



THOUGHTS FOR THE SUNDAYS OF ADVENT

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By The Reverend John Perry

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT - THE GENERAL JUDGMENT

“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, by reason of the confusion of the roaring of the sea and of the waves; men withering away for fear and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world. For the powers of the heavens shall be moved.” (Luke xxi. 25, 26.)

THESE are some of the signs that are to come before the last day and are to indicate the approach of the last day. Now, if the mere signs of that day will be so alarming, as even to make “men wither away for fear of what shall come upon the whole world;” what must be that fearful account that is to follow? It is to this account that our Lord alludes, when, speaking of these signs, that “they are but the beginnings of sorrows.” It is to the same account that I intend now to call your attention.

POINT 1. All mankind is most strictly examined.

“Oh! Terrible hour!” exclaims Saint Ephraim. “Who shall relate, or who shall bear to hear, this last and fearful rehearsal?” For we shall then have to account for our whole life--for every thought, word, and deed; for every omission of duty; for every sin we have criminally caused in others; and even for our very virtues, on account of the imperfections accompanying them.

- 1. THOUGHTS.** Then will be brought against you all the evil thoughts you willfully entertained; all those thoughts of pride when, like the proud Pharisee, you raised yourselves above what you are and despised others; those thoughts of envy, hatred, and revenge you cherished in your mind; those thoughts of groundless suspicion and of rash judgment when you put a bad construction even on the innocent actions of others; and those thoughts of impurity that were indulged with pleasure, with desire, and perhaps even with the intention of accomplishing what you desired. All these will be strictly examined.
- 2. WORDS.** Your words also must be accounted for--they will be brought to judgment, all those words of lying when you spoke against the truth; of rash judgment, detraction, and calumny when you destroyed or lessened your neighbor's character; those words of injustice when you were guilty of deception in your dealings with your neighbor; those words of contention, quarrelling, and contumely that created animosities or disturbed peace among neighbors and were the cause of many other evils; those words of cursing and blasphemy you uttered to the injury of yourselves and the disedification of others; and those words of indecency and double meaning when you defiled not only your own soul but also the souls of those who listened to you. All these will be examined and set against you.
- 3. ACTIONS.** Then come your actions: all the thefts and injustices when you took to yourselves what did not belong to you or in any other way wronged your neighbor; all the excesses in drinking when you degraded yourselves, scandalized your neighbor, and grieved and injured your family; and all the improper liberties, and shameful acts that Saint Paul says, “ought not to be so much as even named among you, as becometh Saints.” (Eph. v. 3.) All these will be brought against you and put to your account.

4. **OMISSIONS.** And not only will you have to account for the evils done but for the good you have left undone--for all your omissions of duty; for all your omissions of deeds of charity, by refusing alms to the poor, when you ought to have given them; your omissions of prayer, meditation, and spiritual reading, and of assisting at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, through negligence, sloth, tepidity, or indifference; your omissions of the means of grace provided for you in the Sacraments by having seldom or never received them, from those like sloth, or tepidity; your omissions of the duties of your state of life, to the disedification and prejudice of your family or your employers; your neglect of religious instruction, which, by causing you to live in ignorance of your religion, produced many other omissions and transgressions of duty. All these, with their consequences, will be examined and added to your account.
5. **SINS OF OTHERS.** You will not only have to account for the evils you did yourself and for your own omissions of duty but you will also have to account for all those sins of commission and omission you criminally caused in *others*. "Soul for soul" will be required from those parents, through whose neglect or bad example, whose children became wicked. Heads of families will have many sins of their dependents to answer for--for exposing them to the occasions of those sins or for not removing such occasions when they should have. Those who have withdrawn others from their duty and seduced them by leading them into evil must answer to their Judge for the long habits of sin, for which they are the guilty cause. Oh! What an account! Such is the perversity of human nature, that scandals will come. Our blessed Lord says, "Woe to the world because of scandals, for it must needs be that scandals come; but nevertheless, woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh." (Mt. xviii. 7.)
6. **DEFECTIVE VIRTUES.** But don't you have at least some good works--some virtues-- to be put in the scale against so much evil? Alas! Even these are to be closely examined--to be nicely weighed. In how many instances will they be found "wanting?" You prayed, perhaps, frequently, but how? With what attention? With what disposition of heart? You abstained and fasted, but in what spirit? You approached the Sacraments, but was it from a pure intention? Was it with due preparation? Was it with proper disposition? "And it shall come to pass at that time (saith the Lord), that I will search Jerusalem with lamps." (Soph. i. 12.) What, then, will become of the wicked Babylon? "If the just man shall scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (I Peter iv. 18.) After this fearful examination, where, my Brethren, shall we appear?

POINT 2. Every sin is publicly exposed.

There is another circumstance in this examination that will add very much to our distress. The conscience of each individual will be known, not only to himself and God, but to all his relatives, friends, and acquaintances--to the entire world! Oh! What will be the sinner's shame and confusion at seeing himself thus publicly exposed? You may judge of this by what your feelings would be if an Angel were to descend now into this temple and reveal all your secret sins to the rest of the congregation. What then will be your feelings at the last day, when all those secret sins will be revealed to the whole world? Overwhelmed with confusion, will you not "call upon the mountains and rocks to fall upon you, and to hide you?" (Apoc. vi. 16.) But there is no escape.

POINT 3. The sentence is pronounced.

The Judge will pronounce the irrevocable sentence to all mankind, who will be strictly examined and every conscience will be exposed to public view. To the just He will say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." But to the wicked, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels." "And these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the just into life everlasting." (Mt. xxv.)

Thus will terminate the last and fearful day. By these two sentences, the lot of each individual of the human race will be finally and eternally fixed. But oh! What a difference between the lot of the saint and that of the sinner! The saint in heaven--the sinner in hell. One perpetually happy--the other perpetually miserable. One with God in eternal glory--the other with the devils in everlasting flames.

And where will **you** be, my Brethren? Where do you wish to be? Make your choice now, for you can do so--it is in your power now because this life is the **time of mercy and grace**. "Now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation." (2 Cor. vi. 2.) If you defer your repentance and amendment of life and die in the state of mortal sin, at the last day you will receive "judgment without mercy." (James ii. 13.)

Judge yourselves now, my Brethren, by making due preparation for the Sacrament of Penance so you will not be judged then. Repent now and you will not have to repent then. Enter now upon a new life and you will deprive that day of all its terrors. For then, instead of being banished from God eternally with the reprobate, you will be found worthy to hear from your Judge that consoling sentence, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Mt. xxv. 34.)

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT - THE VIRTUE OF HOPE

“Now the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in Hope and in the power of the Holy Ghost.” (Rom. xv. 13.)

DURING the time of Advent, we must prepare ourselves to worthily and profitably celebrate the approaching Festival of Christmas, wherein we commemorate the first coming of our blessed Lord, when, in quality of our Redeemer, He came “to seek and to save the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel.”

POINT 1. We must fear God.

To guide and assist us in this preparation, the Church directs our attention, on the First Sunday of Advent, to the terrible judgments of God, which, at the last day, or the second coming of Christ, will be executed severely and eternally upon impenitent sinners, “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.” (Mt. xxv. 41.) And thus we are led to the fear of God, which, according to the Council of Trent, is the first step in the sinner’s conversion to God. (Sess. 6, c. 6.) It is also the first step in the sinner’s preparation for Christmas.

POINT 2. We must also hope in God.

On this Second Sunday of Advent, it would seem to be the intention of the Church to lead you on, through this salutary fear of God’s judgments, to the consideration of His Mercy and Goodness so you may be raised to a firm hope that He will be propitious to you for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Redeemer. This hope, according to the same Council, is the second step in the sinner’s conversion to God and it is the second step in the sinner’s preparation for Christmas.

God has revealed to us, in the book of Ecclesiastics (ii. 9), that this is the sure way to escape His severe judgments and to draw down upon us the consoling effects of His mercy. “Ye that fear the Lord,” He says, “hope in Him, and mercy shall come to you for your delight.” May “the God of hope,” therefore, from the riches of His mercy and goodness infuse bountifully into your souls this necessary, saving virtue, “That you may abound in hope and in the power of the Holy Ghost.”

We will consider now the powerful motives that urge us to place all our hope in God. We will also consider the qualities our hope should have.

POINT 3. Why we must hope in God.

Hope is a theological virtue that “helps us to expect, with confidence, that God will give us all things necessary for our salvation, if, on our part, we do what He requires of us.” (Catec.) This virtue is of strict obligation--it is absolutely necessary for us, as a means of salvation, and it is grounded on the most solid foundation.

For we have every motive to induce us to hope in God--to place an unlimited confidence in His mercy and goodness.

1. We have the pressing Exhortations, or rather, Commands of God. “Trust in Him, all ye congregation of people . . . God is our helper forever.” (Ps. lxi. 9.) “Have confidence in the Lord with all thy heart and lean not upon thine own prudence.” (Prov. iii. 5.) “And hope in God always.” (Osee xii. 6.) “Casting all your care upon Him, for He hath care of you.” (1 Pet. v. 7.)
2. We have also the infallible promises of God, whereby He has pledged Himself to reward those who “cast all their care upon Him.” For He says, “Because he hath hoped in Me, I will deliver him. I will protect him, because he hath known My Name.” (Ps. xc. 14.) Consequently, He declares, “Blessed is the man whose trust is in the Name of the Lord.” (Ps. xxxix. 5.) “Do not, therefore, lose confidence,” He says, “which hath a great reward,” (Heb. x. 35.)

We read in the Gospel that our Lord attributed many of the miracles He wrought solely to the great confidence with which the petition for cure was presented to Him. Thus, He said to the centurion, “As thou hast believed, so be it done to thee.” (Mt. viii. 13.) In like manner, to the blind men, He said, “According to your faith,” (that is, your confidence) “be it done unto you.” (Mt. ix. 29.) The woman, who, for twelve years, had been laboring under an infirmity, which, during that period, had been incurable, said within herself, “If I shall touch only the hem of His garment, I shall be healed.” But Jesus, seeing her, said, “Be of good heart, daughter; thy faith (that is, thy confidence) hath made thee whole.” (Mt. ix. 20.)

3. Other motives of confidence are the great Love of God towards us (His infinite goodness and mercy in our regard) and (lest our past sins should weaken our hope) the infinite merits of Christ, which more than supply for our unworthiness.

These are the powerful and solid motives that should excite our confidence in God--the sure grounds whereon our hope is founded.

POINT 4. How we must hope in God.

And resting, as it does, on sure grounds, it follows, that our hope should be firm and unlimited.

1. **FIRM.** It should be firm, because the goodness, power, and promises of God leave no room for the least diffidence. And hence Saint Paul calls this virtue, “The anchor of the soul, sure and firm” (Heb. vi. 19); it being impossible that God should want either the power or the will to assist them that trust in Him; or, that He should be untrue to His promises.
2. **UNLIMITED.** Our hope must also be unlimited. That is, we should hope for ALL that we need, both for soul and body--we should hope for eternal happiness and for all the means necessary to obtain it, if only, on our part, we will do what God requires from us. And nothing should make us lose our confidence in God. “For He hath said, “I will not leave thee; neither will I forsake thee.” So that we may confidently say The Lord is my helper.” (Heb. xiii. 5, 6.) And He positively assures us “He will not suffer us to be tempted above that which we are able” (to resist); “but He will make with temptation issue, that we may be able to bear it.” (1 Cor. x. 13.) He declares, indeed, that “the hope of the wicked shall perish.” (Prov. x. 28); but this is to be understood of such only, as will not have recourse to His mercy.

Examine now, my Brethren, whether your hope is such as it ought to be. Is it weak and languishing? When attacked by temptations or oppressed with misfortunes, do you not immediately “lose confidence,” and become dejected and “sorrowful, even as others who have no hope”? (1 Thes. iv. 12.)

By commanding you to pray for salvation, for help in temptations, for pardon, for daily bread, and for all that you stand in need of, God thereby engages Himself to grant these things and He will grant them, according to His repeated promises, if you pray with an entire confidence in Him, grounding that confidence on His infinite goodness and promises, through the infinite merits of Jesus Christ.

Never fail, therefore, to have immediate recourse to God, with a firm and unlimited hope, in your difficulties, dangers, and temptations, and in all your necessities.

On all occasions, cast yourselves confidently upon Him, for He will not withdraw that you may be left to fall. And let it not weaken or diminish your hope, when He appears to defer the help you crave, or if it should seem to you that He even positively refuses your requests. For He is then only trying your faith, as He tried the woman from Canan, whose faith (or firm, unlimited hope) He afterwards admired and rewarded, "O woman, great is thy faith. Be it done unto thee as thou wilt." (Mt. xv. 28.) "Do not therefore lose your confidence, which hath a great reward" (Heb. x. 35). "Hope in your God always" (Osee xii. 6) because "mercy shall encompass him that hopeth in the Lord" (Ps. xxxi. 10) for "no one hath hoped in Him and been confounded." (Eccli. ii. 11.)

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT - PRAYER

“In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God.” (Philip.6.)

AT the beginning of Advent, we were led to a fear of God by the consideration of those eternal judgments that, on the last day, will be executed upon all impenitent sinners, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.” (Mt. xxv.) In the Epistle of the Second Sunday we are cheered with the consoling prospect that hope holds out to us. “The God of hope fills you with all joy and peace in believing.” (Rom. xv. 13.) For it is the consoling effect of hope, that it gives us an assured confidence of God’s being willing, and even desirous, to pardon our sins, through Jesus Christ, and so to avert from us those heavy judgments to which our sins have exposed us. That encourages us, moreover, to apply to Him confidently for the happy effects of His mercy. Hence, we see the reason for that tender solicitude and anxious desire of the Apostle, as expressed in the concluding words of the Epistle, “That you may abound in hope and (also thereby) in the power of the Holy Ghost.” (Rom. xv. 13.)

On the next Sunday we are directed to consider, not so much in fear but in hope, the destitute state of our souls to which sin has reduced us. We are directed to look to our wants and necessities and to exercise our hope in God by having recourse to His mercy and goodness for relief. “In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your petitions be known to God.”

It is on prayer, therefore, that I intend now to address you--on its Necessity and its Advantages, and on the Conditions that are required for rendering it effective in obtaining for us the grant of our petitions.

POINT 1. Necessity of Prayer.

WE MUST NECESSARILY PRAY. This necessity of prayer arises from our relation to God, from His absolute dominion over us and our entire dependence on Him for everything. It is from Him we received and still hold our being. For He created us and is continually preserving us. We must therefore pay Him the homage of our adoration, praise, thanksgiving, and supplication.

Having created us, God placed us in this world between two extremes. We must either serve Him while we are here, and thereby come to possess and enjoy him eternally, or we must neglect His service and thereby lose supreme happiness and be condemned to perpetual banishment from Him in the flames of hell. We have to escape the one by gaining the other. This is a work every one of us has to accomplish; and no work can be of greater importance to us. But, of ourselves, we can do nothing towards it. At every step, we need God’s assisting and protecting grace--but that needed grace cannot be obtained without prayer. Without prayer we must perish eternally.

We see the reason, therefore, why Saint Paul so earnestly admonishes us to pray on all occasions “In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God.”

Saint Paul also says, “Be instant in prayer.” (Col. iv. 2.) “Pray without ceasing.” (1 Thess. v. 17.) And our blessed Lord repeatedly commands us to pray, “Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation.” (Mt. xxvi. 41.) “You ought always to pray and not to faint.” (Lk. xviii. 1.) “Ask, and you shall receive.” (John xvi. 24.)

It is clear from these, and from many other considerations, that it is necessary for us to pray and to pray continually; that prayer is the first and most necessary thing for us to learn and make use of; that it is both the key to unlock the treasury of God's graces; and that it is also the channel through which those graces are to be conveyed to our souls. The treasury of graces cannot be unlocked and opened to us without the proper key. And, those graces will not be conveyed to us except through the appointed channel.

POINT 2. Advantages to be gained by prayer.

What has already been said on the necessity of prayer, serves, in a great measure, to show also the advantages of prayer as the effective way to obtain necessary wants and to save our souls. No supply of our employment, therefore, can be more profitable or, at the same time, more consoling.

1. **PROFITABLE.** How can we be more profitably employed than in drawing down upon ourselves the graces and blessings of heaven when we can obtain them, and do obtain them, by prayer. For the truth of this, we have the positive assurance of our blessed Lord Himself, "Amen, Amen I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you. Ask, and you shall receive that your joy may be full." (John xvi. 23.) "For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." (Mt. vii. 8.)
2. **CONSOLING.** What, therefore, can be a source of greater consolation than prayer? Saint Chrysostom calls it "an angelic occupation" and Saint Gregory calls it "an anticipation of the joys of heaven." What sweet consolations have the Saints drawn from prayer? When God, for their greater good, withdrew those consolations from the saints for a time, their persevering fidelity to prayer did not fail to afford comfort to their souls.

POINT 3. Conditions that must accompany our prayer.

But, so prayer may be effectual in drawing down these advantages, it must be accompanied with certain conditions, Prayer must be offered to God with such dispositions of soul as He requires.

We must pray, therefore, **with humility**--with a deep sense of our nothingness, our unworthiness, and our sinfulness. "To whom shall I have respect," says Almighty God, "but to him that is poor and little, and of a contrite heart, and that trembleth at My words?" (Is. lxvi. 2.) "He hath had regard to the prayer of the humble and He hath not despised their petition." (Ps. ci. 18.) "The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds and he will not depart till the Most High behold." (Eccli. xxxv. 21.) "To the humble He giveth grace." (1 Pet. v. 5.) In King Achab, we have a striking example of the advantage of humbling ourselves before God in prayer. For, as soon as he had done so, God said to Elias, "Hast thou not seen Achab humbled before Me? Therefore, because he hath humbled himself for My sake, I will not bring the evil in his days." (3 Kings xxi. 29.)

We must pray also all **with confidence** in God. Nothing honors God more--nothing is more pleasing to Him or more effective in drawing down His blessings than praying to Him with a humble, but entire confidence in Him. "And Jesus saith to them, "Have the faith of God. Amen I say to you, whosoever shall say to this mountain, 'Be thou removed and be cast into the sea' and shall not stagger in his heart but believe whatsoever he saith shall be done, it shall be done unto him. Therefore I say unto you--all things **WHATSOEVER** you ask when you pray, believe that you shall receive and they shall come unto you." (Mk. xi. 23.) When Mary Magdalene, with a

humble confidence, prostrated herself at our Lord's feet, He said to her, "Thy sins are forgiven thee. Thy faith (that is thy confidence) hath made thee safe. Go in peace." (Lk. vii. 48, 50.) "If any of you want wisdom," says Saint James, "let him ask of God, who giveth to all men abundantly" "and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea that is carried about by the wind. Therefore, let not that man think he shall receive anything of the Lord." (James i. 5.)

We must pray, likewise, with **perseverance**. We must continue knocking at the door of God's mercy until it is opened to us. For "we ought always to pray and not to faint." (Lk. xviii. 1.)

We must "be instant in prayer." For God wishes us to constrain Him, as it were, to show mercy. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent bear it away." (Mt. xi. 12.)

God requires, moreover, that we should pray with attention and fervor, for He looks to the heart more than to the lips. "Prayer is the raising up of the mind and heart to God" and not merely the raising up of the voice to Him. To ensure you pray with attention, put yourselves in the presence of God at the beginning of your prayers. Saint Ignatius says you should do so before every prayer, however short. This is the same direction God Himself gives us, when He says, "Before prayer prepare thy soul and be not a man that tempteth God." (Eccli. xvi. 23.)

Humble yourselves, my Brethren, at the thought of not having profited more by this powerful means of grace. Look back and examine what it is that has rendered your prayers ineffective. Is it attachment of your heart to creature pleasures--to some passion that, producing a want of fervor and attention, has hindered the effect of your prayer? Has there been a neglect of preparation that has produced the same effect? Has there been spiritual sloth and, consequently, a want of perseverance? Has your confidence in God been deficient? Whatever you may find to have been the defect, it must be corrected in the future. Resolve therefore to begin, from this present moment, to take the necessary means to correct it. "He lives well," says Saint Augustine, "who prays well."

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT - PREPARING FOR CHRIST'S COMING

“A voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight His paths. Every valley shall be filled; and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight; and the rough ways plain; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” (Luke iii. 4, 5, 6.)

THE Prophet Isaiah, foreseeing the coming of the promised Redeemer, and unable to contain his joy, breaks forth into fervid exclamations. “Be comforted, be comforted, my people, saith your God. Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem . . . for her evil is come to an end--her iniquity is forgiven. Get thee up into a high mountain, thou that bringest good tidings to Zion; . . . say to the cities of Juda, “Behold your God.” (Is. xl. 1, 2, 9.) Yes, my Brethren, the time is at hand when we are to celebrate the birth of our Redeemer--our Savior--our God! That happy day approaches--that day the ancient Saints so ardently longed for--that happy day when Abraham rejoiced and, when he saw it in spirit only, he was glad--that happy day is approaching and the Church now asks us to prepare our hearts to celebrate it properly. Let us do so, my Brethren, by considering, first, why Jesus Christ came on earth and, second, how we are to prepare our hearts to profit by His coming.

POINT 1. Why Jesus Christ came upon earth.

Jesus Christ came “to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Lk. xix. 10.) To be convinced of this we only have to follow Him from the manger to the Cross. The slightest attention to His life will be sufficient proof.

Why was He born in poverty, in humiliation, and suffering? It was to teach us how to avoid and expiate sin. Why did He receive the Name of JESUS, at the same time shedding His blood? An Angel from heaven tells us the reason. “Thou shalt call His Name JESUS, for He shall save His people from their sins.” (Mt. i. 21.)

How clearly, how forcibly, His ardent desire for our salvation shines forth in those tender parables that He delivered to the Jews during the three years of His public ministry? At one time, He represents Himself as the Good Shepherd going in search of the lost sheep and continuing His search until He has found that sheep (Lk. xv.). At another time, He represents the kind and compassionate Samaritan, soothing and healing the wounds of one who had fallen amongst robbers (Lk. x.). Again, He represents the loving and forgiving Father, receiving back His prodigal but repentant son and restoring him to favor. (Lk. xv.) These parables are so evident in their meaning and object that they need no explanation. For how clearly, and how forcibly do they show that “the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost!” (Lk. xix. 10.) More especially, when we consider the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the prodigal son, we see they were intended by our Lord to answer the objection the Jews had made against Him when they said, “This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.” (Lk. xv. 2.)

If we consider those tender and pressing invitations where He urges sinners to return to Him, how plainly does he manifest the same earnest desire of our salvation? “Come to Me, all you who labor and are burdened, I will refresh you.” (Mt. xi. 28.) “Go and learn what this meaneth. I will have mercy and not sacrifice . . . for I am not come to call the just but sinners.” (Mt. ix. 13.) “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldst not?” (Mt. xxiii. 37.)

How powerfully, and with what complete conviction, does He still further prove the ardor of His desire to procure our eternal happiness by the constant labors He underwent to teach us the truths of salvation? “And Jesus went about all the cities and towns teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity. Seeing the multitudes, He had compassion on them, because they were . . . lying like sheep that have no shepherd.” (Mt. ix. 35.) Thus did He go about from place to place, “to enlighten them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death and to direct our feet into the way of peace.” (Lk. i. 79.)

How vividly and how strikingly He exemplified this same earnest desire to save sinners, in the mercy by which He received and pardoned Magdalene (Lk. vii. 48) and Zaccheus (Lk. xix. 9), the humble publican (Lk. xviii. 13), and the penitent thief? (Lk. xxiii. 43.)

Indeed, so much did He show His tender mercy towards sinners that the Jews accused Him of being “a friend of publicans and sinners.” (Lk. vii. 34.) But, in answer to them, He said, “They that are whole need not the physician, but they that are sick. I am not come to call the just, but sinners to penance.” (Lk. v. 31, 32.)

Follow Him, my Brethren, through the different stages of His Passion. Contemplate Him agonizing in the Garden, seized by His own chosen people, and dragged by them from one tribunal to another amidst insults, injuries, and ill-treatment of every kind. Contemplate Him most inhumanly scourged at a pillar, barbarously crowned with thorns, falsely accused, unjustly condemned, and still allowing Himself to be “reputed with the wicked.” (Is. liii. 12.)

Contemplate Him on the Cross, dying the most cruel and humiliating death, and shedding the last drop of His Sacred Blood for our Redemption while at the same time praying for His enemies (that) is for sinners. He suffered all this to atone for our sins and to enable us to obtain forgiveness. He shed the last drop of His Blood upon the Cross to wash away the sins of the world and to reconcile lost man to his offended God.

If further proof is necessary, consider what takes place on our altars. Why does He daily renew the Adorable Sacrifice of the Mass till the end of the world? Why does He still continue His presence amongst us and even feed and nourish our souls with His own Body and Blood in the Holy Communion? He could not give us stronger testimonies of the tenderest love and of the most ardent desire to save our souls.

And, so our sins will not prevent Him from visiting us in Holy Communion, thereby enriching our souls with His strengthening graces, He has still further manifested His desire for our salvation by instituting in His Church a means of pardon--the Sacrament of Penance.

You see, then, His great goodness and mercy towards us. His sincere desire to save, not only the just but also the sinners who return to Him by repentance.

POINT 2. How we are to prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ.

Go to Him, therefore, with confidence, be not disheartened at the thought of difficulties, for His mercy will assist you. You see the means of pardon provided for you in the Sacrament of Penance and of future advancement and perseverance in Holy Communion. It is by preparing for these Sacraments that you are to “prepare the way of the Lord, to make straight His paths.” By reviewing of your past sins and by the humiliation of confession, “every mountain and hill shall be brought low.” That is, your pride will be humbled. By your contrition and resolutions of amendment, “the crooked shall be made straight.” That is, your vicious habits will be corrected and divine grace,

obtained by these Sacraments, will make “the rough ways plain.” That is, will smooth down every difficulty.

But you must not only bring down the mountain of pride and make your crooked ways straight by renouncing your evil habits but you must also “fill up every valley.” That is, your want of virtue must be supplied by religious exercises of good works.

To “fill up every valley” then, practice “The Christian’s Daily Exercise,” that you find at the end of the Catechism. As you are taught there, give the first moments when you awake to prayer; adoring God and offering to him your heart with all the actions of the day. Reflect, at least for a short time, on some pious subject. Resolve to conquer some vice and to labor for some particular virtue. During the day bear in mind the presence of God. Making to Him frequent aspirations of love, conformity, contrition, and patience. Be always intent upon mortifying your passions, receiving, in the spirit of penance, all the crosses, contradictions, and troubles with which you may meet.

At night, make your general and particular examination of conscience. Thank God for the blessings you have received. Lament your sins and crave forgiveness, resolve to avoid them in the future, and implore the graces necessary for that purpose.

Sanctify the Sundays and Holy Days and be regular in approaching the Sacraments.

Practice these duties, my Brethren. Then, all your days will be full days--full of merit and good works--for it is by practicing these duties that “every valley will be filled up”—that every vacancy or deficiency of your past life will be supplied, that your souls will be adorned with virtue, and fitted, not only for worthily celebrating our Savior’s coming amongst us, but also for enjoying Him eternally in the Kingdom of His glory.



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