

Eleven Addresses during a Retreat of the Companions of the Love of Jesus,
engaged in perpetual intercession for the conversion of sinners.

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ADDRESS XI.

The Prayers for departed Companions of the Society of the Love of Jesus.

THERE is yet a subject of the prayers of the Society, which, although not part of the original design, nor essential to it (for those may pray for the living who have not yet learned the comfort of prayer for the departed), yet are engrafted into it, are a very tender touching part of it. They grow out of it by way of nature, as Companions of the Love of Jesus were removed from us; for, unless there were, in the Word of God, an absolute prohibition of prayer for the departed, how should we go on praying for those whom we love until they were out of sight, and then cease on the instant, as if “out of sight, out of mind” were a Christian duty? How should we not rather follow the soul to the Eternal Throne, with the Apostle’s prayer (as seems probable, for the *departed* Epaphroditus) “the Lord grant that he may find mercy of the Lord in that Day?”¹ But we have no doubt that we *may* pray. For the whole Church so prayed, much nearer to the time when the beloved disciple left this earth, than many of us are to the early memories of our fathers. And however, in evil days, the public and ritual use of those prayers was laid aside in the Church of England, yet even a Court of Ecclesiastical law formally decided their lawfulness, according to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, and the departed are but indistinctly yet *are* included in our Eucharistic prayer, “by the merits and Death of Thy Son Jesus Christ and through faith in His Blood, we and *all Thy whole Church* may obtain remission of our sins and all other benefits of His Passion.”

I say this, in case any should be afraid so to pray. But since it is lawful, what an unspeakable privilege! It is so cold a thought that we have for the time no more to do with those who loved us here, and whom we loved, that it must needs, on that ground alone, be false, because it is so contrary to love. And yet much more, since the Church has always prayed for the departed from the very first! It belongs to the Communion of Saints, that they, in the attainment of certain salvation and incapable of a thought other than according to the mind of God and filled with His Love, shall pray and long for us, who are still on the stormy sea of this world, our salvation still unsecured: and that we, on our side, should pray for such things, as God in His Goodness wills to bestow upon them. But what things? It would not matter to us, if we knew not “what things.” We might leave them safely in God’s Hand, committing it to Him to do for them more than we can ask or think. And yet one of the earliest thoughts of the intermediate state was that it was a preparation to “contain God.”² Think we, what God is, absolutely holy, undefiled, “of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,”³ into Whose Presence “nothing that defileth can enter,”⁴ “a consuming Fire,”⁵ Which must consume all rust or dross which could cleave to the soul. A soul, which has any spot of sin, could not endure itself in the brightness of

¹ 2 Tim. i. 18.

² “Capere Deum.” St. Iren.

³ Hab. i. 13.

⁴ Rev. xxi. 27.

⁵ Deut. Iv. 24, Heb. xii. 29.

that Almighty Presence. It was shewn in vision in the early Church, how one, who, when else ready for Martyrdom, had one little grudge about the admission of another to Holy Communion (and in the abstract he was in the right) could not endure himself in Heaven. That one little grudge was a black spot in his heart, with which he could not be in heaven. It was to be effaced, before Martyrdom should transmit him to his Lord.⁶ And we part hence, with our old habits ingrained in us; thoughts, which are the spectres of past sins, coming to us unbidden; our besetting sins, still unextirpated, even if by God's grace they do not gain the mastery over us; our prayers distracted, dry, often tepid. What are we, that we are, all at once, to behold God, for Whom we have most of us so little longed? True! God might, in an instant, if it seemed good to Him, cleanse the soul, in the twinkling of an eye. But who has told us that He will? The souls of those, who are departed hence in the grace of God, are in unconceivable bliss, a bliss, to which every spiritual bliss in this life is joylessness. Conceive, what bliss to know that in all that boundless Eternity they shall for ever see God! And they know what Eternity is! Time has been put aside with the mortal clay; they live years in moments; they live already the life of spirits, and in Jesus, as their Judge, they have seen God. Whether the Judgement be longer or shorter, we know not: one should have thought that St. Paul's description of the burning of the "wood hay and stubble"⁷ of those, who, upon the One Foundation Which is Christ, build worthless works yet not only such works as are worthless, implied a prolonged Judgement. But whether longer or shorter, the souls of the saved must not only have seen Jesus, and His loving, even though reproachful Eye, but must have seen in It all that ineffable love of God. They must know what it is to behold God. Although not fully (for they will have seen the Godhead only through the veil of the Humanity of Jesus), they will have seen That Light, which on earth eye cannot see and live. They will have been immersed into the Ocean of joy; they will have adored Jesus face to face. "What eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor heart of man conceived," and could not see or hear here and live, they will have seen and heard, and have not conceived only but have known the transcendent beauty and glory and majesty and Divinity of Jesus. They will have known "what Jesus 'tis to love," as saints too cannot know in this life. What if the further sight be delayed? What if they know, that it is through their own inadequate sorrow for any grievous forgiven sins, or for their cleaving to things temporal, or for their own lack of thirsting to behold the living God, while in this life, or for tepidity, or sloth, that that Beatific Vision is delayed? They know with absolute certainty that it is delayed only, that they shall behold the All-Holy Trinity for ever. It must be a suffering pining, longing, yet consoled by that absolute certainty.

Then too they cannot sin. O joy of joys! joy, above all other joys! joy, beyond that of seeing the Face of God Himself, Father Son and Holy Ghost; joy, without which to see the Face of God would be utter misery, as it was to Satan, that the will, fixed and motionless, adhering immoveably to the Will of God, and beating with one pulse with the pulses of the Divine Heart, cannot, by the very faintest motion of impulse, look away for

⁶ See S. Cyprian's Epistle lxxviii p. 311 note c. Oxf. Tr. There is a like history, in the middle ages, of a Bishop, who, in vision, saw his predecessors on thrones in glory, and a vacant throne, which he advanced to occupy. When motioned back, he saw a black spot in his heart. He was told that on a fixed day he should return. The black spot was some ill-will towards a city, which had despised his authority. He forgave them and died on the day named.

⁷ 1 Cor. iii. 11-15.

one twinkling of an eye from the Adorable Will of God. Temptation itself, soliciting the will from without, will have ceased then. O victory of victories, victory complete! All the old slough fallen away for ever! all, even temptation gone! The last was, when the soul was about to leave the body; the soul wonders how it ever could have been tempted. It cannot will any thing except the All-Holy Will of God. The thought of such bliss is enough to take us out of ourselves. One wonders, whether a loving soul may not at times have left the body, for the transport of such a thought. O Fire of love, what must Thou be, so to absorb us into Thyself!

But the absence of the capability of sinning is itself not all. There are the continual inundating graces and consolations and influences of the good-pleasure of God. To those who have felt them here, it is like being already out of the body, except that the weakness of the body makes itself mostly felt. But St. Paul says, "Whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell; God knoweth."⁸ There, there is no body to fatigue, no consciousness that the soul will have again to fall back into its wonted state, no possibility of distractions darting in. For this is its one state, to long for the sight of God, whenever it shall be His Good Pleasure that the soul should see Him, and not one moment sooner. There can be no impatience there, no anticipation of God's Will; no faintest wish that it should be other than it is; no wish to know even what it is, further than it feels. It is a silent peaceful land of expectation.

But then there is the other side, in reference to which we pray. The soul, in the particular judgement, has seen itself, unveiled in the light of truth. Every excuse which it ever made for itself has fallen off. It has seen in the Face of Jesus, what one the slightest venial sin would be. It would mar heaven! And then, its own! Sustained by its Judge, it has beheld them all, the poorness of its penitences, the nothing of its self-revenges,⁹ the little genuine sorrow for the love of God, that it has displeased Him, and so it shrank back, feeling itself unworthy to approach Him. It cannot wish to be in His Presence, Which it feels itself unfit to enter.

And yet it must be an untold, inconceivable suffering, that this period might have been abridged, that it might at once have entered into the joy of its Lord, had it kept from such or such sins, or had it, like S. Mary Magdalene, that great noble penitent, grieved all its life that it had offended Him. Strong burning love melts out all the dross. Had we the penitent robber's penitence and the robber's faith, to us our Lord would say, "To-day shalt thou be with Me."

Then too how poor our longing for God! How poor our desire to be for ever free from sin! We are content with the weary round of this life, not only that we may (if indeed we can) obtain more glory to God, at least by our prayers for our fellow-sinners. We are content with it, not only because we do not feel ourselves as yet fit to behold God, not because we wish to have some more victories, to become more Deiform, but because we are inured to life. We do not mostly long to see God; and so, when the time comes, it is not fitting for us to be admitted at once to that Beatific Vision which we have here so little longed to behold.

But whatever the past has been, whatever the hindrance may be, those souls can do nothing to undo it. The time of probation is over; and, where there is no peril of forfeiting grace, there is no opportunity of gaining by grace. The disembodied soul can do

⁸ 2 Cor. xii. 2.

⁹ Ib. vii. 11.

no act to please God, whereby it may abridge its exile from God. It has but to wait in silence. O how it must long that it had not so sinned, or that it had repented more zealously of its sins! And how purifying that burning longing for God must be, that inextinguishable thirst, and yet that meek patience! We cannot, in this flesh, in which we have so little longed for God, imagine what that strong impulse must be, with which the soul is borne towards God; what that suffering of temporary “loss” must be, when all distractions of this world are removed; when it has only one fixed motionless thought, “When shall I be admitted to behold God? When shall I be admitted to praise and adore Him face to face? When shall I again see Jesus, not as my Judge any more, but to thank Him and bless Him for all His love for me, that He has redeemed me? When shall I be admitted to join in those blissful Halleluiahs?” But we do know, what it is to be separated by death from those whom we loved as our own souls: we know how it is like death itself; we did not know, how we should live through it. But now it is no question of dying. “Death,” we thought, when we had lost those whom we deeply love, “would rejoin us to those whom we love.” What must it be to long, again to behold Jesus, with all that longing which the sight of His forgiving love must have inspired, and yet to have it for a while delayed? The soul has seen Jesus, it knows what it is to see Jesus, and it sees Him no more. It is not as with those whom He left here in the flesh. They gained unimaginably by their loss. The love of the beloved Disciple, the love of His Virgin-Mother, their conformity to the will of God, must have been so intensified during those 30 or 70 years of absence. There, there is nothing to gain, because there is nothing which could be lost. In silence they wait for their perfected redemption. And yet, although I have, in illustration, compared the longing for those, whom we have loved as our own souls here and have parted with out of sight, the comparison is as nothing. God gave them to us to love; He gave us our pure love; yet they were not the end of our being, but God Alone, Who made us for Himself. Towards Him, Whom now it feels to be the one end of it’s being, the soul is borne; for Him it pines; it feels itself separate from Him, not, as even here, because God has some work for us on earth to do, some grace to gain, not by time, but by its unfitness. It longs to divest itself of *that*, whatever it be, which keeps it away from God. If it were in the flesh, what would it not do? It might even die through the vehemence of its grace-inworked longings, and through the vehemence of its cleansed desires, might be freed wholly and at once from every stain which clave to it, and be admitted at once to the sight of God. Now it is powerless! And yet it’s longing is undistracted. Here, in the deepest sorrow, which does not dethrone reason itself, there is duty to be done, and joy in fulfilled duty, and variations of day and night, and distractions of the body and it’s needs; *there* it is one fixed gaze towards Him, the sole End of its being, its sole contentment. “The eyes”¹⁰ of the soul “fail with looking upward;” but it may not see Him. What an unspeakable solace it were, to be able even by one second to hasten that time! Yet it cannot!

But we (so the Church has ever thought) may hasten it. The love of the departed avails for us, in gaining grace for us in this our perilous voyage, where there are so many shipwrecks, even, as it seems, within sight of the last haven of rest. Our prayers avail for them to abridge the time of their waiting. So would God perpetuate Divine love beyond the grave; so would He, in the Communion of Saints, provide that “they, without us,

¹⁰ Is. xxxviii. 14.

should not be made perfect;”¹¹ that they who have attained, should be yet indebted to our love, while we are yet more indebted to their love. For they are in certain possession of the bliss of eternity, even though its fruition is for a time delayed; we are still tossed upon this boisterous sea, where so many around us are alas! for ever shipwrecked, and where He Alone, Whom they pray, can bring us safe to the shore.

Let us then fearlessly follow the triumph of those conquerors, to whom God has given the victory over the devil the world and the flesh. The victory is complete. “They rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.”¹² If we could have the whole world and all its glories, would we not thankfully exchange it for their incapability of displeasing God by any the slightest emotion of their will? They are carrying on those prayers for sinners, which they offered so fervently on earth. As the strife thickens on earth, the number of the Church’s intercessors increases in heaven. The portion of the Church in heaven is, oh how manifold more than the Church on earth. Yet we have an office of love too for them, as many as are not yet perfected. Not in vain has the Church of old taught us to say, “Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them!”

And now, if Jesus has brought before you any fresh thought of His great love for our own souls, and for the souls of all His redeemed in those unimaginable depths of His Passion; if the condescending love of God the Holy Ghost has become in any way more vivid to you, let it not be a passing thought. Be not satisfied to have felt. But when we, as we soon shall, “offer up ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable holy and lively sacrifice to God,” hallowed by that Adorable Sacrifice, whereof He has made us partakers, let us pray Him for that sealing gift of perseverance. To all who ask it He gives perseverance; they only do not persevere, who do not ask.

Nor let us be content with greater diligence in our own prayers only. Every where the fields are white to harvest. Every where there are souls, which can be gathered into Christ’s fold. Pray we the Lord of the harvest that He would send labourers into His harvest. Pray we, that He would add to the band of those Christian women, to whom it has been given to be missionaries in bringing the poor wanderers at home or the Heathen in the isles of the sea, into or back to the fold of Christ. Let us pray that God Who has so wonderfully renewed among us the call to devoted service, would extend that call yet wider. Let us help others, as we can, to understand and to follow that call, that so this our land may once more be the island of Saints, the horrible dishonour to His Name be mitigated, the terrible waste of souls, for whom Jesus died, be stayed. This, let us ask of Him Who can do abundantly more than we can ask or think. Let us ask it of Him now, by His Body which was given for us, by His Blood which He shed for us.

Thanks be to God.

¹¹ Heb. xi. 40.

¹² Rev. xiv. 13.