity, and mention even the persons with whom they sinned. There are even old people who delight to talk before the young and innocent of the excesses of their youth. Nay, many a one boasts of those crimes, although he may not in reality have been guilty of them, simply to satisfy his desire of being looked upon as more ungodly than others.

And a fine thing, too, that is, to boast of committing sin and offending God! becoming God's enemy, and rebelling against Him! making one's self an abomination in the sight of Heaven; a child of malediction, and a bond-slave of Satan! What madness, what folly, to seek glory in that way, and thereby to commit a new sin, to forfeit Heaven anew, and to condemn one's self again to hell! I find in the Sacred Scripture many examples of people who sinned by vainglory; but how did they sin? The Philistine giant boasted of his bodily strength and stature; Absalom, of his beautiful hair; Sennacherib, of his mighty army; Aman, of his power at court; Antiochus, of the many victories he had gained over his enemies; Nabuchodonosor, of his magnificent palace; Ezechias, of his treasures; the Pharisee in the temple, of his fasting and alms-deeds; Lucifer, the prince of demons, of his mighty intelligence and surpassing beauty. All these offended God by their vainglory; but we must acknowledge

What madness to deserve hell by vain-glory of that kind.

that they all had something to be proud of. But you, O sinners, who boast of your sins, what do you do? You, “are glad when you have done evil, and rejoice in most wicked things;” you glory in your dishonor: “Whose glory is in their shame;”¹ as St. Paul says. Therefore you are the most shameless of mortals, and you act more like unreasoning animals, than thinking men; for, as St. Thomas of Villanova says, “Brute beasts may be beaten, slain and burned; but they cannot be made to feel shame.”² In so far they who boast of their sins, are like dumb beasts; “they have committed abomination,” the Prophet Jeremias might well say of them, “yea, rather they are not confounded with confusion, and they have not known how to blush;”³ they have done abominable things, and they make a boast of them!

Conclusion
and exhortation
to
keep silence
about one's
sins.

Ah, sinner, (if any such are here present, as I hope not) I beg of you in the words of Ecclesiasticus: “If there be a sin with thee, disclose it not.”⁴ If you have taken revenge on your neighbor; if you have been intoxicated, or have made others so; if you have given away to an impure passion; ah, do not disclose it! keep your guilt to yourself; let your misery be confined to yourself. Why should others know anything about it? They have, or are bound to have, a good opinion of you, until they find out for certain that you are wicked and godless. If you are not disgusted at the deformity of sin, keep your shame concealed at all events; do not exhibit it openly. Let it suffice for you to be a sinner and a slave of the devil, without proving yourself lost to all sense of shame. If you do not fear the Almighty and all-seeing God, who alone knows your secret sins; if you do not fear the eternal fires of hell; if you are resolved on losing your soul; then carry out your desperate resolution; God leaves you at liberty to do so; but have a little respect for your honor and good name, while you are still on earth! How bitterly you complain sometimes of calumniators and detractors, who speak ill of you, either in your presence, or behind your back! My honor, you say, is as precious as my life; I cannot allow the least stain to rest on it, I would give the last drop of my blood in defence of my good name. Why then should you yourself destroy your own reputation? yet that is what you do, when you boast of

¹ Quorum gloria in confusione eorum.—Phil. iii. 19.

² Jumenta pecuti, occidi, cremari possunt; verecundari non possunt.

³ Abominationem fecerunt: quinimo confusione non sunt confusi, et erubescere necierunt.—Jer. viii. 12.

⁴ Si est tibi delictum, noli denudare.—Eccl. xix. 8.

your sins. Therefore, if you have a sin on your conscience, do not reveal it.

Yet, if you wish to reveal it as you ought, if you wish to escape hell and to gain eternal happiness, I will tell you where you can do so, to your own great glory and honor in the sight of Heaven; go to the sacred tribunal of Penance, and there, putting aside all shame, disclose your sin, with contrite heart, to the minister of God. If you follow that advice, you will be cleansed from the filth of sin, rescued from the slavery of the devil, and be given the liberty, honor, and glory of the children of God, with the certain hope of enjoying honor and glory with the elect for all eternity. Amen.

And to declare it candidly in confession.

SEVENTY-FIFTH SERMON.

**ON THE HOPELESS STATE OF THOSE WHO BOAST
OF THEIR SINS.**

Subject.

He who boasts of his sins is a hopeless sinner: 1. Hopeless as far as he himself is concerned. 2. Hopeless as far as God is concerned.—*Preached on the fourth Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Cum venerit ille, arguet mundum de peccato.—John xvi. 8.
“And when He is come, He will convince the world of sin.”

Introduction.

The sin of which the Holy Ghost will convince the world, is, strictly speaking, the want of faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as the gospel of to-day expressly says: “Of sin, because they believe not in me.” Yet this conviction will be extended to each and every sin, for all sins are due to a want of lively faith, but especially to those sins which are committed against the Holy Ghost, the chief of which is despair on the part of the sinner. But if there is any despairing sinner in the world, my dear brethren, it is, in my opinion, he who boasts of his sins. He is the most shameless of all sinners, whether he boasts by word, or by act, as we have seen in the last sermon. He is a hopeless sinner, too, as I shall now prove.

Plan of Discourse.

He who boasts of his sins is a hopeless sinner; such is the whole subject. Hopeless as far as he himself is concerned; the first part. Hopeless as far as God is concerned; the second part.

O God of goodness, save us all from that hopeless sin, we beg of Thee, by the intercession of Mary our Mother, and the holy angels guardian.

If a sinner wishes to repent and to save his soul, he must acknowledge and detest the wickedness of his sins.

That sick man is in a hopeless state, who, laboring under a dangerous malady, refuses to follow the advice of the doctor or of his friends and to take the medicine that might help to cure him, and that, because he is firmly persuaded that he is in good health, and that there is nothing amiss with him. Nothing short of a miracle can help a man in that state. This, my dear brethren, is an exact picture of the sinner who boasts of his sins; he has as many dangerous maladies, as he has mortal sins on his conscience; his soul is actually dead, and only awaits the last moment of his life, which is known to God alone, to fall into the everlasting death of hell. For him to have any hope of recovery, of saving his soul by true sorrow and conversion to God, he must heal radically the diseases of his soul by using the medicine appointed for that purpose, and be reconciled to God in the Sacrament of Penance; but that is just where there is no hope for such a sinner. For he cannot do penance and recover the grace of God without acknowledging the wickedness and deformity of his sin, and detesting and execrating it, with all his heart, more than any other evil in the world. It is not enough for him to confess his sins most accurately and with all their circumstances that are necessary to be declared, to an approved priest; that is certainly required, but it is, so to speak, the least and most insignificant part of true penance. How many confessions of Christians are but the outward appearance of penance, and mere counterfeits, which add to, instead of taking away, the guilt of sin! For it is only in a minority of cases that people wilfully conceal mortal sins and thus make their confessions invalid. Besides, it is not a great trial for those shameless sinners, who boast of their wickedness and talk about it to others, to tell their sins candidly in confession. That which most frequently interferes with the validity of the sacrament is the fact that there are many who do not fully acknowledge the malice and deformity of sin, and consequently they do not sincerely repent of and detest it.

Hopeless state of those who boast of their Sins. 487

You see now, my dear brethren, why I say that he who boasts of his sins is in a hopeless state, as far as his salvation is concerned; for he does not acknowledge the malice and deformity of his sins, and does not repent of them. He does not acknowledge their malice and deformity, for otherwise he would be ashamed of having committed them and certainly would not make a boast of them. A vain woman, who thinks herself beautiful and wishes to attract admiration, cannot bear to have the least speck of dirt on her face; she is continually studying the glass, and asking others how she looks, so that, if there is anything wrong, she may set it right at once. If some mischievous person were secretly to make a black mark on her cheek or forehead, and she, knowing nothing about it, went out into the street, or into company, what would people say of her? They would say at once that some one had made a fool of her, and that she had not the slightest idea of the trick that had been played on her, for the purpose of making her ridiculous. Suppose, now, that she happens to look in a glass, and sees the black mark on her face; she is ready to die with shame, and runs away at once, nor does she show herself again in the same company for a long time. To be thus ridiculed and put to shame might be to many a cause of serious trouble, and even of illness. On the other hand, the same woman may wear patches on her face, and take some trouble too to put them on properly, without being in the least ashamed of them. And why? Because she does not consider them a deformity, but rather a means of enhancing her good looks, so that people will admire her all the more. By the help of this simile, my dear brethren, you can draw your own conclusion with regard to him who boasts of his sins, and see whether he can have a true knowledge and heartfelt detestation of the malice and deformity of those sins which he glories in. No, that cannot be; he looks at his sins as "beauty-spots"; he thinks they are becoming to him, and therefore he speaks of them and boasts of them. Thus he refuses to acknowledge the malice and turpitude of his sins, and consequently he cannot repent of and detest them.

Now he who boasts of sin does not acknowledge its malice.

The sorrow required for true repentance and conversion is a supernatural act of the will, by which man conceives such a hatred and horror of sin, that he execrates and condemns it more than any other evil, more even than the eternal flames of hell, because it offends God who is infinitely great, or infinitely

He does not repent of and detest his sins.

just, or infinitely deserving of love for His own sake; and he who is not in such disposition has not a sorrow that will avail to obtain forgiveness of his sins. Now, in the case of those of whom we are speaking, where is this horror? "They are glad when they have done evil, and rejoice in most wicked things."¹ O ye holy souls who did penance! David, Peter, Magdalen, the public sinner of the Gospel, what were your dispositions when you first began to repent and to amend your lives? David watered his couch with his tears every night; he ate ashes like bread; he mingled his drink with his weeping, as he himself testifies. The public sinner stands humbly at the door of the temple, striking his breast, and not daring to raise his eyes to Heaven. Peter used to shed bitter tears during the remainder of his life, whenever he was reminded of his denial of Christ by hearing a cock crow. Magdalen retired into a cave in the desert and scourged every day severely her body, that was the occasion of the sins she had formerly committed. But those other sinners rejoice when they have done evil, and boast of having offended God as they would of some heroic action; and by that very boasting they commit another mortal sin. What hope is there of such sinners sincerely repenting and saving their souls? I know, that, as long as a man lives, he can change his perverse will, even if he has become hardened in guilt; and therefore one might think, that, although those sinners do not now see the malice and deformity of their sins, yet they may see it later on and repent of it. They have now neither hatred, nor detestation, nor sorrow for their crimes, yet they may by and by sincerely repent of them, and be reconciled to God by a supernatural sorrow, and thus save their soul. But, my dear brethren, there is very little hope of that; the great probability is that they will never repent. And this is the reason:

He will hardly repent later on, because he has fallen into the very depths of sin.

Of hardened and obdurate sinners the Holy Ghost says in the Book of Proverbs: "The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth; but ignominy and reproach follow him."² There is hardly any means by which he can be brought to repentance and amendment. You may give him the most salutary warnings: "he contemneth;" threaten him with the severest punishment: "he contemneth;" speak to him of the omnipresent, Almighty God, whom he has so often offended:

¹ Lætantur, cum malefecerint, et exultant in rebus pessimis.—Prov. ii. 14.

² Implus, cum in profundum venerit peccatorum, contemnit, sed sequitur eum ignominia et opprobrium.—Ibid. xviii. 3.

“he contemneth;” it is long since the thought of God had any power to move him; show him how he has forfeited the joys of Heaven for a worthless thing: he cares nothing for his loss; open hell to him, if possible, and let him behold all the fearful torments that await him in that sea of fire: he has no fear of it. And why? Because “he is come into the depth of sins.” There you have a true sketch of the sinner who boasts of his sins; he is sunk into the lowest depths of wickedness. The Prophet David calls him mighty in iniquity: “dost thou glory in mischief, thou that art mighty in iniquity?”¹ And certainly he must be sunk deep in depravity and, so to speak, have lost all feeling through a long-continued habit of sin, who is no longer ashamed of his wickedness. For experience teaches, and every one who has offended God by a grievous sin knows well, that the first, second, third, or fourth sin always inspires one with a secret fear and anxiety. And what a combat goes on before consent is given to the first mortal sin! That consent is given after a long struggle, but with fear and trembling; and therefore, as Our Lord says, “every one that doth evil hateth the light.”² He who meditates evil shuns the light; he does not wish to be seen; he hides himself in dark corners; he is afraid almost that the very walls of his room will reproach him. And when he has committed the sin, how ashamed he is of himself! How careful he is to prevent others from coming to a knowledge of his guilt! When David committed adultery with Bethsabee, he was filled with anxiety lest his crime should become known, and he had recourse to all sorts of artifices to conceal it, until at last he commanded the husband of Bethsabee, Urias, a brave soldier who had often exposed his life for him, to be placed in front of the army, so that he might be slain by the enemy. This cruel order was carried out; Urias was killed, and David married Bethsabee; and all that he did solely with the view of concealing his crime from the eyes of men. Nature itself inspires a man with that sense of shame, when he is still a novice in wickedness.

Even after he has made some progress in vice and committed many grievous sins, it still takes a long time to deaden the worm of conscience, so that its gnawings are not felt. He is filled with fear and despondency, when he remembers that he is an enemy of God, a child of perdition; there is no repose nor enjoy-

He loses all fear and anxiety about committing sin.

¹ Quid gloriaris in malitia, qui potens es in iniquitate.—Ps. li. 3.

² Omnis qui male agit, odit lucem.—John iii. 20.

ment for him even in his sinful pleasures, and it is the greatest torment to him to think of having to declare his sin even to one man in the tribunal of penance. Even they who have been for some time in the habit of indulging recklessly in sin, and who have as yet no intention of amending, seldom go so far as to wish to be looked on as bad and vicious. The proud man does not like to be thought proud; the avaricious man dreads nothing more than to be called a miser, and tries to palliate his parsimony by saying that it is a necessary economy; anger is called just indignation; hatred, envy, and vindictiveness are dignified with the name of lawful resentment; and thus the vices are clad with the appearance of virtue, that they may be concealed from the eyes of the world. It is the lowest degree of wickedness to wish to appear wicked and to put off all appearance of goodness. And here we have the true character of him who boasts of his sins; he has neither fear nor anxiety on account of them: he is not ashamed of them, nor does he try to hide them; he glories in publishing them; his delight is to be looked on as impious and ungodly; he does not wish to be thought pious. He has come into the depth of sins, and is obdurate in wickedness, so that he scornfully rejects all the means that could help him to repent and amend, and therefore he is in a hopeless state as far as his salvation is concerned; as Louis of Grenada says: "It seems to me a sure sign of reprobation, to have a facility in committing mortal sin without any sense of sorrow."¹ And that is my opinion, too, my dear brethren. Yet, what am I saying? Who am I, O great God, that I should dare to set bounds to Thy infinite power and mercy? Is there any heart so hard that Thou canst not soften it, if Thou wilt? No; the treasures of Thy grace are inexhaustible, and in it Thou hast an endless store of inspirations and impulses, with which Thou canst in a moment convert the most obdurate sinner! Thy goodness and mercy, too, are infinite, and are always ready, at every moment, to receive even the greatest sinners, if they wish to turn to Thee! So it is, my dear brethren; and therefore we must never despair of the conversion and salvation of any one, no matter how wicked he is, as long as the breath of life is in him. Still, if I consider the matter according to the general course of divine Providence, I find that there is a great difficulty attending the conversion of those who boast of their sins, for there is no reason to suppose that

¹ *Reprobationis signum mihi certum videtur facilitas lethaliter peccandi sine doloris sensu.*

the just God will ever give them the extraordinary and most powerful graces that they require to be converted; and therefore, as far as God is concerned, the salvation of such sinners appears hopeless. The reason of this I shall briefly explain in the

Second Part.

The crime of high treason is committed by one who insults his sovereign, and it is punished by the severest kind of death. If that crime is committed in a sudden fit of passion, and secretly, so that no one is aware of it except the culprit and the sovereign to whom the insult is offered, then perhaps the latter, if he is of a merciful and forgiving disposition, may be induced to listen to the humble prayers and apologies of his guilty subject, and to pardon the offence. But if the culprit is so foolhardy as to boast of the insult he offered his sovereign, and to make it a subject of laughter among his companions, and actually to seek thereby to foment a rebellion against lawful authority, what would you think of it, my dear brethren? Would you say that there is the least hope of pardon for such a one? No; such insolence as that could not be tolerated even by a private individual, much less by a crowned head, who must rule his people by his authority, and make them respect and obey the laws of the land. To have his tongue torn out and to be quartered is too slight a punishment for one who openly insults his sovereign and is guilty of high treason.

Public offences against a sovereign are not easily pardoned.

Oh, sinner, you are guilty of the same crime against the infinite majesty of God, when you boast of your sins. You have deliberately deprived yourself of the use of reason by drunkenness, or you have encouraged others to a similiar excess; you have vented your wrath on your neighbor, you have had revenge on him who has injured you; you have gratified your impure desires; all these sins are so many insults and acts of contempt towards the infinite majesty of God, that deserve to be punished by hell fire. Another has committed the same sins, but secretly and stealthily, and at first with a feeling of shame and fear at having offended God so grievously, so that he sinned because he was overcome by a violent temptation, and he is very careful to hide his guilt from the knowledge of men. He has sinned grievously, I know, and deserves hell; but we have a patient, long-suffering and merciful God, who is always ready to receive into His favor the sinner who acknowledges his guilt, and returns to Him with a contrite heart, and that favor is easily shown

Such is the crime committed against God by him who boasts of his sins.

to the secret sinner, because the insult he has offered to God is, so to speak, a hidden and private thing; the divine honor is assailed only by and in presence of one individual, accompanied perhaps by the parties of his guilt. But you, O presumptuous man, are not satisfied with that; it is not enough for you to despise and insult your Lord and your God; you must make known to others the insult you have offered Him, and boast of it to your companions! Can you imagine that you will find a way to recover His friendship and favor as easily as he who sins in secret and is ashamed of his guilt? Must that great and jealous God, who so often assures us in Holy Scripture that He will not allow any one to attack His honor and authority with impunity, bear such an insult patiently? No, no; that cannot be. I know that St. Augustine has made known to the whole world the many and grievous sins he committed in his youth, and that he has published them, so that any one who wishes may read them; but why did he do that? What was the holy man's object? It was to humble himself, to put himself to public shame: to show to the whole world that he had acted most unjustly towards God; to testify to the deep and heartfelt sorrow that he felt for his sins, and to the hatred and execration with which he regarded them; to make known to all, and to glorify throughout the world, the infinite goodness and mercy of God who had borne with him so patiently for so many years, and had admitted him again to His grace and friendship; to give courage and confidence to all sinners to do penance, and to return to God without delay; to inflame all hearts with love for a God who is so deserving of love, and thus to make reparation for the insults he has offered to the Almighty. Such was the desire for humiliation with which true contrition and a burning love of God had inspired St. Augustine.

And that,
too, as a pub-
lic defiance
and rebellion
against God.

But you, on the contrary, O shameless sinner, who boast publicly of your sins, what are your motives in doing so? You wish to gain honor and glory before men, because you have ventured to offend God and to transgress His law without scruple or shame; to protest before the world that you care nothing for God's commandments, and that you disregard alike His promises and His threats; to show others that you still have a secret pleasure and satisfaction in remembering that you have sinned and offended God; to carry sin about in triumph, as it were, by making your honor and glory before the world consist therein; and to encourage others to be just as unscrupu-

lous as yourself in transgressing the divine law. And what else is that but to treat the Almighty with public disrespect, as if He were unworthy of honor or reverence, to defy Him, and, as it were, to say to Him: what do I care for Thee? What else is it but to make one's self a leader of rebels, and to seek to induce others to revolt against God? What else is it but to take away all shame and dishonor from sin, to make it respectable and becoming, and to set it up on a throne, since you make it the subject of mutual rejoicing and congratulations? And where is all that done? In what country? In Tartary, perhaps, amongst barbarians? In a savage land inhabited by heathens and infidels? Amongst idolaters and sworn enemies of God? Amongst witches and sorcerers who devote themselves to the service of the devil? No; it is done in a Christian country, in the bosom of the Holy Catholic and only true Church, in sight of the Cross of Jesus Christ, by and amongst Catholic Christians who in the holy Sacrament of Baptism have publicly sworn to uphold the honor and glory of Jesus Christ, their God and Saviour, even to the last drop of their blood. These are they who thus boast of and glory in having committed sin and offended God!

And wilt Thou, O Almighty God, bear with that? Wilt Thou allow men to insult Thee thus publicly with impunity? Wilt Thou give Thy grace and favor, and that too in an extraordinary measure which Thou owest to no sinner, to one who acts so insolently and presumptuously against Thy honor? No; for Thou assurest us of the contrary by Thy Prophet Isaias: "Their tongue and their devices are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of His majesty. The shew of their countenance hath answered them; and they have proclaimed abroad their sin as Sodom, and they have not hid it."¹ And what will happen to them? "Woe to their soul, for evils are rendered to them."² But was it not the intention of the Prophet to threaten them with evil which should befall them in the future? Certainly. Could he not then have said, woe to their soul, for evils will be rendered to them? True; but the punishment that awaits them is so certain that it may be looked on as a present reality: therefore, "evils are rendered to them;" the wrath of God has already overtaken them, nor is there any hope of their escaping it. Woe to their soul! and woe forever!

Therefore
his salvation seems
hopeless
as far as
God is concerned.

¹ *Lingua eorum et adinventiones eorum contra Dominum, ut provocarent oculos majestatis ejus. Agnitio vultus eorum respondit eis; et peccatum suum quasi Sodoma prædicaverunt, nec absconderunt.—Isa. iii. 8, 9.*

² *Væ animæ eorum, quoniam reddita sunt eis mala.—Ibid. 9.*

Conclusion
and exhortation to
correct
and to
avoid those
boasters.

Ah, dear Christians, be careful to avoid that hopeless state of sin; do not allow yourselves to become so shameless and so presumptuous as to make a boast and a source of amusement of your sins! If any one speaks vauntingly of his sins in your presence, then, at all events, show to the Almighty God, who is present everywhere and who is worthy of all fear and love, the same respect that you would show to your sovereign if any one attacked his honor, especially if there is reason to believe that the latter will hear of your conduct. Oh, how careful people are under such circumstances! They cast their eyes to the ground; no one speaks a word; every one seems anxious to leave the company in which such disrespectful conversation is carried on; nay, he who is zealous for his sovereign's honor will not hesitate to stop with a blow the insolent mouth that dares to speak thus. Let every good Christian, I say, have the same regard for the honor and glory of God. If you hear any one dishonoring God by boasting of his sins, sanctify your hand by giving him a good blow on the blasphemous mouth; but if you have not courage or zeal enough for that, interrupt him at least by a gentle warning, and tell him that it is small honor to him to have offended God; or else show by your silence that you do not approve of such talk. In any case, do not allow yourself to be scandalized by it; nor seem to approve of it by laughing at it; nor must your hatred and detestation of sin be a whit less, although you hear others glorying in their sins. You must feel sorrow for the insult offered the divine honor; say to yourselves with contrite hearts: O God be merciful to me and all poor sinners: "From my secret sins cleanse me, O Lord; and from those of others spare thy servant." Thou, O Lord, knowest the sins I have committed in secret; I confess my guilt to Thee: "To Thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before Thee."¹ I am sorry from my heart for ever having offended Thee! Instead of boasting of my past sins, I will glory in and make publicly known the infinite goodness and mercy with which Thou hast so patiently borne with me, a presumptuous sinner, for so many years, and as I confidently trust, forgiven me my transgressions; I will not cease to bewail my sins as long as I live, that I may one day exult, through Thy great mercy, in the sight of Heaven for all eternity. Amen.

¹ Ab occultis meis munda me; et ab alienis parce servo tuo.—Ps. xviii. 13, 14.

² Tibi soli peccavi, et malum coram te feci.—Ibid. 1. 6.

SEVENTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE PRESUMPTION OF EVERY SINNER.

Subject.

Every one who commits a mortal sin, treats his Lord and his God most contemptuously. What insolence and presumption on the part of man! How fearful the malice of sin!—*Preached on the fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Unum sustinebit, et alterum contemnet.—Matth. vi. 24.

“ He will sustain the one, and despise the other.”

Introduction.

In these few words, my dear brethren, is described the presumption of every sinner: “ No man can serve two masters,” says Christ; no one can serve God, and at the same time the devil, the corrupt flesh, or the perverse world. Now, what does man do when he commits a mortal sin? “ For either he will hate the one, and love the other; or he will sustain the one, and despise the other.” He hates his God, who is his lawful Master, and loves the world, or the flesh; he sustains the devil, and despises his God. O sinners, is there one among you who finds it hard to acknowledge and repent of his sins? Let him only consider well what it means to have treated his Lord and his God with contempt; and he will find therein cause enough for the most profound sorrow and detestation of his offences. To that end I will now spend a little longer than usual in explaining the meaning of those words. This sermon will be profitable, not only for sinners, to arouse them to repentance and amendment, but also for those who have already repented of and amended their wicked lives, to keep them from relapsing into sin, and also for the just and the innocent, to give them a greater knowledge of the malice of sin, and thus inspire them with a greater horror of it.

Plan of Discourse.

Every one who commits a mortal sin treats his Lord and his God most contemptuously. This is the proposition which I intend to prove. What insolence and presumption on the part of

man! How fearful the malice of sin! Such will be the inference from the first truth. To impress you with the fear of ever offending God is the object of this sermon.

O Immaculate Mother of my Lord and my God, and you, O holy angels, who are His ministers and servants, obtain for us all the grace to know what a terrible thing it is to commit sin, and thereby to despise Our Lord and God, that we may never dare to offend Him.

God is the
Lord.

Amongst all the titles which, as far as our weak understanding can know His infinite attributes, properly belong to God, there is none that He has reserved to Himself in such a special manner as that of the Lord, the Almighty Lord. Whenever He speaks of Himself, or is spoken of in the Holy Scripture, it is nearly always by the name of Lord. With this He begins, continues, and ends all His command and laws. "Thus saith the Lord," are the words with which the Prophets begin their inspired utterances; "Thus saith the Lord Almighty," are the words in which they conclude them. If He promises His people to protect them against their enemies, or to free them from tribulation, He generally confirms His words by saying, "And you shall know that I am the Lord." If He threatens punishment and eternal death to the wicked and disobedient, He gives a terrible emphasis to His words by adding, "And they shall know that I am the Lord." If He is asked why He does this or that in such and such a way, His answer is: "Because I am the Lord." So that it is the same whether we say the Lord or the Almighty: God has done it, or the Lord has done it: "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Thus He shows the greatness of His majesty and unlimited supreme power over all created things, which He cannot and will not share with any creature, and which all creatures must obey, like servants and slaves, with the greatest submission.

He is the
Lord of in-
finite great-
ness.

But how great is the Lord our God? That is a useless question to ask, my dear brethren. If I wish to answer it, I should use the words of Epictetus; if I could say how great God is, then, "either I should be another God, or God should not be what He is."² For He alone can understand and say how great He is, and He can say it to no one but Himself; because no understanding outside of Him can comprehend the height and greatness of His majesty. Ask the heavenly hosts of angels

¹ Dominus dedit, Dominus abstulit, sit nomen Domini benedictum.—Job i. 21.

² Aut Deus non esset Deus, aut ego essem deus.

who surround His throne, and see Him clearly, how great this Lord is. They will turn away from you in silence, and trembling with awe, veil their faces before Him, as if they could not bear the brightness of His Majesty. If I place Him above everything in Heaven and on earth, if I say that God in His goodness and perfection far surpasses all that He has created and will create, I should do Him more injury than honor by a comparison of the kind; just as if I were to compare a man to a worm, and say that he far surpasses the worm in excellence. "Lord," says St. Ambrose, "if I say Thou art greater than all created things, I do Thee an injury by comparing Thee with Thy works."¹ The philosopher Simonides offered a great insult to God when, on being asked about the essence and perfection of God, he requested three days' time to consider the question, and at the expiration of that time, deferred answering for another three days, so that his answer might be complete and satisfactory. Three days indeed, and three days again! If all the Cherubim and Seraphim were to spend a whole eternity thinking of it, they could neither understand nor explain what a great Lord God is. This is all we can think and say with the Prophet David: "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and of His greatness there is no end."² So great is He, that St. Paul is amazed that He should not be ashamed to be concerned about us, and to be called our God: "God is not ashamed to be called their God."³

If we consider His power, who can resist Him? He is the Lord; to will and to accomplish is the same thing to Him. Does He wish to create the world and all that is in it, or millions of worlds vaster and more beautiful than this? He requires no help, no instrument for that purpose, but a single word, the breath of His mouth, as the royal Prophet says: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were established; and all the power of them by the spirit of His mouth."⁴ And where does He place the world? On what foundation? "He hangeth the earth upon nothing."⁵ Let the most clever inventors, the most experienced masters and talented artists of the whole world put their heads together, and see whether they

God is Almighty.

¹ Domine, si te omnibus majorem dixero, injuriose te tuis operibus comparavi.—S. Ambros. L. 5, de fide, c. 9.

² Magnus Dominus et laudabilis nimis, et magnitudinis ejus non est finis.—Ps. cxliv. 3.

³ Non confunditur Deus, vocari Deus eorum.—Hebr. xl. 15.

⁴ Verbo Domini cœli firmati sunt, et spiritu oris ejus omnis virtus eorum.—Ps. xxxii. 6.

⁵ Appendit terram super nihilum.—Job xxvi. 7.

can find any way of making even an apple remain unsupported in the air without falling to the ground. But our Lord and our God can keep the vast globe of the earth in the midst of the air without support or foundation for it to rest on: "He hangeth the earth upon nothing." Does He wish to destroy the earth and reduce it to nothing? Again, He need only make a sign as the Jewish hero, Judas Machabaeus, reminded his soldiers, when exhorting them to fight bravely. "For they," he said of the enemy, "trust in their weapons, and in their boldness; but we trust in the Almighty Lord, who at a beck can utterly destroy both them that come against us, and the whole world."¹ If any man had strength enough to crush to powder a ball of stone or iron by merely closing his fingers on it, who would allow himself to be grasped by such a hand? And yet what would it be, compared to the mighty hand of the Lord? If we consider His riches, we find that He has everything, and wants nothing. "Thou O Lord of all things, who wantest nothing"² was the prayer of the priests in the Old Law. "Is there any numbering of His soldiers?"³ asks the friend of Job. Consider His pomp and magnificence, as the Prophet Daniel describes it, and you will cry out in astonishment: "Thousands of thousands ministered to Him, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before Him."⁴ O ye monarchs and kings of this world, you must grovel in the dust before this Lord! No matter how great the power He has given you, you are not able, by your utmost efforts, to create a single blade of grass; with all your might you cannot command even a single drop of rain to respect your crowned heads, nor a single gnat not to disturb your rest! In spite of the respect, reverence, and submission that are due to your exalted persons, you must humbly acknowledge, that, compared to this Lord, you are infinitely lowlier and meaner than the poorest beggar is, when compared to you! He is the Lord of lords, who alone can say of Himself: "I am the Lord, and there is none else."⁵

And yet, what a fearful crime it is in the eyes of the world, to offend an earthly sovereign! He bears the scepter in one hand,

How presumptuous the man who dares to despise this Lord!

¹ Nam illi quidem armis confidunt, ait, simul et audacia: nos autem in omnipotente Domino, qui potest et venientes adversum nos et universum mundum uno nutu delere, confidimus.—II. Mach. viii. 18.

² Tu Domine universorum, qui nullus indiges.—Ibid. xiv. 35.

³ Numquid est numerus militum ejus?—Job xxv. 3.

⁴ Millia millium ministrabant ei; et decies millies centena millia assistebant ei.—Dan. vii. 10.

⁵ Ego Dominus et non est alter.—Isa. xiv. 7.

and the sword in the other, to punish those who dare to resist his authority; the laying waste whole cities and countries is sometimes not punishment enough for a single insult offered to an earthly ruler. But why, dear brethren, speak of the kings and monarchs of earth? What a disturbance is sometimes created in a family, if a servant is disobedient or obstinate! What a crime it must then be, what wickedness and presumption, for a mere mortal to dare to offend the Almighty Lord, and to despise Him! Could one believe such a thing to be possible? "Can the vile dust of the earth," asks St. Bernard in astonishment, "dare to offend such awful Majesty?"¹

Alas, it is not impossible; it may happen; it has happened frequently; it still happens every day and hour, and it will happen. You, and I, and all who commit mortal sin, are guilty of that wickedness and presumption. We insult our Lord and our God by despising His authority, His majesty, and His almighty and supreme power. Is it not "the Lord Himself, against whom we have sinned?"² There is no necessity of wasting time in proving this; every one knows it who understands what sin is. For what else is sin but a transgression of the divine commands, an opposition of a created will to the will of the Creator; in a word, a rebellion and disobedience by which man refuses to do what God wills him to do, or does what God forbids him to do. Hear how this great Lord complains by the Prophet Isaias of all sinners: "I called, and you did not answer; I spoke, and you did not hear; and you did evil in my eyes, and you have chosen the things that displease me:"³ you have refused to do as I commanded you. "You slighted the commandment of the Lord your God, and did not believe Him, neither would you hearken to His voice; but were always rebellious."⁴ This very day, the Lord says to you, O sinner, and to me, that we must keep within the bounds of the law He has laid down for us, and never refuse Him our service. But what answer do we give Him, when we commit sin? Hear what He says by the Prophet Jeremias: "Thou hast broken my yoke, thou hast burst my bonds, and thou saidst, I will not serve."⁵ And yet I have placed a sweet

Yet it is done by every one who sins mortally.

¹ Tam terribilem Majestatem audet vills pulvisculus irritare?

² Nonne Dominus ipse, cui peccavimus?—Isa. xlii. 28.

³ Vocavi, et non respondistis: locutus sum, et non audistis, et faciebatis malum in oculis meis, et quæ nolui, elegistis.—Ibid. lxx. 12.

⁴ Contempsistis imperium Domini Dei vestri, et non credidistis ei, neque vocem ejus audire voluistis, sed semper fulstis rebelles.—Deut. ix. 23, 24.

⁵ Confregisti jugum meum, rupisti vincula mea, et dixisti: Non serviam.—Jer. ii. 20.

yoke and a light burden on thee:"¹ but, like an untamed horse, thou hast thrown off My yoke and My burden, and trampled them under foot: "Thou hast broken My yoke." The commandments I have given thee, are so many bonds to bind thee in My love and service, and in the true freedom of My children; but thou hast torn them asunder, and hast dared to refuse absolutely to obey Me, and to serve Me. If thy friend asked anything of thee, thou wouldst grant it willingly, and wouldst count it an honor and a pleasure to serve him; and thou art ready to do just as much for a neighbor, or a mere acquaintance, or even for an utter stranger. But when I, thy only and supreme Lord, ask thee for anything, thou answerest without shame: no, I will not serve.

By breaking any commandment, he opposes the will of God.

Yes, O great Lord, so shamefully do I treat Thee whenever I transgress Thy commands! Thou sayest to me that I must sanctify the Lord's day, and devote all Sundays and holydays to Thy service alone by good works; but I answer: no, I will not serve; I will spend those days in gambling and drinking. Thou sayest I must honor my father and mother, and treat them with due respect, obey and love them; but with all disobedient children, I answer: no, I will not serve. Thou commandest parents to "bring up their children in the discipline and correction of the Lord;"² to train them up in Thy fear and love for their last end, not to teach them worldly vanities, but to keep them from evil and lead them on to good. No, says the father or mother, I will not serve; Thou mayest command me a thousand times, but I will not obey. "But I say to you, love your enemies;"³ forgive them from your hearts; do not cherish hatred, anger, or a desire of revenge. But the vindictive man refuses to obey; let me only get my enemy in my power, he says, and I will revenge myself in spite of Thy command; I will not obey; I cannot and will not endure the sight of that man. Thou commandest us not to steal, nor to injure another's property, either by word or deed, or to hinder another's prosperity, or to retain anything unjustly. No, is the answer; I will not serve; I will steal whenever I can; I will get possession of that property unjustly; I will not make restitution. Thou commandest us not to commit adultery, nor to give way to impurity even in thought or desire, much less in

¹ Jugum enim meum suave est, et onus meum leve.—Matth. xi. 30.

² Educate illos in disciplina et correptione Domini.—Ephes. vi. 4.

³ Ego autem dico vobis : Diligite inimicos vestros.—Matth. v. 44.

words or acts; to avoid dangerous company, and to renounce at once that unlawful attachment. But the answer is again, I will not serve; I prefer Thy creature to Thy command; I will give every freedom to my eyes, ears, and other senses; I must gratify my lusts. Thou commandest us not to curse our neighbor, nor to wish him harm, not to speak ill of him, nor in any way to scandalize him, or give him occasion to sin. But Thy command is disregarded; I will not serve, is the answer; I will not obey. Thou sayest: But I am the Lord thy God who command thee! No matter, I will not obey. But I will punish thee in hell with the demons, if thou art disobedient! No matter, I disregard Thy threats; I will not serve.

See, O presumptuous mortal, so insolently do you act towards Him whom you know to be your supreme Lord and God, whenever you commit a mortal sin! I say, Him whom you know to be your supreme Lord; for when King Pharaoh was told, on the part of God, that he should allow the Israelites to go, he answered at once: "Who is the Lord that I should hear His voice? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go."¹ Pharaoh paid no attention to what the God of Israel said. But he would have shown far greater pride and insolence, if he had said: I know the Lord, but I will not hear His voice, nor receive any commands from Him. What the shameless pride of Pharaoh could not do, that you do, O sinner! For you acknowledge God to be your supreme Lord and Master; you know full well what He so earnestly requires of you; and yet you dare to say to Him that you will not hear His voice, nor listen to His command, nor obey Him, nor serve Him. Is not that despising His authority and supreme power? Is not that an act of rebellion against His will? And a creature dares to act thus towards his Creator! A vile worm of the earth, towards the great God! If the Lord were your equal, could you act more insolently towards Him? But, you think, far be that from me; I have never said such a thing in my whole life; I have sinned, not through contempt of God, but for the sake of gain or pleasure. True, you have not said it in words; but you have by your sinful actions, which speak louder than any tongue could, and are understood better by the Lord who knows all things. If I give you a blow on the cheek, although I keep silent, and do not say I wish to hurt you, you feel it all the same, and I have insulted you; for I

By his acts
he says to
God: I will
not do as
Thou com-
mandest.

¹ Quis est Dominus, ut audiam vocem ejus? Nescio Dominum, et Israel non dimittam.
—Exod. v. 2.

know well that you do not like it. You command your servant-maid to do something; she says nothing, but does not obey; you may command or threaten as you will, she continues obstinate. Do you not think her guilty of contemning your authority? You certainly do not propose to yourself contempt of God as the end and aim of your actions; but in reality you do contemn Him, since you know that act to be in direct opposition to His express command. What greater presumption can there be?

He encourages others not to hear the voice of God.

Yet the presumption of most sinners goes even beyond this, and they offer a still more grievous insult to the Lord. For he who sins, and who requires an accomplice and helper in his sin, if only in thought and desire, not only disobeys his Lord and his God, but, terrible to think, actually makes others share in his disobedience. He wishes, as it were, to be a greater lord than God; he sets more value on his own will and command, than on the will and command of the Almighty. See now whether this is not the case. The sinner says, not in word, but in deed, I desire to prove that God is less deserving of obedience than I; He forbids that man to swear rashly, or to bear false witness; but my wish is that he should do so, my interest requires it, and I will cajole and bribe him until he accedes to my wish. God commands all men to abstain from drunkenness, and not to injure their reason or their health by excessive indulgence; but I wish the contrary to happen; I will ply that man with drink until he is completely intoxicated. The Lord commands that married woman or that maiden to observe chastity according to her state; but my wish is that she should help me to gratify my sensual desires, and she will do it, in spite of what God commands her; He promises her eternal joys, if she is faithful to Him; I have nothing for her but a few flattering words, and she will listen to me rather than to God. The Lord forbids that official to be untrue to his trust, that lawyer to defend an unjust cause, that judge to pronounce an unjust sentence, that superior to tolerate any injustice; He causes them to hear His voice by His preachers and confessors; He threatens them with a terrible judgment and the flames of hell, if they do not hearken to Him, but all to no purpose; my money, or persuasion, or trickery, or authority will have the contrary effect, and my will must be done.

What fearful presumption!

O my Lord and my God, canst Thou behold this and yet bear it patiently? Ye heavens, how can you restrain your thunderbolts from avenging the insult thus offered your Creator? O man, can you dare to think of such wickedness, not to speak of

committing it? A rebel angel once thought to himself, "I will ascend into Heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will ascend above the height of the clouds, I will be like the Most High;"¹ and like a flash of lightning he was hurled into the abyss of hell. But man goes, so to speak, still further; he is not satisfied with being equal to God; he must have greater authority than He; his will must be preferred to the will of God: "For he hath stretched out his hand against God, and hath strengthened himself against the Almighty."² What a fearful thing that is! If a subject rebels against his earthly sovereign, the whole country demands that he expiate his crime with his life, and even death by the gallows or wheel is deemed insufficient chastisement for his presumption; and who pities even the death agony of such a criminal! Yet a miserable mortal dares to revolt against Heaven, against the almighty, infinite majesty of God, and to say, I will not serve, I will not do as my Lord and my God commands; but no one is disturbed thereat; it happens every hour of the day; we bear with it in our children and domestics; we do it ourselves and intend doing it again!

Miserable mortal, what makes you so daring and insolent as thus to provoke one who can in a moment hurl you into the depths of hell? Suppose I held you by the hair of the head suspended over the parapet of a bridge, ready to drop you into the water, how would you behave towards me? Would you struggle against me, abuse and curse, and try to beat me? Oh no; you would keep quite still, for I need only open my hand to let you drop into the river below, where you would be drowned. I think you would rather be inclined to talk very gently to me, and to beg my pardon most humbly, if you had ever done anything to offend me. And yet, if I, dear brethren, let you fall, I should only take away your temporal life; I could not do your soul the least harm. Now I ask you, has not your Lord and your God got you in His hands, far more than I should in that imaginary case? When, how, and where He wills. He has complete power over you. If He withdraws His all-powerful hand from you, where will you fall? Not into a river, from which you might possibly be rescued, but into the abyss of hell, thus losing not only the temporal life of the body, but the eternal life of the soul. He is the Lord whom Christ tells us to fear, in the

Shown by a simile.

In cœlum conscendam, super astra Dei exaltabo solium meum; ascendam super altitudinem nubium, similis ero Altissimo.—Isa. xiv. 13, 14.

² Tetendit enim adversus Deum manum suam, et contra Omnipotentem roboratus est.—Job xv. 25.

Gospel of St. Matthew: "Fear Him that can destroy both soul and body into hell."¹

All creatures are ready to avenge such an insult to their Creator.

Nor would it cost him any trouble to do this in a moment; for all the creatures He has made are so many executioners who stand ready to do His bidding, and to inflict punishment on you. For, as St. Thomas of Aquin, the Angelic Doctor, says, even senseless creatures have an innate desire and inclination to avenge, as far as they can, every insult offered to their Creator.² They all cry out against the sinner, just as Abisai did against Semei, who was reviling his King David: "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? I will go and cut off his head."³ I will go, cries out the fire, when man sins and despises his Creator, I will go, O Creator, and burn him to ashes! I will go, exclaims the water, and overwhelm him, and drown him! I will withdraw from him, says the air, that he may be suffocated. I will open under his feet, cries out the earth, and swallow him up. We will go, howl the wild beasts in the wilderness, and devour him. I will go, barks out his own dog, and tear him to pieces. I will fall in upon him, says the house in which he has sinned, and crush him. The lightning and hail are ready to strike him. The demons are only waiting the word to carry him off. If the Lord only gave a sign, there would be an end to the sinner. And yet, O man, you, who are so completely in the hands of God, in all places and at all times, dare to defy and provoke Him, to despise His commands, and to say by your actions, I will not serve Thee, O Lord; I will not do as Thou commandest!

This shows the great malice of every sin.

This, my dear brethren, is enough to make our hair stand on end with horror. To sin means to despise the Almighty God, and not to do as He wills. That is a consideration that should make you pine away with grief and sorrow, if you have committed but one mortal sin; and it should at all events keep you from all grievous sin in future. To sin means to despise the Almighty God! Oh, if we thought of that as we ought, which is, alas, the last thing the vain world thinks of, we certainly should not be astonished to hear, that, as the learned Sessius says, God receives more dishonor and insult from a single sin, than He does honor and glory from all the good works of the angels and saints in Heaven, and of the just on earth. "Sin," says the learned

¹ *Time eum, qui potest et animam et corpus perdere in gehennam.*—Matth. x. 28.

² *Naturaliter est institus cuilibet creaturæ appetitus vindicandi injuriam creatoris.*

³ *Quare maledicxit canis hic mortuus domino meo regi? vadam, et amputabo caput ejus.*—II. Kings xvi. 9.

author, "appears greater to God as an evil, than all good works do as a good. If God were capable of feeling pain, sin would cause Him more affliction, than good works cause him joy." ¹ He would feel more sorrow at one act of revenge, than He does joy at the heroic virtue displayed by those who for His sake forgive their worst enemies; He would be more troubled by one act of impurity, than consoled by the spotless purity of all virgins, and of His own ever Immaculate Mother Mary; He would be more embittered by the irreverence of those who talk, and laugh, and behave disrespectfully in church, than pleased at the zeal and devotion of the most pious souls. The reason of this, says Sessius, is "because all the works of men are as nothing compared to God," ² and we should owe God a tribute of infinite honor and love, if we were capable of paying it. But what is most intolerable in the sight of God, is that a miserable creature should despise and dishonor Him. If we only thought of that aright, we should not be surprised at what St. Catharine of Siena says, that if we knew clearly what a great injury is offered God by sin, and were in the midst of a fiery furnace surrounded by flames, and could save ourselves therefrom by committing sin, we would rather burn to death, than commit a single sin. Nor should we be astonished at St. Anselm, who said that if he had to choose between offending God, and being buried forever in hell, he would prefer the latter.

And this is the reason why mortal sin is punished eternally. Many a one may think that God is too strict with His poor creatures, that the pains of hell are too severe for a single sin, and that it is not right to have to spend a whole eternity in fearful torments for a momentary pleasure, that may have been consented to only in thought. True, my dear brethren, it is a severe punishment to have to spend a hundred years, a hundred thousand million years, in hell, and yet to have hardly reached the beginning, not to speak of the end of eternity, and that, too, for one sin that was committed in a moment. But if we consider the malice and presumption with which it was committed, we shall find that it is not the momentary pleasure which is so severely punished, but the perverse will with which the sinner has enjoyed that pleasure, knowing that he was acting against God's express command. And if we remember what a great Lord He

Which is
justly pun-
ished in
hell.

¹ Peccatum plus a Deo aestimatur in ratione mali, quam omnia opera bona in ratione boni. Peccatum magis Deum affligeret, si capax esset doloris, quam omnia opera bona exhilararent.

² Omnia opera hominum sunt ad instar nihil respectu Dei.

is who is thus despised, and whose Majesty is thus insulted, knowingly and deliberately and for such a miserable thing, by one who is always in the power of that Lord, then we shall understand why theologians say that the punishment of hell, instead of being too severe for one sin, is not severe enough, and that God shows His mercy even when chastising sinners eternally.

The consideration of this should keep us from all sin.

What, O sinners, are the thoughts and resolutions that this truth inspires you with? Will you still continue in the state in which you now are? Ah, I beg of you, change at once! You have against you a great Lord, whose enmity you have first provoked by wanton insults, and from whose power you can never escape. Woe to you, if He should now wish to take vengeance on you! Do you intend to sin again? Ah, think of what you do! The duration of the sin is short, the pleasure or profit it brings you, is small; but the injury you thereby offer to God is exceeding great. If you are ever assailed by a violent passion or temptation, if company or occasion is about to lead you into sin, if the desire of unjust gain, or of revenge, or the unlawful love of a creature almost compels you to transgress the divine law, then, I beg of you, wait a moment; say to yourselves first: where am I going to? what am I doing? My sovereign Lord is present and sees me; shall I, in spite of that, say to Him, I will not serve, I will not obey Thee? If that thought is not enough to keep you from sin, you have either reached the farthest limits of presumption, madness, and desperation, or else you have no real faith in God and His commandments.

As it kept Joseph from sin.

What a fearful temptation it was that Joseph had to endure in Egypt from the continual solicitations of that wanton woman, as the Holy Scripture says. And yet the mere thought of the injury he would do his master by consenting, was enough to keep him from sin. "How can I do this wicked thing," he said, "and sin against my God?"¹ Not only am I unwilling, but actually unable to do it. But why, O Joseph, can you not do evil? So many of your ancestors and relations have committed grievous sins. Think of what your own brothers did; was not "Her, the first-born of Juda, wicked in the sight of the Lord?"² Were not all your brothers guilty of the greatest injustice to you, when they sold you into slavery? Why then can you not sin? Ah, I should offend my God, and I cannot do that; it is impossible. Such too, my dear brethren, should be our dispositions

¹ Quomodo possum hoc malum facere, et peccare in Deum meum?—Gen. xxxix. 9.

² Nequam in conspectu Domini.—Ibid. xxxviii. 7.

in all temptations and occasions of sin. Shall I sin against God? we should say: no, I cannot do this evil thing. If I dwell on this sinful thought, I shall offend my Lord and my God; how can I do this wicked thing! If I speak impurely, uncharitably, or profanely, I shall speak against my God; how can I do this wicked thing? If I commit this act of injustice, impurity, or revenge, I shall violate the express command of God; how then can I do this wicked thing, and sin against my God?

Ah, my Lord and my God! I am ashamed of myself when I speak these words; how often and how shamelessly have I not offended Thee hitherto! I have, alas, been able to do many wicked things, for I have done them, and have sinned against Thee in thought, word, and deed, and have despised Thee by trampling under foot Thy holy law. Oh foolish presumption! I have not wished to do as Thou hast commanded me! Thy will and command have had as little influence with me, as if I had to do, not with the true living God, but with an idol hewn out of wood or stone. And what should now most astonish me? My own presumption in revolting against Thy awful majesty, and offending Thee by my sins, although I am a miserable worm of the earth, who am always in need of Thy help and protection; or the patience with which Thou hast borne with me for so many years, allowing me to treat Thee so unjustly, and remonstrating with me, as if Thou hadst not the power of defending Thyself against my attacks? O heavenly spirits, what did you think, when you saw me, a handful of dust and ashes, despising your Lord and mine? While you were veiling your faces, trembling with awe before His divine majesty, and crying out, Holy, Holy, Holy; I, a miserable mortal, stretched out my hand against Heaven, and like a rabid dog, raved against your God, crying out in my madness, I will not serve; I will not do what God commands! Oh! how were you able to restrain yourselves from taking up arms against me, as against a rebellious Lucifer, and avenging the insult offered to our Creator by hurling me into hell? I know who restrained you; it was the same God whom I offended, and who is as good as He is great, and desires not the death, but the repentance of His disobedient servant. Why then do I delay? why do I not at once throw myself at His feet and beg for mercy and pardon? Perhaps this is the hour in which my long-suffering Lord has determined to take vengeance on me? Oh no, merciful Lord, wait a little! Behold me at Thy feet, full of contrition and sorrow! I have sinned against Thee;

Sorrow, and
resolution to
avoid all
sin.

I have shamelessly and presumptuously sinned against Thee; I acknowledge it. But I am sorry for it from the bottom of my heart, not on account of the punishment that I so richly deserve, but on account of the injury I have offered Thee, my sovereign Lord. Have mercy on me according to Thy great mercy! I will at once do Thy will by candidly confessing my sins, to my own confusion, and I will never again, during my whole life, consent to sin; rather would I suffer the pains of hell, than offend Thee. Hence forward I shall be the more zealous in Thy service, as I have hitherto been more shameless in insulting and despising Thee. I will show, by Thy grace in all my actions, that I honor, fear, and love Thee, who art our Almighty Lord. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle.

Text.

Dominus meus, et Deus meus.—John xx. 28.

“ My Lord, and my God.”

The holy Apostle St. Thomas may be considered as a true model of a penitent, since in those words of his, “ My Lord and my God,” he includes all the parts of true penance. For, in the first place, he repents of and detests forever all the sins he committed by his incredulity and obstinacy, and in the second place he confesses those sins in the same words. At the same time he alludes to the reason of his repentant confession, namely, that by his sins he had offended his Lord and his God. O sinner, is there one amongst you who has a difficulty in acknowledging and detesting his sins? Let him only consider, with the repentant Thomas, those words, “ My Lord and my God,” Thee have I offended. Therein he will find reason enough for a most heartfelt sorrow. To that end I shall now spend a little more time than usual in considering those words. This sermon will be found profitable, etc.—*Continues as before.*

On the strict justice of God against sinners, on the wickedness, obduracy, and temporal punishment of sinners, see the following Third Part. On the eternal punishment of the wicked, see the following Fifth Part.

END OF THE FOURTH VOLUME.

To the greater honor and glory of God, of the most Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of Heaven, and of all the holy Angels Guardian, and to the salvation of souls.

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