

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 VIII.

Horribleness of sin.

How horrible it is, to turn from the thought of the Love of God and Jesus to the thought of sin, even if it were not for those most miserable of all sins, our own. The earthly cloud never looks so black, as when the sun is shining full upon it. The depth of its blackness none can thoroughly know, save God Himself. For God Alone knows the infinity of that Love and Holiness, against which we sin. It is offence against God's Infinite Majesty; and that, from us His poorest and lowest creatures, whom He has endowed with reason. It is offence against His Infinite Wisdom, Who chose for us what would be our perfection, what would raise our nature not only to the perfection of its natural being, but to heights inconceivable by us now, and, in their highest degrees, for ever inconceivable by ordinary Christians, heights of supernatural endowments. It is offence against Him, our Lord and God, to Whom we belong by virtue of our creation, as His subjects, whom He created for His good pleasure and glory. It is rebellion against His most righteous Will, withdrawing from Him His lawful possession, our souls, and transferring them to His and our enemy, the devil, who disputes His sovereignty over us. It is offence against Infinite Goodness, bringing a black spot into His creation; a putrid foulness, marring its beauty, as He made it, to be a mirror of some of His own perfections. It is a defiance of His power, as though He could not requite. It is contempt of Himself, the Infinite Good. For what is all sin, except a choice, more or less deliberate, of some of God's creatures, or of the abuse of God's creatures against Himself; and that, of things so vile, so wretched, so passing, that we are sick of them or revolted at them, when the choice has been completed? God created us to be like unto the Angels; our spiritual sins are an imitation of the sins of devils, without the temptation of the enormous intellect at least of some of them; our fleshly sins are disordered below the beasts that perish. When people lead others into sensual sin, they enact at once the sins of devils, and of a beast's nature. But we do not choose either, without having first rejected God. So God Himself complains, "My people have committed two evils. They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water."¹ "Will ye pollute Me among My people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread?"² All this makes sin a sort of insanity. But it does not yet touch the depth of sin.

Again; look we at sin in ourselves, in its consequences to us. It is the loss of God, and of every thing whereby we may gain God. The loss of God, the loss of the eternal fruition of God, the loss of the end of our being, for which God created us! And such an end! The sight of Him as He Is; the possession of His love; the entering into our Blessed Lord's joy, God and Man; the unfolding of His wisdom, Goodness, Love, Joy; the likeness to Him, to God; the beholding Him, because we have been made like unto Him, and have been endowed by Him with the power to behold Him, and being transformed

¹ Jer. ii. 13.

² Ezek. xiii. 19.

more and more into His likeness, because we behold Him. “We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him, as He is!”³ And not this only, but all in God is Infinite; so that it is self-evident, that if the highest Intelligence and most burning Love, which Almighty God could create, and endow with gifts, which He could Alone conceive, almost infinitely beyond our conception, of wisdom and of love, should throughout eternity receive more of the wisdom and love of God and become more Deiform in wisdom or love, so that if we did not see God, as He Is, we might mistake what is so full of the Wisdom and Love of God for Himself—still, in all eternity, (I must not say at the end of Eternity, since Eternity has no end, but at every, to us inconceivable, prolongation in eternity, only that as to eternity all human words are indescriptive, because taken from time,) such a creature would have made not even the very slightest approximation to know fully the wisdom or the love of God. Plainly. For the finite cannot approximate to the Infinite. And all this men fling away by sin, as if it was not of so much value as a night’s debauch, or the passing breath of man’s praise, or some trifling vanity, contemptible even to ourselves! God, (and what have we not pronounced, when we have said, God!) Father Son and Holy Ghost, the All-Holy and Ever-Blessed Trinity, are compared, as it may be, to the excitement of a glass of brandy, and the glass of brandy is preferred to the Trinity!

Many of the damned may not know what they have lost, unless it be those who have had faith in this world without love, and that they, remembering what they knew of Him Whom they have lost and what was revealed to them of Him, do, out of that hatred which will be the ruling passion of Hell, aggravate the sufferings of those who know it not, by telling them of their common loss. We see, from time to time, something of this sort on earth, how hatred will mock another with the knowledge of what she has forfeited, it may be, for some profession of love. But, apart even from this, there must be in Hell a burning restlessness, because the soul was made for God, and, when the things of this world shall no more entice it, the soul must know that God was the End of its being (for it is part of the soul to know it at least indistinctly), and then, though it know not what God is, and can hardly imagine His Love, being itself all hate, it must hate Him, because He withholds from it what it was made for. But we are Christians, and have to pray most especially for bad Christians! And lost Christians must have a knowledge of what they have lost, beyond what others have. And this may be part of our Lord’s meaning, “That servant, which knew his Lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to His will, shall be beaten with many stripes,”⁴ while “he that knew not,” like that other, “and did commit things worthy of stripes shall be beaten with few stripes.” O what an aggravation of the misery even of Hell will be the memory of past graces! How will the grace of Baptism be a brand-mark on the deserter! What a source of mockery to the other damned! What a triumph to Satan! *‘Thou* wast called by His Name; *thou* becamest the dwelling-place of the Trinity! *thou* wast washed with the Blood of Jesus, and didst own Him God. Aha! Aha! And thou ‘art become like unto us!’⁵ O that hideous laugh and mockery of devils! And the soul will know it to be true, better than they! It will have the memory of its baptismal, its childish, innocence; it will remember the grace it once had, its natural good feelings and how grace worked upon them, and by what act it first parted with them, and how that act became the parent of others, and those

³ 1 St. John iii. 2.

⁴ St. Luke xii. 47.

⁵ Is. xiv. 10.

others of others, and how it repented, and how it repented of its repentance, and how it became obdurate! That first act, by which it offended against Baptismal grace, was its first deadly sin. Repeated relapses into deadly sin did the rest. Each deadly sin is a preparation for the everlasting hate of God; it is loss of all former grace, of all former good; it is, unless God send some fresh grace into the heart, an impossibility to repent; for it cuts off past grace, and, without some new inspiration of God, the soul cannot repent. (God does give such inspirations; but I am speaking of sin in itself, and of what, if left to itself, it would work.) It deafens the soul to the Voice of God; it renders her insensible to its own bitterness, its own foulness. It is the death of the soul, the rejection of the friendship of God; it is an incredible foulness and stain of the soul (the soul, if it died in it, would bear a stain, which would itself be its condemnation); it obscures and corrupts even the good of nature. It makes the soul to cease to be the dwelling-place of the Trinity, and makes it “the dwelling-place of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird,”⁶ the abode of Satan. Sacraments, until God give it repentance, have lost their power, and could be received only to hurt. It gives to the soul the devil as its father, instead of God; as Jesus said, “ye are of your father, the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do;”⁷ “the tares are the children of the wicked one;”⁸ “he that committeth sin, is of the devil.”⁹ It makes the soul, by the abuse of the soul’s own free-will, sin’s slave. For “whoso committeth sin is the servant of sin;”¹⁰ and God speaks of those “sold under sin.”¹¹ It has forfeited its share of the merits of Christ, and has made itself unworthy of them and of all gifts and fruits of the Spirit.

But further still; sin is very seldom confined to the sinner. It is a great mercy of God, when it is. Some, and those the heaviest sins, necessarily involve others: others are necessarily public and infectious. Sin has a horrible infectiousness. Multitudes do evil together. Sin is such a horrible evil, that men can scarcely endure it alone. They corrupt others, because the sight of the good is a reproach to them. It is well known, how every public report of sin produces like sins. The knowledge of sin is like a spark on gunpowder to the prepared heart. One who has been remarkable for sin tempts to sin by example, even after his death. How horrible must be the malice and hatred in Hell, when some fresh victim of the scoffs and blasphemies of Voltaire, or of the death-attracting foulnesses of some foul writer, meets him in Hell! What a horrible greeting! One can conceive the infidel, out of malice, acting the moralist and retorting upon his victim, that it was his own fault that he believed him and not God; or one may conceive his exulting in his horrible victory; “God has sentenced me here, but I have had a power against God. I have robbed Him of thee!”

But there can be no mere triumph in Hell. Chief in malice must be chief in torment. They who corrupt others prepare for themselves a more horrible damnation. Even in Hell itself, one can scarcely imagine any thing so horrible, as the sight of one, who came thither through the participation of any one’s sin, who has also perished. O the horrible cry and yell through the vaults of hell, “but for thee, I had not lost heaven.”

⁶ Rev. xviii. 2.

⁷ St. John viii. 44.

⁸ St. Matt. xiii. 38.

⁹ 1 St. John iii. 8.

¹⁰ St. John viii. 34.

¹¹ 1 Kings iii. 20, 25, 2 Kings xvii. 17, Rom. vii. 14.

Horror of horrors all this! The flesh creeps when one speaks or hears it. It is like seeing Hell upon earth. And what alas! is very much upon earth, but Hell? Men speak thoughtlessly of certain dens of sin, as if it were a proper name, as “Hells;” they must have much like Hell in their malice and hatred; but coarse vulgar Hells are probably not the worst. The more refined sin is always the more diabolic. O what is so much on earth but a living death; a Hell, except that there is yet space for repentance, that the day of grace is not absolutely past, that the door is not shut, that the irrevocable sentence has not yet been passed? Yet horrible as it is, this is not yet the most piercing view of sin.

It is not the sight of Hell, it is not the loss of God, it is not the offence against our Maker, which will work in us true hatred for sin. The thought of Hell alone might rather produce rebellion against God. It will be, much more, the thought of the blackness of our ingratitude in our contempt of His love. Such was the penitence of the Prodigal Son. He says, not like the Pharisee, “O God,” but “*Father*, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son.”¹² It aggravates the ingratitude, that, except those who have severed themselves for ever from God, we are the only blot in God’s creation. Inanimate creation reproaches us; for they all act according to their nature and obey God’s laws. “All things serve Thee.”¹³ But we—God ennobled us by that almost Divine gift of freewill, and we ungrateful have abused the gift of God to offend God. We had the privilege freely to serve Him, and, whenever we sinned, we have rejected it. Sin itself were ingratitude, even had we not been grace-endowed. What a gift to be endowed with the capacity of doing the will of God, of being in the relation of a creature to Him in Whom is all Perfection, all Goodness, all Beauty, all Wisdom, all Love, even if we had been created such beings as should never see Him! But, as creatures only, to have been endowed with His grace, to have had our will inclined by Himself to Himself, to have been, over and over again, called by His love, pricked and goaded by His love, almost melted by His love, and then to have lain down as sluggishly as the poor animal, whom we hold to be specially obstinate, or to have gone fiercely and recklessly to the object of our passion, to have gone as fiercely to what God forbade, or to have held back as sluggishly from what God commanded, as if God had never loved us,—this, this is the misery of sin.

This is the wretchedness of our own sins, whatever they have been, not only because of the everlasting fire which we deserved and incurred, but for Jesus’ sake; not only for the loss of God and of all that unspeakable love and joy; not only because we are wrecks of what we might have been, (wretched as it is to have missed, so far, what God designed us for): but that God has ever been good and loving to us, and we, evil and ungrateful to Him! He has “daily loaded us with His benefits.”¹⁴ The powers of mind or body, the instruments of our will, which we misused against His Holy Will, were His. He created us for His glory and our bliss in Him. He ordered all things for our well-being and salvation. He redeemed us by the Blood of His Only-begotten Son; He more than repaired our loss in Adam by His gifts to us in Christ. Our natural will has indeed a hankering towards evil which Adam had not, but we have had gifts of grace which Adam had not, being made members of Him, God’s well-beloved Son. We had power given us

¹² St. Luke xv. 19.

¹³ Ps. cxix. 91.

¹⁴ Ps. lxviii. 19.

to “trample upon the lion and the adder,”¹⁵ and all the snares and assaults of the Evil one. God became more than our own Father by creation. He gave us in our Baptism habitual grace, the Presence of the Comforter; He gave us continually, over and above, actual grace according to our needs. He gave us, as our inseparable companion, our own Guardian Angel, to “keep us in all our ways,” and to “drive far from us all the snares of the Enemy.” Jesus ever interceded for us. In our Confirmation, God the Holy Ghost gave us new gifts of strength: He continually drew us to Jesus and the Father; He continually asked for our love; He aided our prayers with His own “unutterable groanings;” there has not been a prayer, however poor, for spiritual graces, which God has not heard. He taught us and besought us to pray: He prayed us more than we prayed Him: He drew our young hearts to Him; He set before us a bright pure future of joy and peace and service; every childish sin He washed away, when we said to God the words which His Son had given us, “Forgive us our trespasses.” When older, He increased His drawings: He gave us His own Body and Blood, to hallow us and unite us to Him. Our whole life, as far as we would admit of it, has been supernatural. Well may He say, “What could have been done more to My vineyard, which I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?”¹⁶ The mighty spiritual works which He has worked, or has been willing to work in us, have been greater than the works which He worked in Chorazin and Bethsaida. How should He not say to us, “If the mighty works which have been done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes?”¹⁷

This then should be the especial grief as well for our own sins as for others, that they are contrary to the love of God. Then shall we gain a loving sorrow for sin; then shall we grieve that Jesus is so little loved; then will God give us a true zeal for souls; then will time seem to be lost when we are not praying to God, or working for God, or doing something for the glory of God; then will our prayers be animated with faith and love and hope, when God, on our prayers, brings home to our souls, how grievous sin is, as being against His love and honour and glory, how He loves the souls, which He has made and redeemed with His Precious Blood, how all those whom we see around us, those for whom we should pray, those who are every minute dying, are the objects of His love; how, if we pray, we are “workers together with Him.”¹⁸

How can we think that we love God, if we are not anxious that others should love Him? How can we think that we believe sin to be the horrible thing which it is, if we are not anxious that others should cease to sin, that this dreadful reign of sin should be checked; if we go on indulging self, giving to the world and to appearances, what may be consecrated to God’s service and the salvation of souls; if we employ what God has given us, in “things which perish in the using,”¹⁹ “in a vain shew,”²⁰ and do not zealously promote works of piety, whereby souls may be saved? How can we think that we love God, if we will not pray earnestly, as with agony,—as we should, if we could save a drowning child of our own,—that God would save the souls, which, with us, He

¹⁵ Ib. xci. 13.

¹⁶ Is. v. 5.

¹⁷ St. Matt. xi. 21.

¹⁸ 2 Cor. vi. 1.

¹⁹ Col. ii. 22.

²⁰ Ps. xxxix. 6.

redeemed? We should, many of us, scream loud enough, if a fire were kindled around those we love, and we saw them out of an upper window stretching out their hands towards us, and the fire mounting higher and higher, nearer and nearer, and we thought that our screams might still bring help. We should scream, many of us, loud enough, if a face which we loved were sinking for the last time under the water, and we thought that our cries would bring help to save them. But they are our brothers and sisters, who with us were redeemed by the Blood of our Redeemer, who were made members of Himself, whose condition should cry aloud to us, even if they are too lost to cry. We should not scream the less, though the child we loved lay asleep, and was insensible to its danger, while the fire was kindling around it. And what is our earthly fire to the fire of Hell? What is sinking under the waves, compared to sinking down the bottomless pit? And yet some yet living, or the saints of old, have seen by God's revelation, how souls who had cast aside as "an unholy thing,"²¹ "the Blood" by which they were redeemed, were cast down thither, one after another, heap upon heap.

The strong desire of the heart is a loud cry to the Heart of God. Then let us cry more devotedly than we ever did, let us pray with greater fervour of earnestness than we ever did, "Save them, Lord, save them, O most sweet, most loving Jesus! Let not Thy Blood have been shed for them in vain; save them with us, O most loving Jesus. Saviour of sinners, save them!"

²¹ Heb. x. 29.