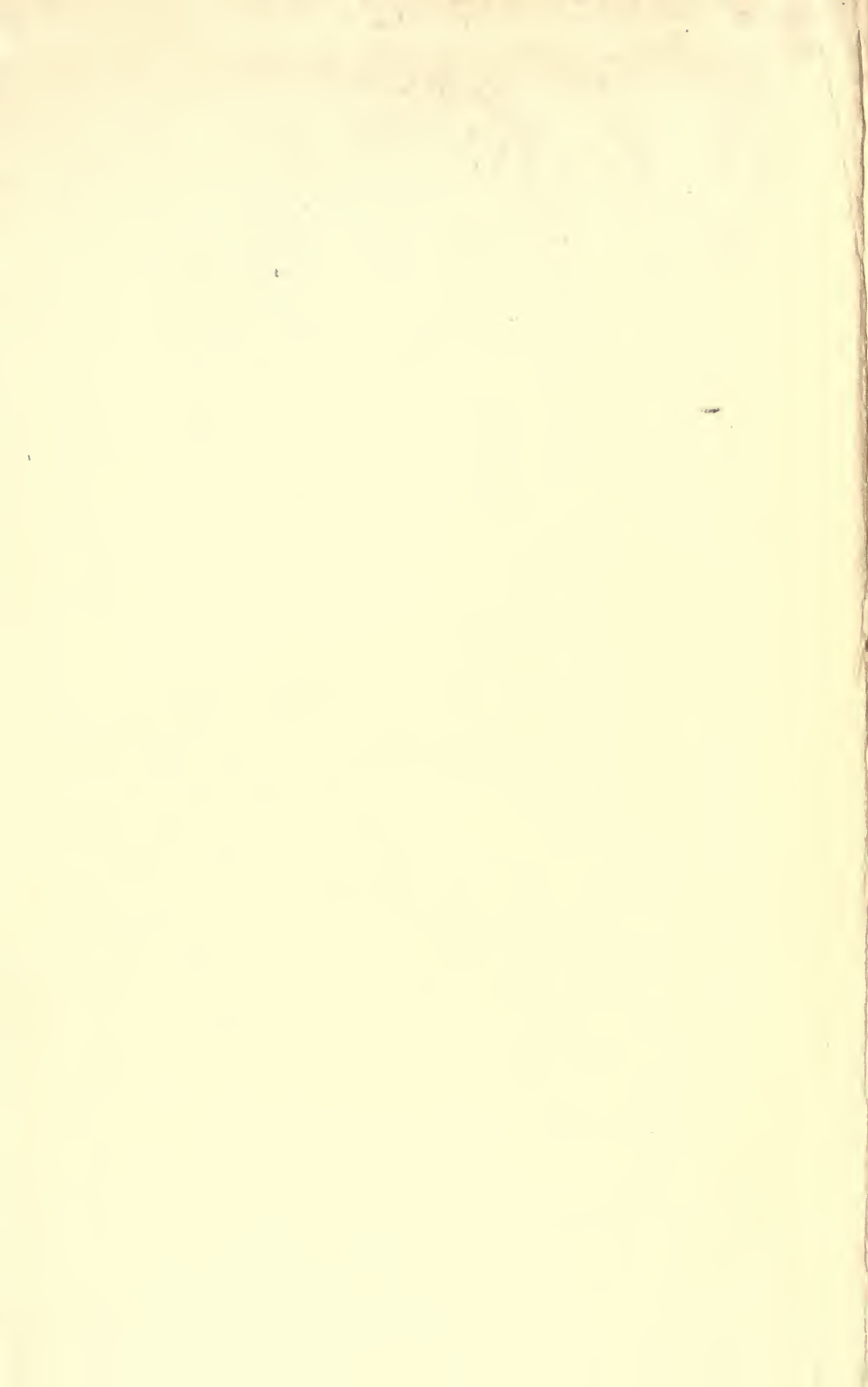


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SERMONS

ON THE

FOUR LAST THINGS.

DEATH, JUDGMENT, HELL, AND HEAVEN.

ADAPTED TO ALL THE SUNDAYS AND MOST OF THE HOLYDAYS
OF THE YEAR.

BY THE

REV. FATHER FRANCIS HUNOLT

Priest of the Society of Jesus, and Preacher in the Cathedral of Treves.

TRANSLATED BY THE

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VOLUME I.

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FIRST SERMON.

ON THE CONSIDERATION OF OUR LAST END.

Subject.

Where shall man go? 1. His body shall go into the grave; 2. his soul into eternity.—*Preached on the fourth Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Nemo ex vobis interrogat me; Quo vadis?—John xvi. 5.

“None of you asketh me: Whither goest thou?”

Introduction.

A general and at the same time a rare question: Whither goest thou? A useless and at the same time a most important question: Whither goest thou? It is a general question; for whenever one acquaintance meets another in the street, the first word is: where are you going to? A rare question; for you seldom find one who says to himself: where am I going to? It is a useless question when proposed to others; for as a general rule it is prompted by mere curiosity, and deserves no better answer than: what is that to you? It is a most important question when one proposes it to himself; for the answer to it brings before us the most weighty, useful, and fundamental truths of our faith, the neglect of which causes the loss of most souls. I will now, my dear brethren, consider them in the form of a quiet meditation, for your good and my own; and since man consists of two parts, body and soul, I shall propose them in a twofold question and answer, namely:

Plan of Discourse.

Whither goest thou, O man? Thy body shall go into the grave. Such shall be the answer in the first part. Whither goest thou, O man? Thy soul shall go into eternity. The answer in the second part. From the first we shall learn to despise all temporal things; the second should urge us to greater zeal in striving for eternal goods.

O God of goodness! we beg of Thee, by the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels, to make those truths sink deeply into our minds.

As far as the body is concerned, our proper home is the grave. Shown by an example.

There is a well-known anecdote recorded of St. Jacoponus, who through humility pretended to be a fool. He one day met on the market a citizen, who had just bought a pair of chickens. "Here," said the latter, "bring these home for me, and I will follow you shortly and pay you for your trouble." "Willingly," answered the Saint; and taking the chickens, he went to the church, in which the citizen had already caused his tomb to be prepared, and placing the chickens in the grave, went his way. The citizen comes home and asks about the chickens, but no one knows anything of them. What is the matter now? he thinks; can that fool have run away with them? He runs off again to the market and finds Jacoponus standing in the same place as before. "What have you done with my chickens?" he asks in an angry tone. "I did as you told me," was the answer of the seeming fool. "You did no such thing," said the other; "for no one in my house knows anything of them." "Come with me, then," said Jacoponus, "and I will show you that I have done what you told me." He brought the man to the grave; "see, there they are," said he; "for that is your house; the one you are living in now is not your home in reality; it belongs to the world; but this will be your home till the last day." And he was quite right; but the citizen had not thought of that before.

For the house we live in shelters us only for a time.

And we too, my dear brethren, are very apt to forget that the true home of the body on this earth is the grave. "My days shall be shortened," says Job, "and only the grave remaineth for me."¹ Nothing shall remain to me of all the lands I have owned; nothing of all the houses I have lived in; nothing of all the money I have amassed, which has made me so important

¹ Dies mei breviabuntur, et solum mihi superest sepulchrum.—Job xvii. 1.

amongst men; the dark grave is all that I have to expect. Your magnificent palaces, O kings and princes of earth! your beautiful dwellings and mansions, O rich ones of this world! do not belong to you, exclaims St. Augustine; "a man is but a guest in his own house;"¹ he merely takes shelter in it for a brief space. My father or my grandparents, you say, have left me this house; it has been bequeathed to me, and has thus become mine. Quite right, continues the Saint, I know what you mean; your grandparents took shelter in this house, and then left it; so, too, it will be with you; in a short time you will have to leave it, and your descendants will take possession of it. But the grave is your true dwelling; of that you can say with certainty that it is your house, for you shall remain in it and it shall belong to you till the last day.

Every day brings us nearer to this house, and hardly is there one to be found to ask himself: whither am I going? hardly one who thinks of or considers this question. The consequence of this neglect is that we set such a high value on temporal things and think so little of eternity. If we often reflected on this truth seriously and deeply: I am hastening to the grave, should we then plague ourselves so much with disturbing cares and wearisome toil for the sake of the mortal body, or to amass money, or enjoy the pleasures of life, or gain the esteem of men? In God's name, what is the use of such inordinate desires? Imagine that you are looking at a prisoner condemned to death; he thinks of nothing but filling his barns with corn, his cellar with wine; he wants clothes made in the newest fashion; as he is brought to execution he sees a fine house, and asks at once whether it is for sale and what is the price of it, as he wishes to buy it for himself. What would you think of such a man, my dear brethren? Would you look on him as a wise man? O fool! you would say to him; do you know where you are going to? To the gallows, to the place of execution, where you will be hung by the neck for an hour. Why, then, do you trouble yourself about fine houses and grand clothes, about corn and wine? Look after your soul, and see what you can do to make it happy in eternity.

If we remembered that we are daily hurrying to the grave, we should not worry so much about temporal things. Shown by a simile.

Another has built a house on the Moselle, where the current is so strong that nothing can resist it. The rushing waters eat away the bank more and more every day, until at last they work

Confirmed by another.

¹ Unusquisque in domo sua est hospes.

their way into the foundations, and the walls and beams begin to lean on one side. Meanwhile the owner goes on furnishing and ornamenting the house; he has it plastered on the outside and all the rooms newly painted and hung with beautiful tapestry; the windows are carefully cleaned and the grounds outside laid out most tastefully in pleasure gardens. What do you think of all this? Does that man act wisely? By no means, you say; the whole place will be about his ears in a few days; instead of furnishing and decorating, he should try to save whatever he can of his property before the building falls in ruins; it is certainly no place for a man to live in.

Our bodily
life wears
away daily

Now, my dear brethren, all of us who live on this earth are condemned to death. Sentence is already pronounced on us, as St. Paul says: "It is appointed unto men once to die."¹ Our life is the way to the place of execution, on which we are really led to death. Our life and body is that building that is eaten away by the rushing river; time constantly gnaws at and undermines the foundation; every moment we live takes away a piece of our lives that we shall never get back again; every breath we draw forces on another breath, until we come to the last. Thus the beginning of our life is also the beginning of our death. The last grain of sand that falls in the hour-glass does not make the hour, it merely marks the end of the hour; so, too, the last breath does not make death; it simply shows that death and life have come to an end together. Just as the iron has in itself the rust, wood the worm, cloth the moth that gradually destroys it, so also the human body bears about in itself from the first moment of its existence the matter by which its own life will be gradually and insensibly eaten away.

How foolish, then, the conduct of those who care only for the body.

Yet, although we are thus every day, hour, moment hurrying to the gallows, to death like condemned criminals; although every day, hour, moment our house is being undermined by the rushing river and ready to fall; yet the most of us are principally, nay, almost solely occupied by our efforts to adorn and furnish the falling house, to pamper and fatten the body. That we may live comfortably in this house we work from morning till night, amassing money, buying land, building, going to law for the sake of a square foot of ground, as if a little world depended on it; while for the sake of a wretched handful of money our precious souls, God and heaven are freely staked. What arrant folly

¹ Statutum est hominibus semel mori.—Heb. ix. 27.

and stupidity! A heathen philosopher complained of this long ago: "We know," he says, "that we are mortal and must die; that we are in daily danger of being surprised by death; yet our desires are as great as if we were immortal."¹ It is not enough for us to have our daily bread, for which Christ taught us to pray, in order to preserve our lives; we wish for superfluities. Nor are we satisfied even with the superfluous; we long for still more. The care for the present day, to which Christ exhorts us, is not enough; we take into account future and uncertain days, weeks, months, and years, so that nothing may be wanting to us. Our desires are as great as if we were immortal; we do not think of where we are going; we forget that we are really on the road to death and that we are hurrying to the grave. For what else are we so careful in nourishing this flesh of ours but to give it to the worms? For whom do we heap up wealth if not for our descendants to whom we must leave it? Is it not a foolish thing to build in a place in which we cannot remain? To spend so much labor in gathering together what we cannot keep possession of? "I beg of you, brethren," says St. Augustine, "whenever you pass by the tomb of a rich man to look round and see where are his riches and ornaments, his glory, his vanity, his luxury, his pleasure, or what remains to him of all these things. Consider diligently and see and acknowledge that nothing remains to him now but ashes, filth, and worms. Imagine that you hear a voice from the grave crying out to you, and indeed the silence of the grave is eloquent enough: What you are now, I was; what I am now, you will be. Miserable mortal who now think so much of the comforts and enjoyments of life! see and consider what the end of them must be. I was formerly as rich, as powerful, as mighty, as fond of comfort, as you are; and one day you will be as foul and fetid as I am now."²

Yes, we know that we are going to the grave; but the way may be a long one; we may still have many years to pass in this world. Such are the thoughts of most people. They all acknowledge that they must die; hardly one thinks he will die soon. Each one looks at his grave as still many miles, many years distant from

Although one may live longer than another, yet we must all

¹ *Tanquam mortales vivimus; tanquam immortales concupiscimus.*

² *Rogo vos fratres, quoties per sepulchrum divitis transitis, ut diligenter inspicatis, ubi est ejus divitiæ et ornamenta, ubi gloria, ubi vanitas, ubi luxuria, ubi voluptas, vel ubi eorum sint spectacula. Considerate diligenter, et videte et agnoscite, quia nihil aliud in eis est nisi cinis, foetor et vermis. Hoc quod tu es, ego fui; et ego quod sum modo, tu eris postea.*

die. Shown
by a simile.

him. He who is young counts on his vigorous youth; he who is grown up on his manly strength; the old man trusts in his still robust health; every one finds something in his imagination to defend himself against the approach of death; and hence there are few who are disquieted by the question: whither goest thou? To the grave? Oh, it will be long before it comes to that with me! Supposing now, my dear brethren, that such is the case, and indeed it is true that some live longer than others, what difference does that make? For instance, there are three men on their way to execution; the one is to be beheaded in the market-place here in Treves; the other is to be brought outside the town to Euren; and the third has to go three or four miles along the bank of the river before he comes to the place of execution. They are brought out of prison at the same time; the first has but a few steps to go to the market-place, the second a few hundred yards to Euren, the third has a much longer journey before him; but they are all going to the same end; they must all lose their lives. If the third were to give way to feelings of exultation, to provide himself with new clothes, to curl his hair, and to make all kinds of purchases, thinking that he has some hours longer to live than the others, would you not be inclined to laugh at him? Eh? There is little inclination for merry-making in any of them! They are all in an evil plight; all full of sorrow and care, because they know that they are going to die, that they are being led out to death. Is it not the same with us, my dear brethren, in this world? We are all condemned to death, only some are executed a little sooner than others; one has a few more steps to take, a few more days to live before he comes to the place of execution. The Creator has given to one twenty, to another thirty, to a third forty, fifty, sixty, seventy years of life; but meanwhile are we not all travelling the same road that leads to death? Truly such is the case! As St. Jerome beautifully says: "There is no difference between him who has lived ten and him who has lived a thousand years, once the common end of all and the inevitable doom of death has come upon them."¹ Consider the years of the patriarchs of old; we think what long lives they had; but what of that after all? Their years came to an end at last. Adam lived nine hundred and thirty years; and what then? And he died. Seth lived nine hundred and twelve years; and what then? And he

¹ Inter eum qui decem vixit annis, et illum qui mille, postquam idem finis vitæ advenit, et irrecusabilis mortis necessitas, transactum omne tantundem est.—S. Hieron. Ep. ad Heliod.

died. Enoch lived nine hundred and five years, Jared nine hundred and sixty-two, Mathusala nine hundred and sixty-nine years; and what then? They all died; one sooner, another later, but all of them had to pay the debt of nature. Now I am certain that I shall not reach such an age; and even if I could hope to do so, I should still have to die at last, and in fact I am now actually going to my death. What, then, is the good of my becoming attached to a few earthly things for a few miserable years, and plaguing myself on account of them, and seeking after pleasures, while I neglect the one only necessary business of my immortal soul? Whither goest thou? I must ask myself: where am I going to? To the grave, to death; and whether the way is longer or shorter makes little difference to me.

But what have I said? That we are all like the criminals led to death? We are rather worse off, if anything; for they know at least for certain how far off their death is; they know the way on which they are going; they can count the steps they still have to take, and hence they can say how long they still have to live. Not one of us can know that much. The Lord has said to us that we must die; we know that we are going to the grave, but not a whit more. How long we still have to journey; how far off death is from us; let him who can guess that. "You know not the day nor the hour," says Our Lord.¹ And there is another thing we have from the infallible lips of God Himself, that He will come like a thief unawares, at a time when we least expect Him: "At what hour you think not, the Son of man will come."²

And we know not when.

Æsop, the celebrated writer of fables, was one day sent by his master to see if the bath was ready, and as he was going along the street he met a judge who asked him where he was going to. What a curious fellow, thought Æsop; what is that to him? And he answered: "I do not know where I am going to." The judge, offended at the impudent reply, ordered his servants to bring Æsop to prison. The latter went on a few steps, and then, stopping, turned round to the judge, and said to him: "You see now, sir, that I did not know where I was going; I had intended to go to the bath where my master sent me; but I had no idea that I should be sent to prison to-day." Ah, my dear brethren, how many there are who go and know not whither! How many dying persons who, if they were asked, where are you going to? should

We find death when we least expect it. Shown by an example.

¹ Nescitis diem neque horam.—Matt. xxv. 13.

² Qua hora non putatis, Filius hominis veniet.—Luke xii. 40.

have to say: I know not; I had thought I was on my way to a foreign country, to this or that town; I had no idea that death would overtake me on my way. I know not where I am going! I thought I should return from that foreign country in good health and spirits to my friends; I never imagined that I should die on the road. I know not where I am going! I thought I should recover from this illness; but now I see that it will be my last. I know not where I am going! When I was young and strong, I thought I had many years to live; I never suspected that I should die a premature death. I know not where I am going! I thought I was going to get married, or to take possession of the new charge conferred on me, or to the feast to which I was invited, to that garden, that company, that ball, to enjoy myself; but now I see that I was wrong, for I am going to death before my time. I was going and knew not whither. So, my dear brethren, we are all of us on our way to the grave every day, and we cannot say when we shall come to our journey's end.

Hence we should often ask ourselves: whither goest thou?

Therefore, lest I should fall into the grave unprepared, I will often ask myself this question: whither goest thou? Thy body to the grave! Before I leave my house in the morning I will ask myself, whither goest thou, if not nearer to death every day? and therefore I will be careful not to bring back any sin with me. In the evening before retiring I will ask myself, whither goest thou? Is not my bed the image of the grave, sleep the brother of death; and may not both come upon me together this night? Therefore I will first examine my conscience and bewail my sins with true contrition. In all my actions I will ask myself: whither goest thou? And since I am continually approaching nearer to the grave, I will say with the Apostle in truth: "I die daily;"¹ that is, not only do I go nearer to death every day, but daily I see clearer how transitory are all earthly things; daily does my heart become more detached from the vain joys and pleasures of earth; daily do I raise my mind and my desires with more earnestness to heaven; daily do I so live that I may be ready daily to die. Whither goest thou? Thy body shall go to the grave. But what of the soul? It shall go into eternity. This we shall briefly consider in the

Second Part.

He who has The wise Ecclesiastes, after having written a whole book de-

¹ Quotidie morior.—1 Cor. xv. 31.

scribing the vanity of all things on earth, concludes his teaching in the last chapter with these words: "Man shall go into the house of his eternity."¹ O house of eternity, what a vast edifice thou art! He who has a long journey before him, my dear brethren, through a desert country, where there is no shelter to be found and no food, must take provisions with him and fill his travelling-bag with food and drink if he does not wish to perish on the way. Silver, gold, bank-notes, precious treasures are of no use to him on such an occasion; they would only tire him, but could not prevent him from dying of hunger and thirst. Leonius tells us of two travellers who were journeying together through a desert; the one had over ten thousand golden crowns, the other had nothing but a piece of dry bread and a jar of water. The first began to suffer thirst, but knew not where to find help, because his companion had too little water to spare him any. At last he offered all his gold for a drink of water. The second, greedy of the money and anxious to become rich all at once, exchanged the water for the gold. But how foolish he was! The first drank the water and thereby saved his life; the second grew tired carrying the gold and perished of thirst. If he had kept the water he might have had the gold too, in time, for the first would have died and left it to him. But he did not think of that in time, and so his repentance came too late.

Where art thou going, human soul? Into the house of thy eternity; that is, into that vast, infinite wilderness in which thou shalt find nothing but what thou bringest with thee from here for thy journey; in which there is no shelter for thee but what thou hast first built up for thyself; and no other life but what thou hast prepared for thyself here below. What will become of thy wealth, O rich man? Will it go into eternity? But what good would it be to thee there? That is a land in which money cannot buy anything. Wo to thee, then, if thou hast made no other provision for the road; thou shalt surely suffer eternal hunger and thirst! What will become of thy honors and dignities, O ambitious man? Will they, perhaps, accompany thee into the house of thy eternity? But hast thou nothing else to bring with thee? Alas! if so, thou wilt receive but little honor there, for in that house there is no respect for persons, for high dignities, for great honors, and an illustrious name. There the peasant is as good as the king, and the humble servant will be

to travel through a desert must take provisions with him.

We are journeying to a long eternity, where temporal things will not help us.

¹ *Ibit homo in domum æternitatis suæ.—Eccles. xii. 5.*

treated better than his proud master. What, O vain and idle Christian! will become of thy comforts? Will they, perhaps, go into the house of thy eternity? And what art thou bringing with thee thither? Nothing? Alas! how will it be with thee then? What hast thou to live on during a long eternity, where thou shalt find no one to give or lend thee anything; where every one must live on what he has brought with him; where there is no possibility of working to earn anything; for there is the night of which Christ speaks in the Gospel: "The night cometh when no man can work."¹

Hence we must provide in time, that we may have something to live on in eternity.

Now is the time for us to make provision for our souls, that they may be able to live there forever. What we neglect now we shall never be able to do hereafter. "Therefore, whilst we have time, let us work good,"² as St. Paul exhorts us. How many years have I already spent in this world? What a long and beautiful time I have had of it during all those years! But where are the virtues, the good works, the merits that I should have collected and sent before me into the house of my eternity? Alas! if my journey were now brought to an end, and the great account-book, in which are written all my thoughts, words, and actions, and all the years, months, weeks, days, and moments of my life—if that book were now opened before the judgment-seat, and examined so as to separate the good from the bad, the useless from the meritorious, what would then remain over for my soul? The years of my childhood, during which I lived without the use of reason, are all blotted out; I find nothing in them to live on during eternity. The time I have spent in eating, drinking, amusing myself, dressing, idling about, all without the good intention, all these are blotted out; they bring me in nothing! The good works that I have performed in the state of mortal sin, no matter how numerous they may be, are all blotted out too; my soul can expect no profit from them for all eternity! And if that is the case, what time will remain to me in which I have done something for my soul and served God? Ah, how little I have thought of this hitherto, although every hour the stroke of the clock warned me, and as it were, called into my ear: thou art again an hour nearer to thy eternity; what good hast thou done during this hour? what merits hast thou gained?

But few

Alas! how great, how deplorable the stupidity of us mortals!

¹ Venit nox, quando nemo potest operari.—John ix. 4.

² Ergo dum tempus habemus, operemur bonum.—Gal. vi. 10.

If we go to the country for a few days to enjoy ourselves we send out provisions beforehand; we roast and boil and make every preparation, although we could find food enough in the place itself if we wish to pay for it. And now we are already half way on our journey to a vast desert, to the house of our eternity, where we can buy nothing, find nothing, expect nothing, except what we bring with us; where neither money, nor treasures, nor learning, nor knowledge, nor art, nor dignities, nor honors can help us in the least. Yet we make such little preparation, we think so little of this journey, that hardly once in a year do we ask ourselves: whither goest thou? Truly we are travelling as blind people! And if we occasionally make some provision for the road, that is, if we have performed some good works, gained some merits, we often act like the traveller of whom I have told you, who sold his jar of water; we sell our provisions, not for ten thousand crowns, but often for a wretched shilling of unjust profit, for a point of honor, for a moment of brutal pleasure, for the respect or love of some mortal creature! Thus we have lost all!

think of this.
What folly!

And how vain the repentance this folly of ours will entail, when we shall have come to the end of our journey and shall find nothing but our sins! When people enter on the married state without thought or reflection or seeking counsel from God, how bitterly they repent afterwards of their folly! Oh, would that I knew you before as I know you now, they say to each other; I would never have married you! Would that I had never laid eyes on that man! But all your wailings are of no avail; you should have thought of that before; it is too late to repent now; you must live with that man whether you like it or not. Yet be contented and have patience; you can still hope that death will put an end to your troubles. But if you have once entered into the house of your eternity, and you find things wrong with you there, there is no help for you, no hope; what you have neglected here is lost forever and can never be replaced. "We fools," you will cry out, and with you all careless Christians for all eternity, "therefore we have erred from the way of truth, and the light of justice hath not shined unto us;"¹ all is lost and gone from us forever!

For which repentance will come too late hereafter.

"Man shall go into the house of his eternity." Mark those

When they

¹ Nos insensati. . . ergo erravimus a via veritatis, et justitiæ lumen non luxit nobis.—Wis. v. 4, 6.

find them-
selves in
hell.

words, my dear brethren. "Of his eternity." What does that mean? Are there, then, more eternities than one? Truly there are, and each one will find his own, either in indescribable joys or in intolerable torments, according as he himself has prepared his eternity during this life. Sinner! whither goest thou in thy sins? Thy wickedness seems to answer me, as the boy answered those who asked him where he was going on a horse that was running through the streets with him without a bridle; "I am going," said the boy, "wherever the brute wishes to bring me."¹ In the same way you, O wicked Christian! say: I am going wherever my inordinate appetites and brutish desires wish to bring me; I am going where my pride, avarice, sensuality, vindictiveness, gluttony and my outward senses are dragging me; wherever the fashions and usages of the world lead me; I go into that street, that house, that company, to that infamous person to satisfy my lusts; I go to that gaming and drinking house to get drunk; I go to seek revenge on that man who has wronged me; I go to cheat and deceive others, etc. I go, in a word, wherever my brutish inclinations bring me. Ah, go then! I quite understand that you are on that broad road of which Our Lord has said: "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat."² But, unhappy man, where will this journey end? In eternity. You do not think of that now. And in what kind of an eternity? In that which you will find at the end of the way you are going, of which Job says: "If I wait, hell is my house, and I have made my bed in darkness. All that I have shall go down into the deepest pit."³ Alas! hell is my dwelling-place! eternal darkness my couch! hunger my food! the gall of dragons my drink! my only company the demons! my only delight eternal fire! See, now, where you are going to; in that house of your unhappy eternity you will have to remain forever. Blind soul! will you not even now reflect on this?

Conclusion
often to re-
member our
last end,
that it may
be well
with us in
eternity.

My dear brethren, surely we do not wish to have a home of that kind! Do we not hope and wish and expect to find a far better one? If such is the case, let us often seriously ask ourselves the question: where am I going? My body will go to the grave. If so, what better shall I be for all that the vain world

¹ Quocunque belluæ collibitum fuerit.

² Lata porta, et spatiosa via est, quæ ducit ad perditionem, et multi sunt qui intrant per eam.—Matt. vii. 13.

³ Si sustinero infernus domus mea est, et in tenebris stravi lectulum meum. In profundissimum infernum descendent omnia mea.—Job xvii. 13. 16.

can give me in the short time of life? Why should I treat this decaying body too tenderly? Why should I leave my God, my sovereign Good, for earthly things? What is it to me whether divine Providence gives me little or much here below? Should I not be satisfied with my daily bread, since I know not how near I may be to my grave? Where am I going to? My soul shall go into a long eternity. Why, then, am I so idle in the divine service? Why am I so sparing of my labor that during this short and uncertain time I do not employ it in gaining treasures and merits on which I can live in eternal joys? "I go to him that sent me"¹ shall be my conclusion in the words of Christ; I will go to Him who has sent me into this world as a laborer into His vineyard, to earn the promised penny with the sweat of my brow; who has sent me as a merchant to the market to purchase wares for my eternal life; who has sent me as a servant whom He has entrusted with a talent to gain many other talents. I go to Him who is my First Cause, and my Last End, for whose service alone I am created. Thither shall be directed all my thoughts and desires, my words and conversations, my actions and occupations, my crosses and trials, my mortifications and penances; so that I may one day arise from my grave with a glorified body, and go with my soul into the happy house of my eternity. Amen.

¹ Vado ad eum qui misit me.—John xvi. 5.

ON DEATH.

SECOND SERMON.

ON THE FREQUENT CONSIDERATION OF DEATH.

Subject.

The frequent consideration and remembrance of death is one of the best means of leading a holy life.—*Preached on the fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Ecce defunctus efferebatur.—Luke vii. 12.
“Behold, a dead man was carried out.”

Introduction.

“Behold, a dead man was carried out;” one who was in the bloom of youth, who was enjoying life in all the vigor of health and strength, and who was, moreover, the only son of his sorrowing mother, the only consolation left to her in her widowed state! “Behold, a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother.” He it is whom they are bringing to the grave. Thus death has no respect for age, or sex, or health, or prayers, or entreaties; he hurries all off without mercy, without distinction, young and old, great and lowly, together. My dear brethren, which of us who are here now alive and well, shall be the first to be carried out dead? Shall it be I, or you, or some one else? We know not; but of a certainty every one’s turn will come, sooner or later, whether we like it or not. And yet we think so little of it! Daily, almost, do we see a corpse carried to the grave, and we look at it as if it were nothing at all to us; nay, if sometimes a thought of death tries to intrude itself, we endeavor to shake it off as unnecessary, tending to melancholy and sadness. But

what do we gain by thus trying to hide ourselves from death? Shall we be able to avoid it by not thinking of it? No indeed! But on the contrary we should frequently and seriously meditate on it, for thereby we shall be wonderfully helped to lead a good Christian life, as I shall now prove.

Plan of Discourse.

The frequent consideration and remembrance of death is one of the best means of leading a holy life. Such is the whole subject of this exhortation. Judge of the living and the dead! who this day caused the men who were carrying the bier to stand still, that Thou mightest raise the dead to life, awaken now our dulled memories, that we may in future learn to lead better lives by the frequent remembrance of death. Holy Mother, and you, holy guardian angels, help us thereto!

The whole idea of a good, that is, pious Christian life may be summed up in the twofold precept; avoid evil, do good. But if there is anything to act as a counterpoise against all sin and evil, if there is anything that can spur us on to good and virtuous actions, it is surely the frequent consideration of death, in which one is constantly reminding himself: I shall die; I shall one day be carried to the grave a corpse. In the very beginning of the world God impressed this fact on the mind of man as a necessary preservative against all crime. How happy was the state of Adam in paradise in his first innocence! There was a constant peace between the spirit and the flesh; there was no inclination to evil; all the appetites and desires were in the most harmonious subjection to reason, so that not one of them dared to move without the command of the will (how miserable the state of us poor descendants of Adam, who have always to fight against ourselves, and are constantly assailed by a hundred passions, even against our will, and are thus inclined to evil!), and yet when God gave Adam the command not to eat the forbidden fruit, He at the same time put the thought of death into his mind, lest he should transgress the command. "In what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death."¹ And well worthy of note is it, that as long as this thought remained before the minds of our first parents they experienced no inclination for the forbidden fruit; and during that time, too, the treacherous serpent could do nothing with them; for when he ventured to

The thought of death is a powerful means of avoiding evil.

¹ In quocumque die comederis ex eo, morte morieris.—Gen. ii. 17.

represent to Eve how sweet and pleasant the fruit was, she answered at once that God had forbidden it to be touched and that under a severe penalty: "God hath commanded us that we should not eat; and that we should not touch it, lest perhaps we die."¹ O Eve! would that thou hadst remained firm in thy resolution! Then shouldst thou indeed have done well and save thyself and us, too, from destruction! But when the crafty serpent had persuaded her to forget the warning, and to believe his lies: "No, you shall not die the death;"² be not afraid of death; the Lord does not mean it so; then, without any hesitation, the unhappy resolution was formed of transgressing the divine command: "She took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave it to her husband, who did eat;"³ and thus the sin was accomplished. An evident proof of the evils that follow the neglect and forgetfulness of the thought of death.

All creatures remind us of death that we may avoid evil.

And we poor, wretched mortals, who are naturally so inclined to evil, how much more are we not in need of something to restrain us from evil, and to keep us on the right path! Yet we are not unprovided with that restraint if we only take the warning to heart. Wherever we go divine Providence has surrounded us with exhortations to this effect. Nearly everything we perceive by the senses is a picture and messenger of death, that calls out to us; *memento mori!* remember, O man! that thou must die. Hardly a day in the year on which we go out into the street that we do not see either a corpse being carried to the grave, or a priest going with the Blessed Sacrament to a dying person, or some one clad in mourning, or an altar in the church on which Mass is offered for souls departed, or else a grave-stone in the church-yard under which some one lies buried; or some friend comes up to us and says: such a one is dead; such another has received the last sacraments; and so on. Nothing grows or is born on earth, in the air, or in the water, but something has died or decayed in its place. If the wind blows it reminds us of the words of holy Job: "Remember that my life is but wind, and my eyes shall not return to see good things."⁴ If a fog rises in the morning, see, exclaims St. James the Apostle, that

¹ Præceptum nobis Deus ne comederemus, et ne tangeremus illud, ne forte moriamur.—Gen. iii. 3.

² Nequaquam morte moriemini.—Ibid. 4.

³ Tulit de fructu illius, et comedit, deditque viro suo, qui comedit.—Ibid. 6.

⁴ Memento quia ventus est vita mea, et non revertetur oculus meus ut videat bona.—Job vii. 7.

is how your life begins and ends: "What is your life? It is a vapor which appeareth for a little while, and afterwards shall vanish away."¹ If the sun casts a shadow on the earth; so do the days of my life pass away, as the Prophet David says: "My days have declined like a shadow, and I am withered like grass."² If I happen to see a cobweb in the room, I can think with the same David: "Our years shall be considered as a spider;"³ to-day the spider runs about in its web spinning out its own entrails; to-morrow the maid comes with the broom and sweeps the whole thing away. You who are now in the bloom of youth and crown yourselves with flowers, hear what those same flowers say to you: "Man born of a woman, living for a short time, . . . who cometh forth like a flower, and is destroyed;"⁴ to-day the flower blooms, to-morrow it decays. If you stand before the looking-glass to contemplate your beauty, even that announces death to you, for it reminds you of the words of the Psalmist: "Surely man passeth as an image."⁵ All the years, months, weeks, days, hours, and moments that we have lived say to each one of us: you are now so much nearer to the hour of your death. Fire, water, sword, bullet, poison, sicknesses of countless kinds, nay, our very pleasures cry out to us and warn us that they are the instruments that help us to death. In a word, all creatures, if we could make a quintessence of them, would cry out to us: *memento mori*—remember thou must die. Now, my dear brethren, why has divine Providence sent us so many messengers and warnings of death, in and outside of ourselves, and surrounded us with them in all places, if not that the remembrance of death may urge us to lead good lives, restrain us from evil, and teach us to prepare in time for eternity?

Oh, if we only kept this thought before our minds, who would then dare abandon himself to a wicked life! I am altogether of the opinion that, as there is no power, no authority, no riches in the world that can protect us against the approach of death, so also there is no vice, no evil inclination, no bad habit, no matter how inveterate, that cannot be tamed, subdued, and eradicated altogether by the frequent consideration of death. The

If we thought constantly of it, there would be no room for pride and vanity.

¹ Quæ est enim vita vestra? Vapores est ad modicum parens, et deinceps exterminabitur.—James iv. 15.

² Dies mei sicut umbra declinaverunt, et ego sicut foenum arui.—Ps. ci. 12.

³ Anni nostri sicut aranea meditabuntur.—Ps. lxxxix. 9.

⁴ Homo, natus de muliere, brevi vivens tempore, . . . qui quasi flos egreditur et conteritur.—Job xiv. 1, 2.

⁵ Verumtamen in imagine pertransit homo.—Ps. xxxviii. 7.

three springs from which all our vices flow are, as St. John says, "the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life;"¹ the desire of sensual pleasures, of worldly wealth, and of honor and esteem. Now, if I often thought to myself: I must die; in a few years, perhaps to-day or to-morrow, I shall be carried to the grave to be buried; what shall then become of my dignities, honors, the esteem of men, the favor of the great, the respectful submission of my servants and attendants? They shall disappear completely and forever. So, too, with whatever knowledge, science, skill I may have had, although I may have been as wise as an angel; death hurries all away; the bell that tolls for my funeral will wipe out all memory of me, as the Psalmist says: "Their memory hath perished with a noise."² Not a vestige shall I leave behind me, nor any memento except, perhaps, an epitaph which shall describe how I was once and am now no more. My dwelling shall be with and amongst the meanest paupers; my companions, my bed and my covering shall be worms and rottenness. If I thought of all this and frequently recalled it, how quickly I should free myself from pride and vanity! For it is not vanity, but rather arrant folly to give way to pride at the thought of death, as St. Gregory says: "No thought of the human mind, be it ever so proud, that does not immediately vanish at the thought of death."³

After the
example of
St. Francis
Borgia.

If there was ever a man in the way of being puffed up with earthly honors and dignities it was certainly St. Francis Borgia, Duke of Gandia and a near relation of the Roman emperor Charles V. The lands and people he ruled over, the ministers and attendants who had almost to worship him, the high offices he held, the great favor he enjoyed at the imperial court, all these things might indeed have given him a great esteem of himself; but death once read him a single lesson and spoke to him so powerfully, that he banished all pride out of his mind and became a miracle of humility and lowliness. Hear what occurred to him. When the dead body of the lately deceased empress Isabella, who, during her life, had been looked on as a great beauty, was brought from Granada, in Spain, the coffin was opened in order to make sure that it contained the body of the empress. When the cover was raised the body appeared so frightfully deformed and

¹ Concupiscentia carnis, concupiscentia oculorum, et superbia vitæ.—I. John ii. 16.

² Perit memoria eorum cum sonitu.—Ps. ix. 7.

³ Nulla humanæ mentis cogitatio sic per superbiam effertur, quæ ad mortis cogitationem devicta funditus non corruiat.

emitted such a horrible odor of corruption that the pages and servants who were present ran terrified out of the church. Borgia alone remained, and filled with astonishment, thus apostrophized the dead body: "Ah, Isabella, is it thou? A short time ago thou wert well known to me; now I no longer recognize thee! Where is the beauty that people came from distant lands to see? Where the majesty that compelled every knee to bend? Where the winning countenance that formed the joy of the whole court? And is that the great empress I have served so long, from whom I have received so many favors? from whom I hoped for even still more? Has, then, death no respect for the body of such a great lady? If not, then away with the false, deceitful world! I will in future serve a greater emperor and lord, the almighty God alone, and that I may no longer be deceived by the vanities of the world, I will hide myself in some poor hut amongst the servants of the Lord." And he carried his resolution into effect.

If I often thought to myself: I must die; in a few years, perhaps to-day or to-morrow, I shall be carried to the grave and buried; death, as Our Lord assures me, will creep on stealthily like a thief: "I will come to thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know at what hour I will come to thee."¹ Then everything will be taken from me and I shall be completely stripped; nothing will be left to me of all the money I have, of all my possessions and revenues; I shall not be able to take a farthing with me on the journey; of all my silver plate, of all my clothes and linen, of the whole earth, nothing, not as much as a straw, will remain to me, save and except the hole in which I shall be buried; the rich man "when he shall die he shall take nothing away; nor shall his glory descend with him."² Then will be seen to whom my goods belonged, and that they were merely lent to me for a time, and not given to me as their owner. Sometimes a dog follows two people who are going the same way; to whom does the dog belong? That you cannot say; for he follows both; but wait a little, till they come to a cross road and separate, then the dog will follow his master and leave the other. As long as a man is in life and has to do with the world, one might imagine that he really possesses worldly goods; but wait till he comes to the cross roads that lead to eternity, then you will see who is the real owner of his goods; for they at once leave the man who has

If we often thought of death, there would be no avarice or injustice.

¹ Veniam ad te tanquam fur, et nescies qua hora veniam ad te.—Apoc. iii. 3.

² Cum interierit non sumet omnia, neque descendet cum eo gloria ejus.—Ps. xlviii. 18.

been using them, allowing him to go forth bare and naked, and follow and remain with the world. Ah, when we think of this, is it possible that we should be so infatuated with temporal things as to seek or possess anything wrongfully or unjustly, sacrificing thereby a long eternity, the treasures of heaven, my soul and my God?

Shown to
an ex-
ample.

A rich young man named Guericus, who, while still a student, lived in a very sumptuous fashion, came one day into the church during the recitation of the office, and heard one of the clergy sing with a loud, clear voice the lesson taken from the fifth chapter of Genesis: "And all the time that Adam lived came to nine hundred and thirty years, and he died. And all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years, and he died. And all the days of Enos were nine hundred and five years, and he died. And all the days of Cainan were nine hundred and ten years, and he died. And all the days of Malaleel were eight hundred and ninety-five years, and he died. And all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years, and he died."¹ The young man, astonished at this, thought to himself: all these people have lived so many years in the world, and yet they all came to the same end: "and he died." What then, is the good of living for seven, eight, or nine hundred years, if death must come in the long run? And if a life of nine hundred years is but a transitory thing after all, what am I to think of a life of sixty, seventy, or eighty years, which is the longest I can expect? Come, Guericus! now is your time. Away with your wealth to the poor, and bid good-bye to the world; if death is so certain and unavoidable, I will go where I can prepare for it! Such was the resolution this young man made on hearing but a single warning of death.

The thought
of death is
a sure pre-
ventive
against im-
purity.

If I in the same way often repeated to myself: I must die; in a few years, perhaps to-day or to-morrow, it will be said of me too, "and he died." And what then? "Under thee shall the moth be strewed, and worms shall be thy covering."² That body that is now so delicate and so carefully looked after, so well clothed, so anxiously protected against cold and heat, so well sup-

¹ Et factum est omne tempus quod vixit Adam, anni nongenti triginta, et mortuus est. Et facti sunt omnes dies Seth nongentorum duodecim annorum, et mortuus est. Factique sunt omnes dies Enos nongenti quinque anni, et mortuus est. Et facti sunt omnes dies Cainan nongenti decem anni, et mortuus est. Et facti sunt omnes dies Malaleel octingenti nonaginta quinque anni, et mortuus est. Et facti sunt omnes dies Jared nongenti sexaginta duo anni, et mortuus est.—Gen. v. 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20.

² Subter te sternetur linea, et operimentum tuum erunt vermes.—Isa. xiv. 11.

plied with appetizing food ; even that very body that so often burns with an unholy fire will at last become the food of worms, will emit in its decay an intolerable stench, and will finally crumble away into a handful of dust which one breath might blow away. And should I give this food of worms, which bears about in itself the elements of its own corruption,—should I give it all indulgence in sensual pleasures, thus placing my soul in danger of burning forever in hell? Or should such a body, because it is now clad with a certain kind of beauty, so infatuate and befool me, that for its sake I should be ready to sacrifice God and heaven? Am I not blind and mad to allow myself to be captivated by love for such a mass of corruption, whose deformity and stench will in a short time fill me with horror? Ah, it is evident I have not thought enough of these things before! No, says a holy hermit with reason, “there is no better way of taming the living flesh than by thinking what it will be when dead.”¹ Truly, whenever I am tempted to impure love by another’s beauty, all I need do to conquer the temptation is to fly for refuge to death, and represent to myself what that beauty will be like in a short time. Oh, would that I could now open a grave before your eyes, a grave in which a dead body has lain for a month ; that I could invite you to look at it in the words of the sisters of the dead Lazarus to Christ : “Come and see!”² Come, O unchaste young man, and see what that is, or shortly will be, which you have so foolishly loved and still love : Come and see ! Come, vain and proud woman, see what you will soon become ; see how the blackened and mortifying flesh is dropping from your bones ; see how the lips and nose are eaten away and leave only gaping holes ; see the worms creeping out of the eyes and the whole body a horrible mass of corruption ! You cannot bear the insupportable stench ; you turn your eyes away from the hideous sight ; you run off terror-stricken ; you cannot bear to think of such a horrible thing ; nay, you look at me with disgust because I dare to draw such a loathsome picture for you ! Yet it is a true one ; for, alas ! what is man when he turns into foul carrion ? And therefore I must again think to myself : truly, it is not worth while to allow myself to be so captivated by love for such a mass of corruption as for its sake to offend God even by a wilful desire and condemn my soul to hell forever.

¹ Non potest melius domari caro viva, quam cogitando qualis erit mortua.

² Veni et vide.—John xi. 34.

Shown by
an ex-
ample.

Bromiardus writes of a young man who was inflamed by an impure passion for a virtuous and chaste married lady. To his wicked solicitations the lady answered: "If you love me you must give me a proof of your love and do what I shall ask of you." The young man promised to fulfil her behests no matter how difficult they might be. "Well, then," said she, "my wish is that you should find out as soon as possible where there is any one in the town in danger of death, and remain by his bedside until the last moment." The young man kept his word, and assisted at the death-beds of many people. When he again returned to the lady, he said to her: "Now you will surely do what I wish, for my sole desire now is that you should live pure and chaste, as I myself am firmly resolved to lead a pure and chaste life; for I have learned that lesson in the book of the dead to whom you sent me, and I have taken it deeply to heart." "Oh, if we all went to that school of the dying once in the day, there is not a doubt that we should soon be freed from impure passion!

An incen-
tive to avoid
all sin.

Finally, if I often thought thus to myself: I must die. When? I know not. It may be to-day. I must die. Where? I know not. It may be in this very church; I may drop down dead in the pulpit, as happened already to a preacher of our Society in this cathedral. I must die. How? I know not; death may surprise me in the state of sin. And where shall my soul go then? Before the judgment-seat of God, to give an account of all my actions, and to be sent either to the eternal joys of heaven or to the eternal torments of hell. If I frequently renewed this thought, could I sleep quietly one night in the state of sin? Could I offend God grievously for the sake of any earthly good, or honor, or pleasure? No, that could never be! "In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin."¹ "Nothing," says St. Augustine with truth, "is so powerful to keep us from sin as the frequent consideration of death."²

Shown by
an ex-
ample.

A certain princess, as Father Cataneus writes, had a page fifteen years old, for whom she conceived an extraordinary affection. This page was one morning found dead in his bed. Hearing an unusual tumult in the house, the princess went to see what was the matter; but the sight of the page's dead body filled her with such sadness, pity, and apprehension, that she knew not what

¹ *Istam namque lectionem didici, et consideravi in libro mortuorum ad quos me misisti.*

² *In omnibus operibus tuis memorare novissima tua, et in aeternum non peccabis.—*
Ecclus. vii. 40.

³ *Nihil sic revocat a peccato, quam frequens mortis meditatio.*

to do, and went at once to her confessor for advice and consolation. The priest, seeing that her heart was touched and completely changed, told her to go to the church, kneel before the altar and there beg of God to reveal to her what He wished to effect in her by such a sudden death. She followed the advice, and during her meditation received an inward inspiration, as if some one was speaking into her ear, saying: wilt thou not at last begin to prepare better for death? How long wilt thou still wait before laying aside thy vanity, tepidity in My service, inordinate love of creatures and the vices to which thou art grown accustomed? On what dost thou rely? On thy youth? But the dead page was much younger than thou. On thy health and strength? He was much stronger than thou. Dost thou expect to have time to prepare for death during a long illness? Thou hast seen that one may be surprised by death without any illness; if a sudden death had hurried thee off, as it did thy page, where shouldst thou be now with thy conscience weighed down with sins and faults? Where shouldst thou be with thy own sins? Where with the many sins thou hast caused others to commit by thy extravagance in dress, or to which thou hast given occasion by thy caresses? The princess, terrified at this, fell down at the priest's feet, and with tears in her eyes cried out: Ah, father, have patience with me; I am determined not to leave this church before I have done two things; the first is to make a good general confession of my whole life, and the second to make a better rule and daily order for my life in future. She carried her resolution into effect, and lived ever after such a pious and holy life, that when, after some years, she was at the point of death and saw those who were standing round her bedside weeping, she commenced to laugh, and said to them: "Why are you so troubled on my account? You must know that death is nothing new to me; I have been thinking of it every day, and for many years I have awaited it with composure." Ah, my dear brethren, would that we, too, thought and acted in the same manner; we should soon find a great change for the better in our lives. "Nothing is so powerful to keep us from sin as the frequent consideration of death."

And again, there is no more powerful incentive to practise virtue than the frequent thought and consideration of death. I will explain this to you briefly. The motive and the end are with philosophers one and the same thing. For instance; the

The thought of death is an incentive to virtue.

end for which war is waged is to gain a victory over the enemy; the same victory is the motive or reason which fills the soldier with courage and urges him to venture boldly into the field and to fight bravely. The end that the sick man has in view is the recovery of his health; the same health is the motive that impels him to take the most bitter medicines readily, no matter how disagreeable they are to him naturally. The end of a business is gain; the same gain is the motive that impels the merchant to undertake the most dangerous journeys by land and sea, and to spare himself no trouble or inconvenience. So, too, death is the end of all things; but the same death can and must be the motive that impels us to do good works during life, that our death may be a happy one. Such is the sense in which King David speaks to God: "I spoke with my tongue: O Lord, make me know my end, and what is the number of my days, that I may know what is wanting to me."¹ Never allow me, O Lord, to be unmindful of my last end; keep my memory always occupied with the number of days that still remain to me, that I may know what is wanting to me, and prepare properly for death. Thou knowest, O Lord, how faulty are my works; I will try to amend them by the daily consideration of death. There are many days that passed by without fruit, although I might have gained much merit in them; I will try to make good that loss by the constant recollection of my last end.

How one
can thus im-
pel himself
to do good.

Such are the thoughts that the consideration of death must suggest to any Christian who desires to die well and to make sure of his salvation. I must die, he says to himself; I know not when; it may be to-day or to-morrow. As long as I am in this life, so long does the period of combat last for me; if I do not gain the victory before death I shall never gain it for all eternity. Now is the time for me to do business, as far as my soul is concerned; what I do not gain before death I must do without for all eternity. Therefore I must and will now heap up merit by the practise of good works, so that I may have something to live on forever in heaven. Death will, in a moment, take from me the money and other things that I have amassed with so much trouble; be it so! I care little for such goods. But it cannot take from me the alms I have given and the other works of Christian charity I have performed. These

¹ Locutus sum in lingua mea: Notum fac mihi, Domine, finem meum, et numerum dierum meorum quis est, ut sciam quid desit mihi.—Ps. xxxviii. 5.

shall be safely stored up for me in heaven by Our Lord Himself. Therefore I will now bestow a good part of my temporal wealth in charity, thus sending it on before me into eternity. Death will strip me of all my clothing. No matter; it cannot take from me the beautiful robe of sanctifying grace, the mortification of my senses, patience in crosses and adversities, constant contentment with and resignation to the will of God, and the other virtues with which my soul shall be adorned. Therefore as long as I live I shall do my best to acquire those virtues. Death will deprive me of all the favor and esteem I may enjoy amongst men; in a short while no one will remember me; let it be so; that is but a small matter. But it cannot take from me my humility, my forgiveness of injuries, my love for my enemies. Therefore I will bear meekly and humbly for God's sake whatever men may do to spite me. Death will at once deprive me of all pleasures and comforts and of the love and society of men. Let it do so! I shall not require those things at the end of my life. But it cannot take from me my prayers, my morning and evening devotions, my frequent confessions and holy Communions, my constant intimacy with God, the sermons I have heard so often, the reading of spiritual books, the upright supernatural intention in all my actions. These things shall remain with me; these shall follow me into eternity, as the Word of God itself assures me: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors: for their works follow them."¹ Therefore I will be constant in the practice of those good works during the short and uncertain time of this life. Death will give my body over to the worms, to be changed in a short time into dust and ashes; be it so; it is nothing to me! But all the more earnestly will I now mortify that flesh with toil and labor, with temperance and fasting, with voluntary penances and austerities, and so wear it away in the zealous service of my God. For of what use is this body of mine to me in this world, since it must rot away like a dead ox or dog, if it cannot render some service to my immortal soul? Therefore in future all my care shall be for my soul.

Such were the thoughts with which St. Bernard used to encourage himself. "Bernard," he would say to himself daily, "the axe is already laid at the root of the tree; death will prob-

After the example of holy servants of God.

¹ *Beati mortui qui in Domino moriuntur. A modo jam dicit Spiritus ut requiescant a laboribus suis; opera enim illorum sequuntur illos.—Apoc. xiv. 13.*

ably soon strike the last blow. What art thou doing, Bernard? There is no time to be lost. Where is thy prayer, thy fasting, thy penance and mortification? It will be too late bye-and-bye to look after those things. Now is the time to be up and doing!" Pope Innocent IX. once took the general of our Society, Father Claude Aquaviva, to his private chamber, and after having shown him a number of costly things that were safely kept under lock and key in different coffers, said to him: "What do you think, Father, that I have in this coffer?" "I do not know," answered the other; "your Holiness doubtless has some precious treasure or relic of some saint." But when the chest was opened there was nothing in it but the picture of the Pope himself, kneeling before a coffin. "You know, Father," said the Pope, "that according to the duties of my office I have often to decide most weighty matters; you know also that I have to look out for the eternal welfare of my soul; now, that I may do everything according to the requirements of justice, and at the same time not endanger my soul, nor become tepid in the service of God, I look at this picture and say to myself these words: 'Do now what you would wish to have done when you shall be shut up in this coffin.'"¹

Conclusion
and exhorta-
tion often to
think of
death.

My dear brethren, if we wish to lead good and holy lives the best thing for us to do is to meditate frequently on death. "Behold, a dead man was carried out." It is not convenient for us to kneel down beside a coffin every day; but we can daily follow the advice of Thomas à Kempis, and think, for instance, when we get up in the morning: this evening I may be lying dead. When going to rest: perhaps I shall be found dead in my bed to-morrow morning. If a neighbor, friend, or acquaintance dies, I can think: one day or other my turn will come too. If I hear the funeral bell tolling: this bell will one day ring for me also. When going out of the house: one day I shall be carried out of this house dead. When passing by a churchyard: that place will be my home one of these days; how would I wish to have lived when that time comes? Must I not, then, prepare for that supreme hour? Let those be our thoughts, that our resolution. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." Blessed are those who are already dead and acquainted with death before their time comes. Amen.

¹ *Fac nunc quod volueris fecisse, cum in tali capsula fueris inclusus.*

THIRD SERMON.

HOW TO MAKE THE THOUGHT OF DEATH USEFUL.

Subject.

For the thought of death to be useful in helping us to lead good lives it must be serious and apt to influence our future actions.—*Preached on the sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Ecce homo quidam hydropicus erat ante illum.—Luke xiv. 2.
“Behold there was a certain man before him that had the dropsy.”

Introduction.

In the Gospel of last Sunday we have seen how, when Our Lord was approaching, “a dead man was carried out;” in to-day’s Gospel we read that “there was a certain man before him that had the dropsy;” this man was dangerously ill, and would certainly have died had not Our Lord cured him. Here again, my dear brethren, we have a warning that we must die, a sermon and an exhortation to think often of death. In my last exhortation I showed you how the frequent meditation of death is a powerful means to induce us to avoid sin and practise virtue; the Gospel of to-day furnishes me with another opportunity of treating of the same matter, which cannot be sufficiently insisted on, and of showing in what manner we may derive advantage from the frequent meditation of death.

Plan of Discourse.

We must think of death seriously, and in such a way that the thought may influence our future actions. Such is the whole subject of this instruction. The plan of discourse will be made clearer as we go on.

Do Thou, O God of goodness, give us Thy light through the merits of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

If any hap-hazard thought of death that may occur to us could inspire us to lead holy lives there would be hardly one man in the world who would not live piously, and there would be no ne-

Not every
thought of
death im-
pels us to

lead a holy
life.

cessity of trying to extirpate the vices that are now, alas! so common. For who of us is not reminded of death, and that, too, even frequently, either by our faith, or by daily experience, or as we have seen on the last occasion, by the sight of a corpse being carried to the grave, or by a monument in a churchyard, or by meeting people clad in mourning, or by our own bodily weakness and failing health? Even those who do their utmost to fly the thought of death are compelled to think of it against their will. For it is brought before their minds by their own horror of and aversion to it, by their unwillingness to hear of it, by the medicines and other means they use to ward it off, by the fear they have of being separated from their pleasures worldly goods, comforts, and luxuries by a sudden and early death. So it is; there are many things that remind us that we must die, no matter how much we try to shun the thought of death; but the thought thus inspired is generally a superficial one, that touches only the imagination—a useless thought that annoys without helping one to amendment of life.

It must be a
serious,
careful
thought of
death.
Shown by a
simile.

The recollection of death should be lively, effective, and apt to have an influence on our future actions, such as God spoke of to His servant Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy: “O that they would be wise and would understand, and would provide for their last end!”¹ That is, that they would now, during their lifetime, find out what will be good for them at the end, what will be then a source of joy, of sorrow, of terror to them, and would now try to do what they shall then wish to have done, to amend what they shall then wish to have amended, to avoid what they shall then wish to have avoided. O that all would think of death in that way! Consider the horse, the mule, the ass (pardon me, rational human beings, if I bring forward such unreasoning, stupid animals as an example in this weighty matter); consider, I say, how they act when one tries to lead them over a frozen river in the winter; you will see how they, while still on the bank, try the ice with their fore feet, in order to see if it is strong enough to bear their weight. Nature has implanted this instinct in them, that they may not expose their lives to danger. According to Pliny, the fox, cunning as he is in other matters, shows a peculiar cunning in this; although he is light and swift of foot, he does not venture over a frozen stream until he has first studied the nature of the ice. Mark how he does that. He

¹ *Utinam saperent, et intelligerent, ac novissima providerent!*—Deut. xxxii. 29.

listens attentively to hear if there is any sound of water flowing underneath ; if he hears it flowing noisily, it will be a long time before he trusts himself to the ice. Why so? The ice bears him up at the bank. Yes, but it would not do so in the middle of the stream, where it must necessarily be thinner, since the water makes such a noise at the bank. He knows that, therefore, although he might take a few steps without danger, yet he could not cross the river without imperilling his life, and so he prefers to go another way.

My dear brethren, our life is a passage, and a very dangerous one; for we have to bring our one immortal soul from time to eternity. Can we then afford to take blindly the first way that seems a little safe, and trust ourselves to it? No ; he who wishes to act prudently and secure his soul's salvation goes far more carefully to work. Now, he thinks, while I am strong and healthy, this or that appears good and desirable to me ; but how will it be hereafter? Will it bring me to the haven of salvation? What shall I think of it at the end of my life? Oh, if we acted thus, how far different would be our opinion of things from what it now is! As it is, our understanding, especially in what concerns our souls, is darkened and blinded by many evil inclinations and appetites, by our love for creatures and by our own self-love, so that it is almost incapable of forming a correct judgment of good and evil. But when we come to the last supreme hour ; when the lighted candle is in our hand, the eyes of the body are indeed dimmed, but the eyes of the mind become all the clearer ; and how our judgment, our wishes and desires will then be altered! "When he shall sleep," says Job of the vain worldling, "he shall open his eyes, and find nothing."¹ When he begins to sleep the last sleep, his eyes will be opened for the first time, and he will see what he before neither wished nor tried to see. The sins that he committed through culpable ignorance and therefore did not look on as evil, or that he continued to commit in doubt, or that he excused and palliated, or even thought nothing of, "when he shall sleep," when he is at the point of death, they shall weigh on his conscience like a millstone.

In the hour of death we shall have a knowledge of our actions that we had not in life.

Go down to the Moselle, my dear brethren, and see how easily a huge balk is drawn hither and thither by one man, as long as it floats in the water ; but if even a part of it is on the bank it

Explained by a simile.

¹ Cum dormierit, aperiet oculos suos, et nihil inveniet.—Job xxvii. 19.

takes all the strength of two, three, or four horses to move it. So shall we find it, too, with our sins. During life we are, as it were, floating in the water; we think so little that sins appear but a light matter to us; we drag them along one after the other without feeling their wickedness, without being aware of any weight on our conscience. But "when he shall sleep," when a man comes to the point of death and has to drag his sins out of the water to the haven of eternity; then he opens his eyes and sees what an intolerable burden he has been bearing about with him. Then will appear as great balks of timber the revengeful feelings he so long entertained against his enemy, the scandal he gave by his loose conduct, vanity in dress, and dissolute behavior, the freedom with which he allowed his eyes to wander on dangerous objects, the impure thoughts and desires that he so often amused his imagination with, not believing or wishing to believe that they were vicious or dangerous, the pleasures that he looked on as innocent, the confessions that he made insincerely, not disclosing his secret sins, the confessions he made through hypocrisy, mere custom, human respect, without true sorrow and repentance, without a firm resolution of amendment, without avoiding the proximate occasion of sin, without restoring ill-gotten goods—things of which he thought little and made no scruple of; those uncharitable conversations about the faults of others that tend to injure their good name; those superstitious practices contrary to the teaching of the Church that were indulged in with even a show of piety; those injustices so frequently committed in business and so easily excused as trifling; that carelessness on the part of parents and superiors with regard to their children and subjects; all these things, of which so little is made now, "when he shall sleep," when he shall come to the haven of eternity, will appear in their full gravity. Then will he say as the wicked king Antiochus said on his death-bed: "Into what tribulation am I come, and into what floods of sorrow, wherein now I am: I that was pleasant and beloved in my power. But now I remember the evils that I did in Jerusalem."¹ Now I remember, will many a one cry out, now I remember the sins I committed at home, in the garden, in company, alone, which my sloth, my wilful blindness concealed from me. Alas! what anguish and fear have come upon me now about things that I

¹ In quantum tribulationem deveni, et in quos fluctus tristitia in qua nunc sum, qui jucundus eram, et dilectus in potestate mea! Nunc vero reminiscor malorum quae feci in Jerusalem.—I. Mach. vi. 11, 12.

formerly laughed at! Ah, would I had thought of this before!

Truly, my dear brethren, now is the time to think and to weigh everything carefully in the balance of death. Now, while we are still in life and have no fear of death, we often fear and avoid what we shall at the end wish to have eagerly embraced; now we long and yearn for and look on as a great happiness what we shall then wish we had avoided as the greatest evil. Solitude, humiliation, self-denial, mortification of the senses, poverty, crosses and misery, the bare idea of such things fills us now with aversion and disgust; but how differently death will speak to us of those things! And here I can best explain my meaning by a story that Plutarch relates of a certain queen. Mark what I am about to say, my dear brethren, not for the sake of the story, which I bring forward only as a simile, but on account of the application of it to our subject. Berenice, wife of King Deiotarus, and a model of beauty, heard that there was, in a certain village, a peasant girl who resembled her in every particular, features, gait, and gesture, so that if she were clad in royal robes she might be mistaken for the queen. The king, and especially the queen, were very anxious to see this girl and sent for her to come to court. And now comes the wonderful part of the story. The queen and the girl entered the hall of the palace by different doors at the same time; but hardly had they come together when the queen held her nose tightly with her fingers, the peasant girl flung her hands up above her head and both fled precipitately without greeting each other. The fact of the matter was that the queen, being delicately reared, could not bear the odor of hay, straw, and cow-dung that came from the peasant girl, while the latter on her part, being unused to perfumes, could not stand the smell of the balsams and other scents with which the queen's garments were saturated, so that to avoid fainting, she had to hold her head with both hands and escape as quickly as possible. Thus they went away, having the same opinion of each other; the queen thinking the girl smelt ill and the girl having the same opinion of the queen; both were right in their own imagination, according to the training they had received.

Now for the application of this. It sometimes happens that two women of equal age and standing go to church together; the one pious, humble, modest, according to the Christian law; the other worldly, vain, light-minded, bold. In the same way two young men meet; the one quiet, well-reared, inclined to piety

Now we are
disgusted
at many
things.
Shown by
an example.

Now the
pious and
worldly dif-
fer in their
opinions.

and the fear of God; the other insolent, proud, dissolute. Two men meet; one goes regularly to church, to sermons and devotions, the other seldom; the one is resigned to the will of God in poverty, contempt, and adversity; the other lives in splendor, dignity, and superfluity. If we could see the heart, we should find out the different opinions those people form of each other. The vain woman, the tepid man would think: oh, what a simple woman or girl! what a melancholy man! See how abject they are, with their prayer-books always under the arm, the rosary always in the hand; they have no pleasure in life! They should enter religion and not live in the world. I would rather die than lead such a life as they lead! See, thinks the dissolute young man with scorn and contempt, what a stupid fellow that other is! how scrupulous he must be! He never omits going to church; never goes into society; he cannot know anything of the world; he ought to turn hermit. Alas! cries the rich man, how poor and miserable that other is! He has hardly enough bread to eat, all his clothes are on his back! God protect me from such misery! And so on. But the others have their say, too. For shame, they think, that men and women should be so haughty and conceited! How proud and stuck-up they are! How dissolute in their behavior! How vain and scandalous in dress! How inconsiderate in speech, how irreverent in the house of God; how luxurious in eating and drinking; how idle and useless in their mode of life! Are they Christians? Do they ever think of their souls? Do they expect to get to heaven? Thus they mutually reproach each other's mode of life; just as the queen and the peasant girl found each other's presence insupportable. Now, which of the two parties is right? Which will gain the victory?

The latter, when on their death-beds, will acknowledge they were wrong.

You who are skilled in the law know very well that if one of two contending parties gives way voluntarily to the other the latter gains the case, and the suit is at an end even before the judge pronounces sentence. Wait now, and see which of the parties in question will be the first to yield. "When he shall sleep, he shall open his eyes." When they come to the point of death their eyes will be opened. Then will the dissolute young man moan and sigh, if not in words, at least with the heart, if so much time shall be given him: "Therefore we have erred."¹ Ah, what a mistake I have made! In what a wretched, immoral, godless manner I have spent my young years! What will now be-

¹ Ergo erravimus.—Wis. v. 6.

come of my soul? Ah, would that I had served my God better! Then will the tepid, luxurious, idle, rich man cry out, as the pious Philip II. of Spain did on his death-bed: "How happy I would be now if I had spent my life in some corner of a desert."¹ Then will he sigh forth, like that dying rich man of whom St. Vincent Ferrer speaks: "I have built many houses on earth; would that I had built even one small cell in heaven!"² Then will he cry out with that dying courtier: "I have served a mortal king for some forty years; would that I had spent the twentieth part of that time in the service of the Emperor of heaven! I have written many reams of paper; would that I had used one leaf to write out my sins for a general confession!" Then will that vain woman, if so much grace will be given her, full of anguish and remorse, send for a confessor, and exclaim with lips and heart: Ah, would to God! Ah, if I had only. . . ! Well? What do you wish for? If you had only what? Ah, if I had only lived a more pious, devout, and Christian life! If I had only made more use of my crucifix than of my looking-glass! If I had only been more zealous in going to adore God in the church, and in attending sermons and devotions, than in paying visits to mere mortals! If I had only my rosary more frequently in my hands than the pack of cards! If I had only wrapped myself up in a mantle many a time, so that no eye could see me, instead of giving scandal to others by my indecent dress! If I had only spent more time in adorning my soul with virtues than in tricking out my body with vain apparel! If I had only given to Christ in His poor what I squandered on luxury and superfluities! If I had only chastised my body with penances instead of indulging in those pleasures I sought after so eagerly! If I had only mortified my body by hair-shirts and disciplines and iron girdles instead of decking it out for show! If I had only given the morning to devotion instead of spending it in sleep! But what a change in your opinion! Those wishes are quite contrary to what you formerly expressed. Now you appear to wish to have led the very life that formerly inspired you with horror and disgust. Ah, so it is! Now you wish you had acted like those whose piety and modesty you used to hold in derision. So you have completely changed your judgment; and why? The blessed candle that I hold in my hand to remind me that I am about to journey into eternity has filled

¹ Ah quam forem beatus, si vitam omnem in angulo deserti alicujus traduxissem.

² Plures ædificavi domos in terris; utinam parvam unam cellulam ædificassem in cœlis.

my eyes with such a powerful light that I now can see what I before was blind to. I have made a great mistake; I must acknowledge it!

As we know
by expe-
rience.

Sighs of that kind and a repentance that in many cases comes too late are common enough amongst all sinners and tepid Christians who, during their lives, have seldom thought of death; they are like moles: blind during life, and able to see only when, at the point of death. I would wish to call upon you, Reverend Fathers who have to attend the dying, as witnesses of the truth of what I say, if you were allowed to speak out freely what you have heard in those death-bed confessions. I appeal to all who have ever assisted at a death-bed. What signs have you remarked in the dying person? When he was filled with fear, anguish, remorse, and repentance, was it not because he had not been zealous enough in the service of God, because he had not been sufficiently careful to avoid sin? If he was filled with consolation, was it not because he had performed good works, borne his crosses with patience, fasted, given alms, and practised different devotions and mortifications? Were not these the cause of the inward peace and joy he experienced at the last? Truly the sentence of death is right and just!

We should
not forget
this when
we think of
death, and
should try
to live as we
shall wish
to have
lived at the
last.

Such is the way, my dear brethren, in which a soul desirous of salvation often remembers death, and that, too, in a way that helps to amendment of life and makes her think beforehand what she would wish to have done and omitted at the approach of death, so that she may now regulate her life accordingly. She asks herself: is the life I am now leading one that will bring comfort or anguish to me on my death-bed? Should I like to die with the goods of others in my possession, in that dangerous intimacy, in that impure love in which I have hitherto lived? Should I like to die in that hatred and anger against my neighbor, with that secret sin on my conscience that I have not yet properly confessed? Ah, no! God forbid! Why, then, should I wait any longer, since death may surprise me in any place, at any time? At once, therefore, I will restore those ill-gotten goods, avoid that dangerous intimacy and occasion, change that hatred into Christian charity and meekness, confess my sins candidly, and follow the humble Gospel of Christ to the best of my ability! That is the real, practical manner of thinking on death.

Such a
thought

“O that they would be wise and would understand, and would provide for their last end!” Oh, if we all frequently thought of

death in that manner! No other means should we require to lead a Christian life, no other to die a happy death. This, as Silveira remarks, seems to be what Our Lord desired to teach us when He raised the dead to life. How did He act when He raised the daughter of Jairus? "He went in," says St. Matthew, "and took her by the hand. And the maid arose."¹ This was all the ceremony He used on that occasion, and having worked the miracle, He went His way. How did He act in the case of the widow's son of Naim? "Young man," He exclaimed, "I say to thee, arise." The dead man stood up, "and He gave him to his mother."² That was all. He raised Lazarus from the grave. "Lazarus," He cried out, "come forth. And presently he that had been dead came forth. Jesus said to them: Loose him and let him go."³ Why did He do no more on those occasions? Because, when healing the sick, He generally gave an exhortation to the people, as was the case with the man born blind, whom we read of in the ninth chapter of St. John, and of the paralytic man in the fifth chapter, to the latter of whom He addressed this exhortation before dismissing him: "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee."⁴ Why did He not act in the same manner when raising the dead, especially since He had such a fine opportunity of exhorting the people to good, and besides those whom He restored to life, being still young, would require some words of warning to induce them to avoid the dangers that threaten youth? "No," says Silveira, "that was not necessary; for death itself was their best teacher."⁵ For he who has once died and knows what death is, requires no other master to teach him to live well; while the mere sight of dead people was already sermon enough for the bystanders. He who meditates seriously on death needs no other incentive to amend his life and avoid sin: "For death itself is the best teacher."

helps us to
live well.

But, alas! thought of death, practical meditation, careful provision for the last end, how rare you are amongst men! From how many hearts are you not excluded day by day and year by year! The inordinate care for temporal things, as if we had to

Many sins
come from
neglecting
this
thought.

¹ Intravit, et tenuit manum ejus. Et surrexit puella.—Matt. ix. 25.

² Adolescens, tibi dico, surge. Et dedit illum matri suæ.—Luke vii. 14, 15.

³ Lazare, veni foras. Et statim prodiit qui fuerat mortuus. Dixit eis Jesus: Solvite eum, et sinite abire.—John xi. 43, 44.

⁴ Ecce sanus factus es: jam noli peccare, ne deterius tibi aliquid contingat.—Ibid v. 14.

⁵ Ipsa enim mors optimus erat magister.

live here for eternity, insatiable desires that seek a heaven on this earth leave no room for you in the heart. The celebrated Italian preacher, Father Paul Segneri, of our Society, ascended the pulpit once on Ash Wednesday and commenced his sermon in the following words: "My dear brethren, to my great sorrow I must announce to you sad and unexpected tidings. Pay attention to what I am about to say; for it will certainly frighten you." And then he kept silent for a moment. The people were amazed; they pricked up their ears, and stared open-mouthed at the preacher, partly through curiosity, partly through fear, to hear what was coming next. "Listen to me," he said in a deep voice, quoting the words of St. Paul to the Hebrews: 'It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this, the judgment.'¹ The sentence is pronounced; all of us who are here present, without exception, must die. This is the news I have for you." Then he kept silent again. The people's astonishment and fear were almost changed into laughter at this unexpected turn things had taken; they began to shake their heads and to murmur. "Is this the terrible news?" they said. "Is the man trying to make fools of us with his silly talk? Do we not know well enough, does not our daily experience convince us that we must die?" This sudden change in his audience was the very thing that the clever and zealous preacher wanted. "Pardon me," he said, "pardon me, ladies and gentlemen, if my news has fallen short of your expectations; however, I have not deceived you, but you have deceived me. To judge from the lives that most of you lead I could not persuade myself that you had the least knowledge of death. I see you sunk altogether in earthly things, given up to transitory pleasures and joys, indulging in sins and vices of all kinds without fear or shame, and leading dissolute, idle, worldly lives. What else could I think but that you knew nothing of death, and looked forward to living always on this earth? Therefore I thought I had some news for you;" and he went on with his sermon. But my time is nearly up and I must close. I do so maintaining that the reproof that was necessary for the Italians in those days would also be required for the Germans in our day. For truly in our country there are many, I am afraid, who live as if they knew nothing of death. And forgetfulness of death is the cause of their wicked lives, for they either refuse altogether to cast a

¹ Statutum est hominibus semel mori, post hoc autem iudicium.—Heb. ix. 27.

thought on it, or else they think of it in a careless manner. "Therefore," says the Prophet David, "pride hath held them fast; they are covered with their iniquity and their wickedness. Their iniquity hath come forth, as it were, from fatness: they have passed in to the affection of the heart." And what is the cause of that? "For there is no regard to their death."¹ Therefore evil comes forth, as it were, out of their very entrails. There is nothing for me to do but to sigh forth in the words I have already quoted for you: "O that they would be wise and would understand and would provide for their last end!"

Ah, brethren, why are we so backward in meditating on death? Why do we so obstinately close our hearts to it, although it will infallibly come to each and every one of us? How carefully we set about some temporal end we have in view, although we may never gain it! What preparations we make to entertain a dear friend, although he may never come to visit us! How eagerly we work and plan in order to leave rich legacies to our children, although they may die before us! Death is infallibly certain for all; why, then, do we not think of it? Why do we not take care that we may once die well? Once, I say; because if we make any mistake in dying, we shall never have the chance of repairing it. And why should we not think of death? Tell me, poor mortal, why do you so obstinately reject such a wholesome consideration? You must die; you may die this very moment. If death were to come to you now, and it is actually coming to many, and may easily come to you, you would go to hell for all eternity. But you do not consider this, and therefore you go on living as a careless sinner. You must not say: the thought of death is a sad one, and therefore I reject it; but say and acknowledge candidly: my sins and the love I have for earthly things embitter the thought of death, so that I can never recall it without shuddering. Therefore I will at once be converted; at once detest my sins and detach my heart from the false joys of this miserable world. Then I shall be able to think of death, and make provision to avoid danger without sadness. But you refuse to do this because you do not now wish to detach your heart from sensual and sinful pleasures. I say to you, however, and let the words sink deeply into your mind, what St. Malachy said once to a vain worldling. The latter had often

And at last
eternal
death.
Shown by
an ex-
ample.

¹ Ideo tenuit eos superbia; aperti sunt iniquitate et impietate sua. Prodit quasi ex adipē iniquitas eorum; transierunt in affectum cordis. Quia non est respectus mortis eorum. Ps. lxxii. 6, 7, 4.

been warned by the holy man to give up a dangerous intimacy, but had been deaf to all exhortations. At last St. Malachy said to him: Sir, you refuse to renounce this sinful love, although you are required to do so by the love of God, the love of your own soul and its eternal salvation, as well as by the fear of eternal ruin; "but the Lord God Himself will make you renounce it even against your will."¹ That very evening, as the unhappy man was going in pursuit of forbidden pleasure, he was assassinated on the way. But his soul, sunk, alas! deep in hell, amidst terrible torments, how it now must curse the unlawful love that ensnared and infatuated it! How it must curse its own obstinacy in refusing to listen to the warnings of the Saint who meant so well by it! Consider now this incident, and say to yourself: if I do not at once renounce my sinful life God will separate me from it against my will. I will not avoid that sinful intimacy; I will not restore those ill-gotten goods; I will not give up the hatred I feel against my neighbor; God will take all from me against my will. I will not amend my bad habits by a speedy conversion; God will separate me from them by force, by a speedy death. If I will not now give up my sinful life, I shall have to do it against my will.

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion often
to think of
death in the
manner rec-
ommended.

Now is the time, my dear brethren, to prepare. Now is the time for frequent and mature reflection. Now is the time to do that which will render the death that certainly awaits us a happy one! I dare not advise all of you to do what one of our brethren used to practise in this way daily. He was sacristan, and as we have to make an hour's meditation every day, he used to go for that hour into the church, and there lay himself out with folded hands and closed eyes on the bier, just as if he was about to be carried to the grave, and then he would say to himself: "On this bier and in this position you will one day lie cold and dead; do you believe that? If so, live to-day as you would then wish to have lived." Truly a beautiful and salutary meditation. But, my dear brethren, I dare not advise all to adopt the same plan; many would be frightened out of their lives at it. Yet we all can and should adopt that form of meditation on death to which St. Bernard exhorts us: "In all his works let him say to himself: if you were now about to die, would you do this?"² In all temptations and occasions of sin let each one ask himself: if I were now about to die, would I commit that sin? Would I speak,

¹ Deus te separabit vel invitum.

² In omni opere suo dicat sibi ipsi; si modo moriturus esses, faceres istud?

act, think in that manner? Would I listen to that talk, look at that object? Would I permit that person to act as he does? And if I should, at the hour of death, wish to have acted in a certain way, let me choose that way now. Perhaps death is actually very near me. If I were now about to die, would I not wish that the action I intend doing, the work I am engaged on, the devotion I am practising were done well and zealously? Would I not wish to have borne this trial, poverty, illness, and tribulation patiently for God's sake? Truly I would! Therefore I will do so now and suffer resignedly and with Christian fortitude. O happy man who has death daily before his eyes! He belongs to the number of those faithful servants of whom Our Lord has said in the Gospel: "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching."¹ Let us all, then, in future, think and act accordingly. Amen.

FOURTH SERMON.

ON PREPARING CAREFULLY FOR DEATH.

Subject.

For a long time beforehand, nay, all the time of our lives, we should prepare for the approach of death. This is required by the importance of the business that has to be transacted in death.—*Preached on the seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Obsecro itaque vos, . . . ut digne ambuletis vocatione qua vocati estis.—Eph. iv. 1 (from to-day's Epistle).

"I therefore beseech you . . . that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called."

Introduction.

In to-day's Epistle the holy Apostle St. Paul exhorts his Christians of Ephesus to persevere in the way of virtue, so that their lives may be consistent with the holiness of the Christian faith, to which they were called by God. The same exhortation serves for all of us to-day, for, in preference to many nations, we have received from the infinite goodness of God the great grace

¹ *Beati servi illi, quos, cum venerit Dominus, invenerit vigilantes.*—Luke xii. 37.

of vocation to the true Catholic Christian faith. Hitherto, my dear brethren, we have treated of the frequent thought of death, and we have seen in the last sermon that we must think of death, not in a mere cursory, careless manner, but with deep attention and practically, so that our meditations may urge us to lead a good life that we may die a happy death. That is the meaning of the words of the Apostle I have just quoted for you: "I therefore beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called;" that you may be thereby prepared for death. This preparation shall supply me with matter for to-day's sermon. How, and for how long a time, should we prepare? I answer:

Plan of Discourse.

For a long time beforehand, nay, all the time of our lives, we should prepare for the approach of death. This is required by the importance of the business that has to be transacted in death. Such is the whole subject.

To the end that we may all live worthy of our vocation, and so order our actions that the Lord, when He comes to call us away, may find us ready. This most necessary grace, which we should all strive for, we hope and beg that the same Lord may give us through the Mother of the Lord and His holy angels.

One makes a long and careful preparation for a difficult and an important business.

It is self-evident and requires no proof that the more important a business, the more depends on it, the less experience we have of it, and the more difficult it is in itself, the greater also will be the care we take, the longer the preparation we make, so that it may terminate favorably. You gentlemen, learned in the law. You have undertaken to conduct a case on which depends the gain or loss of some hundred thousand dollars. Your opponent is very powerful; he spares no trouble or expense, and seeks patrons for his cause wherever he can find them to ensure his own success and your injury. You are most warmly urged and exhorted to take an interest in the case, and to do your best to disprove the documents and writings that will be brought forward against you; tell me, is there any one of you, nay, is there any lawyer in the world who values his own honor and profit who would trust the whole matter to his own cleverness, ingenuity, and good memory, so far as to put off studying the case until the very last day, when the judge is ready to pronounce sentence, and would

then hope to gain the case by hurriedly reading over the evidence and studying the proofs? No, indeed! our experience teaches far differently. For we know what an amount of thought, study, speculation, examination, running hither and thither, finding out facts and writing it costs in order to win a case. And how often are not meals interrupted, sleep shortened, and years of toil undertaken in order to gain a suit that is perhaps not worth the twentieth part of the costs? You, ladies and gentlemen, you have to marry your daughters to husbands suitable to their rank. The contract is agreed to, the date for the marriage fixed; do you think also of the bride's trousseau, of the clothes suitable for the occasion, of the entertainments and wedding festivities that have to be given? Truly you do! But when do you begin to prepare these things? You wait, do you not, until the day comes when the wedding party is going to church? Not by any means, you answer; we should be very foolish to wait as long as that. We make our preparations weeks and months beforehand. Why so? Because otherwise we should be too late, and it is a matter in which our honor is concerned. So prudent are we in temporal things.

My dear brethren, is the affair of our eternal salvation then of less importance, so that we can put it off until the time when it is to be really concluded? In the Gospel of St. Matthew Our Lord compares His coming at our death to that of the bridegroom who knocks in the middle of the night, when no one expects him: "And at midnight there was a cry made: Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet him."¹ Christian soul! at thy last breath thou shalt hear the words: go forth to meet Him; arise; now is the time in which thou art to be espoused to the sovereign Ruler of the world, to reign with Him for all eternity. Where is the wedding-garment of sanctifying grace? Where are thy ornaments, thy jewels, thy merits and virtues, that thou mayest appear worthily before such a great lord? Wo to thee if thou hast not collected all those things beforehand! Wo to thee if thou shouldst have put off to the last moment the preparation for the great marriage-feast! I know thee not, the Bridegroom will say, as He said to the foolish virgins who had not oil in their lamps. "They that were ready went in with him to the marriage."² Mark the words: "they that were

At the hour of death we have a business of that kind to transact.

¹ Media autem nocte clamor factus est: Ecce sponsus venit, exite obviam ei.—Matt. xxv. 6.

² Quæ paratæ erant intraverunt cum eo ad nuptias.—Ibid. 10.

ready," not they who then began for the first time to prepare. These latter were excluded: "the door was shut."¹ Each one of us has a difficult, very important, and very complicated suit depending on the divine justice. It is a difficult suit, because many and very many, nay, the most of men, and perhaps the most of adult Christians, will lose it. It is a very important suit, because on its gain or loss depends the gain or loss, not of a piece of land on this poor earth, not of a capital of a million ducats, but of an immortal soul, of an immense glory, of an infinite good; on its issue depends whether our lot for eternity shall be with the reprobate or the elect. It is a very complicated suit; the demons of hell, the dangerous occasions that are to be met with in the world, and the lusts of the flesh are our opponents, whose sole effort from the beginning of our lives is to destroy us. And if we enter into our own consciences, we must acknowledge that we have made matters much worse through our own fault, by our manifold sins. The day on which the final judgment shall be pronounced is the day on which the Lord shall come to take the soul away from the body by death, and it is known to no one but God Himself.

And we shall not be able to put it off.

Ah, have we not every reason to prepare ourselves in time and with all earnestness, to examine our consciences, to repent of our sins, and to settle our accounts with God? In time, I say; for why should we wait any longer? What grounds can we have for a hope of salvation, if we defer our preparation for death till death itself is at hand? Shall we, perhaps, be able to put it off until we are ready? That kind of a thing might indeed be done in temporal affairs. If it is found that after due diligence and care all the things required for the marriage-feast are not ready, the ceremony is put off for a week or two, or even longer if necessary. If a lawsuit is decided against me the first time, I can appeal and have a new trial. But what can we put in the way of death to defer his coming? Nothing, my dear brethren, it is impossible to put him off; whether we are ready or not, we must go at the appointed time. "Thou hast appointed his bounds which cannot be passed."² Cry out then, as much as you please, to the Lord when He comes to your sick bed to take you; say to Him like that sinner of whom St. Gregory speaks: "Let me off till to-morrow!"³ Great God! Thou hast millions

¹ *Clausa est janua.*—Matt. xxv. 10.

² *Constituisti terminos ejus, qui præteriri non poterunt.*—Job xiv. 5.

³ *Inducias usque mane!*

of years in Thy hands, time itself must obey Thee; ah, give me one hour of life, till to-morrow, that I may prepare for the long journey into eternity; but all your crying will be of no avail; you will not obtain a single moment more. If you are not prepared when the time comes, so much the worse for you; death will not wait. "The days of man are short, and the number of his months is with Thee."¹ "Thou hast appointed his bounds which cannot be passed."

In temporal matters, if one makes a mistake the first time, he can be on his guard the second time and repair his former error. If you have lost a lawsuit and suffered injury thereby, you can make up for the loss by redoubled diligence. But if you have once made a mistake in death, there is no chance of coming back to amend it. If you have lost the suit of your eternal salvation, because you did not prepare in time, you have lost it without any possibility of regaining it. Even if one makes a mistake in matters concerning his eternal salvation during life, there is still time to recover what has been lost. If to-day I were to make a sacrilegious confession, either through want of proper preparation, or because I have not true sorrow for my sins, or because I have concealed a sin wilfully, that would be truly a great evil, great enough to expose me to the danger of damnation; but yet I must not despair; to-morrow or even to-day I can go to confession again, and free my soul from the evil. But if I am so unfortunate as to die an unhappy death, I cannot come back any more, but must remain forever in the state in which death has found me.

What follows from this, my dear brethren? That since our salvation or damnation depends on our death; since we cannot hope for anything greater than salvation, or dread and fear anything more than damnation; the most important, nay, the only business we have to attend to during life, the one end to which should be directed all our thoughts and cares, should be to die a happy death; and hence we must at all times use our utmost diligence in preparing to die well, and be always ready for the hour when the Lord will come to take us. Seneca, although he was a heathen, maintained that the importance of dying well is so great that a man's whole occupation during life should consist in learning how to die. "During our whole lives we should

Nor amend
any mistake
we may
make in it.

Therefore
we should
prepare for
it our whole
lives long.

¹ Breves dies hominis sunt; numerus mensum ejus apud te est. Job xiv. 5.

learn how to die.”¹ This, dear Christians, is the reason why we are on this earth; for this God gives us every day of our lives that we may prepare worthily for His coming. This is the thought that should be always before our minds to stimulate us; that should be always in our memories crying out to us: prepare for death! Whenever St. Teresa heard the clock strike she used to say to herself: “Teresa! we are already another hour nearer to death.” The holy Scripture calls the life of man a voyage: “My days have passed by as ships,”² says the Prophet Job. In the same sense St. Gregory says: “Our life is like one who voyages in a ship.”³ How does the sailor act that he may continue his voyage in safety? He seats himself in the after-part of the vessel, that he may constantly have both the vessel and the course he has to steer before his eyes, and be thus enabled to make a proper use of the rudder to guide his course. So, too, should we keep our whole future lives before our eyes, and so order them that we may arrive at the haven of a happy eternity. “During our whole lives we should learn how to die.”

But most men do not think of this.

Ah, Christians! why are we so careless, indifferent, and forgetful in this great affair on which all depends? Everything else in the world interests us; in everything else we wish to act with prudence. To live, to live long, to live in good health, fortune and prosperity, to avoid suffering and misfortune; this thought drives the hand to labor, the feet to activity, the whole mind to reflection and meditation; for these things every one wishes to be prepared, and dreads coming too late. Death and what comes after it is almost the only thing that is forgotten. The last thought with most people is when, how, or where they shall die, or what means they should use to die well. The mere remembrance of death and eternity, suggested in a sermon, is looked on with chagrin and annoyance, and thrust out of the mind as a melancholy thought, likely to disturb our peace and the enjoyment of those sensual pleasures that we do not wish to give up.

And therefore are not aware of death until they are dying.

As St. Gregory remarks, most men live in such a manner that they are hardly aware of death at all until he knocks at their doors, and is about to strike the fatal blow. This was the case with the celebrated Alexander the Great, of whom we read in the First Book of the Machabees. “After these things he fell down

¹ *Tota vita discendum est mori.*—Senec. de brev. vitæ, c. vii.

² *Dies mei pertransierunt quasi naves.*—Job ix. 25, 26.

³ *Vita nostra naviganti similis est.*

on his bed and knew that he should die.”¹ “After these things;”—after the earth had trembled before him; after he had conquered the greater part of the world by his forces, “he fell down upon his bed” in a mortal illness, and knew what he had not thought of before, that he must die. But could he not have learned that when he saw so many battle-fields covered with dead bodies? “He fought many battles, and slew the kings of the earth.”² That was the time for him to remember that he, too, had a mortal body, and that his turn would come. He might have learned it when he laid waste whole countries, and plundered kingdoms: “He went through even to the ends of the earth: and took the spoils of many nations: and the earth was quiet before him.”³ Then, I say, he might have seen how death would one day come to him, and strip him of everything, leaving him bare and naked. But the last thing he thought of was his own death. It was only when he felt the poison working in his body, when he lay on his death-bed, that he became aware that it was time for him to die. But he knew it too late, and was surprised by death in the height of his pride and intolerable tyranny, and thus hurried into eternity. O Christians, how many there are amongst you who require a mortal illness, the very presence of death, to warn you effectively to prepare for eternity! After these things; after twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years squandered away without doing anything for salvation; after these things; after body and soul have been exhausted in the service of some earthly master, who cannot help to gain heaven; after these things; after having devoted all one’s cares, thoughts, and labor to the world; after these things; after having suffered so much discomfort, annoyance, and misery without a supernatural intention, without resignation to the will of God; without any profit for eternity; after these things; after having spent in vanity, idleness, and sin of all kinds the precious time given by God; after these things; after having bestowed hardly a thought on the last end; after these things; after the conscience has been hardly once purified by a true repentance; “after these things he fell down upon his bed, and knew that he should die;” after all this death comes and summons him into eternity. Then it is too late to know that we must die. Then it is in vain that we sigh for time

¹ Post hæc decidit in lectum, et cognovit quia moreretur.—I. Mach. i. 6.

² Constituit prælia multa, et interfecit reges terræ.—Ibid. 2.

³ Pertransiit usque ad fines terræ, et accepit spolia multitudinis gentium, et siluit terra in conspectu ejus.—Ibid. 3.

to prepare, to amend our lives, to do something for our soul; then we must die as we have lived, unprepared.

Shown by
an example.

Charles, surnamed the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, had no braver soldier in his army than a certain man named William. This man had been accustomed to arms from his earliest youth, and was a thorough soldier; he was always the first to encounter danger; he was often grievously wounded; but that did not lessen his courage; he purchased his promotion, not with money, but with his blood. Having grown grey in arms, he was sent to court to rest on his laurels, and there he was invested with a charge and dignity suitable to his merits; nor did he show less fidelity and energy in the affairs of state than courage and bravery in war. At last he fell into a mortal illness. His death in the eyes of the world ought to have been a glorious one, for he was laden with honors, he had ennobled and enriched his family, performed many heroic actions, and gained an undying name. When he was told that the end of his life was at hand, and death at his door, he opened his eyes wide and seemed lost in thought. Finally he broke out into this sorrowful complaint: And must I leave my dignity, my charge, my duke? Where shall I now have to go? I must appear at a strange court, where I have never done any service. I must go amongst lords and princes whose favor I have never tried to win. And how can the Duke of Burgundy help me now? What can he do for me? For his sake I have endured toil and labor for seventy years, in addition to shedding my blood for him; but to the Lord of Hosts, before whom I must now appear, I have not given a month, a day, a moment, nor even a thought. Give me back the years I have spent so ill, that I may make a better use of them, and turn them to my profit. With this tardy and useless repentance in his heart and on his lips he died. In his last will he ordered this short but pithy epitaph to be written over his grave: "Here lies William, who devoted his services to the court and forgot himself, and went out of this world without having learned why he came into it."¹ And so it is with most people in the world.

How stupid, especially since no one can escape death.

But what stupid, deplorable indifference that is in a reasoning man who has got the gift of faith, to be so careless in a business on which body and soul, and God and eternity, and everything depends! Seneca justly looked on him as a fool who feared death only when he heard the thunder rolling and saw the lightning

¹ *Aulæ oblatuſ, ſui oblituſ, abite mundo ignaruſ cur venerit in munduſ.*

flashing: "O foolish man, and forgetful of your frailty, if you fear death only when it thunders!"¹ If there were any exceptions to the general law of death; if one by forgetting death and rejecting all thought of it could avoid it and save himself from the common fate; then, indeed, we should be excused for seeking all sorts of means of escaping it, of not thinking of it, instead of preparing for its approach; like little children who, when they imagine they see a ghost, put their hands before their eyes, and think that they cannot be seen then and are safe from all danger. But we, my dear brethren, may cover our eyes as much as we please, we may think of it or not, death will come on at his own pace, nearer and nearer every day, hour, and moment; and he will hurry us off without any one being able to protect us from him. The sentence already pronounced is irrevocable: "It is appointed unto men once to die,"² and no one is excepted. To all, rich and poor, young and old, healthy and sick, prince and peasant, are the words uttered: "Take order with thy house, for thou shalt die and not live."³ If we belonged to the number of those wicked and reckless infidels and atheists of whom Isaias says that they neither fear nor hope for anything after death, because they believe that the soul dies with the body, then we should be less inexcusable if like them we said: "And behold, joy and gladness, killing calves and slaying rams, eating flesh and drinking wine: Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die."⁴ Let us enjoy ourselves and let nothing interfere with our pleasures, for death will soon come, and then there will be an end of all. But the man who is persuaded that death is waiting for him; the Christian who is instructed and knows that there is another life after death which will never end; that on the last moment of his life depends his eternal happiness or misery; for such a one, I say, to forget death so easily and put off all preparation for it to the last moment, that is indeed a stupidity that we cannot sufficiently wonder at or deplore.

Let us, my dear brethren, for a moment put out of our minds the universality of the law of death, and try if our imaginations will not help us to grasp the truth we are considering. Sup-

Shown by a
parable.

¹ O te dementem et oblitum fragilitatis tuæ, si tunc times mortem cum tonat!—Senec. in quæst. natur.

² Statutum est hominibus semel mori.—Heb. ix. 27.

³ Dispose domui tuæ, quia morieris tu, et non vives.—Isa. xxxviii. 1.

⁴ Ecce gaudium et lætitia, occidere vitulos, et jugulare arietes, comedere carnes, et bibere vinum: Comedamus et bibamus, cras enim moriemur.—Ibid. xxii. 13.

pose that no one had ever died, and that the name of death is unknown, so that we are all to live forever in this world. And a sad thing that would be for the poor and afflicted who would then have to remain in this vale of tears without the hope of a better life. But suppose for a moment that it is so. Imagine, further, that an angel comes and announces to us in a clear voice: one of you who are now in this church must leave the world and die after a short time, and then he will be brought before the judgment-seat of God, where he shall have to render an exact account of all the thoughts, words, and actions of his whole life; if they are found to be good, he will enjoy himself with God for all eternity, otherwise he must burn forever in the fire of hell. How disturbed we should all be at hearing such a message! What thoughts, doubts, fear, and terror it would give rise to! "O dear angel," we would say, "do not keep us all in suspense! Tell us who it is who must die, so that the rest of us may be free from anxiety!" "I will tell you," replies the angel, "see, there is the man;" and he points to him and says: "thou shalt die." Now we know who he is. But what the man's thoughts would be I leave to himself. Now, my dear brethren, if you saw that he who is thus condemned to death was quite indifferent to his fate, and occupied himself only with building houses, enlarging his gardens and fields, amassing money and having one new garment made after the other; if you heard him complaining and saying: Oh, what a great loss of property I have suffered! What would you think and say of him? There is no doubt that you would say to him: you fool, leave your houses, riches, and lands for us who are to live forever in this world. You are certain that you must leave this life in a short time; why, then, should you trouble yourself about such things? You know that the world will come to an end for you soon; you should, therefore, be indifferent to its riches; nor should you be concerned about the loss of things which you cannot take with you beyond this life. Rather consider how you can best prepare to appear before God after death. But the man takes no notice of all this; and what is still worse, he indulges in all kinds of sinful pleasures, and places no restraint on his passions, as, alas! so many do nowadays. What would you think of this conduct of his? Ah, blind and stupid man! you know that you must give a strict account to an all-knowing God; you must appear before the pure spirits of heaven, and yet

you wallow like a swine in the filth of impurity, although you are certain that you must pay for your wickedness in a short time in the fire of hell! Where is your common sense? Leave those joys and pleasures to us who are not in danger of ever losing them and of having to render an account to a strict Judge; prepare for death; order your life so that you may not lose eternal joys. Such is the advice you would give that man. But is it not the same that every one of us is bound to take and act upon? for we are all sure and certain that in a short time we shall die and appear before the divine Judge, who will send us to heaven or hell for all eternity.

Therefore, I will take this advice to myself, and never forget that it is I who must die, that another will come after me and succeed to my place. Ah, why then do I live so careless of my soul? Why do I think so little of the long eternity of happiness or misery that awaits me? But I will now begin to prepare for the approach of death, and to disregard everything that could prevent me from dying a happy death. Let each one of you, my dear brethren, often say to himself the words: "Thou shalt die and shalt not live;" it is I who must die, and that perhaps soon; I cannot send another in my place into eternity; I myself must journey thither, and leave behind all that I ever possessed or shall possess in the world. Why, then, should I be so concerned for temporal things, since I cannot take them with me? Why do I desire, seek, and love that which God has forbidden me to seek and to love? Why do I long for that which will keep me from heaven, embitter my death, and precipitate me into the flames of hell forever? Why do I not at once try to purify my conscience from the filth of sin, to serve my God more zealously, and to ensure my eternal salvation? Am I not mad and foolish to have ever grievously offended the Lord God and exposed my soul to the greatest danger? "Thou shalt die and shalt not live;" it is I who must die; should I not then begin at once to prepare for death as well as I know how? Truly it is so, and I will prepare myself.

But in what manner? I must now at once do that which I shall have to do in my last illness if I wish to die well, but which I shall then possibly not be able to do properly. To square our accounts with God, to bewail all the sins of our past lives with a contrite heart, and candidly confess them in the holy sacrament of penance, to form the earnest purpose of never

Conclusion and resolution to prepare well for death.

How to do this.

again, for all eternity, committing a sin, to make what restitution I can for the injuries done my neighbor in his property or character, to avoid the proximate occasion of sin, and atone, by good example, for scandal given, to lay aside completely all feelings of disunion, hatred, and anger against my neighbor, and to pardon from the heart and be reconciled to all who have injured me, to make up for lost time by being more zealous in the service of God; ah, to do all that when death is already knocking at the door, when the body is writhing in pain, the heart filled with anguish and the mind bewildered, ah, truly that is not the time for such a weighty business! Therefore the beginning must be made at once, and that to-day, so that everything may be duly attended to. Now I must do what I shall wish to have done on my death-bed, but shall then be unable to do; that is, I shall live as I shall desire to have lived on my death-bed; I shall do and avoid what on my death-bed I shall wish to have done and avoided, and by a frequent reception of the holy sacraments, resignation to the will of God, patience under trials, and a good supernatural intention in all my daily duties, I shall prepare for the coming of the Lord. Let that be our conclusion. It must and shall be mine, with Thy grace, O Lord! that I may be found ready in the hour when Thou shalt come for me, and that when Thou knockest and callest me away from this world I may be, to my great consolation, able to answer Thee: Behold, O Lord, I am ready! Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the first Sunday of Advent.

Text.

Tunc videbunt filium hominis venientem.—Luke xxi. 27.

“Then they shall see the Son of man coming.”

Introduction.

In this season of Advent the Catholic Church warns all her children to prepare their hearts by special devotions for the coming of the incarnate Saviour. “Let your modesty be known to all men: the Lord is nigh,”¹ she says to us in the words of St. Paul; you should now give special signs of humility and piety, etc. For the same reason the daily office is lengthened during the whole month in all religious communities, and prayer, fasting, and mortification are redoubled, just as if the members of those communities wished to encourage one another to be

¹ *Modestia vestra nota sit omnibus hominibus; Dominus prope est.*—Philipp. iv. 5.

ready like the five wise virgins with oil in their lamps, and to say to one another: "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye forth to meet him."¹ Nor does this happen without reason; for never did God show greater mercy and generosity to the world than when He emptied Himself for our salvation, and came down from heaven, took upon Himself human flesh, became man, and was born in a poor stable. My dear brethren, our faith tells us that there is another advent, which we should justly take the utmost interest in; that, namely, in which the Lord will come to visit each one of us in particular, not as a child accompanied by mercy alone, but as a stern and strict judge to administer justice. It is an advent of the Lord of which we cannot say as we can of the first, that it will be for us men and for our salvation: for it will be for the salvation of the just alone, but for the damnation of the wicked. This advent, or coming of the Lord, will happen in the hour of death, that is in the particular judgment of each individual dying mortal. O terrible advent! of which we may well say with fear and trembling in the words of the Prophet Malachy: "Who shall be able to think of the day of His coming? and who shall stand to see Him?"² Now, if a whole month is to be devoted to preparing for the coming of Our Lord as a child, a coming that takes place only in a spiritual manner, how long should we prepare for the other coming of Our Lord in the hour of death, as a strict judge, when His coming shall be real? Oh, truly, a long time beforehand! Nay, all the time of our lives, and that, too, with the utmost care and diligence. The preparation for death should be made a long time beforehand; this is required by the importance of the affair that has to be settled in the coming of Our Lord. It should be made with the greatest care; this is necessary because that coming will happen but once. And further, it should be made always, because we know not when the Lord will come. It should be made with the utmost diligence, because His coming will be unexpected. There we have the division of the matter which we undertake to consider in this season of Advent. To-day I begin with the first point, and say:

Plan of Discourse.

We should prepare a long time beforehand for the coming of the

¹ *Ecce sponsus venit; exite obviam ei.*—Matt. xxv. 6.

² *Quis poterit cogitare diem adventus ejus, et quis stabit ad videndum eum?*—Malach. iii. 2.

Lord in death; this is required by the importance of the affair that has to be settled in His coming. Such is the whole subject, to the end that we may, etc. Continues as above.

FIFTH SERMON.

DEATH COMES BUT ONCE.

Subject.

Our eternal happiness or misery depends on the last moment of our lives, and on that moment alone, because we can die but once; therefore we must do all we can to prepare, so as to be found pure in that moment.—*Preached on the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the B. V. M.*

Text.

Dominus possedit me in initio viarum suarum.—Prov. viii. 22.
 “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways.”

Introduction.

When the question is asked whether Mary, the ever blessed Virgin, is free from original sin, we consider one single moment, and that is the first moment of her existence in her mother's womb. Was she free from original sin in that moment? For no Catholic theologian ever doubted that afterwards, to the very end of her most holy life, she was free from even the least stain of actual sin. The whole glory and privilege of the Blessed Virgin, as far as this point is concerned, consists in the very beginning, the first moment of her conception. And that she was immaculate in that moment is an undoubted truth, believed and taught publicly by the greater number, nay, I may say by all who are true, honest servants of Mary. Truly, O most blessed Virgin, we all believe this firmly, and for my part I am ready to shed my blood and give my life in proof of this truth. That privilege belongs to thee, because thou alone, of all mere creatures, hast had the honor of being chosen as the Mother of the Son of God; thou alone hast brought Him into the world. But what thoughts arise in my mind when I consider this? Ah, if I could only be sure of this much good fortune, that as thou wert pure from all sin from the very beginning of thy life, and didst remain

so till the end of it, so I, at least in the last moment of my life, might be found free from sin! Then, indeed, my happiness would be ensured for all eternity. Mark this, my dear brethren; the happiness of the Blessed Virgin consisted in the first moment of her life; our eternal happiness depends on the last moment of our lives, namely, on whether we shall then be found free from sin. Now, this depends on how we live, and on what we do to prepare for that moment. Ah, should we not use all possible diligence to lead pious and holy lives, that we may find eternal happiness in our last moment? Such is the end and aim of this meditation; its subject is as follows:

Plan of Discourse.

Our eternal happiness or misery depends on the last moment of our lives, and on that moment alone, because we can die but once; therefore we must do all we can to prepare, so as to be found pure in that moment.

O ever immaculate Virgin! obtain for us from thy Son the grace to do this! Help us herein by your intercession, O holy angels!

A prudent man will certainly watch with greatest care over a thing on which all his comfort and happiness depends, that it may not be lost or destroyed. The only son of a rich family is seldom away from under his mother's eye. If he sleeps, it is in his mother's room, or in her lap; if he eats or drinks, it is by his mother's side, or in her arms; he passes almost his whole childhood in his mother's presence. Why? Because he is her darling son, and her only son; for she has no other. If the morning air is somewhat sharp, oh, quick! shut the window, and do not on any account let the child go out, lest he should catch cold! If the fruit is not good, or ripe, or unhealthy for any other reason, for God's sake do not allow the child to get hold of an apple or a nut! He might get sick from eating it. Servants, maids, and every one in the house must be always on the watch to prevent him from running here and there, lest he should fall and hurt himself, or go up or down the stairs without there being some one at hand, or lest he should go too near an open window, or run the risk of burning himself at the fire, or cutting himself with a knife. Wo to the maid who is so unlucky as to let him fall through accident! Wo to the servant who does anything to annoy him! The

The only child of a rich family is taken great care of.

mother's eye is always open and watchful; her uneasy, anxious heart is always beating. Ah, my God! I have but the one! If he dies, my name and family, my consolation and joy are all at an end!

An only means to an important end is used carefully. Shown by a simile.

If there is only one means of preserving the beloved object, it surely will not be neglected, but rather used with the greatest care, that it may not fail of producing the desired effect. Suppose, my dear brethren, that two soldiers who have been condemned to death for desertion, and are already on their way to execution, throw the dice with each other to see who shall escape with his life. Trembling and shuddering the first takes the dice-box in his hand; his anguish is so great that he hardly dares to make the throw; he grows pale at the bare idea of throwing a low number. But why is he so cowardly? He can make the throw at once? Yes, that is true; but he thinks to himself: my life depends on this throw, and that, too, the only life I have; if I lose it I am done. But if you throw a low number the first time, you can take the dice again and try your luck a second time. Oh, no! I am allowed but one throw, and if I am unlucky in that my life is lost. This is a mere question of luck, my dear brethren; what would it be if the soldier had the chance of practising beforehand, so as to make sure of throwing a high number? How do you imagine he would act in such a case? He would almost forget to eat, drink, or sleep; day and night he would have the dice-box in his hand practising so as not to make a mistake in the last decisive moment. And yet nothing more than his life depends on it, and that, too, a mortal life, which he must lose in a short time, whether he wishes or not; and, moreover, it is a very short, uncertain life, full of crosses and troubles, that vanishes like a shadow. Yet it is the only life he has and it is dear to him. So great is the esteem, so jealous the care we have for a good that belongs to us, and that we can possess but once.

Confirmed from Holy Scripture.

Come with me, now, into the valley of Terebinth. There we find the people of Israel in the greatest fear and confusion. "And Saul and all the Israelites," says the Scripture, "hearing these words of the Philistine, were dismayed and greatly afraid." What was the matter with them? What was the cause of their fear? What had they heard? The huge giant Goliath stood in the van of the Philistine army: "And standing, he cried out to the bands of Israel: Choose out a man of you, and let him come down and fight hand to hand," on this condition: "if he be able to fight with me and kill me, we will be servants to you: but if I

prevail against him, and kill him, you shall be servants, and shall serve us.”¹ That, says Gaspar Sanchez, was what caused such terror to Saul and the Israelites; nor is it to be wondered at; for it is a terrible thing to think that the freedom or slavery of a whole nation depends on the success or failure of one man in a single combat. David, a shepherd, had to undertake the task and face the giant, the mere sight of whom was enough to strike terror into the bravest. On one side stood the army of the Philistines, on the other the people of Israel. David takes a stone out of his wallet, places it in a sling, and swings his arm to launch the stone against his enemy. O unhappy Israelites! “they were dismayed and greatly afraid;” they were filled with anguish and apprehension, waiting to see whether David would hit or miss. O God! they thought, now is the decisive moment. On this cast of the sling depends our freedom or slavery; if he succeeds, we are free; if not, we are lost! Oh, what will be the upshot of the affair! O terrible chance which depends on the throw of a stone!

My dear brethren, let me now call out to all of you, and repeat a thousand times those memorable words of Our Lord to Martha, as she was busying herself about her domestic occupations: “Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and art troubled about many things. But one thing is necessary;”² only one thing has to be well looked after once for all. Ah, foolish mortals, why are you so careful and so inordinately troubled about so many things? What do you seek, desire, and strive for in the world? What is the meaning of all your hard work and struggles for earthly and transitory things? Only one thing is necessary, and that we must love and prize above all; we have but one child, whom we must labor with all our strength to preserve, and that is the salvation of our own soul; for if that is lost, all is lost. And it can be saved or lost but once, according as we now look after its interests or neglect them. Our life is a game, or rather a continual preparation for a game; the stake is this one soul of ours, and its eternal happiness in heaven or eternal misery in hell. There is only one moment in which the decisive throw can be made, and that is the last moment of our lives, as I have said before. For

The eternal happiness or misery of our only soul depends on the last moment of our life.

¹ Audiens autem Saul et omnes Israelitæ sermones Philistæi hujuscemodi, stupebant et metuebant nimis. Stansque clamabat adversus phalangas, Israel: Eligite ex vobis virum, et descendat ad singulare certamen. Si quiverit pugnare mecum, et percusserit me, erimus vobis servi; si autem ego prævaluero, et percussero eum, vos servi eritis, et servietis nobis. —I. Kings xvii. 11, 8, 9.

² Martha, Martha, sollicita es, et turbaris erga plurima. Porro unum est necessarium.—Luke x. 41, 42.

in whatever state death finds us, whether in the state of sanctifying grace or of mortal sin, according to that state our fate shall be decided for all eternity.

As I am prepared or not in that moment, so it shall be well or ill with me forever.

Before this last moment comes, no sinner, no matter how bad he is, should despair of salvation; for he still has time to play his game well. Before this last moment comes, no just servant of God, no matter how pious and holy he has been hitherto, can be infallibly certain of winning the game; it is still possible for him to lose. And when that moment is at hand, wo to him who is not prepared! But well indeed it will be for him who is ready! "If the tree fall to the south, or to the north," says the wise Preacher, speaking of a dying man, "in what place soever it shall fall, there shall it be."¹ If man at his death falls to the south, that is, if he dies well and goes to heaven, he will remain there for all eternity. If he falls to the north, that is, if he dies unprepared and goes to hell, he will remain there for all eternity.

And it is but one moment that will never return.

This happiness or misery of the soul depends on one single moment which comes but once. No one shall be allowed to take part twice in this decisive game; no one shall be able to make a second throw of the dice. Ah, must not then the upshot be a matter of the deepest interest to us? If death was a play that one could practise several times before putting it on the stage, then we could easily correct any faults that might be made in it. But tell me, can we, perhaps, die by way of practice, to see how the thing is to be done, and then return in order to die the second time better and happier? Or can we send one soul before us into eternity to feel the way for us, and if that goes wrong, send another soul by a better way? Oh, no! that is utterly impossible. The first soul that we send into eternity is the only one we have; we have no other; the first death we die shall also be our last; we cannot expect another.

When it has passed it will be too late to correct mistakes.

We are challenged to single combat, each one for himself, alone, with the hellish Goliath. Truly a terrible combat on which infinitely more depends than on the fight that David had with the giant! On the one side will stand heaven, on the other hell; on the one side the elect, on the other the reprobate, who will be witnesses of this combat to see how it ends. Then we shall see practically the truth of the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians: "We are made a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to

¹ Si ceciderit lignum ad austrum aut ad aquilonem, in quocumque loco ceciderit ibi erit.—Eccles. xi. 3.

men.”¹ In this last combat, this supreme moment, defeat means being a slave of the devil; victory means conquering him forever. If David had missed Goliath with the first stone, he could have quickly got another out of his wallet, and rectified his mistake; but if we miss in our last battle, in the one throw we can make, we are done forever.

Plutarch writes of a captain who summoned one of his soldiers before him for some breach of discipline. The soldier, having heard the punishment to which he was condemned, with pallid face and down-cast eyes answered in his defence: “Sir, forgive me this time! I will not do it again.” “That is a fine excuse!” said the captain. “I will not do it again! Do you not know that one cannot commit a fault the second time during war? There is no correcting faults in war-time;”² the first fault must be punished. Change one word, my dear brethren, in this answer; say *in death* instead of *in war*, and you will have said the truth; in death you cannot blunder twice; no chance then of correcting a fault; what is then once faulty remains so forever. And why? St. Paul tells us, when he says that it is decreed for all men not only to die, but also to die once: “It is appointed unto men once to die,”³ not twice; and after death comes judgment, which is irrevocable, and from which no appeal can be made to another judge. If I once die well, I shall be well off, and that forever, without any fear of losing my happiness; if I once die unhappily, I am lost and cast away, and that forever, without any hope of ever being freed from torments. If I am in the state of grace in my last moment, a friend and child of God, my lot shall be an eternal kingdom, everlasting riches, joys and oceans of joys with God in heaven, which no man shall be able to take from me. If I am in the state of sin in my last moment, an enemy of God, then my dwelling-place shall be a prison, in which I shall suffer eternal poverty and pain, burning forever with the demons in hell, and no one shall be able to help me.

O last moment of my life and first beginning of my eternity! How terrible thou art! In one moment my soul shall go forth from this world and at once appear before the judgment-seat of God. In one moment I shall see clearly all my sins in their gravity and deformity, and I shall have to answer for them! In that one moment I shall see clearly all the graces, inspirations,

Shown by
an example
after the
manner of a
simile.

In this one
moment all
shall be
settled for
eternity.

¹ Spectaculum facti sumus mundo, et angelis, et hominibus.—I. Cor. iv. 9.

² Belli non datur correctio erroris.

³ Statutum est hominibus semel mori, post hoc autem iudicium.—Heb. ix. 27.

benefits, and opportunities that God gave me so generously during my life, and I shall have to account for them! In that one moment sentence shall be pronounced on me, and I shall have to go either to heaven or to hell! O terrible truth that no more time than one moment should be required to decide for an eternity! one moment! O moment! if thou art unlucky for me, of what use will be to me all the worldly wealth I now possess? "Silver and gold I have none,"¹ I shall then be able to say in the words of St. Peter to the lame man: all that I had remains behind on earth, and I am going with empty hands, bare and naked, into everlasting misery. Of what use will be to me all the pleasures and joys that I now seek from creatures? They have vanished "as a dream,"² as the Prophet David says; the body is borne to the grave; the soul goes to eternal torments. And of what use to me will be all the dignities and honors I enjoyed on earth? They shall all disappear with the last toll of the funeral-bell.

In that moment we shall have a different opinion of earthly things.

How different the judgment I shall then form of the vanity of the world! Many a one who is now high in honor will then be of the opinion of Pope Leo XI. This pontiff was on his death-bed, and his confessor came to him. "Your Holiness should be comforted," said he to the dying pope, "for you have the keys of the kingdom of heaven." "Ah," was the answer, "I should be more consoled if I had held in my hands, during my life, the keys of some poor convent!" Many a mighty potentate of the world will then be of the opinion of Philip III., that celebrated king of Spain, of whom it was said that he never committed a mortal sin in his life. When he was on his death-bed he was asked what he thought of the royal dignity. "I wish," he replied, "that I had been a poor monk, instead of being king of Spain." O last and only moment, on which eternity depends! if thou art a fortunate one for me, of what harm to me will be the poverty, trouble, humiliation, crosses, and trials that I now suffer? With joy I shall then be able to say, like St. Peter of Alcantara, who appeared to St. Teresa after his death, and said to her of the penance and mortification he used to practise during life: "O happy penance, which has merited such glory for me!"³

Truly a terrible mo-

O last and only moment, on which the twofold eternity de-

¹ Argentum et aurum non est mihi.—Acts iii. 6.

² Velut somnium.—Ps. lxxii. 20.

³ O felix poenitentia, quae tantam mihi promeruit gloriam!

pendents! who shall not fear, who shall dare to indulge in forbidden pleasures, when he thinks of thee? Raulinus writes of a certain Christian prince who was always thinking of death, and never indulged in idle amusements or in the vain joys of the world. His jester once asked him why he was so thoughtful and fond of solitude; why he did not sometimes enjoy himself. "Wait a little," answered the prudent prince, "I will soon show you the cause of my seriousness." He then ordered a worm-eaten chair to be brought in, a fire to be lit under it, and a sword to be suspended over it by a thin thread; and then he told the jester to sit down on it. We can easily imagine what the jester's feelings were on the occasion. "Well," said the prince to him, "what do you think of yourself now? Are you not inclined to be merry and joyful?" "Ah," answered the other, "how can I be merry in the frightful danger in which I am? If the chair breaks, I shall fall into the fire; while over my head hangs the sword suspended by a thread! How can I possibly be merry?" "Oh! is that so?" said the prince; "then you should not be astonished that I take no pleasure in the vain joys of earth; for I am just in the position in which you are now; for in one moment the chair of my life can break and hurl me into hell, while over my head hangs the sword of divine justice."

ment, that we have reason to fear! Shown by an example

O my God, if I always remembered this, would it be possible for me to live so carelessly in the state of sin? O last and only moment on which a twofold eternity depends! Would that thou wert happily gone by for me! But why wish for that which is in my own hands, in my own free will? I can die happily in that last moment if I wish, and if I faithfully correspond with the grace of God, which will never be refused me. My dear brethren, the game we have to play is no game of chance, in which mere luck decides the fall of the dice or cards. The result depends on how we prepare for the last moment, on whether we lead a pious or a wicked life. For no one dies a bad death who has lived well to the end; no one dies a good death who has lived wickedly to the end. What more reasonable object, then, O Christian souls, can we have for all our care than to lead a pious, modest, humble, God-fearing life, that we may once die well, and by that one good death gain heaven?

Hence we should labor beforehand to make this moment a happy one by leading a good life.

St. Jerome relates that a band of robbers once met a holy hermit named Hilarius, and asked him what he would do if he were attacked by robbers. The holy man, who was then only eighteen

Then we need not fear it. After the example

of pious
Christians.

years of age, answered undismayed that he was not afraid of robbers, for he was poor and had nothing they could take from him; "he who is naked fears no thief."¹ "But," said they, "you might lose your life."² The holy youth laughingly answered them: "Yes, I can lose my life, but that is no reason for me to fear robbers, for I am already prepared to die."³ So calmly does he await death who is always prepared for it.

How foolish
to waste
one's life in
sin!

And since we believe and are infallibly certain that we must die but once, what could be more foolish than to prepare ourselves for death by leading a vicious life, thus running the risk of dying unhappily and being condemned to hell for all eternity? Yet, alas! that is what most men do. "O that they would be wise and understand, and would provide for their last end."⁴ Such is the ardent wish of our good God uttered by the lips of Moses; for He desires all men without exception to be saved and to be happy with Himself in heaven. Would that they were wise enough, now while there is time, to provide for their last end; then they would think of it more frequently and seriously, and use all diligence not to live so carelessly in the state of sin, but rather to gain and keep the favor and friendship of God. Oh, that we were wise!

We should
remember
we can die
but once.

Come, holy Apostle St. Paul, with that terrible yet salutary sentence of thine. We must hear it; let it therefore resound incessantly in our ears: "It is appointed unto men once to die!" Write up in all public and private places the words "once to die!" Write them on the coffers of the unjust, of usurers and misers, whose end and aim and only god is their money, which they try to add to by all sorts of dishonest practices, oppressing the poor and needy and taking their little all from them. "Once to die!" Write it over the shops of those merchants, over the offices of those state officials who so often barter their consciences and their hopes of heaven. "Once to die!" Write it in those drinking and dancing houses where so many sins are committed in thought, word, and deed. "Once to die!" Write it in those secret places where so much impurity is committed. "Once to die!" Write it on the looking-glass before which so much precious time that God has lent us to work out our salvation, and to prepare for a happy death, is lost in vain and scandalous

¹ *Nudus latrones non timet.*

² *At illi, certe ajunt, occidi potes.*

³ *Possum, et ideo latrones non timeo. quia mori paratus sum.*

⁴ *Utinam saperent, et intelligerent, ac novissima providerent!—Deut. xxxii. 29.*

dressing to please the eyes of others, and win their hearts, thus often giving occasion to unchaste desires and thoughts. "Once to die!" Write it on the doors of the churches in which due respect and reverence are replaced by wandering thoughts, curious looks, idle greetings, not to speak of still worse. "Once to die!" Write it in the confessionals, in which so many bad confessions are made, and consciences are stained with fresh guilt, either through shame or through want of true sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment. "Once to die!" Write it on the communion rail, at which so many sacrilegious communions are made, because men do not hesitate to approach the Table of the Lord with sinful hearts, or while they are still in the proximate occasion of sin, or persisting in their evil habits. "Once to die!"

Let us impress the same words deeply on our hearts and minds, that we may never forget them. "Once to die!" We shall die; we shall die but once; so that in all times and places, in everything we do, we may work hard to prepare to die well that once, and thus insure our salvation. For my part, that shall be my first thought on awaking every morning; I shall die but once, therefore I will serve my God to-day with zeal, and neither in thought, word, nor act will I do anything that might prevent me from dying well that once. Every evening when retiring to rest I will remember that I shall die but once; and therefore I shall purify my conscience by a good examen and true repentance before I go to bed, so that nothing may remain on it during the night that could prevent me from dying well. Dearest Christians, remember this, all of you; never forget it! We shall die but once. Ah, live good lives always, and that is as much as to say: die happy deaths. Amen.

Conclusion
to be always
ready to die.

Another introduction to the same sermon for the second Sunday in Advent.

Text.

Qui præparabit viam tuam ante te.—Matt. xi. 10.

"Who shall prepare Thy way before Thee."

Introduction.

John was the precursor whom God sent to prepare the way for His Incarnate Son: "This is he of whom it is written: Behold

I send my angel before Thy face who shall prepare Thy way before Thee." My dear brethren, the Son of man will come one day to each one of us in the particular judgment, that is, in the hour of death, to call us into a long eternity; who will prepare the way for this coming of His? Ah, to no purpose should we expect an angel to do this work for us! For it is laid on our own shoulders; each one of us must see that he prepares the way himself; and, as I have shown already, this preparation should be made a long time beforehand, because the business treated of in this coming of Our Lord will be a most important one. Now I add that this preparation should be made with the utmost care, for that coming shall happen only once, that is, we shall die but once. There you have the

Plan of Discourse.

Only once will the Judge come to call us in death; therefore we should labor with all diligence and care, that things may go well with us that once. Such is the whole subject of this meditation.

O holy guardian angels and thou, Mary, Queen of angels, help us by your intercession with God! Urge us constantly by your inspirations and warnings to care for nothing more than to prepare worthily for the coming of the Lord.

SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE UNCERTAINTY OF DEATH.

Subject.

It is uncertain when death will come; therefore if we desire our salvation we should be always ready and prepared for it.—*Preached on the twentieth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Incipiebat enim mori.—John iv. 47.

“For he was at the point of death.”

Introduction.

So that even rich people must die? Truly they must! Even kings and princes cannot escape death. And have young people to die also? Without the least doubt. He of whom the Gospel

says that he was at the point of death was the young son of a ruler. Who is, then, free from death? Not one in the whole world. "It is appointed unto all men;" the sentence is gone forth that all without exception must die, and that, too, but once. When shall we die? That is known to God alone, who has fixed the last hour for each one. What follows therefrom? This; that he who wishes to die well must be always prepared for death. There you have, my dear brethren, the subject of this sermon.

Plan of Discourse.

It is uncertain when death will come; therefore if we love our salvation we should always be ready and prepared for it.

That we may all do this give us, Lord, Thy powerful grace, which we beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

Our dear Saviour, who knew all things, wishing to exhort and instruct us as to how we should prepare for death, makes use of these words, which we find in the Gospel of St. Luke: "And you yourselves like to men who wait for their lord . . . that when he cometh and knocketh they may open to him immediately."¹ Mark well this simile, my dear brethren. In two different ways can servants await their master, when they have received word that he is coming. For either a messenger is sent on to announce the master's arrival, saying for instance: your master is now some hours from here; he will arrive towards evening; and in that case the servant takes matters easily the whole forenoon; for, he thinks, it will do if I am at home in the evening. Why? Because I know that my master will not arrive till evening; at all events he cannot be here in the forenoon. And he is quite right. Or else the message is delivered in the following terms: your master is on the road home; he will arrive to-morrow, but I know not at what time. How must that servant act in order to be sure of being present to receive his master? Can he go out in the forenoon? No, because his master might come during his absence. He has waited till ten, eleven, twelve o'clock, and no sign of his master yet; can he not now leave the house and do as he wishes? Not by any means, for his master might come at midday. He waits still longer, until it begins to get

The servant who knows not when his master will return from a journey must be always ready to receive him.

¹ Et vos similes hominibus expectantibus dominum suum, . . . ut cum venerit et pulsaverit, confestim aperiant ei.—Luke xli. 36.

dark. Now, perhaps, he might go to the ale-house to drink a glass with his companions? But no, for his master can and will still come. If that servant means to do his duty he must be ready every hour during the whole day. Why so? Because the master may come at any moment, and the servant knows not when to expect him.

We know not when the Lord will come to call us from this world.

Now, my dear brethren, this is the way in which we must be all ready for the coming of Our Lord at the hour of death. It is infallibly certain that He is already on the way, that we must die, and that the longer we have lived the nearer our death is; but at what time will He come? In what year shall we die? This year, or next? In what month, week, day, hour, moment? No man can tell us that, because no man knows it. Meanwhile we have received a message regarding this matter, delivered by infallible truth itself through the apostle St. Matthew. What is that message? You have often heard it; listen to it again: "Watch ye, therefore, because you know not what hour your Lord will come."¹ In the following chapter He gives us the same message, concluding the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in these words: "Watch ye, therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour."² In the Gospel of St. Mark He says: "Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is."³ And again: "Watch ye, therefore (for you know not when the lord of the house cometh: at even, or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning)."⁴ "Lest coming on a sudden, he find you sleeping."⁵

He exhorts all without exception to be on the watch for His coming.

And lest it should appear that this warning was given only to His apostles and disciples, He adds the expressive words: "And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch."⁶ The warning is given to all men; no one, no matter who he is, knows anything of the day, the hour, or the moment when I will come to call him. "But of that day or hour no man knoweth, neither the angels in heaven."⁷ "Our Creator," says St. Gregory, "is pleased to conceal our end from us, and to leave the day of our death unknown to us; that as we are ignorant of it, we may al-

¹ *Vigilate ergo, quia nescitis qua hora Dominus vester venturus est.*—Matt. xxiv. 43.

² *Vigilate itaque, quia nescitis diem neque horam.*—Ibid. xxv. 13.

³ *Videte, vigilate et orate; nescitis enim quando tempus sit.*—Mark xiii. 33.

⁴ *Vigilate itaque; nescitis enim quando dominus domus veniat: sero, an media nocte, an galli cantu, an mane.*—Ibid. 35.

⁵ *Ne cum venerit repente, inveniat vos dormientes.*—Ibid. 36.

⁶ *Quod autem vobis dico, omnibus dico: Vigilate.*—Ibid. 37.

⁷ *De die autem illo vel hora nemo scit, neque angeli in cælo.*—Ibid. 32.

ways believe it to be at hand.”¹ Let no one, then, try to deceive himself, as many have done, by saying: I am still young, I shall not die yet; I am still strong and healthy. I am in no danger of death; I will finish this business before I die; death will not overtake me in the public street; I shall have time to confess my sins; I am not so far gone, I have still time enough, and so forth. Ah, foolish thoughts! Believe rather what the God of infallible truth says: “I say to all: Watch.” “You know not the day nor the hour.” I say this to all without distinction of age or condition: you know not whether you will be sick or healthy, young or old, at home or abroad, in the state of sin or in the state of grace, when you are called into eternity, or whether that summons will be given to-day or to-morrow, at ten or at one o’clock. Death has no consideration for the distinction that people make on account of rank, age, or condition. It is all the same to him who, where, or what it is.

As we have seen in the last sermon, since we can die but once, and on the last moment depends our happiness or misery for all eternity, it follows undeniably that we must use all diligence to be prepared for this last moment so as to die well; in the same way it follows from this third truth that, since we know not when the last moment will come, we should be ready for it all the time of our lives, and therefore that it is the greatest folly to be unprepared and in the state of sin even for a single moment, because that very moment may be our last. Even now, as far as I myself am concerned, I acknowledge that when I am opening my mouth to address you and exhort you to prepare for death I may breathe my last before closing it again; can I, then, allow a moment to pass without being ready to die? In a short time, when I am leaving this church, each step I take may be my last; can I then be satisfied if I am still unprepared to take the final step into eternity? In the moment I raise my hand to take my food at table I may swallow the last morsel; can I then dare to go to table without being ready to die? In the hour when I retire to rest I may sleep my last sleep, and never wake up again, as happened to Sisara, of whom the Scripture says: “Passing from deep sleep to death, he fainted away and died.”² Shall I then dare to bring to bed with me a con-

Hence we must be always ready for death, and not remain a moment in sin.

¹ Ad hoc autem conditor noster latere nos voluit finem nostrum, diemque nostræ mortis esse incognitum; ut dum semper ignoratur, semper proximus esse credatur.—S. Greg. l. 12. moral.

² Soporem mortì consocians deficit, et mortuus est.—Judges iv. 21.

science burdened by sin? In the very moment in which I commit sin (ah, may God protect me from such an evil!) I may and perhaps shall fall dead on the spot; how then could I dare to sin?

How foolish
those sin-
ners who
are afraid to
die and yet
continue in
sin!

Would I now, in the state in which I am, would you, my dear brethren, in your present state, be ready to open the door to the Lord, if He should knock, and to travel with Him into eternity? Let each one consider his own case, and ask himself: am I now ready to die? Reflect a little. . . . If not, why then do I not at once remove the obstacle out of the way, and place my soul in safety; for I can never be sure of the hour at which Our Lord will come. Do you dare, O unjust man, to await the coming of death, while you still have in your possession that which you obtained by dishonest means? Truly not! Why then should you be so foolhardy as to keep those ill-gotten goods, I will not say an hour, but years and years? Would you, O unchaste man, like to be surprised by death while your mind is filled with impure images and desires, your heart full of unchaste love? Would you wish for death while the pen is still in your hand to write a letter to the object of your unlawful affection, while you are in that company in which you allow your eyes all liberty, and keep your ears and mouth open to sinful discourses? Would you like death to come for you in that secret place in which you gratify your impure passions? Oh, no, you think; that is certainly not the time nor the place to die in. How then can you dare to continue your wicked ways? Would you, O vindictive man, wish to die in the moment when your heart is full of bitterness and hatred, anger, and revenge, and your mouth with curses, oaths, and imprecations against your neighbor, and your whole idea is to have satisfaction from him who, as you imagine, has injured you? Oh, no, indeed! And why do you not then at once begin, according to the Christian law, to pardon your neighbor from your heart, to be reconciled to him, and to give up the abominable habit of cursing? Would you, O drunkard, wish to die when you come home completely intoxicated, and ill-treat and tyrannize over your poor wife as if she were a dog? Would you, O sinner, wish to be surprised by death with those secret sins on your conscience, which you have not confessed through shame, or which you have not really repented of, or are not firmly resolved to amend? Would you, I ask, like to die then? Ah, God forbid! Is that your idea? If so, then why do you wait? Why do you not at once seek an experienced confessor, who will

free you from the dangerous state in which you are? Open at once the mouth you have kept closed so long, and bewail your sins, that you may free yourself from the evident danger of hell in which you are; for death can and perhaps will otherwise surprise you in your present evil plight.

If you received a certain message from heaven telling you that you are to die to-morrow, or in a week, nay, even in a month, would you wait long before preparing yourself for death, and freeing your conscience from sin? My opinion is that you would begin at once to settle accounts with your Judge and to lead, for the rest of the time that is given you, a pious, Christian, humble, holy life, so that you may not be lost, but may be happy with God forever in heaven. Is not that the case? And yet you continue to sin, and intend to remain in the state of sin, although perhaps not a month, nor a week, nor a day, but only a few minutes of life remain to you. Imagine you are now on a bed of sickness; the doctors have given you up and say that you must certainly die in four hours unless a miracle is wrought in your favor; how would you spend those last hours? There is not a doubt that you would look after the interests of your soul, that you would receive the last sacraments at once, make your will, and do all in your power to prepare for eternity. Is that not so? And why? Because you know that you must die in four hours, that it is all over with you, and that death is at hand. Quite right! Now how many sick people are there not, who according to the doctors were bound to die, and yet they have recovered and are still alive? Cases of the kind are countless. How many, on the other hand, have preserved their lives contrary to the declaration of God and of our faith? Not one. What do God and faith say? That you must die at an hour you know not; He does not fix for you four hours, like the doctors, but one hour, nay, one moment, and you know not when that shall come. If you believe the doctor when he tells you that you have four hours to live, and on the strength of his opinion prepare so carefully for death, why are you so negligent in preparing when God does not promise you even one hour of life? Faith tells you that you cannot be safe from death for a single moment. How, then, can you dare to continue living as you have hitherto lived? How can you still persist in sinning? How can you be so presumptuous as to remain for one hour in the state of sin and yet expect to go to heaven?

Although they know they may die at any moment.

And are
hastening
to death
wherever
they are.

Seneca (if I did not know that he was a heathen I could imagine him to have been one of the holy Fathers, from the way in which he speaks of this subject) says: See how those who have to go on a long sea-voyage, or to risk their lives in battle, make their wills before setting out. And why do they do that? Why are they so anxious? They are still strong and healthy, and have no wish to die. Why are they in such a hurry about their last wills? Because on sea and in battle death is but three paces distant, and therefore it is not advisable to go so near to death without having first written down that will which is probably to be the last. Hear now what Seneca says to this: O foolish mortals! you must know that in all places and times we are just as near to death; he is as little removed from us on land as on sea, at home in bed as in the battle-field.¹ The only thing he has to do is to cut the slender thread of our lives. The only difference is that in some places he appears nearer, while in others he keeps himself concealed.² Death is near, on sea and in the battle-field, and he shows himself as at hand; he is quite as close at home and on land, but he does not show himself; that is, we imagine we are not in immediate danger of being surprised by him. He is near and shows himself to the sick and aged; he is just as near, without showing himself, to the young and healthy; and in all cases the hour of his coming is uncertain. If, then, we think it necessary to put our affairs in order before undertaking a dangerous voyage, or going into battle, or when we are grievously ill, because death is to be feared in such circumstances, why do we not always keep ourselves ready, since in all times and places there is the same danger to dread? This argument was suggested to a mere heathen by the simple light of reason. My dear brethren, what can we Christians say to this, if not to acknowledge, to our secret shame, that many of us, although we have known that same truth by the infallible light of faith, have spent years in vice and sin and vanity, without ever thinking of our last end, to say nothing of preparing for it? This is what St. Bernard calls a terrible, incomprehensible blindness and presumption.

How un-
wise to
trust one's
only soul to

But there is one excuse, I know, that men bring forward to blind themselves to the truth, or rather to help the devil to close their eyes to the danger. And what is that? It is true, they

¹ In omni loco æque tenue intervallum est.

² Ubique tam prope est, sed non ubique se prope ostendit.

say, that the hour and moment of death are uncertain; still people do not die without having some warning of their approaching end. Experience tells us that many thousands live in sin till their old age, and yet they are converted at last. Sudden death is the exception; most people die after an illness, and they can make their confession and reconcile themselves with God, and thus die fortified with the holy sacraments. So, I trust, it will be with me, and therefore I am not under the necessity of living in fear and dread all my life. Is that really possible? Christians, what are you thinking of? I will say nothing now about your assertion that most people die after an illness; I will answer that next Sunday, and from experience, too. But I ask you again, what are you thinking of? Do you know of what you are speaking? What the question is about? What we are treating of in the present instance? Is it about landed property, or a vineyard, or a sum of money? I am sure that if such were the case you would be very far from allowing your property to take its chance in an uncertain manner; but you would go to work with the utmost caution; although you could not be blamed if you were somewhat careless in this latter instance, since earthly goods are not of much importance, and their loss can easily be repaired again, so that you may readily expose to danger all your wealth, strength, and reputation. But what are we speaking of now? "Ah," exclaims St. John Chrysostom, "remember that you are speaking of the soul;"¹ of your own soul, of your only soul, of your immortal soul, which shall live forever, of that soul whose loss is irreparable, whose wound incurable. And do you speak and think of it so presumptuously? Are you so ready to imperil it so foolishly? Will you give it over to such an uncertain, blind, dangerous chance?²

an uncertain chance

Many men sin, and are converted afterwards, you say; and you are right. That may be the case with me, you infer. It may be, but also it may not be; it is uncertain. Many die in old age; that is true. But still a greater number die before old age; and that is true also. Perhaps I shall live to be an old man, and then lead a holy life. Perhaps, and perhaps not. Who has told you that such will be your lot? Most people get sick first, and are warned of the approach of death by their sickness, so that they can prepare; I hope for a similar chance. You

They are mostly deceived by the hope of a timely conversion.

¹ Memento, memento quod de anima loqueris.—St. John Chrys. hom. 24 in Ep. 2 ad Cor.

² Incertis ergo eventibus telpsum committis?

hope for it; but you may be disappointed! How many people there are who die a sudden and unprovided death? Many young and healthy people whose last thought was death, have thus left the world and gone to eternal ruin, because it never entered their heads to be reconciled with God. Almost every day you hear something of this kind; so-and-so was carried off by a stroke of apoplexy; another was shot by accident; a third was struck by lightning; a fourth was drowned. Do you think that God will let you know the day of your death a long time beforehand, so that you may continue offending Him by sin until the last moment, and then recover His friendship by a tardy repentance? Open the holy Scriptures and the History of the Church and you will see that God foretold the day and hour of their death to some holy servants of His; but that very few sinners ever received such a revelation. In the Old Testament, as far as I remember, there is no case of the kind except King Saul, whose death was announced a day beforehand by the Prophet Samuel. In the New Testament the only instance we have is that of the foolish rich man, to whom God said a few hours beforehand that He would come that night for him. How can you, then, dare to flatter yourself with the assurance that you will not die this very day? “Even if the day of judgment is far away from us,” says St. Augustine, “is your last day far off? And how can you know when it will come? Have not many gone to bed in good health and died in the night? Do we not bear about the seeds of death in this body of ours?”¹ The most famous anatomists and naturalists wonder, when they consider the structure of the body, how a human being can live even for one day; for in even the smallest member of it there is enough to cause death. “Are we not more fragile than if we were made of glass?”² What could our bodies do to resist the different exterior accidents that may and often do befall us? Now, if it is so easy for me to die suddenly, and I am in the state of sin, I am in as great danger of dying in sin as I am of dying suddenly. You think to yourself, the number of those who die suddenly is small; it is not likely that I shall be amongst them. But how do you know that? Death will not come so soon for me! But he might come: and if he did? Oh! there is no fear of that.

¹ Numquid si longe est dies iudicii, longe est dies tuus? Unde scis quando est? Nonne multi sani dormierunt, et obdormierunt? Nonne casus nostros in hac carne portamus?

² Nonne fragilliores sumus, quam si vitrei essemus?

How do you know? Have you any letter or document to prove what you say? All those who have been drowned, or have fallen dead on the spot, or been carried off by an apoplectic fit, or have died by some other accident, have thought that death would not come to them so soon; but they were mistaken.

Such was the case with that nobleman in England of whom Bartoli writes. When the Catholics were bitterly persecuted in every part of the country and cruelly tortured, he said to himself: At heart I will remain a Catholic and keep all the laws of the true religion; but outwardly I will conform to the heretics. So I will save my goods, my honor, and my life. The good God, who sees my heart, will not let me die without giving me a chance of confessing my sins and getting rid of them by true repentance, so that I may save my soul. I generally live in the town where there is a priest concealed, who is ready to absolve me; if I go into the country, there is another there; so I cannot be disappointed. Death will not come upon me in the public streets, like a robber. No, there is no fear of my dying without confession. And yet he was surprised by death as he was on the way from the town to his property in the country. His servants, seeing that he was grievously ill, ran, one into the town, the other to his country-house, to bring the priest; but to no purpose, for their master was dead before they arrived. Thus, concludes Bartoli, he who had two priests to live badly could not find one to help him to die well. The same fate has happened to thousands of others, who left this world in the state of sin, thinking that they were still safe enough from death.

Therefore I ask you again: Sinner! if you were to fare as they did? If death came to you now—and that is quite possible—what would become of you? Oh, if he comes, let him come! I must only have patience. Patience? If death surprises you in the state of sin and you die impenitent, will you suffer that patiently? If he hurls you into the depths of hell, will you suffer that patiently? If you have to weep and howl and gnash your teeth, curse God and yourself, and burn in that lake of fire forever, will you suffer that patiently? Will you then commit your fate and fortunes to such a blind and uncertain chance? You would not lend your money to any one of whom you could say: perhaps he may give it back to me. Before parting with it you must have some surety that it will be returned. You would not venture your life in a leaky vessel, of which you could say:

Shown by
an example.

The same
may happen
to any one:
therefore no
one should
run the risk.

perhaps she may make the voyage in safety; but you would seek out the strongest and safest ship. And yet, foolish man that you are! you intrust your soul and its salvation to such an uncertainty!

Shown by
another ex-
ample.

Arnulph, Count of Flanders, was suffering the most violent pains. The doctors tried every means to give him relief, but fruitlessly, and at last they determined to perform an operation on him. They proposed this to the count, but he objected to being the first on whom they should try the experiment of a new operation. At the time there were in the place twenty people who had been operated on for the same disease as that from which the count was suffering, and of the twenty only one died. The doctors told the count of this, and advised him to submit to the operation. But he, hearing that one of the persons operated on had died, grew pale and began to sigh deeply. And, said he to the doctors, can any of you assure me that it will not be the case with me also? Although nineteen were cured, how do I know that I will be as lucky as they? Perhaps I shall be the second case of failure? The mere thought of this is enough to hinder me from risking the operation. Suppose, now, that out of the number of patients only the half of them had been healed, nay, that the greater part had lost their lives, and only a few had recovered health; what do you think the prudent count would have done in such circumstances? Would he not have sent away the doctors in anger? But you, presumptuous man, how do you dare to act in a matter in which the eternal happiness or misery of your immortal soul is concerned? Very many who have been of the same opinion as yourself have been hurried off by a sudden death, and most of those who are in the same state as yourself have been thereby consigned to everlasting torments; yet you flatter yourself that you will escape that misfortune? Will you then commit your eternal salvation to such an uncertain event?

Conclusion
and exhor-
tation to be
always
ready for
death.

Ah, my dear brethren, I beg of you for the sake of your souls, think often and deeply on this truth: I shall die but once. There is but one moment in which I shall die; on that moment depends my salvation or damnation. It is absolutely uncertain when that moment will come; it may come to-day, this very hour, nay, at once. And what other resolution can such a thought inspire me with but this: therefore I will be always ready to die; therefore I will not remain a minute in a state in which I should

be afraid to be surprised by death. So it is, my dear brethren. I do not mean that we should always live in a state of fear, dread, and melancholy. No, that is by no means necessary. To be joyful in the Lord, cheerful, and good-humored harmonizes easily with the meditation on death, provided we are only firmly resolved not to commit a grievous sin, or if we should commit one, not to remain long in the state of sin. He who lives in that way need not fear death, since he is always ready for it; and no man on earth has greater cause to rejoice at heart than he whose conscience gives him this testimony: if death were now to come and hurry me off into eternity I should be prepared for it.

If, then, I find anything on my conscience that troubles it I will say to myself what Eliezer, the faithful servant of Abraham, said when he went to bring home Rebecca, the bride of Isaac, as we read in the Book of Genesis. He had come to the house of the bride weary and tired, hungry and thirsty, and was at once invited by her parents to sit down to eat. No, said he: "I will not eat till I tell my message."¹ But rest a little first, and take some refreshment; then we shall hear what you have to say. No, I cannot do that, nor taste a single mouthful, nor drink, nor sleep, until I have done what I am sent for; the business for which I have come is the most important thing and must be attended to first. Oh! exclaims de Lyra, commenting on this passage, "in this he showed that he was impressed with the importance of his duty."² In the same manner I will in future take to heart the affair of my eternal salvation, and say and think to myself: "I will not eat till I tell my message." I will not eat or drink until I have opened my mouth to disclose the sins I have committed and till I repent of them. I will not eat till I have made restitution for my neighbor's injured honor or property. I will not eat till I have been reconciled to my enemy and made friendship with him. I will not eat till I have removed the occasion of sin, given up that dangerous intimacy, and abolished those abuses. I will never lay down to rest till I have examined my conscience and excited myself to sorrow and contrition for my sins. I will give myself no rest till I shall have begun to lead a better life. In a word, I am in earnest about dying a happy death and going to heaven; and therefore I am determined never to consent to mortal sin for a single moment for the sake of any

And to remove every obstacle to a happy death.

¹ Non comedam, donec loquar sermones meos.—Gen. xxiv. 33.

² In hoc ostendit se habere negotium impositum cordi.

man, or thing, or pleasure, and so to live in future that in the supreme hour, when and wherever it may come, I may be amongst the number of those of whom Christ says: "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching,"¹ for He will place them over all His goods in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

*Another introduction to the same sermon for the third
Sunday of Advent.*

Text.

Ego vox clamantis in deserto: Dirigite viam Domini.—John i. 23.

"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord."

Introduction.

Oh, that a voice of that kind were to cry out to the hearts of all men, and unceasingly call out in our ears: "Make straight the way of the Lord"! Christians, be ready! Your Lord will come; He is now on the way; not as a Saviour to free the world from eternal death, as He came in the time of St. John the Baptist; but as a strict Judge, to call each one of us in death to eternity. "Make straight the way of the Lord"! Ah, hold yourselves in readiness for His coming; prepare a long time for it; for much, all depends on it. "Make straight the way of the Lord"! Prepare yourselves with the utmost care! For He will come but once; see, therefore, that His coming be a fortunate one for you. "Make straight the way of the Lord"! But some of you may think: why do you thus try to inspire us with an unnecessary and premature fear and anguish? If, as you have said before, the whole matter depends on one moment, it will be enough for me if I am in the state of grace when that moment comes. Why, then, should I trouble myself now about it? I will live as I please, according to the fashion of other men. When I feel that the last moment has come I shall still have time enough to prepare for it, and to put my soul in the condition required, etc. . . Yes? Is that your opinion? Be more careful in jumping to such an unwarranted conclusion in such a weighty matter! Who has told you when your last hour will come? Do you think death will approach you like a post-rider, blowing a horn from time to time to give notice of his coming? Not by any means! You

¹ *Beati servi filii, quos, cum venerit Dominus, invenerit vigilantes.*—Luke xii. 37.

must know that not only does our eternal destiny depend on a single moment, but also it is quite uncertain when that moment will come. Any minute of our lives may be the last. Therefore I will not be satisfied with merely exhorting you and myself, as I have hitherto done, to make straight the way of the Lord; but I say, moreover, "be prepared;" let us always be ready to die.

Plan of Discourse.

It is unknown and uncertain when the Lord will come to call us away by a death that will occur but once; therefore, etc. Continues as above.

SEVENTH SERMON.

THAT DEATH WILL COME UNEXPECTEDLY.

Subject.

We shall die when we least expect it.—*Preached on the twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Ut sitis sinceri, et sine offensa in diem Christi; repleti fructu justitiæ.—Philipp. i. 10, 11. (From to-day's Epistle).

"That you may be sincere and without offence unto the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of justice."

Introduction.

The holy Apostle has left us a beautiful exhortation in those words: "This I pray, that your charity may more and more abound in knowledge and in all understanding."¹ To what end? "That you may be sincere and without offence unto the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of justice." "Unto the day of Christ;" that is, the day when Our Lord will come to take us from this world by death; and the meaning of the Apostle is, that we should now, during life, gather the fruits of justice, so that the day of our death, the day of the coming of the Lord, may find us filled with them. My dear brethren, it is infallibly certain

¹ Hoc oro, ut charitas vestra magis ac magis abundet in scientia, et in omni sensu.—Philipp. 1. 9.

that the Lord will come to take each one of us from the world by death; and therefore we must all prepare in time for His coming, for much depends on it. It is infallibly certain that He will come but once; therefore we must prepare with great care, so that that one occasion may be fortunate for us. It is infallibly certain that we do not know the time at which this one coming of the Lord will occur; therefore we must be always ready for it. These are the points we have been meditating on hitherto. To-day I add one more, or rather Our Lord Himself adds it; namely, that He will come not only at a time that is unknown to us, but also when we least expect Him and are least thinking of His coming; or to speak more clearly:

Plan of Discourse.

*We shall die at the hour when we least expect it; therefore, if we care for our salvation, we must use all diligence to be always prepared for death. "Be you then also ready: for at what hour you think not the Son of man will come."*¹

This is the subject of the present meditation, which I begin at once, relying on the grace and help of the Holy Ghost, which I hope to obtain through the intercession of Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

We must be prepared for an unforeseen death, as if we foresaw it.

A noble youth who wished to enter religion was asked by one of his friends why he had chosen such an austere life, and how he could make up his mind to abandon father, mother, friends, and relations, and to renounce the rich inheritance that would fall to his lot, with all the honors and wealth appertaining thereto. He answered laughingly: "There is a singular custom in the world which drives me to take this resolution." "And what is that custom?" asked his friend. "It is a custom that people have of dying," was the reply; "and on account of it I wish to go somewhere where I can prepare for death in a better manner." A clever answer, and a wise resolution in such an important matter! It is one, too, that we should take to heart and reflect on deeply. If that young man had thought a little more, and had learned by experience how to prepare for death, he could have made a better answer by saying: There is a strange custom in the world that people have of dying unexpectedly, at a time when they least think they will die; therefore I must be off at

¹ Et vos estote parati, quia qua hora non putatis, Filius hominis veniet.—Luke xii. 40.

once out of the world to prepare myself carefully for death. To die unexpectedly is far more dangerous than merely to die; for the worst feature of death is that he takes us unawares. Hence we pray in the litanies: "From a sudden and unprovided death deliver us, O Lord."

Meanwhile, my dear brethren, the fact stands and we cannot alter it. We must die, and, generally speaking, when we least expect. A few saints, who were always resigned to the will of God, and also criminals brought forth to execution excepted, there is, I may say, hardly one who dies but at a time when he thinks he shall not die. This seems a hard saying, and I might myself have some difficulty in believing it if I were not persuaded of its truth, partly by daily experience, and partly by the inspired word of God. This latter is so clear on the point that we can have no doubt of it if we had no other testimony in proof of it than the few words quoted from St. Luke: "Be you then also ready, for at what hour you think not the Son of man will come:" therefore He will come at a time when we do not await death. It seems, indeed, that Our Lord's whole wish was to impress this truth as deeply as possible on our minds; for He repeats the warning so often, partly by Himself, partly by His apostles and disciples: "Take ye heed, watch and pray."¹ "And take heed to yourselves, lest perhaps your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life: and that day come upon you suddenly:"² lest it come upon you when you think it far off. Let your lamps be always burning, that when the bridegroom comes unexpectedly they may not be extinguished. "Let your loins be girt, and lamps burning in your hands."³

Nearly every one dies unexpectedly. Shown from Scripture.

Hence the Lord sometimes compares death to a thief, according to the words of the Apostle: "The day of the Lord shall so come as a thief in the night."⁴ No thief is so daring as to venture to attempt a robbery in a place that he knows to be well guarded. If he sees the good man of the house on watch at the door as he is passing by, he salutes him as if they were old friends, and says to himself: there is no use in trying to steal anything there; the people are on their guard. But when all the

By similes.

¹ Videte, vigilate et orate.—Mark xiii. 33.

² Attendite autem vobis, ne forte graventur corda vestra in crapula, et ebrietate, et curis hujus vite, et superveniat in vos repentina dies illa.—Luke xxi. 34.

³ Sint lumbi vestri præcincti, et lucernæ ardentes in manibus vestris.—Ibid. xii. 35.

⁴ Dies Domini sicut fur in nocte, ita veniet.—I. Thess. v. 2.

household is sunk in sleep, not suspecting any danger, then is the thief's opportunity; then without making a noise he breaks through the wall, or the window, slips into the house and brings away all that he can lay hands on, and when the master of the house awakes in the morning he finds that he has been robbed. "The day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night." He will steal in when a man is least on his guard and take away his life when he was still in hopes of living for a long time. "For when they shall say, peace and security," continues the Apostle, "then shall sudden destruction come upon them."¹ Sometimes death is compared to a butcher; thus the Lord says by the Prophet Jeremias: "I will bring them down like lambs to the slaughter;"² they will be merry and joyful in their prosperity, and live without forethought, nor will they be aware that death has already sharpened his knife to pierce their hearts in a short time. Sometimes he is compared to a fisherman and to a fowler: as the wise Ecclesiastes says: "Man knoweth not his own end—but as fishes are taken with the hook, and as birds are caught with the snare, so men are taken in the evil time, when it shall suddenly come upon them."³ The fish snaps greedily at the bait, the bird at the corn spread for it. Why? They wish to enjoy the food prepared for them, in order to preserve their lives. Meanwhile the one swallows the hook with the bait, and the other is caught in the net while eating the corn. Thus both find death where they expected to find pleasure and the means of prolonging their lives. "So men are taken in the evil time;" so it is with us: when we think we are benefiting our health and lengthening our lives, we are hurried off by a sudden and unforeseen death.

And by par-
ables.

You rich ones of the world, when do you think the time will come for you to die? Oh, you answer in your thoughts, not so soon, surely! But remember the rich man whom Our Lord puts forward as an example for you by the Evangelist St. Luke. When he was about to pull down his barns to build larger ones, and was saying to himself: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thy rest, eat, drink, make good cheer;" even then he heard the unexpected voice of the Lord: "Thou

¹ Cum enim dixerint: Pax et securitas, tunc repentinus eis superveniet interitus.—I. Thess. v. 3.

² Deducam eos quasi agnos ad victimam.—Jer. li. 40.

³ Nescit homo finem suum; sed sicut pisces capiuntur hamo, et sicut aves laqueo comprehenduntur, sic capiuntur homines in tempore malo, cum eis extemplo supervenerit.—Eccles. ix. 12.

fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee; and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"¹ You vain, delicate tenderlings, whose only thought is pleasure and the gratification of your senses, when do you think the time will come for you to die? Not yet, you say; there is no sign of death in us so far; we are not sick and have no danger to dread. But beware! and hear how the hour was fixed by the Prophet Job for worldlings like you: "Their houses are secure and peaceable," as they falsely imagine; "they take the timbrel, and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment they go down to hell."² O mortals, who rely on your health and strength, and heedlessly think with the wicked servant in the gospel of St. Matthew: "My Lord is long a-coming,"³ I can do what I like, for it will be a long time before he comes; I can eat and drink, and fight and quarrel, enjoy myself at balls and dances, and turn night into day; death is still far off! So you think, and so did that servant think too; but read what happened to him: "The lord of that servant shall come in a day that he hopeth not, and at an hour that he knoweth not: and shall separate him, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."⁴ The huge statue that God showed King Nabuchodonosor in a dream was crumbled into pieces by a stone that fell on it, as we read in the Book of Daniel. It is a figure of those who are exalted high above others by their position in the world; the stone is a figure of death, that without respect or distinction of dignity or rank overthrows the mightiest potentates, and turns them into dust and ashes. But where did the stone come from? "A stone was cut out of a mountain without hands: and it struck the statue;"⁵ from this you can understand how unexpected is the coming of death. A stone that is cut out on purpose seldom strikes any one; for the mason who is pulling down a wall, or the slater working on a roof, looks first to

¹ Anima, habes multa bona posita in annos plurimos: requiesce, comede, bibe, epulare. Stulte, hac nocte animam tuam repetunt a te; quæ autem parasti, cujus erunt? Luke xii. 19, 20.

² Domus eorum securæ sunt et pacatæ. . . tenent tympanum, et citharam, et gaudent ad sonum organi. Ducunt in bonis dies suos, et in puncto ad inferna descendunt.—Job xxi. 9, 12, 13.

³ Moram facit dominus meus venire.—Matt. xxiv. 48.

⁴ Veniet dominus servi illius in die qua non sperat, et hora qua ignorat: et dividet eum, partemque ejus ponet cum hypocritis; illic erit fletus et stridor dentium.—Ibid. 50, 51.

⁵ Abscisus est lapis de monte, sine manibus; et percussit statuam.—Dan. ii. 34.

see if there is any one in the way before throwing down a stone or slate; but if the stone or slate falls of its own accord, or is blown down by the wind, then there is no one to look out or give warning, and it strikes whoever happens to be in the way. Death, my dear brethren, is a stone cut without hands, which falls by chance, unexpectedly, without warning, and at once crushes the greatest, bravest, and mightiest potentates of earth in a moment when they least await it.

Confirmed
by exam-
ples.

This is the hour in which Balthasar, who seemed so happy in the midst of his riches and pleasures, and who desired to be adored as a god—this is the hour in which he read that terrible sentence that he was so far from expecting, which put an end to his life and kingdom. This is the hour in which the proud Aman, before he had time to look around, was hurled from the highest pinnacle of honor, and hanged on a gallows. This is the hour in which Holofernes was killed by a woman in his sleep on his own bed. This is the hour in which Sisara, also during his sleep, was slain by having a nail driven through his head. This is the hour in which Pharaoh was drowned in the Red Sea, Absalom pierced to the heart as he hung on a tree, Amnon murdered as he was carousing at table. This is the hour in which a multitude of disobedient Jews, while, as the Scripture says, “the flesh was between their teeth,”¹ atoned for their gluttony by a sudden death. This is the hour in which all the first-born of Egypt were slain in the middle of the night, experiencing the vengeance of the Lord while they slept, as they thought, in security and without the least apprehension of death. Remember how the pestilence that God sent to punish the pride of David in numbering his people swept off seventy thousand of them; not one of them all thought he would die in three days; there was no sign of plague in the air; no sickness to give warning of its approach; the towns were well provided with doctors and medicines, and yet in a very short time seventy thousand died who were up to that strong and healthy, and imagined they had a long life before them. Consider how a hundred and eighty-five thousand soldiers of Sennacherib’s army were slain in one night by an angel. They had not yet encountered the enemy; they were not afraid of a sudden attack; they were all strong and healthy, and not one of them thought of dying that night. Nevertheless, without any attack on the part of the enemy, without having

¹ Adhuc carnes erant in dentibus eorum.—Num. xl. 33.

been in any regular engagement, they all died that night and entered suddenly into their eternity.

Why should we rake up mouldering bones, and seek for examples from ancient times? Look at the world of our own days, consider the dying of whatever age and condition they may be; few of them, nay, hardly one of them but is surprised by death in some way or other, and dies at a time when he thought he would live longer. For in the first place, they die suddenly who, being in the vigor of health, are assassinated, or drowned, or meet with a fatal accident, or are struck by lightning or by a fit of apoplexy, or who die in the delirium of a violent fever, or in a lethargy. These are ways of dying that may be rare in small communities; but for all that they are common enough in the world and occur very frequently, almost daily. It is beyond a doubt that all those people die when they do not expect death.

You have perhaps heard, my dear brethren, what Bonfinius relates of the wedding of Ladislaus, king of Hungary and Bohemia. This monarch, who was in the bloom of youth and health, sent an embassy into France to bring from there the daughter of King Charles, whom he had already been formally betrothed to. The embassy was accompanied by six hundred knights out of the noblest families of Hungary, Bohemia, and Austria, led by Ulrich, Bishop of Passau, who brought with him a hundred nobles of Passau to escort the royal bride. Besides all these there were also four hundred ladies of the court to wait on the bride, and to add to the splendor of her escort. The magnificence of their apparel, the number of their attendants, the grandeur of their coaches and carriages made them look like so many gods and goddesses as they entered Paris. A vast multitude of the common people thronged the streets and lanes of the city to see the entry of the embassy, while the nobility occupied the windows of the houses. Thus they entered Paris to the sound of the drum and trumpet and the harmony of various musical instruments. The king, full of joy, and the bride, full of expectation, watched the procession eagerly from the palace. And behold, through the very gate through which it was entering, in the very midst of the festivities, came a courier in full gallop to announce to the king and the intended bride that Ladislaus had died suddenly in Prague, the capital of Bohemia. O wo and misery! In a moment all joy was at an end; festivities were changed into mourning; the king was overwhelmed with grief;

And by experience, since many die suddenly.

Shown by special examples.

the princess received a shock from which she never recovered; all Paris was sunk in grief; the preparations they had made, the money they had spent, the splendid embassy, all went for nothing. Thus the whole affair ended in sorrow and wailing. Who would have thought that? Not one in the whole world, and least of all Ladislaus himself, who, as he was on the point of getting married, was surprised by a sudden death. Drexelius writes of a certain man who dreamed one night that a lion had killed him. He arose in the morning and went with his companion to church, not thinking of his dream. Before the door there was a statue of a lion with open jaws. Seeing it he remembered his dream, and related it laughingly to his friend. "There," he said, "is the lion that killed me last night." With these words he put his hand in the lion's jaws, saying: "Come now, you have your enemy in your power; bite me if you can; eat my hand off!" But hardly had he finished speaking than he fell to the ground mortally wounded. How was that? In the mouth of the lion there was a scorpion hidden, which, as soon as it felt the hand disturbing it, bit it, and by the virulence of its poison caused the man's death at once. Now, who would have thought that death was concealed in a lifeless statue? And yet that poor man found his death there where he least expected it. Again, it is unfortunately a common thing for people to die in the state of sin without doing penance; otherwise those words of Our Lord, "few are chosen,"¹ would not be warranted. Now, who is there who has any faith in God, in hell, or in heaven, who if he thought he was about to die would not at once be reconciled with God? Why, then, do the majority die impenitent? It is not their intention to do so; they do not think the end is so near: therefore they defer repentance from one day to another, die and go into eternity in the state of sin. It is clear, then, that all those people, and they are the majority, die when they least expect it.

All others,
no matter
what their
age, die
when they
least ex-
pect.

In the third place, one can die in childhood or youth, or in the prime of life, or in old age. I will say nothing of children; for who could think that they should end their lives when they have hardly begun to live? Are they not often destined to different callings and states, while still in their cradles, by their parents? And yet they often die when neither they themselves nor any one else expects. If a man dies in the prime of life, at

¹ *Fauct electi.*—Matt. xx. 16.

thirty or forty, Who would have thought it? they say of him. He was so strong and healthy; and now he is dead! Yes, indeed, he is dead; although neither he himself nor any one else expected it. How many old people are there to whom one dares not speak of death for fear of annoying them? And the older they get the more confidence they have of living for a long time. Even the oldest think they have still a year of life left; and nothing will persuade them that the year they have begun may be the last for them. "It is true," says St. Jerome, "that there is no one so old who does not promise himself another year of life." If he says of himself: I must soon die; I feel it in my limbs; it is all over with me; I have already one foot in the grave, he does so only to hear what others have to say about the matter, and to give them a chance of flattering him with the hope of a long life. Why should you talk of dying? they say to him. You are still, thank God! strong and hearty, old as you are, and you have a good appetite; you may live to be a hundred, etc. That was just what he was wanting. And thus it happens that he, too, dies unexpectedly, like the others. Finally, there are those who die after a long and tedious illness. But the most of those even die when they least expect it. For show me, if you can, one sick person who, no matter how bad he is, does not at least hope for another day of life? And we know too, by experience, that one effect of a slow consuming fever is that the patient will not be persuaded that his illness is dangerous; he imagines himself to be quite strong, although death is in his eyes, until at last, while he is eating or drinking, or as often happens, expressing a desire to go somewhere for a change, he breathes his last. How many sick people are not deceived by their own children, domestics, and friends, who are unwilling to speak a word to them of any danger of death for fear of troubling them? Every one who visits them tries to encourage them; you must hope for the best, is the word; there have been many far worse who have pulled through all right; you must not be anxious; the doctor is a clever man, and he will surely be able to help you; and so on. Is it not so, my dear brethren? And how often are sick people only too ready to believe such flattering suggestions, since they have a natural love of life and fear of death, and thus put off receiving the last sacraments until they are at the last gasp? I have al-

¹ Illud egregie dictum est; nullum tam senem esse, et sic decrepitæ ætatis, ut non se adhuc uno plus anno vivere suspicetur.

ready excepted malefactors condemned to death; but how many of them, as I know by experience, die sooner than they imagine? For when they are blindfolded at the place of execution, or have the rope about their necks, it is usual to commence what they think to be a long prayer, but before they are aware of it the drop is lowered or their heads are severed from their bodies.

Therefore we must be always prepared for death.

It is, then, and remains true that the Lord will come when we know not, and that we shall die at a time when we expect not.

“At what hour you think not the Son of man will come.”

What follows now from all this, my dear brethren? That which I have already told you in my last sermon, and of which Christ Himself warns us: “Be you ready”¹—that is, be ready now, this very moment. For we must be always on our guard; not for a moment should we remain in mortal sin and at enmity with God. Once for all we should make the same resolution as that young man of whom I told you; that is, since there is a custom amongst men of dying unexpectedly we must so live as to be ready for death even when we do not expect it and think that it is still far from us. And this, as the Venerable Bede says, speaking of the text I have quoted, is the reason why God has decreed that the hour of death should come upon us when we least look for it, “that since we cannot foresee it, we may be always ready for it.”² We should act like one whose enemy is always on the watch to surprise him and take his life; he is always on his guard; he never goes unarmed or alone, so that he may be always in a position to defend himself if attacked.

Unhappy sinners who neglect this!

How I bewail, then, the state of that vast number of men who, unarmed and unprepared, spend whole years as carelessly as if they had nothing to fear from the enemy who is unceasingly plotting against their lives; and these unhappy people live in the state of sin because they do not think that the hour of death has come for them. Therefore they remain in the proximate occasion of sin; therefore they refuse to restore ill-gotten goods; therefore they put off doing penance; therefore they are tepid and cold in the divine service: all because they imagine that the hour of death is still far from them. If a man happens to die suddenly they run to see the dead body; all who hear of the incident wring their hands and cry out: Is it possible that the man is already dead? He was so well yesterday! Only a few

¹ Estote parati. → Matt. xxiv. 44.

² Ut illam dum prævidere non possumus, ad illam sine intermissione præparamur.

days ago I spoke with him! I saw him this morning at church! A few hours ago he certainly did not think that he would be lying dead now! These and similar reflections are generally made on such occasions. But that one should take advantage of the occurrence and enter into himself and think: That man was healthy, and he is now dead; the same thing may happen to me; I am now strong and vigorous; but perhaps in a short time I may be a corpse like him; if that happened to me, should I be fit to go into eternity? Good reason as there would be for such reflections, there are few who make them. Be you ready, then, cries out Our Saviour; you especially who live so carelessly, for you must know that at what hour you know not the Son of man will come. "Therefore be ready."

Just and pious Christians, how happy you are in this respect! How peacefully you can sleep at night! How joyfully you can go through your day's work! For you always have a good conscience and bear about with you sanctifying grace and the friendship of God. Death may come upon you in public or private; he can do you no harm, but rather good; and whether you die suddenly or after a long illness you are never taken unprepared, and therefore you need never fear death. Even holy servants of God have died suddenly when they did not expect death; but their deaths were not on that account unhappy, but rather holy. St. Simon Stylites, as some authors assert, was surprised by death while standing on his pillar and thrown to the ground. St. Francis de Sales died when about to set out on a journey. St. Francis Xavier was found dead alone on an island, without a soul near him. The zealous and holy Father Francis Cardosa was found dead in his chair, sitting at his table, with a sermon on death before him and his finger still pointing to the words: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."¹ Did these, and perhaps hundreds like them, die an unprovided death? No, my dear brethren; they are saints in heaven; they were taken away by a sudden death, which is neither bad nor to be feared in itself; but their death was not an unprovided one, because they were ready for it. There is a difference between an unforeseen and an unprovided death; the latter is bad, but the former is not always so. What a difference there was between the five wise and the five foolish virgins! Yet the former, as well as the latter, slept when the bridegroom came:

Happy the just, who never die an unprovided death.

¹ Beati mortui qui in Domino moriuntur.—Apoc. xiv. 13.

“They all slumbered and slept.”¹ The sole reason why the former were admitted to the nuptials and the latter excluded was that the wise virgins had their lamps well provided with oil when the bridegroom came unexpectedly whilst the five foolish virgins had to go to buy oil. “Now whilst they went to buy the bridegroom came: and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut.”² Once for all, he who is not at all times and in all places ready and prepared with a conscience adorned by sanctifying grace has reason to dread lest death should surprise him at any moment and hurry him into an unhappy eternity. Once for all, he who leads a good, Christian life need not fear death at any moment.

The most necessary means of procuring a happy death is to lead a good life. Shown by an example.

There are here and there certain simple-minded people who imagine that if they repeat or carry about with them certain prayers they will not die a sudden or unprovided death, and that they will never perish violently by water, fire, or sword. This is a vain, hurtful, and superstitious practice, which cannot be justified either by God, or by the Church, or by the nature of the prayers themselves. And even if a hundred revelations are brought forward to prove their efficacy they are still nothing better than a fraud. The best, nay, the only safe means to be sure of a happy death is to lead a pious Christian life, or otherwise, if God gives that grace to the dying person, to repent sincerely of having led a sinful life. You may not perhaps have heard, my dear brethren, of that rich young man who was addicted to the vanities of the world and especially to the vice of impurity, and who placed all his hopes of salvation in a prayer of the kind I mention? He used to say this prayer every day to the Blessed Virgin, and ask her, at the same time, not to allow him to die suddenly without having some warning of his approaching end, so that he might have time to repent of and confess his sins and so save his soul. On one occasion, after having prayed in this style, an angel appeared to him and said: “Yes, your prayer is heard; you will not die before a sign has been given you that death is at hand; meanwhile I advise you to amend your wicked life.” Who would not think that this warning of the angel should have sunk deeply into the young man’s heart, and that he would at once have profited by it? But it was quite the contrary with him; being now, as he imagined, safe, he continued his

¹ Dormitaverunt omnes et dormierunt.—Matt. xxv. 5.

² Dum autem irent emere, venit sponsus; et quæ paratæ erant intraverunt cum eo ad nuptias, et clausa est janua.—Ibid. 10.

vicious ways and gave free rein to his passions. "I will be converted," he said to himself, "when my angel guardian gives me the promised sign of approaching death." Before long he experienced violent headaches, so that he was obliged to keep his room, and soon after he was attacked by a fever. His friends and acquaintances advised him to receive the last sacraments, so as to be prepared for any danger that might result from his illness and place his soul in safety. "What?" exclaimed the young man, "why do you trouble me about receiving the sacraments? There is no fear of my dying yet; I am sure of that." His illness grew worse daily; his friends continued their pious exhortations; but to no purpose. "I will not die yet," was his only answer; "and besides I am not ready now to receive the sacraments; I will do so when I get better." Finally his last hour came, and his guardian angel appeared to him again. "Now," said the angel, "your time is come; you must die." "Alas!" exclaimed the sick man, "how shamefully you have betrayed me! Is that the way you keep your word? Did you not promise you would not let me die without giving me some sign of my approaching end? And now you come only when death is already at my door?" "I have faithfully kept my word," replied the angel, "and have given you signs enough; the unusual headaches you suffered from, the fever that attacked you, the constant exhortations of your friends to confess your sins and receive the last sacraments, the warnings of the priest whom they sent for so often to see you; were not these all so many signs that death was at hand? But you took no notice of them, and would not believe them; and now your time is come." Thus the unhappy wretch died in despair without the sacraments, and went into eternity in the state of sin. No prayer, I repeat, no devotions, no matter what they may be, can make me sure of salvation; the safest, nay, the most necessary means to a good death is to lead a pious, Christian life.

Continue, devout souls, to keep yourselves ready in this manner for the hour of death, and you will be able to say to your consolation, like that holy Bishop: "Every hour I stand at the gate of eternity,"¹ every moment I am ready to enter; and with the Prophet David: "And now what is my hope? is it not the Lord?"² What else have I to do in this world but to serve

Conclusion
to be always
ready for
death.

¹ Singulis horis sto ad ostium eternitatis.

² Et nunc quæ est expectatio mea? nonne Dominus?—Ps. xxxviii. 8.

the Lord? In whom else can I hope if not in Him, whom I love above all things, and by whom I hope to be taken up to heaven? Oh, what a beautiful thing it is, my dear brethren, to have always a good conscience! Happy indeed are they who can, thus prepared, await death calmly every hour and moment. "Let my soul die the death of the just."¹ O my Lord and my God! that I may die with the just I will try by Thy grace to live with them also. Then may death come when, how, and where he wills, even in this very moment. Amen.

Another introduction to the same sermon for the fourth Sunday in Advent.

Text.

Parate viam Domini; rectas facite semitas ejus.—Luke iii. 4.
"Prepare ye the way of the Lord: make straight His paths."

Introduction.

It is remarkable, my dear brethren, that the Catholic Church has selected for the four Sundays of Advent those passages of the Gospels which relate to the coming of the Lord, or to preparing the way for His coming, as is the case with the last three Sundays of this holy season. What is the reason of that? To exhort us to prepare our hearts spiritually for the coming of the new-born Saviour, and what is still more important, to keep our souls in readiness when our Judge shall come to call us out of this world. It is infallibly certain, etc. *Continues as above.*

EIGHTH SERMON.

ON THE TIMELY RECEPTION OF THE HOLY VIATICUM.

Subject.

First; never is the reception of Jesus Christ in the holy Communion more useful and necessary than in sickness, and never has Christ Himself a greater desire to visit us therein; what great condescension and goodness on Our Lord's part! Second; yet there are men who must be almost compelled and forced to take this step and to receive their Lord with becoming respect; what folly and madness on the part of us mortals!—*Preached on the second Sunday after Pentecost.*

¹ *Moriatur anima mea morte justorum.*—Num. xxiii. 10.

Text.

Compelle intrare.—Luke xiv. 23.

“Compel them to come in.”

Introduction.

How well-meaning this good lord was! He had prepared a magnificent supper for the refreshment of his friends; and yet not one of the guests he had invited came. They all sent excuses; so that he was forced to compel the poor and hungry to sit down at his table. Who ever heard of such a thing? Far more wonderful, my dear brethren, are the goodness and love of our God and Saviour, who is represented to us in the person of the lord in the Gospel. What an infinitely precious food He has prepared for us in giving us His own flesh and blood as our meat and drink! He invites all to partake of it: “Come, eat My bread and drink the wine which I have mingled for you.”¹ “Come to me, all you, and I will refresh you;”² eat and drink for nothing! And yet how astonishing the stupidity of us mortals! He has the utmost difficulty in inducing us to come to this supper, which is so advantageous, nay, so necessary for us! And in fact there are Christians who must be compelled almost by force and violence to approach the holy Table, so seldom are they seen at it, so that the Catholic Church has been obliged to make a law rendering the reception of holy Communion at least once a year necessary under pain of excommunication. There is one circumstance in this matter that excites my astonishment, and that is, that if we are ever careless and dilatory in receiving holy Communion it is at the time when we are most in need of it and when Our Lord is most anxious to come to us—I mean the time of illness. To-day I will speak of these two points: the loving condescension of our dear Redeemer, and our own stupid negligence, to the end that we may correct our faults in this respect and treat the hidden God with due respect.

Plan of Discourse.

Never is the reception of Jesus Christ in the holy Communion more useful and necessary for us mortals than in sickness, and never has Christ Himself a greater desire to visit us than at that

¹ Venite, comedite panem meum, et bibite vinum quod miscui vobis.—Prov. ix. 5.

² Venite ad me omnes, et ego reficiam vos.—Matt. xi. 28.

time; what great condescension and goodness in Him! The first and longer part. Yet there are men who must be compelled and forced by extreme necessity before they either receive the visit of Our Lord or treat Him with becoming respect; what folly and madness in us! The second part.

O merciful Saviour who meanest so well with us! “compel them to come in;” (ah, that I must ask Thee to do this!) soften by Thy powerful grace the stony hearts of men, that they may come to Thy supper, and that they may come to it in good time, and receive Thee with due respect. This I am forced to beg of Thee through the merits of Thy dearest Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels. I repeat my prayer “Compel them to come in.”

Nothing comforts the sick man more than a visit from a good friend.

It is when we are sick that we learn rightly to appreciate the value of good health, without which all other earthly goods are worthless. Personal beauty, mental gifts, the esteem of men, great treasures and riches, splendid garments and exquisite food and drink, of what use are all those things to me if I have lost my health and am sick and suffering? For I cannot enjoy any of them and am just as badly off as if I had them not. In the whole world there is nothing I can use but my bed, and even in that I cannot find as much rest and pleasure as the poor ploughman does, when he lays down on his hard bed, worn out with toil and fatigue. His repose is far sweeter and more refreshing than that of a sick man who lies on a bed of down. If there is anything that can bring consolation in sickness it is a visit from a good, sincere friend, who can comfort the sick man and help him to pass the time by agreeable or consoling conversation. By agreeable conversation, I say; for it is not every visit that is pleasing to the sick man; there are some visits that only annoy him and make him wish that the person who came to trouble him with silly talk would go away. Job, patient as he was, sitting on the dung-hill and writhing in pain, complained of the friends who visited him with the intention of offering him consolation; for they began to speak to him of a host of things of which they knew nothing, and tried to fathom the designs of God in punishing him so severely. Ah, said he at last, after having listened to them for a long time in silence: “You are all troublesome comforters. Shall windy words have no end?”¹ Will you not put a stop to that vain, silly

¹ Consolatores onerosi omnes vos estis. Numquid habebunt finem verba ventosa?—Job xvi. 23.

On the Timely Reception of the Viaticum. 99

talk? If I were not sick it would be enough to make me so. But on the other hand a loving, sympathetic, cheerful, modest friend, who as the Apostle says, "showeth mercy with cheerfulness,"¹ encourages one by his conversation and makes his visit welcome. Such a friend as that cheers up the sick man and often helps him to forget his pains. And it is in time of sickness and trouble that true friendship is proved and the steadfastness of an affection that is not changed by outward circumstances.

Nowhere can the suffering Christian find a more faithful, well-meaning, kind-hearted, generous, and loving friend than Jesus Christ; and from whom can he expect greater consolation, refreshment, and help, than when his Saviour comes to visit him in person in the Blessed Sacrament as the food and drink of his soul? A more loving friend is not to be found in heaven or on earth than He who, with unheard-of devotion, came down from heaven on earth for the sake of us men, and shut Himself up in such a wonderful manner in the accidents of bread and wine, that He might be always with us and be united to us in the most agreeable manner in the form of food and drink. In the whole world there is not a greater or better comforter or consoler. When brothers, sisters, parents, friends visit you in your sickness, what can they do for you besides giving you the miserable consolation of the outward expression of their sympathy, making known their good wishes in your regard, and expressing their hopes that you may soon get better? When they have done that they can go home, and what better are you? That is all you have gained by their visit; they cannot take from you the bodily pains or mental depression which the natural sensitiveness to illness causes you. Nor can they give you the strength of grace to support the torments of your sickness and thus make them easier for you; nor can they lengthen your natural bodily life or assure you of eternal life; and therefore you can say to them like Job: "You are troublesome comforters," from whom no help is to be expected.

There is no more faithful or loving friend than Christ when He visits the sick in the Blessed Sacrament.

But when Jesus visits you in the Blessed Sacrament your faith tells you that He is the Son of God, who holds in His hands the keys of life and death, to whom, while He was still on earth, the sick and dying were brought, and as St. Luke says: "virtue went out from him and healed all."² He is the same the touch of whose garments was enough to cure disease; whose visit to a

For He alone then can and will comfort and help.

¹ Qui miseretur in hilaritate.—Rom. xii. 8.
² Virtus de illo exibat, et sanabat omnes.—Luke vi. 19.

house filled it with joy and gladness: "This day is salvation come to this house;"¹ at whose word, although from a distance, the dying were restored to health, as we learn from the prayer of the centurion, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof;" such a great favor I do not expect; "but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed."² In a word, it is Jesus Christ who visits you, and He can at once relieve you from pain and sickness, or alleviate your sufferings, or lengthen your life, or give you patience, or assure you of eternal life; or else, if He does not help you in that way, He can let you understand what His reason is, that He wills you to suffer longer for the good of your soul; therefore He consoles you in the best way of all, giving you the grace of resignation to His holy will and decrees, so that you can say with the patient Job: "Thou hast granted me life and mercy, and Thy visitation hath preserved my spirit."³

Hence the sick man should esteem himself fortunate at being able to receive such a visit from Christ.

We feel a sort of holy envy sometimes when we read of holy servants of God being favored with a visible apparition of their angel guardian, as was the case with St. Frances of Rome, who enjoyed this privilege almost daily; or with visits from the Blessed Virgin, as happened to St. Dominic and others; or from the Child Jesus; and St. Antony of Padua, St. Stanislaus Kostka, and St. Herman Joseph had the honor of holding Him in their arms. Oh, we think, what a happiness, what an extraordinary grace for a poor mortal! If I could only enjoy that privilege even once! But what are we saying? Is not an equal, nay, I might say, a greater honor shown us when the great Son of God Himself, with His body and soul, divinity and humanity, in His own living person, visits us when we receive holy Communion, and allows us, not merely to take Him in our arms, but to receive Him into our mouths and into our bodies? Can we not then say with truth what Solomon said of wisdom: "All good things came to me together with her, and innumerable riches through her hands."⁴ All good things come to me when the Supreme Good visits me. What a great longing should we not then have for Him! What comfort and consolation should we not experience when He comes, and that too, as often as we approach the

¹ *Hodie domui huic salus facta est.*—Luke xix. 9.

² *Domine, non sum dignus ut intres sub tectum meum; sed tantum dic verbo, et sanabitur puer meus.*—Matt. viii. 8.

³ *Vitam et misericordiam tribuisti mihi, et visitatio tua custodivit spiritum meum.*—Job x. 12.

⁴ *Venerunt autem mihi omnia bona pariter cum illa, et innumerabiles honestas per manus illius.*—Wis. vii. 11.

sacred Table with a pure conscience, especially in a dangerous illness, when we are most in need of comfort, help, and strength!

That is the time in which we must be ready for our journey to the house of our long eternity. Who would dare to undertake it without some provision for the way? That is the time of which the Prophet David says: "The sorrows of death have compassed me, and the perils of hell have found me. I met with trouble and sorrow."¹ That is the time in which, besides the bodily pains and mental depression that make the sick man disinclined to and almost incapable of good works, the conscience drives to despair and doubt by representing past sins, although they may have been confessed and repented of. That is the time, according to the teaching of the Council of Trent, when the demons do their worst by all kinds of violent temptations to keep the soul from heaven and drag it down with them to hell. Many even of those who have led holy lives have seen those hellish spirits standing by their sick-bed in countless numbers. The devils then act like soldiers when plundering a conquered city. If they are allowed to work their will only for half a day we then to the poor citizens! For the victors, knowing they have but a short time at their disposal, set no bounds to their cruelty, so as to carry off as much as possible. Such, according to St. John in the Apocalypse, is the manner in which the devils act with a dying man: "Wo to the earth, and to the sea, because the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time."² Oh! wo to the poor soul if it has no one to help it then! For who would dare to oppose alone such a formidable enemy?

Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, is then, in the Blessed Sacrament, the best and surest Protector. Who would be afraid when He is present? For if the mere name of Jesus is enough to make the devils tremble and to put them to flight, what will He not do when He is united to the soul in His own adorable person? If, according to St. Bernard, the mere recollection of Jesus is a source of joy to the heart,³ what an immense consolation and heavenly sweetness will not be caused to the heart of the just man in his sickness by the real presence of Our Lord? Oh, yes,

Especially as it is in sickness that one most needs His comfort and protection.

Our Lord in the holy Viaticum is wont to give evident comfort and protection.

¹ Circumdedarunt me dolores mortis; et pericula inferni invenerunt me. Tribulationem et dolorem inveni.—Ps. cxiv. 3.

² Vae terræ et mari, quia descendit diabolus ad vos, habens iram magnam, sciens quod modicum tempus habet.—Apoc. xii. 12.

³ Jesu dulcis memoria, dans vera cordis gaudia.

continues St. Bernard, "sweeter than honey and all things is His sweet presence."¹

Shown by
an example.

St. Lidwina, that martyr of charity and patience, can give us testimony of this. This poor virgin was tortured by sickness and pain of mind and body, so that at last she became quite despondent and almost despairing. Her confessor stood by her bedside holding a crucifix, and explained to her, one by one, the mysteries of the Passion. This was some comfort to her, but it was of short duration; for when the priest ceased speaking and the crucifix was withdrawn from her sight her former sufferings returned. Then her confessor thought of a better and more lasting remedy. He advised her to go frequently to holy Communion. "Hitherto," he said, "the wooden crucifix spoke to you as you held it in your hand; now the living, crucified Jesus shall speak to your heart in His own person." This remedy was so effective that she was quite changed and strengthened, and in the midst of the most violent pains she experienced such joy and consolation that her only wish was to suffer more. "More suffering, O Lord!" she would exclaim, "send me more suffering! Ah, how sweet are the pains that come from Thy loving hand!" So full of comfort and sweetness in sickness is the sacramental presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Confirmed
by experience.

It is not long since I had a similar experience in the case of a prisoner who was sentenced to die. The poor man had already accepted his doom with resignation, and had made his peace with God by a good confession; yet when the time came for him to receive his last Communion he began to shake and tremble with fear of death, so that I could hardly get him to say a word of prayer by way of preparation, and had almost to drag him to receive holy Communion. But hardly had the sacred Host entered his mouth when he was completely changed and was no longer the same man; for he now became as full of joy and comfort as he was before of fear and anguish. "Now," he said, "I am quite ready and willing to die! Father, let us pray!" "See," said I to him, "that is the work of Our Lord whom you have received." "It must be so," he answered, "for I am quite satisfied." The same testimony could be given by many who have been grievously ill if I asked them if they did not experience a special consolation of heart and more resignation to the will of God in their sufferings after they had received holy Communion.

¹ Super mel et omnia ejus dulcis præsentia.

Nor can it be otherwise. When the God of all comfort and sweetness visits us in person He must leave comfort and sweetness behind, unless we put some obstacle in His way. So advantageous then, nay, so necessary is it to receive Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament in the time of illness. "Sweeter than honey and all things is His sweet presence." Oh, how I pity those poor souls who in different parts of the world have to live amongst infidels and heretics, where they have hardly once in the year a chance of going to holy Communion, whether they are in sickness or health! O God of goodness! what a great favor Thou hast conferred on us in allowing us in this country to enjoy Thy presence as often as we please!

And truly, my dear brethren, this good and most necessary Friend of ours desires nothing more eagerly than to pay such visits in His own person, even to the poorest of the poor, if we are only desirous to receive Him. Day and night He is ready on the altar waiting for some one to ask for Him, or to bring Him to a sick person. He has often shown, even by miracles, how intense is this desire of His, for He came to more than one of His faithful servants, during their illness, in a miraculous manner in the sacred Host. St. Honoratus was awakened one night three times by an angel and told to go at once and bring holy Communion to the holy Bishop Ambrose, who was grievously ill. God Himself commanded the priest Rudolph to bring the Viaticum to the dying St. Deodatus. He raised from the dead St. Eligius, and kept him alive as long as was necessary for him to bring the Viaticum to a person infected with the plague, because there were no other priests to be found on account of the danger of infection. It is well known of our St. Stanislaus that, as he was lying ill in the house of a heretic, and could not have a Catholic priest, St. Barbara appeared to him, accompanied by two angels, and gave him holy Communion. Some holy virgins were not allowed by their confessors to go to holy Communion as often as they wished; the sacred Host came to them of itself, because they were desirous of being visited by Our Lord. Remarkable is the fact I read in the Life of St. Juliana de Falconieris. She bore with cheerfulness the pains of her last illness; but she was bitterly disappointed that, on account of a weakness of the stomach she could not receive the holy Viaticum. In this sad state she begged of the priest at least to lay the sacred Host on her breast, since she could not receive it in the usual manner.

Christ Himself desires nothing more than thus to visit the sick and become their food, as holy servants of God know.

The priest, overcome by her importunity, consented, and wonderful to relate! the Blessed Sacrament no sooner touched her than it disappeared, and Juliana with joyful countenance gave up the ghost. After her death the form of a host was found stamped on her left side near her heart—a proof that Our Lord had of Himself entered into her bosom. O my God! Thou art not wont to work miracles, or to go beyond the established laws of nature, unless in special, extraordinary occasions where Thy honor and glory are concerned; it must then be most necessary for those who are dangerously ill to receive holy Communion, since Thou workest miracles to procure that favor for them, and that, too, in the case of holy souls, who in their last illness seemed to have no reason to fear on account of past sins! And Thou must also have a special earnest wish and desire thus to visit Thy sick servants.

What love
and conde-
scension to-
wards us
poor mor-
tals!

Oh, what love and condescension! What an emptying of Himself, so to speak, on the part of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! The world wonders when it reads in ecclesiastical and profane history of emperors, kings, and princes visiting and comforting the sick poor. Plutarch cannot give sufficient praise to Mark Antony because he felt the pulse of a wounded soldier and bound up his sores. Courtiers still wonder at the emperor Trajan, who used to visit his sick soldiers in the hospitals, and on one occasion, seeing that they had no linen, he pulled off his own imperial mantle and gave it to them to bind their wounds with. The humility and charity of Pope Paul II. are still held in great honor; he used to spend a great part of each day in visiting and consoling the sick poor. In the present gloriously reigning family of Austria it is still regarded as a sort of heirloom to observe the pious practice of accompanying the Blessed Sacrament if met with in the street; and emperors, kings, and queens of that family then go with it on foot, often even to the house of the sick person. But popes, kings, emperors of earth, what are ye compared to the supreme Monarch Jesus, whose vassals you are, and before whom you must humbly bend the knee? Yet He deigns to come in His own adorable person, as often as He is desired to do so, and to visit the sick and give them His own flesh and blood as their food and drink. Even the cabins of the poorest peasants, or the most wretched hovels, or even the stables in which the sick poor sometimes have to seek shelter, are not too lowly and abject for this great Monarch to enter,

that He may visit and console the sick; nay, He goes there willingly, and often far more willingly than to the superb palaces of the great. Nor is He disgusted at the filth and stench of disease; for He does not refuse to enter into a mouth that is already half decayed.

O dearest Saviour! what thanks and love we owe Thee for such condescension and for the favor Thou showest us when we are most in need of Thy visit and consolation! But what am I speaking of? O folly and stupidity of us mortals! often we have no desire for this most loving, and to us most necessary, visit! So it is, my dear brethren. There are men, Christians, Catholics, who if they ever object to be visited by Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament do so especially during the time of sickness, so that they have then to be almost forced to receive holy Communion by extreme necessity. They must be begged and prayed before they will admit Our Lord. What incomprehensible folly! We shall consider it briefly in the

What folly and madness to refuse the visit of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament!

Second Part.

In a certain play there was once represented a grand palace, before the door of which all kinds of men were standing waiting for an opportunity to enter and hand in their petitions; but no one was admitted unless he was a friend of the attendant who had to present such petitions, or knew how to flatter him, or was dressed in costly style, or had bribed the porter. Among the crowd there was an honest, upright man, who had been waiting several days for admission, but in vain. "O blind and unjust gates,"¹ he cried out at last, who so little know whom you should admit first of all! Unjust gates, by which virtue is shut out! I might say the same, my dear brethren, to many a door behind which some one lies dangerously sick. "O unjust door, that so little knowest whom thou shouldst admit!" The doctors come, and the door is thrown wide open; they are sent for in all haste when the sickness first declares itself; and quite right, too. Friends and acquaintances come to see how the sick man is; the door is thrown wide open; nor can we find fault with that. But where is the most skilful Doctor of all? Where is the best, truest and most necessary Friend, Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament? He, too, stands before the door, ready to enter at any moment. He earnestly desires to be admitted to pay a visit

They are guilty of it who put off receiving the holy Viaticum till the last moment.

¹ O orbæ et injustæ fores.

to the sick man; but no one thinks of Him, or at best He is remembered when the patient is at the last gasp; meanwhile the door remains closed. O blind and unjust door!

Some do so through fear of dying after receiving it.

This most reprehensible custom comes, in many cases, from a false idea that people have (and I know not whence they have it) that once they receive the holy Viaticum they must die. What incomprehensible ignorance amongst Catholics! If I receive holy Communion I must die! If I receive the Author of life I must die! If I allow Jesus Christ to visit me I must die! Mercy on us! To what ignorance do we owe an argument of that kind? To make out of a sacrament of the living, that restores health not only to the soul, but often, also, to the body—to make out of that a sign of approaching death, as if He who has the keys of life in His hands could only be a harbinger of death! And you, husbands and wives, parents, friends, and domestics, how cruelly you often act towards the members of your households, in preventing them from receiving holy Viaticum during their illness, or in putting off the reception of it from day to day, asking the doctors, nurses, and friends not to hint a word of danger, and least of all of the holy Viaticum, lest the sick person should be frightened! Thus the patient is defrauded of the heavenly food, until he grows delirious or falls into a lethargy which deprives him of the use of reason, or begins to gasp for breath, or has the death-sweat already on his brow, so that his soul is on the point of departing: thus it is either too late to receive holy Communion and the other sacraments, or else the patient cannot prepare for them worthily, and so receives them without any profit. What am I to think or say of this? According to St. Laurence Justinian this divine Sacrament, worthily received, is a certain pledge of eternal life.¹ Now, if one neglects to receive it through culpable negligence, or defers receiving it until he can no longer prepare for it properly, especially when he is about to undertake the dangerous journey into eternity, what a bad sign that is for him! God grant that I may never fall into the hands of such flattering, deceitful friends, who would hide my danger from me, and defraud me of the Food of my soul, if it were only for half an hour!

Others through human respect.

Others, when they are sick, are afraid to allow Jesus to visit them in the Blessed Sacrament because they are influenced by human respect. If I now settle my accounts with God, they

¹ Notissimum vitæ æternæ præsagium.

think, what will people say? How the neighbors will talk, as if it were all up with me! They will think me half dead already! See, there is the bolt that shuts the door against Our Lord, and keeps Him off for months, until the near approach of death forces them to open the door. O blind and unjust doors! What greater folly and madness could reasoning Christians be guilty of? What will people say! Well! what can they say? That I am dangerously ill. But if they do say that, are you any worse therefor? or will you die any sooner? And if the neighbors do not say that because you refuse to admit Our Lord, will you be any better on that account? or will you be in less danger of death? Are you afraid to send for the doctor, lest the people should think you very ill? But if you settle your accounts with God in good time, when you are still able to dispose yourself properly for such a holy sacrament, do you know what people will think and say of you? They will say: that is a good, pious Christian, who does in time what all Christians ought to do; and they will be edified by the good example which you give them and are bound to give them at all times, whether sick or well. But if you put off receiving holy Communion, or do not receive it till the very last gasp, and till extreme necessity forces you, so that you die immediately after; what will people think then? They will be scandalized at your conduct, and will speak of you in no favorable terms, as of one who could not be induced to receive holy Viaticum until death was already in his face. That is a nice reputation to leave behind you in the neighborhood! A fine eulogy for a Christian! O blind and unjust doors!

There is another unchristian abuse amongst those who would indeed willingly receive Our Lord in their illness, if, like Nicodemus, He would come to them secretly and by night; they are unwilling that the Blessed Sacrament should be brought through the streets by day with due honor and ecclesiastical ceremonies, and try, therefore, to have it brought in a hidden and secret manner, all for the sake of avoiding talk. My indignation almost deprives me of the power of speech. Christians! where are we living? Amongst Turks? Under the yoke of heretics or infidels? In a heretical town where public Catholic worship is forbidden? Where such a step could not be taken without running the risk of martyrdom? If that were the case, necessity must dispense from the law, and allow the secret visits of Our Lord.

Or from the same motive have the Blessed Sacrament brought privately to their houses.

But in a Catholic country, in a holy city, a glorious title that ours boasts of, where all should consider it the greatest honor to show all possible respect to the hidden God; here, I say, to admit Him secretly and without the public honor due to Him—who could approve of or excuse such conduct?

What a
shameful
thing for
Catholic
Christians!

It would make too much talk amongst the people, they say like the others. O great God! art Thou then so low and abject that we must be ashamed to be publicly visited by Thee? Tell me this, whoever you are: if your prince were to send word to you that he intends going to see you; would you wish him to come in the night and incognito, lest people should talk? But the greater the pomp and ceremony with which he visits you the greater the honor and favor done you in the sight of the whole city. And see, the King of kings, the great God, wishes to come to you and honor you with His presence; but you want Him to do so in a secret, furtive manner, because you are ashamed on account of the people! What are you thinking of, poor mortals? You are not worthy to loose the shoe-latchet of that great Lord, nay, not even to raise your eyes to Him; and you are ashamed to receive Him publicly when He desires to do you the greatest honor! What will people say! What will they say if you die after having thus secretly received holy Communion? Neighbor so-and-so is dead, they will say; but we did not see the Blessed Sacrament brought to him. Or else: that man is now so many months sick and has not been to Communion yet. Again a nice reputation to leave behind you! But when the Blessed Sacrament is brought publicly, so many people follow it, and I do not like that. Well, let them follow; let the whole town go with them; it would be only right and just. A Monarch so worthy of honor and love certainly deserves that all, great and small, young and old, rich and poor, should go at the sound of the bell, and humbly accompany Him, to increase, as much as possible, the splendor of His escort, as I have explained on a former occasion. And wo to him who is ashamed thus publicly to accompany his Lord and Saviour! For that same Lord will, as He has threatened, one day be ashamed of him before His Father in heaven. The more people come together when Jesus visits you the better it is for the honor and glory of God, and the more there are to pray for you, that you may get health of soul and body. Alas! where is our faith? The paralytic man in the Gospel had the roof of the house removed,

and himself let down by a rope as he lay in bed, that he might see Our Lord, from whom he was kept by the crowd. And we let that Lord in by the back door, so to speak, when we are sick, that no one may notice that He is visiting us! Faith, I say again, where art thou? I grow heart-sick when I think of this folly. Behold, O dear Lord, how we treat Thee! How we are ashamed of Thee! This is the return we make for the unheard-of love that Thou showest us in the Adorable Sacrament! Thou art so willing, especially in time of sickness, to be our Physician, Comforter, and Helper, for Thou knowest how necessary Thy presence is to us then, and we do not wish to receive Thy visit, unless compelled thereto by extreme necessity! Or else we admit Thee in a furtive manner, as if it were a disgrace for us to allow Thee into our houses!

Christians, either let us give up our faith or else show due honor and respect to the great God who has concealed Himself under the appearance of bread. O God of goodness! is it then true? Shall I really have that great honor and favor when I am lying sick? Wilt Thou show that mercy to me, poor, unworthy mortal that I am, and visit me and refresh me with Thy sacred body and blood? Ah, grant me that grace, I beseech Thee, prostrate at Thy feet, a grace that I will pray for heartily all the time of my life! I am indeed always in need of Thy help and consolation; but never are they more necessary to me than when I am about to journey into eternity. Come, then, dearest Saviour, and do not forget me! I will open my door wide for Thee, and willingly allow all the people in the world to enter with Thee, if possible, as witnesses that Thou, the great Monarch of heaven and earth, deignest to show a poor mortal the favor of visiting him in Thy own person! If in my illness I should be unable to prepare for Thee properly, on account of headache or weakness, or to receive Thy precious body and blood with becoming fervor, I will now, while I am in good health (dear Christians! mark this well, and unite with me in this holy practice)—I will now, as often as I approach Thy holy Table, receive Thee as my Viaticum, as if I were about to die; and I will excite in myself the same desires and practise the same virtues that I would wish to have in my dying moments, when receiving this holy Sacrament. Thus I will now so accustom myself to these virtues that I will have no difficulty in practising them when the last hour comes. Or if Thou art pleased, in Thy inscrutable

Conclusion
and exhortation to receive Our Lord timely in holy Viaticum.

decrees, to call me from this world by a sudden and unforeseen death (O great God, may Thy holy will be done! Here I am, Thy poor creature, altogether in Thy hands, ready to die when, how, and where Thou pleasest! I give myself up to Thy fatherly providence, and throw myself, living and dead, into the lap of Thy boundless mercy!), then I shall have the consolation of not dying without the holy Viaticum, since I shall have received it already in the holy Communion; and thus (as I trust with child-like confidence) Thou shalt be my food on my journey to Thy joyful paradise. Amen.

NINTH SERMON.

ON THE PREMATURE DEATH OF THE IDLE.

Subject.

The idle man is of no use in the world; therefore he deserves that God should take him out of it by a premature death.—*Preached on the eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Offerebant ei paralyticum jacentem in lecto.—Matt. ix. 2.

“They brought to him one sick of the palsy, lying in a bed.”

Introduction.

Truly pitiable is the state of one in a palsy! Afflicted in every member of his body, he can scarcely move a finger, much less can he walk or stand, or help himself in any way; all he can do is to lie in bed. He is of no use to any one, to himself or to others, but is rather a burden; and unless he is cured in some extraordinary way the only thing that he can hope for is a speedy death. My dear brethren, the paralytic man is a true picture of the idle man, who wastes his precious time doing nothing or squanders it in useless occupations; he is of no good to himself or to others, and if he does not amend his life what else can he expect from God but to be called away by a premature death? So it is, as I now proceed to prove.

Plan of Discourse.

The idle man is of no use in the world; therefore he deserves that God should take him out of it by a premature death. Such

is the whole subject. The end of it is to make that abominable idleness, the source of so many sins and vices, hateful to all.

Give us Thy light and grace hereto, O Lord, through the merits of Mary and of our holy guardian angels! Those who have their daily work to do, that they may not listen to me without profit for themselves, may apply what they hear either to the state of sin or to the neglect of the good intention in their daily actions; for, to work in the state of sin or without the good intention of turning what we do to some profit for our souls is the same before God as to be idle.

There is no creature in the whole world, no matter how vile it may be, that is not of some use or other. "No natural thing," says Aristotle, "is altogether useless."¹ The various weeds that grow in our gardens and fields and on the public highways, and that are trodden under foot by the passers-by; the insects, flies, wasps, and vermin that torment us, have been created for a special object, and they are useful and helpful to men, although we cannot always see how that is. Nothing can be utterly useless; and if it were possible for any creature to have no object for its existence that creature, according to philosophers, would at once be rejected and cast out by nature as superfluous. "Nature abhors the superfluous,"² is another axiom of philosophers.

Nature rejects useless things.

Severianus asks a remarkable question: Why did not God create the sun, moon, and stars on the first day, since on that same day He made light? "Be light made. And light was made."³ But He waited till the fourth day before creating the heavenly bodies: "Let there be lights made in the firmament of heaven, to divide the day and the night, and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years: to shine in the firmament of heaven and to give light upon the earth."⁴ What was the reason of that? To teach us a very important lesson, says Severianus; for in the first three days the sun, moon, and stars would not have had anything to do, since there was nothing to which they could be useful. God made those heavenly bodies that by their continual movements, light, heat, and influence, they might help to increase and preserve earthly things. Now it was

God does not tolerate useless things.

¹ Nullum esse naturale natum est otiosum.

² Natura horret superfluum.

³ Fiat lux. Et facta est lux.—Gen. 1. 3.

⁴ Fiant luminaria in firmamento cœli, et dividant diem ac noctem, et sint in signa, et tempora, et dies, et annos, ut luceant in firmamento cœli, et illuminent terram.—Ibid. 14, 15.

only on the third day that the plants, flowers, and trees were created out of the earth, while man was created on the sixth day; hence, before the fourth day there was nothing in which the planets could render any service, and for a time they would have been useless, a thing that the Author of nature could not approve of. That is the reason why those heavenly bodies were made on the fourth day, "because there was not yet on the earth any seed to be fructified and fostered by their heat."¹ So far Severianus. The almighty God wished to show thereby that nothing useless should be tolerated in the world. And Our Lord Himself confirms this in the well-known parable in the Gospel of St. Luke: "A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it, and found none." What! said he in anger to his gardener: "Behold, for these three years I come seeking fruit on this tree, and I find none." Why should I allow it to stand any longer? "Cut it down, therefore; why cumbereth it the ground?"² A good tree might be planted in the place of this useless one. Away with it, therefore, and throw it into the fire.

An idle man
is good for
nothing.

There you have a vivid picture of the man who leads an idle life, who spends the greater part of the day doing nothing; that is, in sleeping late in the morning, taking a long time to dress, eating and drinking, paying and receiving visits, gambling and amusing himself, walking, standing at the door and window, talking and chatting. In a word, he wastes the day in trifles of all kinds, has no order in important affairs, and no becoming occupation for head or hand. Why cumbereth he the ground? Why should a man of that kind remain on earth any longer? Come, death! so must the angry Creator say; cut him down! away with that useless tree! Let that idle man be no longer of the number of the living! For he is good for nothing; neither for himself, nor for others, nor for God!

Firstly: he is
no good for
himself, as
man is born
to labor.

He is useless for himself because he does nothing for the end of his creation. "Man is born to labor, and the bird to fly,"³ are the words of the Holy Ghost by the Prophet Job; and God has commanded man to work constantly and diligently, that he may gain eternal rest. Yes, says St. John Chrysostom, "there is no

¹ Quia nondum erant terre nascentia semina, quæ luminarium calore foverentur.

² Arborem fici habebat quidam plantatam in vinea sua, et venit, quærens fructum in illa, et non invenit. Ecce anni tres sunt ex quo venio, quærens fructum in ficulnea hac, et non invenio; succide ergo illam: ut quid etiam terram occupat?—Luke xiii. 6, 7.

³ Homo nascitur ad laborem, et avis ad volatum.—Job v. 7.

creature on earth less adapted for rest and idleness than man.”¹ And no one is dispensed from this, no matter what his rank or condition may be; no one is exempted from the law of toil and labor. Not even the prince and first father of all men, Adam, could evade it. While he was still innocent and just, and in the garden of paradise, where idleness was not so apt, as it now is, to lead to a wicked, reckless mode of life—even there he was commanded by God to labor: “And the Lord God. . . put him into the paradise of pleasure, to dress it and to keep it.”² But was Adam obliged to work in order to provide himself with food? No, answers St. Chrysostom, he had not to work for a livelihood, since he was master of the whole earth, and that earth would of itself, without cultivation, have produced fruits and means of livelihood in abundance. Why, then, had he to work? “For the sake of having a becoming occupation,”³ that he might live as a reasonable being who must never be idle, but always have some suitable work to employ his time at. But when Adam transgressed the divine command, ate the forbidden fruit, lost his first justice, and was expelled from paradise, how was it with him then? Alas! then was another sentence pronounced on him; for he had to work then, not merely for the sake of having a becoming occupation, but to earn his bread with toil and labor and the sweat of his brow: a sentence which fell on all his descendants. “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,” said God to him, “till thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken; for dust thou art, and into dust shalt thou return.”⁴

From this St. Bernard concludes that, as man is born to labor, if he avoids it he neglects that for which he was created. And during the time that he is not engaged in some becoming occupation he does not live as a rational being, according to the end for which he came into the world. Therefore the idle man was looked on by the holy Fathers, and by heathen philosophers as well, as a corpse, only fit to be buried in the earth. Paulinus once said to the philosopher Seneca, who used to inveigh with special severity against idlers: “But as far as I can see the

Hence the idle man does nothing for the end for which he is created.

¹ Nihil minus otio et quieti natum est, quam hominis natura.

² Dominus Deus . . . posuit eum in paradiso voluptatis, ut operaretur et custodiret illum.—Gen. ii. 15.

³ Ad honestum exercitium.

⁴ In sudore vultus tui vesceris pane, donec revertaris in terram de qua sumptus es; quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris.—Gen. iii. 19.

⁵ Homo ad laborem natus, si laborem refugit, non facit ad quod natus est, ad quod in venit in mundum.—St. Bern. Sermon.: Ecce nos reliquimus.

man whom you condemn as an idler is always busy with something or other; he is either dressing, or visiting, or seeing company, or walking, playing, or dancing. He has always something of that kind on hand; can you, then, call him idle?" "True," replied Seneca, "the man should not be called idle, but sick, nay, rather dead."¹ For he does not live like a reasoning being. He alone deserves the name of a living, reasoning being who uses himself and his reason in becoming, useful, and virtuous occupations.²

But resembles a dead man, as the heathens well knew.

The emperor Tiberius had a minister to whom he was much indebted for past services, but who was now growing so old that it appeared high time for him to be relieved of the burden of office. The emperor intimated as much to him, and told him that he might retire, still retaining his former titles and income. How do you think, my dear brethren, that old man took this message? He had a funeral pyre erected in a large hall in his house, assembled all the members of his family, and said to them as he laid himself down on the pyre: "Weep for me, O friends! Weep and let your tears flow freely; for I am now a dead man; I have become a living corpse." The emperor, hearing of this, sent for him, and asked the reason of his strange conduct. "Your majesty," was the answer, "once I am deprived of my usual occupations and duties I look on myself as condemned to death; for I am idle and have nothing to do." The emperor, amazed at this reply, restored him to his former office; and he ran off home exulting and saying that he had now been recalled to life from death. This example deserves mature consideration, my dear brethren. A nobleman, very rich, and a heathen to boot, who expected no reward in the next life, hated idleness so much that he looked on himself as dead if he had not much work to do, even at an advanced old age, because his reason told him that a man must never be idle. What, then, shall we think of the Christian, who looks for eternal rest in heaven as the reward of his labor, and yet squanders away his precious time in idleness or in useless occupations? Cut him down! Away with the idle man! He is of no use on earth to himself or to the end for which he was created and lives on earth. Nor is he of any use to others with whom he lives.

¹ Non est ergo otiosus hic; aliud nomen imponas; æger est; imo mortuus est.—Seneca, de Brev. Vitæ, c. xlii.

² Vivit is qui se utitur.

Mark this: a dead body is not only useless to itself, because it can neither walk, nor stand, nor see, nor hear, nor move itself in any way whatsoever, but it is also troublesome, injurious, and intolerable to others who are in the house in which it is lying; for once it begins to decay it fills the place with an abominable stench; therefore it is put out of sight and buried as soon as possible. This is, as we know, the custom in the world. It is also the way in which God is wont to act with the idle man, as we read in the parable of the barren fig-tree. "Why cumbereth it the ground?" said the owner of the vineyard; as if to say: since that tree is barren it ought to be cut down. But that is not the only mischief it does. It cumpers the ground; it takes up the place of a fruitful tree, and moreover deprives the trees and plants in its neighborhood of the moisture and nourishment they should have. Away with it, then; cut it down; I will no longer have it in my vineyard.

Secondly: he is of no good but is rather injurious to his neighbor. Shown by a simile.

So, too, does God say in His infinite justice: why does he cumber the ground? Why should that idle man live any longer? He bears no fruit for his soul, and takes up the place of others who would employ their time in a manner more pleasing to God and more useful to the world. The luxuries that he indulges in daily could feed many decent poor, who can hardly earn enough by hard labor to support themselves and their children. What he spends on dress for mere outward show could clothe many a poor person decently. What he squanders in gambling and amusing himself could support many a poor family. The duties he has undertaken to perform he neglects, because he dislikes work; thus he is the cause of injury to others. If another held the same office he would perform its duties more diligently, to the honor of God and the good of many. His children will be brought up to act like him and spend their time in paying and receiving useless visits, standing at the window, sleeping till late in the day, wasting their time in dressing, etc., and they will teach their children in turn; so that whole families will be thus brought to lead worthless lives. Cut it down, therefore! Away with the barren tree! "Just as the tree deserves to be cut down," says St. Peter Chrysologus, "so the idle man ought to be cut off from the number of the living."¹

Hence he is not to be tolerated by his Creator

Even heathens have acknowledged this truth, and therefore amongst all well-ordered nations and peoples idleness was always

Even heathen nations

¹ Sicut arbor e terra, sic iste ex vita meretur excidi.

have ban-
ished the
idle.

held in detestation, as hurtful not only to the individual, but to the community at large. Woo-te, emperor of China, published a severe law obliging all his subjects, especially women, under severe penalties, to have some work to do always, and never to be idle; nor was any one exempt from this, not even the wives of the mandarins or rulers of provinces, nor his own consort, the empress herself; but all according to their station had to occupy themselves with some work in silk, gold, or linen; so that the children might learn industry from the example of their parents; and it was looked on as a most wonderful thing to see one of the female sex in the public street or at a window. So writes Mendoza in his Annals of China. Cleomenes, the Spartan king, being asked why he did not destroy his enemy, as he could easily have done, answered: "No, that would not be good for my country; as long as we have an enemy to fight we have occupation, and that will keep us from idleness, which is the source of all disorder and misfortune in a country, and is most injurious to the common weal." Such, too, was the opinion of Scipio, a wise and experienced man amongst the ancient Romans. These people had subdued almost the whole world, and after they had conquered the Carthaginians and Greeks, who had resisted them longest, their exultation knew no bounds. "Now," they said, "our republic is in safety." "And now, too," said Scipio with a deep sigh, "our republic is in the greatest danger, greater than ever before; for now that we have no foreign enemy to fight idleness will show itself amongst us, and with it the vices that spring from it, and finally the ruin of our republic." And subsequent events proved the truth of these words.

Thus put-
ting us
Christians
to shame.

Ah, Christians, if one of those heathens were to come to Europe, to this Christian city of ours, and see how children are brought up in idleness by idle parents, what would he say? Oh! he would exclaim in astonishment, is then your own happiness and prosperity of no account to you, that you thus waste your time? Or else he might say: has the God you serve no reward for those who are zealous in His service? Truly, we should answer, that is one of the articles of our faith; every thought, word, act, and momentary service that we do for our God will be rewarded by Him with an eternity of glory and happiness. But, he will continue, does not then your God admit all Christians into His service? Yes, we answer; all without exception; young and old, great and small, rich and poor, men and women—all are invited

by Him to use all their diligence in gaining this prize. This last answer would appear stranger to him than all the monsters and prodigies he ever saw in Africa or America.

And from this, my dear brethren, we see the third point in which the idler is useless; for if he is of no use to himself or to his neighbor, neither is he of any to his God, whom he should serve. There are many who imagine that to avoid idleness and fill up the time with some becoming occupation, thus turning it to profit for one's soul, is necessary only for those who cannot otherwise find the means of livelihood, or as a salutary work of supererogation for those who desire to gain greater glory in heaven; but that there is no law of God binding every one under pain of sin to work. But they are vastly mistaken. Nor will I refute them with St. Thomas of Aquin, who expressly teaches that man cannot do a single work with full deliberation and attention without either doing thereby a good and virtuous work or else committing a sin, and this latter is the case when the work is not directed to the proper end, the salvation of our souls and the fulfilment of the will of God. Let idlers see how they can direct their frivolous occupations to this end. It is certain that all adults who do not receive heaven as their reward will be punished forever in hell; now the Lord has said that He will not give heaven unless to those who work diligently for it: "Call the laborers and pay them their hire,"¹ He says in the Gospel. And it is also infallibly certain that the just God will demand a strict account of every idle word: "But I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment,"² and not one such word shall go unpunished. What must then be the result of all the useless thoughts, imaginations, vain conversations, idle staring, and other frivolous things in which the idle pass their time and squander it so shamefully?

It is to no purpose that they try to excuse themselves by saying: we do no harm; we do not commit a sin by seeking our comfort. What? You do no harm? You lead an idle life, and commit no sin? That is, humanly speaking, an impossibility. Even if no mortal sin is committed for some time, that very idleness itself is evil doing, as St. John Chrysostom says distinct-

Finally: the idler is no good to his God, who hates idleness.

It is culpable to pass the time in idleness.

¹ Voca operarios, et redde illis mercedem.—Matt. xx. 8.

² Dico autem vobis, quoniam omne verbum otiosum, quod locuti fuerint homines, reddent rationem de eo in die iudicii.—Ibid. xii. 36.

ly: "not to do good—what is it, if not to do evil?"¹ "Hand in hand the evil man shall not be innocent;"² says the Holy Ghost; when the hands are folded together, doing nothing and having nothing to do, there is little use in looking for innocence and piety.

As Magdalene testifies of herself.

The Scripture says of Magdalene: "Behold a woman that was in the city a sinner."³ In what did her wickedness consist, that she was called by such an odious name? Father Ambrose Cateaneus of our Society writes that St. Mary Magdalene appeared to a pious person in Spain who was saying the office in her honor, and said to that person: "In my lifetime I was a notorious sinner in the city, yet not in the way in which people generally understand the term; for the impure and unchaste actions imputed to me I never even dreamt of. I was of noble birth, and dwelt in a castle, and my only sin was idleness." In the morning (so continues the description of her life), after lying long in bed, her whole occupation was to stand before the looking-glass and contemplate her beauty, taking a vain pleasure therein, curling her hair, and dressing in costly array; she was not content with the natural comeliness given her by God, but sought to increase it by the use of all sorts of cosmetics. Thus splendidly dressed, after having taken her meals, she did nothing the whole day but walk about the city, showing herself off and trying to attract attention. There was no social gathering at which Magdalene was not present, no company in which she was not to be found. She laughed, joked, and amused herself till late at night, and thereby gave occasion for impure desires in some, for rash judgments, suspicions, and envy in others, and scandal in nearly all. This was the life that deserved to be described by the Holy Ghost in the words: "A woman that was in the city a sinner." And she was the woman from whom Our Lord drove out seven devils, that is, the seven deadly sins. And yet her life was only an idle, pleasure-seeking life.

And she has many imitators.

My dear brethren, how many Magdalenes are there not now-a-days in our Christian cities? How many young girls and married women who lead the same useless, luxurious life? How many are there not of the male sex who could with reason be classed amongst them in this respect, for they consume the precious time of their youth and manhood in walking about the

¹ Quid est nihil facere boni ; nisi facere aliquid mali ?

² Manus in manu non erit innocens malus.—Prov. xi. 21.

³ Ecce mulier, quæ erat in civitate peccatrix.—Luke vii. 37.

streets, paying useless visits, gambling, eating, drinking, and doing nothing? And yet they maintain that they are doing no harm in all this, and are indignant with those who dare to describe them as sinners in the city! But when they appear before the judgment-seat of God they shall learn, when too late, what they were in life; namely, useless for themselves and their own souls, which they neglected; useless for their neighbor and their children, to whom they gave bad example; useless, finally, for their God and for His service, which they did not render Him.

Cut it down therefore; why cumbereth it the ground? It is no wonder then if the angry God should send forth the command to have those useless men taken away. And this is the threat that the Lord utters against all sinners: "The fear of the Lord shall prolong days: and the years of the wicked shall be shortened,"¹ as the Wise Man says in the Proverbs. Thus it often happens that one who has sinned much dies sooner than if he had lived piously. This we find to have been the case with Her, the son Juda: "And Her, the first-born of Juda, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and was slain by Him."² Mark these words: God slew him because he was wicked. Baronius writes in his Annals that a person of gigantic stature and terrible countenance once appeared to the wicked emperor Anastasius, and said to him: "Behold, on account of your perversity in matters of faith I strike out of your life fourteen years that you would have lived had you not been given so much to consort with heretics and sinners."³ Death hastens with unwearied steps to meet all men; towards some he advances gradually; but sinners and the wicked he overtakes, so to speak, on horseback. "Now the sting of death is sin,"⁴ says St. Paul; that is, sin is the sharp and pointed spur that compels death to hasten his movements, and makes him, as it were, a swift runner. If this is true for all sinners, it is certainly so for idlers; for idleness is said to tempt the devil, and it fosters all kinds of vice and wickedness. Cut it down therefore, says the Lord; why cumbereth it the ground? Come, O death! and cut down that barren tree. The idle man is not worthy of a long life. Away with him! Alas! and in what am I guilty? I have done no harm. You have done

Thus the idler deserves to die prematurely.

¹ Timor Domini apponet dies, et anni impiorum breviabuntur.—Prov. x. 27.

² Fuit quoque Her primogenitus Judæ, nequam in conspectu Domini; et ab eo occisus est.—Gen. xxxviii. 7.

³ En tibi ob perversitatem fidel tuæ quatuordecim annos vitæ deleo.

⁴ Stimulus autem mortis peccatum est.—I. Cor. xv. 56.

nothing; you have wasted the precious time I gave you to work out your salvation; and therefore away with you! I cannot tolerate your presence on the earth any longer. But I am still quite young. No matter. That tree was not old either. Cut him down! Come, O death! and take him. But I have done some good at least; I have heard Mass on Sundays and holy-days, and sometimes on week-days too; I have visited the churches, said my prayers, fasted till late in the evening on Good Friday, etc.? The same might have been said by that tree, if it could have spoken; it might have urged in its defence: at least I was some good; I brought forth beautiful leaves, that made an agreeable shade. But it produced no fruit, such as its owner expected to find on it; and therefore the order was given: cut it down! Truly, O mortal! the Almighty God can reply: you do some apparent good here and there; but I know the amount of devotion and zeal you have in those visits to the church, in your prayers and other works of piety; all the remaining time of your life you have wasted in idleness; it is not enough for you to do merely something; the whole law has to be fulfilled. Cut it down therefore! Away with the barren tree!

Repentance
for having
led an idle
life, and
purpose of
amend-
ment.

O God of mercy! let me beg of Thee with the gardener in the Gospel for a respite. Have patience with me. Give me at least time to repent of my useless life, and to do penance for it, that I may not be condemned to the everlasting fire of hell! Now I know how grossly I have erred! Truly the time given me during my past years was too precious to be wasted in such frivolous occupations! Every moment of my life I might have gained, with small trouble, an eternity of glory and merit in Thy service; but I have squandered that time so wretchedly doing nothing or neglecting the good intention! I am sorry, O Lord! And I promise in future to use it better for my salvation, to heap up merit and to further Thy honor and glory, for whatever time Thou wilt still in Thy goodness and mercy grant me. Here on this earth, a place of penance and suffering, I am ready to fatigue myself with toil and labor, that in the evening, the end of my life, I may hear the words: "Call the laborers and pay them their hire," and so come to eternal rest. Amen.

TENTH SERMON.

ON THE REMORSE OF THE DYING ON ACCOUNT OF TIME LOST
THROUGH IDLENESS.

Subject.

The time lost in idleness or useless occupations will be a sore thorn in the side of the dying.—*Preached on the nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Illi autem neglexerunt, et abierunt alius in villam suam, alius vero ad negotiationem suam.—Matt. xxii. 5.

“But they neglected, and went their ways, one to his farm, and another to his merchandise.”

Introduction.

Such is the way of the world. The heavenly Father has prepared in His kingdom for His only-begotten Son a marriage-feast, to which He has invited all men, that they may share with Him in all imaginable joys; for as far as He is concerned the Almighty God sincerely wishes all men to be saved. But what occurs? “He sent his servants to call them that were invited to the marriage: and they would not come.” That is, there are some who do not desire to go to heaven; for of their own accord they hasten to hell, by spending their time in sin and vice. Others are careless about heaven: “But they neglected, and went their ways, one to his farm, and another to his merchandise.” These are the idle; and we have seen last Sunday that they deserve to be taken out of the world by a premature death. These people would indeed willingly appear at the heavenly marriage-feast; but they do not wish to put themselves to any trouble about it, since they spend the precious time given them by God for the sole purpose of serving Him and gaining heaven, in idleness or in useless occupations, or in mere temporal cares, without directing their intention to God or to the salvation of their souls. And they think so little of it all! But their thoughts about the matter will be very different when they come to the end of their lives. Alas! what remorse, fear, and despair will then be theirs, as I now proceed to show.

Plan of Discourse.

The time lost in idleness or useless occupations will be a sore thorn in the side of the dying: such is the whole subject. That we may not feel this thorn when it is too late to amend, let us use the present time for the salvation of our souls. Such shall be the conclusion.

Grant us Thy grace thereto, O Lord! We ask it of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

The peasant who leaves his land untilled has just reason for regret at harvest time.

The most pleasant time of the year for peasants is generally harvest time, when they gather in with joy and gladness the fruits of their toil and labor. The greatest loss they can suffer in temporal things, the one which causes them most sorrow and anxiety, is an unfruitful year, which robs them of all they hoped to gain by unremitting industry. But even under that trial pious Christians are not without consolation. What matter? they say; it is not our fault; we have done our best; the Lord of heaven, who alone can give the increase to the seeds we have planted, has so willed it, and this year has been pleased in His all-just and all-wise decrees to give us nothing. May His holy will be done! May the name of the Lord be praised and blessed under all circumstances! But suppose, my dear brethren, that one who has much land in his possession neglects to till it through sheer laziness; what must be his feelings when at harvest time he sees his neighbors busy mowing and bringing home their crops, while he has not even a straw that he can call his own? Should not the sight cause him sorrow and pain?

And is almost in despair when he sees his neighbors reap abundantly.

And that all the more if the harvest has been an unusually plentiful one; such as we read of in Tartary, where one single seed produces five hundred, and the crops are so abundant that there are not barns enough to hold them, so that a great part of them must be allowed to lie on the fields for the birds and beasts. Or as Francis Lopez tells us of India; where in a certain province the harvest was so great in one year that two or three hundred fruitful ears of corn grew from a single seed. What state the lazy peasant would be in if he saw all this! Unhappy man that I am, he would say; what have I done! What have I not lost through my idleness! In one year I might have become rich without any more trouble than what it would cost to scatter a few handfuls of seed, for which I might now

bring **many** hundred bushels home, so that I should have had enough to support myself and my family for years. Now I alone, amongst all the neighbors, must go away empty handed, and see all the others grow rich, while I have nothing. So might that man complain under such circumstances, although his condition is not by any means a desperate one, since he can make up by increased diligence next year what he lost. How would it be with him if he had not a single grain of seed, nor any credit or other means of procuring any, so that he has no prospect before him but perishing of hunger with all his family? And that because he neglected to cultivate his land, because he was unwilling to work! How great would not be his remorse, his sorrow, nay, his despair?

My dear brethren, now to my subject; "the present time," says St. Jerome, "is the time for sowing;"¹ the time that God has given us to work out our salvation. The seed is the use we make of that time; "the seed of eternity,"² as St. Bernard calls it. The fruit cannot be hindered in its growth by bad seasons, heat or cold, rain or inundation, wind or weather, worm or insect. It all depends on how we sow the seed, that is, employ our time.

The time of this life is given to us as the seed of eternity.

If it is well sown, if our time is well employed, what fruit may we expect? A hundred bushels perhaps from a single grain? My meaning is: suppose, O mortal, that but one moment is granted you in this life, how much do you think you can gain by it, short as it is? A hundred thousand acres of land? That would be a great deal to your mind, and at that rate you would become rich in a quarter of an hour. But after all it is nothing; it would be altogether too trifling a gain from such precious seed as a moment of time. For you must look far higher, and expect much more. What then? A kingdom? No; more than that. The whole world with all its wealth and riches? Ah, if you had gained it and nothing more by your one moment of time, you would have reason to complain and call yourself foolish for not having employed your time better. For everything that passes with time is not worth time. Tell us, O holy Apostle St. Paul, what thou thinkest of the value of time. "That which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight

That should bear everlasting fruit.

¹ *Tempus præsens tempus serentis est.*

² *Semen æternitatis.*

of glory.”¹ This one moment produces for us an everlasting weight of glory, an eternity of joys, the possession and enjoyment of an infinite Good; such is the fruit of a moment of well-spent time. I take as witnesses to the truth of this all those who are now happy in heaven. A momentary good thought, a single word, a work directed to the honor and glory of God, an act of patience and mortification, of repentance, of the love of God, such was the seed they sowed; an eternal crown of glory, a superabundance of delights, an everlasting dwelling in heaven, an infinite Good whom they will possess forever; such is the fruit they have reaped from it. The same fruit, my dear brethren, we may gather and heap up every moment of our lives if we only wish.

A great blessing for us to use this time well.

What consolation and happiness for one who, being in the state of grace, labors diligently for the good of his soul! If the joy of the blessed in heaven could be disturbed by any feeling of remorse or regret, it would be at the thought of having lost but a single moment while on earth by not devoting it to the service of God; and nowhere would there be greater unrest than in heaven, through the desire all its inhabitants would have for a little more time on earth in order to gain more glory even by suffering all conceivable torments. Yes, holy souls, if you were not satisfied with the will of God, you would be capable of a feeling of envy in that place where charity is to be found in perfection; you would envy our good fortune, and would desire to be in our place, or with us, that by making a good use of your time you might increase your glory in eternity. So much profit can time bring us, my dear brethren, when it is well employed.

An irreparable loss to misspend it.

From this we can see how great is the injury we do ourselves by making a bad use of time. Come forth from hell, ye lost souls, and tell us what the loss of time has caused you to suffer; for you can give impartial testimony in the matter! This loss, they say, is as great as the Good from which we are forever excluded; great as our misery; terrible as the fire that the divine anger fans to torment us! If I could give you back one of those afternoons that you wasted in immoderate drinking, and in playing dice and cards; one of the evenings that you spent in dangerous company; one of the mornings that you lost by lying too long in bed, or in spending too much time in dressing, or in idle thoughts; one of those nights that concealed your impurity

¹ Id enim quod in presenti est momentaneum et leve tribulationis nostræ, supra modum in sublimitate æternum gloriæ pondus operatur in nobis.—II. Cor. iv. 17.

from the eyes of men; nay, if I could give you but one moment of that time; what would you do? Ah, you would free yourselves from an unhappy eternity by true repentance, and gain a joyful eternity in heaven! But, unhappy souls, in vain would you expect that much! You must go on in your despair! There is not an hour, or a quarter of an hour, or a minute, or a moment for you! Your tears and sorrow are too late. During your lives you could thereby have freed yourselves from everlasting misery; now time is no more for you! O bitter despair! (which I have dilated on on another occasion, my dear brethren, when I wished you a good time.)

Now you may understand how great will be the mental anguish and pain that will pierce the heart of the dying man who has passed a lifetime in useless occupations or idleness, doing nothing for his soul; and what his feelings will be when he looks back on the years he has wasted. Alas! what pain of heart will be his! I have lived twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, or more years; in each year there were twelve months, in each month four weeks, in each week seven days, in each day twenty-four hours, in each hour sixty minutes, in each minute as many moments. All this beautiful time is over. In any moment of it I could have gained eternal glory in heaven! Ah, would that I had abstained from sin! Would that I had always kept in the grace of God! Would that I had been more regular in frequenting the sacraments, in making use of the golden opportunities afforded me, in performing works of piety, charity, and mercy! Would that I had always occupied myself in something useful according to the Christian law, that I had directed my daily duties and trials by the supernatural intention to my last end, to God and heaven! What a rich treasure of merit and eternal joys I should have amassed, that the just Judge would give me now! But alas! it is too late, and I have lost all forever! Poor and naked I must go into the house of my eternity, while others, amongst whom I might have been, enter it with joy and exultation, as the Lord says of them by His prophet David: "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. Going they went and wept, casting their seeds. But coming they shall come with joyfulness, carrying their sheaves."¹ And I must look on with empty hands and tearful eyes!

Hence it will be a source of great torment to a dying man to think of what he has lost through idleness when he might have gained great profit for his soul.

¹ Qui seminant in lachrymis, in exultatione metent. Euntes ibant et flebant, mittentes semina sua. Venientes autem venient cum exultatione, portantes manipulos suos.—Ps. cxxxv. 5, 6, 7.

And to re-
member
how useless-
ly he spent
his time.

The time that the divine liberality bestowed on me was a rich property that I could have left to my soul as an inheritance; but how much remains to me of it when I reckon up all that I have spent for other purposes than the good of my soul? The heirs receive no more of a legacy than what is left after all debts have been paid; *deducto ære alieno*, according to the terms of the law; and moreover whatever the testator has given away during his lifetime must be deducted also, as well as what he has left to others in his will. Oh, what a number of creditors surrounds my death-bed, to whom I have irrevocably made over the time of my life! How much time have I not spent in sleep, in idleness? In dressing? In immoderate eating and drinking? In receiving and paying useless visits? In gratifying my curiosity at the door and the window? In playing cards, amusements, and sinful talk? In excessive care for temporal things? In sensuality and impurity and all kinds of sin and vice? Ah, my poor soul, if all that time has to be taken away, how small thy inheritance will be! And what wilt thou live on during eternity? Thou shalt resemble the poor woman whose husband spends at the ale-house all he has earned during the week—and there are only too many nowadays who do that—so that she has nothing but her tears for herself and her starving children!

For which
he must
give a strict
account to
his Judge.

And in what state wilt thou be to present thyself before thy Judge, when He shall say to thee: “Give an account of thy stewardship?”¹ Tell me how thou hast worked the land I lent thee; what fruit thou hast garnered from the precious seed of time. “What answer will you make on that day?” is the question that St. Anselm asks of the dying man who has spent a useless life, “when you shall be required to give an account of all the time conceded to you during life, and of the manner in which you passed it?”² Oh, truly, the Judge will not need other witnesses against you to pronounce on you the sentence of condemnation; for the time you spent so ill will be your accuser and witness, so that you shall lose your case. “He hath called against me the time.”³ He shall bring up as witness against me the time in which I could and should have done good, but which I used only to secure my own condemnation. And that time in which I could have avoided evil, escaped hell, and gained heav-

¹ Redde rationem villicationis tuæ.—Luke xvi. 2.

² Quid respondebis in illa die; cum exigeret a te omne tempus viventis tibi impensum, qualiter fuerit a te expensum?

³ Vocavit adversum me tempus.—Lam. i. 15.

en, but that I have squandered in idleness—that time shall be my greatest torment in everlasting flames!

O vanished years! where are ye? If I might only call you back now! Ah, unhappy me! I must exclaim with that secretary of Francis I., king of France, as he lay on his death-bed; unhappy me! I have spent so many years, and used up so many reams of paper in the service of my king; would that I had spent but one day and used but one sheet of paper to write thereon a general confession for the good of my poor soul! Would that I had but one hour of the many I have wasted, that I might regain lost time and appease my Judge before I die! But what caps the climax of my grief and sorrow is that I cannot now expect another moment of time! I hear resounding in my ears the words: “Time shall be no longer,”¹ the season for sowing is gone by; not a grain can be planted any more with the hope of a harvest. I am about to journey into eternity, where I have nothing to look for but a tardy repentance, torments, and despair!

In this condition of fear and anguish will depart the soul of the man who has wasted his time during life in idleness or in vanities useless for his salvation. Bromiard writes that a certain holy Father saw once in the house of a dying sinner a swarm of hideous demons coming to the bed-side to carry off the wicked man. He cried out, mercy! mercy! but one of the devils answered him in an audible voice: “It is too late now to beg for mercy.” And so it was. The unhappy man gave up the ghost in that moment. Humbert, a holy priest belonging to a religious order, while meditating on eternity, heard a mournful voice calling out in most piteous tones. He asked who it was, and what was the matter. “I am a soul,” was the answer; “I have just departed, and have been condemned by God; I am sent here by divine command to warn you and others of the great value of the short time of your life. Know then that of all the torments that a man can endure in his last moments, nay, of all the pains and tortures of hell itself, there is none more acute than that which is caused to the dying and the damned by the thought of lost and misspent time. And that shall be the subject of our vain regrets during eternity. Ah, would that God would give us the smallest particle of time, to repent of our sins and atone for the past! But, O despair! time shall be no more!” With this exclamation the unhappy soul vanished.

In vain will he then wish to have the lost time back.

What torment this thought causes on one's death-bed. Shown by examples.

¹ *Tempus non erit amplius.*—Apoc. x. 6.

How foolish, then, the conduct of most people in wasting their time!

My dear brethren, this salutary doctrine, this wholesome thought, which comes too late for the dying, is meant for us who are still alive and well, and can still make a good use of the present time. We must therefore make provision now, that we may not on our death-beds have cause to fear a long eternity of despair and wailing. "The present time is the time for sowing." What is not sown then can never bear fruit, nor be garnered in, but is and remains lost forever. The present time is not a time for idling or loitering; it is not a time for useless talk, amusements, gambling, long sleep and vain pleasures, much less for sin and vice; for it is intended by God, who has given it to us out of His great mercy, for the sole purpose of working out the salvation of our immortal souls, and preparing ourselves for a happy death. St. Bernard says that it is enough to stop the current of his blood partly through pity, partly through indignation, to hear people say: let us talk to pass away an hour;¹ let us play, amuse ourselves, walk about to pass away the time. And have you nothing better to do? Is that the way to use the time that the Creator has granted you to do penance, to obtain pardon, to acquire grace, to merit glory?² Will you waste in useless talk and frivolity the precious hour that God has bestowed on you for such a lofty purpose? What must we think when we hear young people, especially when they are of different sexes, say to each other in their young years, like the idlers in the Book of Wisdom: "Come, therefore, and let us enjoy the good things that are present, and let us speedily use the creatures as in youth. Let us fill ourselves with costly wine, and ointments; and let not the flower of the time pass by us. Let us crown ourselves with roses, before they be withered."³

Shown by a simile.

O foolish mortals! what are you saying? If you saw a gardener picking the blossoms off the trees in spring, and making them into a nosegay because they are beautiful, what would you think of him? You would say that he is either mad or an unfaithful servant, inasmuch as he thus destroys all prospects of fruit. Is not that the case? Because it is from the blossom that the fruit has to come, and if that is destroyed, there can be no fruit. "Let not the flower of the time pass by us," you say;

¹ Licet fabulari donec pertrauseat hora—St. Bern., Serm. ad Scholares.

² Quam tibi ad agendam poenitentiam, ad obtinendam veniam, ad acquirendam gratiam, ad promerendam gloriam miseratio Conditoris indulgeat?

³ Venite ergo, et fruamur bonis quæ sunt, et utamur creatura tanquam in juventute celeriter. Vino pretioso et unguentis nos impleamus; et non prætereat nos flos temporis. Cornemus nos rosis antequam marcescant!—Wis. ii. 6-8.

What are the flowers, the blossoms of this time? They are the works done in this life, from which the fruit is to grow for eternity; if you break off these blossoms, and use the time only for your own comfort, sensuality, and pleasure, what sort of fruit can you have from time for eternity? Certainly no other but the sad and despairing remembrance of lost time.

O lively faith! thou art wanting in those idle men! Experience teaches in countless ways that human life is very short; that its years are uncertain; that God has appointed for one ten, for another twenty, for a third thirty, forty, fifty, sixty years; that no one knows how many years he has to live; now, if we only believed practically, and often reflected deeply on the fact that on the good or bad use of this uncertain time depends eternal happiness in heaven or eternal misery in hell, would it be possible for a Christian who professes to fear hell and desire heaven to squander away so wretchedly the beautiful time of his life, instead of using it to work out his salvation? No, exclaims St. Gregory, that would not be possible if faith were not wanting. Hear his own words: "He who considers in the spirit of faith the course of the present time numbers his days by good works, dreading lest a single moment should pass by without labor and fruit for his soul."¹

It comes from want of a lively faith.

"Therefore, whilst we have time let us work good."² Such is the conclusion to which St. Paul exhorts us. Nothing remains of the time that we have lived up to this; perhaps the greater part of it has been wasted; and, once for all, the time that we do not devote to God and our soul is lost forever. Oh, how great the loss of all the graces and merits we might have gained in that time! But as we cannot recall it, let us at least try to make up for it by renewed diligence, like the traveller who, having lost his way in the forest and wandered about for hours on the wrong path, walks much more quickly when he has found out his mistake, in order to arrive at his destination in time. The time we have still to live is uncertain, and will pass like an arrow shot from a bow. God has appointed the moment of our death as the end of our time. The sinner in hell hates God, curses, blasphemes, and commits other sins; yet his torments are not increased on that account, because he has reached the term

Exhortation to use the time given us to work out our salvation.

¹ Qui fide cursum presentis temporis pensat, dies cum operibus numerat, ne a labore vacua transeant vitæ momenta, formidat.—St. Greg., Moral. l. 8, c. vii.

² Ergo dum tempus habemus, operemur bonum.—Gal. vi. 10.

of time during which he could merit punishment by sin. A just soul in purgatory practises the most perfect faith and hope regarding the joys of heaven it has not yet seen; it hopes for salvation as firmly as if it had already gained it; it loves God above all things, although it feels the heavy weight of His chastising hand; it is fully resigned to God's will in its severe torments; yet by all those virtues which it practises every moment it does not lessen or shorten its punishment, nor bring itself a step nearer to heaven. Why? Because it has already passed the term during which it could merit. "The dead know nothing more," says the wise Ecclesiastes, "neither have they a reward any more."¹ They receive their reward of what they have done during life, and it is according to that that God will pay them. But they have no further reward to expect for what they do after death. Hence, as my merits shall be in the last moment of my life so also shall my reward be; and after that moment I shall not have another to make a good confession, to awaken sorrow for my sins, to gain an indulgence or to acquire grace. If an angel were to come and tell us the day of our death, saying to each one in particular: you have still a year to live; you, half a year; you, three months; you, four weeks; you, five days; after that time shall be no more; how should we act during that time? How carefully we should purify our conscience, if it accused us of any sin? How we should avoid all dangerous occasions! How diligently we should perform the duties of our state! In a word, how zealous we should become in the divine service! Why do we not do all this now, since we are not sure of a single moment in the day? Why do we put off our conversion to a future time, which perhaps we shall never see?

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion.

No, my God! quite different is the resolution I now make, as I did on a former occasion, in the words of Thy servant David: "And I said: Now have I begun."² Now will I begin to make a good use of the time given to me; now will I scatter the precious seed, that I may reap a rich harvest; now will I begin to do what I have unfortunately not done yet, to serve Thee alone, O God! and serve Thee faithfully. Now, in the present time, I say; for to no purpose should I turn my sorrowful gaze to the past, of which nothing now remains to me but regret for the bad use I made of it. O accursed idleness! what a priceless treasure thou

¹ Mortui nihil noverunt amplius, nec habent ultra mercedem.—Eccles. ix. 5.

² Dixi: nunc coepi.—Ps. lxxvi. 11.

hast stolen from me! O useless visits, company-seeking, gambling, sleep! what have you brought me in, when I could have given to God, my soul and heaven, to my great advantage, the time sacrificed for your sake? Ah, my regrets are too late; the time is past! In vain should I rely on future time, for I cannot promise myself that I shall see it. Therefore I will be all the more diligent and fervent in using what I have—the present. “I have said: Now have I begun,” such is my firm resolution. Heavenly Father, who hast created time by Thy Almighty power! Christ Jesus, who hast redeemed it by Thy precious blood! Holy Ghost, who hast sanctified the good use of it! give me the grace to use it in future as becomes such a Creator, such a Redeemer, such a Sanctifier! O most Blessed Trinity! I now offer Thee all the years, months, weeks, days, hours, and moments of the rest of my life. Perhaps my offering is very small indeed; for it may be that the time of my life will be very short; but small as it is, in any case I devote it wholly to Thee! With firm confidence I trust in Thy help to carry out this resolution of mine, so that not a moment may ever again be given to idleness, vanity, or sensuality, to the service of the devil and sin, but that all may be for Thee alone and Thy honor and glory. Then having sown the good seed during this short life, I may garner in the desired fruit in a long and joyful eternity. Amen.

Another introduction to the same sermon for Sexagesima Sunday.

Text.

Dum seminat, aliud cecidit secus viam, et conculcatum est.—
Luke viii. 5.

“As he sowed, some fell by the wayside, and it was trodden down.”

Introduction.

The parable of the sower and the seed needs no special explanation; for Our Lord Himself applies it very clearly to the word of God, which is sown in the hearts of those who hear it, and, according to their disposition and character, produces either no fruit at all, or very little, or else brings in a most abundant return. Yet the holy fathers, who have received a special light from God to interpret the gospels, apply this parable also to the

time of our lives on earth, and to the good or bad use we make of it. "The present time is the time for sowing,"¹ says St. Jerome. The seed is the use we make of time, "the seed of eternity,"² as the same Saint calls it. Alas! my dear brethren, I now must exclaim with sorrowful heart, how wantonly this seed is scattered on the wayside by countless mortals, where it will be trampled under foot and produce no fruit! For they squander in idleness, or useless occupations, or sinful pleasures, the precious time lent them by God to serve Him alone and save their souls. And they make as little account of this as if a fowl had eaten a grain of corn! But how very different, etc.

Continues as above.

ELEVENTH SERMON.

ON THE VAIN HOPE OF A DEATH-BED REPENTANCE.

Subject.

The sinner who puts off repentance until the hour of death can have no hope of being then converted; because that hope is denied him: 1. by God Himself, 2. by experience.—*Preached on the fourth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Per totam noctem laborantes, nihil cepimus.—Luke v. 5.

"We have labored all the night, and have taken nothing."

Introduction.

By the night we understand in a spiritual sense the state of sin, in which he lives who either does not repent of his vices or who, although he goes often to confession, does not earnestly propose to amend his life. While in that state all his works, although they may be good and holy in themselves, cannot gain for him the slightest merit for heaven, as I have shown in another sermon. O Christian! who continuest to labor in that dismal night, I beg of thee, return by true repentance and amendment to the clear light! Do not wait any longer, for it is a deceitful and treacherous hope that builds on the future, as I have also shown. Dost thou still refuse to hearken to my warning? Then learn

¹ Tempus præsens, tempus serentis est.

² Semen æternitatis.

what I am afraid of: that it will be with thee as it was with nearly all Catholics who are now lost forever, and who with the fishermen in to-day's Gospel have had to say at the end of their lives: "We have labored all the night, and have taken nothing." Our lives were a continual night; a continual falling from one sin into another. Now all is lost to us forever! But, some may say (and would to God that many sinners did not flatter themselves with this thought!), when I see that I am dangerously ill I can repent of and confess my sins, and by receiving the last sacraments gain heaven at the end of my life. Alas! this hope of heaven rests on conversion in the last illness. Now this is a most false, deceitful, and almost desperate hope, as I shall now prove by way of salutary warning to sinners. I repeat :

Plan of Discourse.

In vain do you hope to be converted and save your soul in your last illness. Why? God Himself denies you that hope. This I shall show in the first part. Experience also denies it to you; as I shall prove in the second part. What I hope and trust is, that this subject may not concern any of those who are here present, and that all of them may derive from it only this fruit; namely, that they continue to serve God with pure consciences, or else if they fall, that they at once repent of their sin and do penance for it; this shall also be my conclusion.

Do Thou, O Lord! through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels, grant us Thy grace that this hope of mine may be fulfilled, and that none of us may have to say at the end of this life: "We have labored all the night, and have taken nothing."

That you, O sinner! who spend your whole life in wickedness may have the hope of being converted at and before the end of your life, the Almighty God, from whom you have to receive this grace, must either have given you some promise to that effect, or else He must at least have given you some sign by which you can know that your hope is justified. For all prudent hope must have a reasonable foundation to enable us to trust that we shall obtain what we desire; and that foundation rests chiefly on the promise of the person from whom the favor is to come. I see a beggar standing before the door; poor fellow! I say to him, why are you making such a noise for a piece of dry bread? Go

The hope of a death-bed repentance should rest on some reasonable basis.

to that rich man over there; he can give you at once a hundred pieces of gold, and with that you may buy as much bread and meat as you like. Oh, it is easy to talk of a hundred pieces of gold, is his answer; it is not so easy to get them! But try at all events; you must not lose hope so soon. What! do you think me a fool because I am a poor man? A hundred pieces of gold! I have not even the idea, much less the hope of getting so much. And why not? Because I have never heard that the gentleman, whose house you have shown me, has ever given so much to one like me, or that he has the intention of doing so; so there is no use in hoping. And the beggar is quite right.

No sinner can have such a hope, for he knows not whether he will die after an illness or with the use of reason.

O mortal! you have put off repentance till your last illness. Now tell me, where have you found any promise on the part of God, nay, any sign of His will to the effect that He will then give you the grace without which repentance is impossible? Mark well that I am not now asking you how you know that you will be sick. You may be surprised by a sudden death in the field, in the street, in sleep, in the state of sin, in a short time, nay, this very day. That manner of death is not by any means an unusual one. Nor shall we consider the many accidents that are so liable to happen, especially in our days, such as a sudden attack of apoplexy, that is now so common that even the youngest and strongest have reason to dread it. There are many diseases that attack men so suddenly and with such violence and smarting, acute pains, that all strength of soul and body is taken from them at once, and it becomes impossible for them to collect their thoughts sufficiently to make a good confession, or even to repent of past sins with a true supernatural sorrow, and from a supernatural motive; much less can they give any outward sign of this inward and generally imperfect contrition. And it is greatly to be feared that in the case of most sinners, who are apt to study their bodily comforts, and to deny themselves no pleasures or sensual delights, the least pain will be intolerable to them. If you are attacked by a milder form of illness, it still may happen that you die before the priest comes, to whom you intend to confess your sins. And if the priest is at your bedside, perhaps your weakness or the heat of the fever may make you delirious, and deprive you of reason, without which you cannot repent; and in that case no absolution you may receive will help you to cast off the burden of your sins. Supposing your reason remains undisturbed, it may be that, besides the pains of your sickness,

the fear of death will exercise such an influence over you that you cannot fix your mind on anything, much less on that important, exact, and long account that you will have to render to God of the life you have spent in sin. How hard and terrible death seems to him who has always kept his thoughts fixed on earthly things! For then he is told that he must completely lose and forever abandon all the riches and possessions he sought so eagerly, kept so carefully, and loved so dearly. What trouble and exasperation are felt by one who is altogether sunk in earthly things at the loss of an important law-suit! Or at seeing his crops, that were standing in the field, ripe for the sickle, suddenly destroyed and, as it were, torn from his hands by a storm! But all this is nothing compared to the sad news that he must at once and forever leave all that he holds dear—children, wife, house, lands, wealth, and life. Experience teaches that in such circumstances the mind is apt to be greatly disturbed and completely deranged. Who can then believe or hope that in such a case a sinner will be able to examine his hardened conscience, troubled and disturbed as he is, to collect his thoughts, to turn at once to God, to confess his countless sins, and to repent of them with his whole heart? Our Lord Himself, when He saw death coming, “began to fear and to be heavy.”¹ Condemned criminals, when they are told that their time is come, although they may be quite strong and healthy, lose their mind and courage to such an extent that they are incapable of forming even a sensible thought, and the priest who is attending on them must sometimes go away and leave them to themselves for a few hours, as I know well by experience. Now, what can be expected from a sick man who is tormented with the fear of death? If the lips of confessors were not closed, what might they not tell us of death-bed confessions and penitents! But suppose that you will have no difficulty in this way; perhaps you will think the danger not so great, and will therefore defer repentance still longer? For the word of God assures us that death will come when we least expect: “At what hour you think not the Son of man will come,”² as I have already shown to be the case from experience. Perhaps you will act as unfortunately many Christians do nowadays, who are ashamed to receive the last sacraments in time from some foolish, unchristian notion that then they will have to die, although

¹ *Cœpit pavere et tædere.*—Mark xiv. 33.

² *Qua hora non putatis, Filius hominis veniet.*—Luke xii. 40.

Our Lord has instituted those sacraments partly for the healing of bodily illness. According to the testimony of the holy fathers, the tardiness of those people in receiving the last sacraments deprives them of their efficacy, because they are received too late.

Even if he has that manner of death, he knows not if God will give him the powerful grace of repentance.

See, all these points I do not wish to delay on any longer to-day, although they are so well established by experience that I might easily use them in proof of my subject. And that you may have still less to urge in your favor, I will take it for certain and granted that you shall not die a sudden death; that you shall have the use of reason to the last; that neither your illness nor the fear of death shall disturb your mental balance; that you shall have some knowledge of the approach of death, nay, that you shall foresee your last hour; that you shall have time enough to make your confession; that you shall have at your service an experienced confessor, who with crucifix in hand shall remain with you advising you till the last moment. I hardly think you or any one else shall have all these things together; but for the moment I suppose that such shall be your good luck. All I wish to ask you now is this: when has God promised you, or given you any sign of His will to this effect, that even in those circumstances He will give you the great grace of conversion and true repentance? Answer me that if you can, for I have never read anything about it.

For God has not promised it to any one.

What, you reply, are you then so unacquainted with holy Scripture? Are there not hundreds of passages in it to show forth the goodness, mildness, and mercy of God, and His readiness to forgive? Has not God said that at what hour soever the sinner is converted He will accept his repentance? Do we not find in the Book of Ezechiel that oft-repeated and consoling assurance: "The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him, in what day soever he shall turn from his wickedness,"¹ no matter whether that day is the last or the first? Come back to Me, He cries out to all sinners; "Return to Me and I will receive thee,"² and I will no longer remember thy former sins. See, there is the foundation on which you build the house of your eternity, and as if you were quite certain of it, you continue to sin and to defer repentance till the last moment. I acknowledge that apparently the promise is a favorable one for you. But only in

¹ Impletas impii non nocebit ei, in quacumque die conversus fuerit ab implicate sua.—Ezech. xxxiij. 12.

² Revertere ad me, et ego suscipiam te.—Jer. iii. 1.

appearance; for let us examine the matter closely. The words, "I will pardon the sinner on what day soever he will be converted," are the same as saying, "I will give the sinner the grace to be truly converted." The second point is, the day on which this favor will be granted. Thus we have two things to consider that are quite different from each other. The first God has promised to all men; for He is indeed ready to receive the sinner, and to forget his sins, were they a thousand million in number, even on his death-bed, nay, in the very last moment, as long as the soul is in the body, provided the sinner is then truly converted. So wonderfully great is the divine mercy, which, as long as a man lives, never shuts the door against him, so that no one need despair. But the other point, namely, the granting the sinner grace to do true penance, and that at any hour or moment when it may please the sinner to ask for it—that God has never promised to any one, much less to one who has misused His mercy to the last moment.

Not only has God given you no sign of His will to this effect, but He has rather signified that His design and intention are quite contrary to what you suppose. Consider those terrible words in the Old Testament (it is wonderful how often we hear them, and what little impression they make on us): "Turn ye at my reproof," says the Lord; be converted and at once! Delay no longer! Otherwise, "Behold I will utter My spirit to you, and will show you My words. Because I called, and you refused. I stretched out My hand, and there was none that regarded."¹ I have often spoken to you by the voice of My servants, who warned you against evil; I have called to you by the example of so many good Christians, which should have encouraged you to do good; I have urged you by the inward voice of your own conscience, which was troubled by remorse on account of your wickedness; "and you refused." I have caused you to be exhorted in sermons to restore ill-gotten goods, but you have kept them; to renounce that impure intimacy and dangerous occasion, but you remained in it; to pardon your enemy from your heart, but you have wilfully nourished the old hatred and ill-will towards him; to amend your sinful life once for all, to make a good confession, to avoid the sins to which you have grown accustomed,

He has rather said the contrary.

¹ 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 aspiceret.—Prov. i. 23, 24.

and to begin to lead a Christian life; but you refused. "You have despised all My counsel, and have neglected my reprehensions." And what will be the result of this conduct? "I also will laugh at your destruction, and will mock." When? "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 I will laugh at and mock you!" "Then shall they call upon Me, and I will not hear: they shall rise in the morning, and shall not find Me." Overwhelmed by the anguish of death, they will cry out to Me: O my God! have mercy on me! but I will not hear them. They shall ask Me for grace and pardon; I will not hear; I will let them go to destruction, and will laugh at and mock them in their misery. "Because they have hated instruction, and received not the fear of the Lord, nor consented to My counsel."¹ In the same sense Our Lord says in the gospel of St. John: "I go, and you shall seek Me, and you shall die in your sin."² Mark those words; He does not say: you will persist in your obstinacy till the last moment; you will not ask Me for mercy; you will not have time for repentance. No; "you shall seek Me;" you shall be willing to be received into My friendship; but I say to you: "You shall die in your sin;" you shall not find Me; as you lived, and not otherwise, so you shall die in your sin.

Therefore the sinner's hope of a death-bed repentance is a vain one.

Now, O sinners, use your reason! If it is probable that God will give you the grace of true repentance in your last illness, and that one who has deferred repentance to the hour of death has reasonable ground for hoping that his death will be a happy one, why has God said quite the contrary in the Old as well as in the New Testament? Why has He never uttered the least syllable hinting that He is ready to give you such a grace? Why does He rather threaten in the opposite sense? "I will laugh; I will mock; I will not hear; you shall die in your sin," although you call upon Me; you shall not find Me, although you seek Me. Are you not yet afraid? Then hear it again: "You shall seek Me, and you shall die in your sin." Do you still believe there is no danger? no need to live piously if you wish to die happily?

¹ Despexistis omne consilium meum, et increpationes meas neglexistis: 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; mane consurgent, et non invenient me. Eo quod exosam habuerint disciplinam, et timorem Domini non susceperint nec acquirerint consilio meo.—Prov. 1. 25-30.

² Vado, et queretis me, et in peccato vestro moriemini.—John viii. 21.

Have you still hopes of a happy death, when He who alone can give you that grace assures you expressly that you shall die in your sin? What deplorable blindness! You are not sure that you shall have time enough to repent on your death-bed, and you are sure that, although you may have time enough, you have not the grace of God in your power, the grace which you require to do true penance. You are not sure that your will shall then be ready to hate and detest what it now so foolishly loves; and you are certain that the divine will shall be quite contrary to yours; yet you hope, and confiding in your hope, you continue in sin!

O holy Apostle St. Paul! not without reason hast thou wondered at the Patriarch Abraham, who, although commanded by God to slay his only son, still hoped to become the father of a numerous people by that same son! "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might be made the father of many nations."¹ But great as was the confidence of that holy man, thou must acknowledge that sinners have a still greater; for they hope not only against hope, but in God against God and His infallible word. Abraham believed that God would work a miracle rather than break His promise; they believe that God will rather break His word than not perform a miracle for them in giving them a most extraordinary, wonderful grace of repentance at the last moment. But hope as you wish! If you are not disappointed, all the better for you! At all events God denies you this hope, "because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation,"² because you have allowed the time of grace to pass by. Experience itself denies you this hope, as I shall show in the

Nay, a presumptuous one.

Second Part.

If we had no threat from the infallible word of God Himself that He will abandon the sinner at the end of a wicked life; if we did not know how God acts now and then with such a dying sinner, for His decrees are inscrutable, and He can give His grace when and to whom He pleases, and He does sometimes give it to those who least deserve it; yet if He had either promised the last grace to the dying sinner after an ill-spent life, or was wont to give that grace, then after such a long lapse of time, during which there have been so many dying sinners, there must be

If there were any reasonable hope of a death-bed repentance, there must be many instances of persons thus converted.

¹ Qui contra spem in spem credit, ut fletet pater multarum gentium.—Rom. iv. 18.

² Eo quod non cognoveris tempus visitationis tue.—Luke xix. 44.

some examples of the kind; for God is not accustomed to hide His works of goodness and mercy, but rather to make them public to His own honor and praise. So that for you to have reasonable grounds to entertain the hope of receiving the same grace you must be able to refer to a number of cases in which it has been granted and is still granted. Because if one or another has had the luck to find a treasure, that is no reason for you to give up your business in the hope of becoming rich all at once, unless, indeed, you are a fool.

For no reasonable hope can rest on a few cases of the kind.

Joseph was brought out of a prison and placed on the throne of Egypt; which of us will therefore go to Egypt among the Turks and allow himself to be chained and fettered in the hope of being promoted to some high dignity? Jonas was swallowed by a whale and thrown out again on the seashore fresh and vigorous; will any one of you throw himself into the sea in the hope of being saved from drowning in a similar manner? I certainly should not attempt it. Phalaræus, as Pliny relates, was suffering from a cancer in the head; maddened by the pain, he rushed into the middle of a fierce battle to end at once his miserable life; but an arrow happened to strike the wound and opened it, so that the poisonous matter escaped and freed him from his suffering. If one of you had a similar disease, would he run into the midst of a street broil, and rush upon the spears and swords, in the hope of being cured? I hardly think so; such conduct would be foolish. For that which occurs rarely cannot be taken as a general rule, and he who founds a hope on it is guilty of presumption.

The Scriptures give but one such example: the good thief.

Now, O sinner! give me, if you can, an example of real conversion where repentance was deferred till the hour of death! How many such can you bring forward? St. Bernard has inquired most diligently into this matter, and yet he has found but one well-authenticated case, and that is the good thief on Calvary, the only instance of the kind in the history of the world. "There is one," says St. Augustine; "do not despair; it is the only one, do not trust too presumptuously."¹ There was one such case, but of such a nature that it ought to make you tremble. For, in what circumstances did the good thief obtain forgiveness? At the moment when his Creator was hanging by his side on the cross, and about to give up His life for the salvation of the world. Was it any wonder that Christ should then give

¹ Unus est, ne desperes; solus est, ne confidas.

some public testimony of the efficacy of His death, or show some extraordinary proof of mercy on the occasion of the consummation of His Passion and Death? And yet (O my God! who should not fear?) it was only one to whom that mercy was shown; the other thief, who was also at the side of the dying Saviour, was hurried off to hell by the demons. "There is one, do not despair; it is the only one, do not trust too presumptuously."

St. Ambrose and Eusebius of Emyssa do not allow you even this one example in support of your hope. You say that the thief repented at the end of his life, exclaims Eusebius; but it was not in the last, but the first hour that he repented; the first in which he had been enlightened by the grace of God. You allege that he deferred his conversion; while I, on the other hand, says St. Ambrose, rather wonder at the suddenness of it; "The Lord pardoned him quickly because he was soon converted." The thief had never heard any of Our Lord's exhortations to penance, nor seen any of His miracles; all the Jews had been witnesses of those wonders, and yet they were so hardened as to nail the Author of them to a cross; the thief, on the other hand, enlightened by a single ray of divine grace, acknowledges and at once adores the Crucified as his God, and in the sorrow of his heart begs forgiveness of his sins. And now, O sinner! do you still rely on this example in support of your hope? You who for so many years have had opportunities of seeing the true light and hearing the voice of God, and who have still remained deaf to His calls, and still continue in sin? Do you not see that the readiness of the good thief to correspond with grace condemns your persistent malice? And where do you expect to find an instance in support of your hope, if even this so well-known one condemns it and serves only for your greater damnation?

If time permitted I could bring forward a hundred examples from Scripture and Ecclesiastical History of people whose experience on their death-beds has been quite the contrary, and who were condemned to hell without mercy; such as an Abimelech, a Sennacherib, a Saul, and a whole host of kings who died, as they lived, in their wickedness. What St. Paul writes of Esau seems most mournful; he had been living a bad life, and still hoped to inherit the blessing: "Afterwards when he desired to

An example that should weaken, not strengthen, the sinner's hope.

While there are countless instances in Scripture of sinners who failed to repent.

¹ Non fuit extrema illa hora, sed prima.—Euseb. Emiss. Hom. de. Bon. Lat.

² Cito ignoscit Dominus, quia cito ille convertitur.—St. Ambr. in Luke, c. xxiii.

inherit the benediction, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, although with tears he had sought it.”¹ Something of the same kind happened to the wicked Antiochus, as you may read in the Second Book of the Machabees. This unhappy king had his eyes opened at last, when he fell into a disgusting and grievous illness. “Ah,” he sighed, as he was being eaten alive by worms, “it is just to be subject to God.”² I acknowledge my crimes, O God! and beg for a respite of my life, that I may amend and make my repentance known to the world. I have sworn to extinguish the Jewish people; now I promise to make them as free as the Athenians. I intended to destroy Jerusalem; now I will make it greater than any city of the East. I have plundered Thy holy temple; I am sorry for having done so; if I recover I will endow it with the most costly treasures, and double the number of the sacred vases, and provide for the expenses of the sacrifices out of my own revenues. What greater signs of true repentance could one wish to have? But that is not all. I promise, moreover, said the dying king, to become a Jew, and to travel throughout the world, not as a conqueror, as I have hitherto done, to oppress the people, but as a missionary and an apostle, to make known to them the power and glory of God: “Yea, also, that he would become a Jew himself, and would go through every place of the earth and declare the power of God.”³ What would you say, my dear brethren, if you saw a man dying in such dispositions? Would you not look on him as a saint and wish to be in his place? But hear what the Scripture says of this penitent; words that I should not dare to utter if they were not from the mouth of God Himself; words which as long as the world lasts will remain as a warning to sinners who trust their salvation to a death-bed repentance: “Then this wicked man prayed to the Lord, of whom he was not like to obtain mercy.”⁴ And why not, O God of mercy? “Because,” answers Cardinal Hugo, “he did not ask for mercy in due time, nor with a sincere heart.”⁵ Not at the proper time, because he put it off till the last moment; nor with a sincere heart, be

¹ Postea cupiens hæreditare benedictionem, reprobatus est; non enim invenit poenitentiae locum, quanquam cum lachrymis inquisisset eam.—Heb. xii. 17.

² Justum est subditum esse Deo.—II. Mach. ix. 12.

³ Super hæc, et Judæum se futurum, et omnem locum terræ perambulaturum et prædicaturum Dei potestatem.—Ibid. 17.

⁴ Orabat autem hic scelestus Dominum, a quo non esset misericordiam consecuturus. Ibid. 13.

⁵ Quia nec tempore debito, nec corde vero veniam requisivit.

cause it was not the love of God, nor the supernatural fear of punishment, but simply the dread of death that inspired him with repentance.

I could say the same to you, O sinner! if you appeal to the experience of the dying in our own days, as is generally done. We see here and there, you maintain, so many Christians who, although they have led wicked and reckless lives, yet die a happy death as good, pious Christians. But are you sure of that? Oh, yes! they repent of and confess their sins; they receive the holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction; they sigh and pray with those who are standing round; they often kiss the crucifix and press it to their bosoms, and depart with the exhortations and blessings of the priest still ringing in their ears. And do you call that a holy, Christian death? Ah, says St. Gregory with quiet sarcasm, how little it costs to make saints! "We make saints in a day of those who contribute nothing to the process but a good will!"¹ All we want is a day, an hour, nay, almost a few moments, and with one act of the will we become holy. From my heart I wish you all eternal salvation; but I should not like to share the lot of those who are supposed to have thus died holy and Christian deaths. If nothing more were necessary to make a man die happy, then even the most wicked sinners, if they did not despair, who died on a bed of sickness, are saved. For what Catholic is there who does not give some signs of repentance and receive the last sacraments, if possible, when he feels the approach of death? If nothing more were required for a happy death, then all those who say "Lord! Lord!" should go to heaven; yet we have the express word of God to the contrary; and no one who has despised God during his life would be abandoned by God at the end, although that is again contrary to the word of God: "I will laugh in your destruction;" and all who in their lives turn a deaf ear to the voice of God should find Him in that moment if they seek Him, and should not die in the state of sin; but that, too, is against the word of God: "You shall seek Me, and you shall die in your sin." Otherwise why has Christ described the way to heaven as difficult, narrow, and hard to find? Why does He warn us so impressively? "Strive to enter by the narrow gate: for many, I say to you, shall seek to enter, and shall not be able."² And could I

Nowadays
the repent-
ance of the
dying is
generally
no true re-
pentance.

¹ Unius diei sanctos efficitur, qui nihil præter velle afferunt.

² Contendite intrare per angustam portam: quia multi, dico vobis, quærent intrare, et non poterunt?—Luke xiii. 24.

not think to myself: what is the use of going to so much trouble? I will live as I please, and indulge my senses as I see others doing; when I feel that death is at hand I can confess my sins, and go to heaven. Ah, my dear brethren, do not trust to such a confession, holy Communion, or Extreme Unction, if they are not preceded by a Christian life, for otherwise these sacraments are not received at the proper time or with a sincere heart.

Shown from
circumstan-
ces.

And how can a conversion in such circumstances be sincere and real? Let us consider those circumstances, as they generally occur. Imagine, O sinner! that we are both standing by the bedside of a dying man. The priest has been sent for and enters the room; he sprinkles the sick man with holy water, and tries to console him and encourage him; he gives him his priestly blessing that he may make a good confession, repeating the words prescribed by the Church: "May the Lord be in thy heart and on thy lips, that thou mayest duly confess thy sins." Methinks I hear him accusing himself of crimes that he drank in like water in his past life, and thought nothing of, and of which he had hitherto made not the least scruple, although now they fill him with anguish, such as omissions of duty, neglect in fulfilling the obligations of his state, in bringing up his children, in looking after his servants and domestics; certain conversations, looks, amusements, jokes; injustice in dealings with others, in buying and selling, delay in paying his debts, while he spent his money in gambling and drinking, in costly dress, and other unnecessary things; certain feelings of bitterness, hatred, and anger against his neighbor; carelessly and ill-made confessions in his youth; profanation of the holy mysteries of our religion, and such like. But, asks the priest, have you not always maintained that those things were only scruples, and mere unfounded doubts and anxieties? True, when I committed those sins I looked on them as of little account; as long as I was in good health they seemed small matters to me; but now I am near death and in the light of the death-candle I see them far more clearly and as they are in themselves. But have you never made a general confession? No. Not even when you entered the state of life in which you now are? No. I notice that you accuse yourself doubtfully of some sins, and that with trembling voice you add a certain circumstance to a sin; have you never before acknowledged those? Never. And why? Through shame. And you have allowed yourself to be influenced for so

many years by that guilty shame? Yes. Then I see the priest, undecided and thoughtful, going aside a little from the sick man. What a state that man's conscience is in, he thinks; he has made contracts that must be annulled because they are unjust; he has to restore a considerable sum of money because he made it by usury and fraud; he must give back his neighbor's good name that he took away by calumny; this or that scandal must be removed, that proximate occasion abandoned. I find him ill prepared to undertake the journey into eternity; he hardly realizes his state; his repentance is doubtful and weak; and I see that in his present plight he cannot do any better. What could be more distressing to a zealous priest than such a case? Yet the state of his penitent, who stands in such need of repentance, is far worse. He must absolutely have more time; but he cannot get it; there is no respite for him; all is over with him now; "time shall be no more;" his foot is already on the threshold of eternity. The zealous priest uses every effort to excite in him a sincere sorrow for sin; he places before him all the motives that should urge him to bewail his past wickedness; but the sick man cannot appreciate them, nor think of them earnestly; he has never been used to that during his life, and now he hardly knows how to begin. He must say like David, when he put on the armor to attack the giant: "I am not used to it."¹ Cardinal Bellarmine says that he once visited a rich gentleman who was very ill and in imminent danger of death. When the Cardinal saw the man's state, he tried to induce him to make an act of perfect contrition. "What is contrition?" asked the sick man. Amazed at the question, the Cardinal began to explain to him the nature, excellence, and necessity of sorrow for sin, and to exhort him most earnestly to see at once to the peace and safety of his soul; he recited for him the words of the act of contrition, and begged of him if he were too weak to repeat them orally, to say them at least in his heart, devoutly raising his mind to God. But all in vain; all the sick man said was: "I do not understand you; I know not what you want of me."² With these words on his lips the unhappy man gave up the ghost, leaving no doubt that he was lost forever. Let us go back to our first sick man. The good priest calls out to him in heart-rending tones: Repent! Ah, repent of your sins! But how is he to do

¹ Non usum habeo.—I. Kings xvii. 39.

² Non intelligo quid vells; nec capio quid a me requiras.—Bellarm. de Arte Bene Morandi.

so? With eyes that have been used hitherto only for sin, and to seek out occasions of sin? Detest and abominate that unlawful intimacy! But how? With a mind that he could never make up to leave that intimacy, because he was too much attached to it? With a heart that considered it as his greatest pleasure and a paradise on earth? Call upon the saints in heaven, your patrons! But on whom? On those whom he dishonored instead of honoring in church, and whose feast-days he utterly neglected? And shall he call on them with a tongue that has vomited so many blasphemies, so many obscene jests, so many oaths and curses, so many calumnies and detractions? Meanwhile the priest sees that the soul is on the point of departing; what is he to do? He gives the dying man absolution under condition, that is, if he is capable of receiving it. The soul departs amid the prayers of all present. A beautiful death! Is it not? Alas! I trust that mine will not be like that! No, no! that man could not have repented with a sincere heart, or have been truly converted.

Confirmed
from the
holy Fathers.

Ask the holy Fathers, those enlightened interpreters of Scripture, what they think of such a repentance. Ask St. Isidore; he calls it suspicious. Ask St. Bernard; he calls it rash and presumptuous.¹ Ask SS. Cyprian, Ambrose, Gregory, Chrysostom, Thomas of Aquin; they laugh at such a repentance as utterly ridiculous, and, generally speaking, useless. "I dare not say," writes St. Augustine, "that one or the other individual who has repented on his death-bed is lost forever; but I cannot have much hope that he is in heaven. It is true that the confessions of such dying people are received by the Church; but I do not think they are much to be depended on. I do not trust in them," continues the Saint; "I do not wish to deceive you; but I do not trust in them."² "I can exhort such a man to repent; I can hear his confession and give him absolution; but I cannot say that the absolution will have any effect."³ I trust little in such confessions. Eusebius, one of the disciples of St. Jerome, writes that when the Saint was dying he was asked to give his disciples a last lesson, and he said these words, sighing deeply at the same time: "Of a hundred thousand men who have always led bad lives hardly one deserves pardon from God."⁴

¹ Temeraria et presumptuosa.

² Non præsumo; non vos fallo; non præsumo.

³ Pœnitentiam dare possum; securitatem dare non possum.

⁴ Vix de centum millibus hominum, quorum mala semper fuit vita, meretur a Deo indulgentiam unus.

On what, then, do you ground your hope, O sinner! you who defer repentance to the last moment? Do you think that an exception will be made in your favor contrary to the general decrees of the Almighty God and to what experience teaches us of the death of sinners? Or do you imagine that you will be the one in a hundred thousand to whom God will give the special grace of conversion at the end? Will you trust your eternity to such a desperate chance? Ah, "Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day; for His wrath shall come on a sudden, and in the time of vengeance He will destroy thee."¹ Do not wait till the end; do penance at once, and that sincerely; at once amend your life, if you seriously intend escaping hell, and going to heaven! And when will you do penance? Next Easter or Christmas? Oh, no! That would be delaying too long! Next Sunday? Too long also. To-morrow? No, even that delay is dangerous. "If thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day," says the Gospel, "the things that are to thy peace."² Therefore on this very day, on which God calls you and offers you His grace and friendship, do not close your ears. Now, while you are in good health, free yourself from the unhappy state of sin; for you know not what day will be your last, nor when the time of grace will be past for you. Ah, my God! I tremble when I think of the years I have spent in sin! How have I dared to pass even one night with a bad conscience? How could I be so presumptuous as to spend whole months without doing penance? Infinite thanks be to Thee, O God of mercy! that Thou hast borne with me so patiently, and given me so much time to repent. In future my greatest care shall be to avoid sin, and now in the time of Thy grace and visitation I will work out my salvation; now in the days of light I will seek Thee, O Lord! so that I may find Thee in the hour of my death, that I may not then have to say the lamentable words: "I have labored the whole night, and have taken nothing" but rather think to my consolation: I have worked during my life to obtain forgiveness of my sins and the grace and friendship of God, and now I find the reward promised by God, which I hope to enjoy forever in the abode of rest and joy. Amen.

Conclusion
and resolution
to be at
once con-
verted.

¹ Non tardes converti ad Dominum, et ne differas de die in diem; subito enim veniet ira illius, et in tempore vindictæ disperdet te.—Ecclesi. v. 8, 9.

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

TWELFTH SERMON.

ON THE WORTHLESSNESS OF A DEATH-BED REPENTANCE.

Subject.

Firstly: the grace of true repentance and a happy death is far too great for the sinner to expect it in his last moments. Secondly: the sick man is then far too weak to correspond with divine grace, so as to repent sincerely.—*Preached on the fifth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Vade prius reconciliari fratri tuo.—Matt. v. 24.

“Go first to be reconciled to thy brother.”

Introduction.

These words of Our Lord in their obvious sense are to be understood of reconciliation with those with whom we have been at variance or enmity. “If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee, leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother: and then coming thou shalt offer thy gift,” and God will accept it. But how much more necessary is not this exhortation for you, O sinner! who are living at variance and enmity with the great God? Yet you hope and desire one day to offer your soul into the hands of your Creator, to die a happy death and so to go to heaven; is not that so? But you have something to do first; “be reconciled to God,”¹ as St. Paul advises you. And when do you mean to do that? After a while? Ah, that is too dangerous, as we have seen already. At the end, in your last illness, when you are recommending your soul to God? Oh, that is far worse, your state will be even desperate then! Go first and be reconciled to your God. When death is at hand it will be too late; God Himself denies you all hope of conversion then, and experience denies it you also, as I have shown in my last sermon. But why so? one may think. Why should repentance in the last moment be such a desperate chance? God is still as merciful and desirous of our

¹ Reconcillamini Deo.—II. Cor. v. 20.

salvation as He ever was, and the human will is still free, and can then change itself, and, moreover, penance has still the same efficacy in obtaining pardon from God. Do you ask why? I will tell you: there are two reasons; the first comes from the nature of the grace of true conversion and final perseverance; the second, from the nature of man himself, who should then co-operate with that grace. In both cases conversion at the hour of death is, humanly speaking, impossible. Mark the reason:

Plan of Discourse.

The grace of true conversion and a happy death is far too great for the sinner to expect in his last illness. This I shall prove in the first part. The sick man is then far too weak to be able to correspond with the grace of God and to repent sincerely. This I shall prove in the second part. Therefore, sinner! go first to be reconciled to thy God, whilst thou still hast time!

Such shall be the conclusion, which we ask through the merits of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

The grace that enables a man to arise from the state of sin, even if he has committed but one mortal sin, and to be truly converted, is a powerful, special grace, coming from the goodness of God alone, a grace that He is not bound to give to any one. Therefore he who has transgressed the commandments in a serious matter has good reason to beg from God most humbly and perseveringly the grace of true repentance, as I have shown at length when speaking of the sacrament of penance. The grace which brings repentance to one who has lived for many years in sin is an extraordinary, uncommonly powerful grace, that overpowers the human heart, as St. Augustine says, an almost miraculous grace, which man has still less claim to. The grace of conversion at the last moment, the grace of final perseverance, and a happy death is the most excellent of all; it is one that no man, no matter how holy his life has been, with all his good works, can merit in the strict acceptation of the term; such is the teaching of theologians. But we can and must often humbly and confidently beg it from God, that He may bestow it on us as an alms out of His mercy and goodness. Therefore (although His goodness will never allow one who has lived well to die an unhappy death) God is not obliged to give this grace even to His holiest servants and greatest Saints, and He could refuse it to them without doing them any injustice, absolutely speaking.

What a great grace for the dying is that of true repentance!

It is in vain expected by the sinner who defers repentance to the last moment.

And you, O sinner! expect all these powerful graces, without which you cannot save your soul (although you might save it with another grace)? And from whom do you expect them? From an angry God, whom you have provoked a thousand times, and whose patience you have worn out? When do you expect them? When you have spent your life in all kinds of wickedness; constantly kept your ears shut to God's inspirations, despised His warnings and threats, trampled so often on the precious blood He shed for you; and after the same God has so repeatedly implored of you during your lifetime to return to Him, and offered you His favor and friendship—offers which you have rejected with scorn? When do you expect those graces? When you see that you are on the point of leaving the world and entering into eternity? When you are tired of sin, or, to speak more truly, when you are no longer able to sin? When you have no more time left to serve God? Then He has to be ready for you, and give you the greatest and most powerful of all graces that He has ever given to His Saints who are in heaven? What are you dreaming of? Where is your common sense? How can you be so presumptuous as to admit such a hope even in imagination? And if God so deals with you as you expect, on whom shall He pour out the vials of His wrath?

God would rather give him the grace to work miracles.

No matter how ungrateful and wicked you have been during your life, I should be more willing to believe that God would give you on your death-bed the grace of prophecy, of healing other sick people, or even of raising the dead, than that of conversion and final perseverance. And indeed this supposition seems to me the more probable; for even the traitor Judas worked miracles, and a prophet, or one who has miraculous powers, can lead a bad life, and be lost eternally; for, according to Our Lord's own testimony, many will come at the last day and appeal to the wonderful things they have done: "Have not we prophesied in Thy name, and cast out devils in Thy name, and done many miracles in Thy name?" Nevertheless the just Judge will condemn them all to hell: "And then will I profess unto them: I never knew you: depart from Me, you that work iniquity."¹ Thus, I say, God is more likely to give you the grace of working miracles than that of true penance, perseverance, and a happy death after a life spent in sin and in obstinate resistance

¹ Nonne in nomine tuo prophetavimus, et in nomine tuo daemonia eiecimus, et in nomine tuo virtutes multas fecimus? Et tunc constitebor illis: quia nunquam novi vos; discedite a me, qui operamini iniquitatem.—Matt. vii. 22, 23.

to the proffered grace of conversion, when that grace might have been accepted. Indeed, to expect anything else is tantamount to hoping that God will not punish the wicked on that great day on which He intends to let them experience the full power of His justice, the full severity of His anger. No, presumptuous sinner! such a grace is not for you.

Send forth sighs to heaven as you are lying on your bed of sickness, pray as fervently as you know how for that grace (although I much doubt whether you will then think very earnestly of that God whom you have so constantly forgotten during life) pray, I say, but your own despairing conscience will give you the same answer that Samuel gave the unhappy Saul. The latter was surrounded by his enemies; he knew not what to do, and in his anguish he cried out to the dead prophet: O Samuel, holy Prophet! help me in my necessity; "I am in great distress; for the Philistines fight against me; . . . therefore I have called thee that thou mayest show me what I shall do." "Why askest thou me?" was the answer, "seeing the Lord has departed from thee?" or as the Hebrew text has it, "since the Lord is thy enemy?" "Therefore hath the Lord done to thee what thou sufferest this day. He will rend thy kingdom out of thy hand. . . . And the Lord also will deliver Israel with thee into the hands of the Philistines," and to-morrow you and your sons shall be slain, "because thou didst not obey the voice of the Lord."¹ Your conscience, O sinner! will make you the same reproach on your death-bed. What do you ask or desire in your anguish from that Lord whom you have made your enemy, refusing to be reconciled to Him during life, and remaining His enemy till death? When the merciful God offered you the grace of repentance you should have cried out to Him; then you might have confessed your sins, and having begun to amend your life, have humbly begged for the grace of perseverance and a happy death. But in vain do you now expect that favor from your bitter enemy. In vain do you hope that He whom you refused to recognize during life, and whom you now know simply because you are in extreme necessity—in vain do you hope that He will give you His kingdom of heaven, that you have troubled yourself so little about hither-

Shown by examples from Scripture after the manner of similes.

¹ Coarctor nimis; siquidem Philistinum pugnant adversum me; vocavi ergo te, ut ostenderes mihi quid faciam. Quid interrogas me, cum Dominus recesserit a te? Ideo quod peteris, fecit tibi Dominus hodie. Scindet regnum tuum de manu tua. Et dabit Dominus etiam Israel tecum in manus Philistinum. Quia non obedisti voci Domini. — I. Kings xxviii. 15-19.

to! But you need not wait long to find out all about this; to-day you will be in eternity, and then you will see how matters stand. Do you know what kind of a reproof Jephthe gave his countrymen when they came to him for help? Read the eleventh chapter of the Book of Judges. Jephthe was a valiant warrior who was banished out of the city by the ancients of Galaad. Shortly after the Ammonites began to wage war on the Israelites and pressed them hard, as the latter had no one to take command of their forces. In this strait the ancients saw the fault they had been guilty of, and went suppliantly to Jephthe: "And they said to him: Come thou and be our prince, and fight against the children of Ammon," whom we cannot conquer. See what necessity is able to do. They sought now as their prince and chief one whom a short time before they were unwilling to tolerate as their fellow-citizen. Yes, said Jephthe scornfully to them, you can find friendly words for me now! "Are not you the men that hated me, and cast me out of my father's house, and now you are come to me constrained by necessity?"¹ You ask me to help you against your enemies, when you should rather expect punishment from me.

Similarly explained by other examples.

Such, too, was the reproach uttered by the emperor Charles V. when he had after a bloody battle taken prisoner John Frederick, Duke and Elector of Saxony, who had taken Luther's part against the emperor. The captive prince fell on his knees before him and begged pardon for having so wantonly violated the fidelity he owed his lawful sovereign. "Most element emperor," he said, amongst other things, "now I am in thy power!"² Indeed! said Charles disdainfully, am I the emperor at last? Before I was only the Austrian Charles, but now that you are a captive and cannot defend yourself I am your most gracious emperor; you will be treated as you deserve. And he passed upon the rebel the sentence of death. Truly impressive are those words of Jephthe and Charles! But still more impressive will they be when heard from the mouth of the Emperor of heaven, and when He addresses them to the presumptuous sinner, who in the last extremity begs of Him for the first time the grace of forgiveness and a happy death. What, He will say, are not you the man that hated Me during your life? Are not you he who

¹ Dixeruntque ad eum: Veni, et esto princeps noster, et pugna contra filios Ammon. Nonne vos estis qui odistis me, et ejecistis de domo patris mei? et nunc venistis ad me necessitate compulsi.—Judges xi. 6, 7.

² Caesar clementissime!

has so often driven Me out of your house by your impurity, pride, and injustice, by your abominable cursing and swearing, by your gluttony and drunkenness, by the hatred and revenge you cherished against your neighbor? Do you think I have forgotten all that? Now you come to Me compelled by necessity; now that you see that no one but I can help you; that you are a prisoner in My hands; and that you have no more time in which to wage war on Me by your sins. Now at last you have come to Me. Now at last I am your Emperor, your Lord and your God, whom you treated like a worthless rag during your lifetime. Now you begin to know who I am, after having completely ignored Me; now you wish to speak Me fair, after having mocked and ridiculed Me all your life; but it is not love, but rather extreme necessity and a slavish fear of hell that drive you to My feet. You shall have what you deserve, namely, the sentence of eternal condemnation.

Hear the words of Our Lord Himself in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Many will say to Me in that day: Lord, Lord. And then will I profess unto them: I never knew you; depart from Me, you that work iniquity."¹ So did God act towards the wicked Israelites, when He said of them: "They have turned their back to Me, and not their face," but the time shall come when I will treat them in the same manner. "And in the time of their affliction they will say: Arise, and deliver us. But I will answer them: Where are thy gods, whom thou hast made thee? let them arise and deliver thee in the time of thy affliction."² Sinner, you shall also hear these words in your extremity! Where are the gods you have adored and honored in your lifetime? You have not adored Me. Where are the idols, O unchaste man! whom you loved more than Me? Where is your wealth, O miser! that you looked on as your god? Where the world, O vain child of the world! which you took against My strict command as the guide of your actions? Where are those men, O tepid Christian! to please whom you have omitted so much good and done so much evil? "Let them arise and deliver thee in the time of thy affliction;" call now upon those gods of yours, and see if they can save you from hell! You have

Confirmed
by the
threats of
God Him-
self.

¹ Multi dicent mihi in illa die: Domine, Domine! Et tunc confitebor illis: Quia nunquam novi vos; discedite a me, qui operamini iniquitatem.—Matt. vii. 22, 23.

² Verterunt ad me tergum et non faciem, et in tempore afflictionis sue dicent: Surge, et libera nos. Ubi sunt dii tui quos fecisti tibi? surgant et liberent te in tempore afflictionis tue.—Jer. ii. 27, 28.

not known Me during your life; neither will I know you now in your death.

Confirmed
by experi-
ence.

All this happened in visible manner to a dying Christian of whom Henry Gran writes. A holy old man, who had come out of his solitude into a town to sell the baskets he had made, sat down for a moment to rest before the door of a house in which a rich man lay mortally sick. Suddenly he saw two terrible looking black men on black horses ride up to the door, enter the house, and go into the sick room; then a mournful voice cried out: "Lord, help me!" Whereupon the devils began to laugh, and said: "Do you remember God at last? Do you seek Him now at the sunset of your life? Why did you not do so earlier, while you still had light? Why did you not turn to God while you had time? Now there is no hope for you." Nearly the same answer was given by one of the holy fathers to a dying man. The Abbot Mutius once visited a man whose life was despaired of; he saw from his mournful face and other signs that the dying man was in great trouble, and therefore he said to him: "My dear friend, I am afraid that your conscience troubles you, and that death, which you have not expected so soon, has filled you with terror." "That is only too true," answered the sick man, sighing deeply, "but I implore of you, father, beg of God to grant me a little time, that I may repent of my sins and amend my life." And Mutius answered him: "Do you now seek for time to repent, when you have finished the time of your life? What were you doing in all the past years? Could you not then have healed your wounds? But instead of that, you have inflicted new ones on your soul" and wantonly added to your misery. Now there is no use asking for more time.¹

Hence
the sinner
should not
expect such
a grace.

O sinner! you, too, shall be asked, when you pray for grace at the end of your life, Do you now seek for time to repent, when you have finished the time of your life? What have you been doing all these years? God has given you time enough to prepare for death. You have seen many other Christians go to holy Communion almost every week; did you ever take the trouble to receive it once a month? You have heard so many sermons; have you ever tried to profit by them and to amend your life? You have often seen the confessional and an experienced priest ready to receive you and relieve you of the burden of your sins;

¹ Nunc spatium poenitentiae requiris, ubi vitae spatium impietati? Quid faciebas in omni hoc vitae tuae tempore? Non potuisti vulnera tua curare? Quinimmo et recentiora semper addebas.

have you ever even once made a candid confession with true sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment? What were you doing from morning till night but spending your time in pleasures and pastimes and in the pursuit of temporal gain, heaping sin on sin, as if God had given you time only for that purpose? And now, when time is no more for you, you ask for an opportunity to make good the great loss? No, that cannot be; your prayer cannot be granted. Ah, unhappy man! do not trust to a future repentance, which is to be when you see that you are about to die. The grace of conversion, of perseverance, of a happy death is far too great for you to hope for it then from an angry God, who will already have begun to act as your Judge. But there is another point: supposing even that there will then be still room for you in the divine mercy, and that God will not refuse you the powerful grace of conversion, yet on your own side all hopes of salvation must vanish; for then you shall be neither disposed nor able to work with the grace of God so as to be truly converted, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

He who thinks that he will be able to repent sincerely at the end of an ill-spent life shows that he does not understand what is meant by sincere repentance. It is easy enough to confess your sins to the first priest that comes in your way; and if he asks you whether you are heartily sorry for having offended the good God, to answer yes; and if he further inquires whether you wish to be absolved and to receive the last sacraments, to say yes to that too. But is that sufficient to obtain pardon of your sins? Gracious God! if such were the case, how many Christians would be in heaven who are actually burning in hell! Do you wish to know, O sinner! what it means to do true penance? Then pay attention. To do penance is to love sincerely and earnestly what I before hated against the law of God; sincerely and earnestly to hate what I before loved contrary to the divine will, and to detest, curse, and reprobate all such unlawful thoughts, words, and actions; to love God more than all joys, goods, honors, and creatures in the world; to hate and detest my sins more than all imaginable evils, pains, and troubles in the world, nay, more than death itself, and all that from a supernatural motive; that is, not through desire of a natural gain or profit, nor through fear of a natural misfortune, or the dread of death; but on account of

In what true repentance consists.

the divine anger and the eternal punishment we have deserved.

The dying man is not in a state to undertake it.

Now, my dear brethren, is it likely that such a sudden change will take place, and that one who has grown old in vice, whose inclinations and desires have always aimed at sensual, carnal, and unlawful objects; who has loved sin all his life, and who is leaving it now through force, nay, who would not leave it if he had not death before his eyes; one to whom sin by long use has grown to be a second nature; who has seldom made an act of the love of God, or of supernatural sorrow; who hardly understands what it is to repent sincerely; who, while he was strong and healthy, had such frequent opportunities of repenting with the full force of his reason, and who, instead of using them, said: I cannot give up sin now; I cannot yet amend my life; I cannot do penance for a while longer; is it likely, I ask, that a man of that kind will change so suddenly as to do sincere penance in so short a time, and at such an inconvenient time too?

Shown by a simile.

When a large door has been kept fast bolted for twenty years without being opened, so that its hinges are rusted, can a weak man open it at once? Not by any means; he will be almost obliged to use a windlass at it. "Behold," the Almighty has often said before to such a dying man, "I stand at the gate and knock; if any man shall hear My voice, and open to Me the door, I will come in to him."¹ Now after all the knocking for so many years, the sinner could not make up his mind to open the door of his heart to the Lord by true repentance, so that it has become, as it were, quite rusted; how, then, will he be able to open it in a hurry when he hears death knocking? Ah, it cost St. Augustine the labor of twelve whole years to combat himself and overcome his evil inclinations and bad habits, and at last it required almost a miracle to change him. Can the dying sinner expect that miracle in the short time that remains to him when he is told that he is in a dangerous state and must die?

Confirmed by examples.

No indeed! He will be like so many others, who died with the bad habits and desires in which they lived. I will give you a few examples. A rich miser was dying; he was attended by three priests, members of a well-known order; one was an excellent preacher, the other a master of novices, the third the man's own son, a pious, edifying, truly spiritual man. What did not those three zealous priests do for the soul of the dying man,

¹ Ecce, sto ad ostium et pulso; si quis audierit vocem meam, et aperuerit mihi januam intrabo ad illum.—Apoc. iii. 20.

which they were burning with zeal to save? One said: "Sir, please repeat after me, with heart more than with lips, the words: My God I believe in Thee!" The sick man answered: "I think the wheat crop will be a failure; my barns are full, so that they require to have two arches and buttresses built on to them. The price of corn has gone up very high; wheat costs two gulden the measure; I believe I shall succeed in emptying my barns and filling my coffers with money." "For God's sake," said the other priest, "raise your heart and mind to heaven; look at your crucified Redeemer; here He is before your eyes!" "Yes," said the sick man, "that crucifix is made of silver; in these days we can be sure of no one; even in one's own house there may be thieves; we cannot be too careful; there are rascals who would steal Our Lord Himself if He were made of silver; son, take the crucifix and lock it up. But where are the keys? I had them under my pillow; some one must have taken them away. O wretched man that I am! I see how it is! I am betrayed, and robbed!" "My dear father," answered the son, "here are the keys; no one has taken them; do not annoy yourself so much about them." "Oh," said the dying man, "it is easy for you to talk! You are a religious and provided for. I know better and have had experience of the labor and trouble it takes to put a trifle together." The third priest read an act of contrition for him, and asked him to repeat after him the words: O my God! I am sorry from my heart that I have ever offended Thee by my sins! Whereupon the dying man said: "I am sorry, ah, bitterly sorry, that I have lent such a large sum of money to that untrustworthy fellow! He promised to pay me in a certain time; but the time is long since past, and he has not given me a penny. It is a dead loss to me! How could I have been so silly, so imprudent as to trust him!" Continuing to make those beautiful acts of faith, hope, charity and contrition, he at last gave up the ghost. What do you think of this incident, my dear brethren? Are you surprised at its tragical termination? I am not a bit; for you cannot expect any other wine out of a vessel but that which was poured into it. Such, too, was the end of an unhappy young man. Standing by his bedside were his mother, a pious, virtuous lady, and her other children, brothers of the sick man, who were all priests and confessors. The dying man wept bitterly, not on account of his past sins, nor through love of God or hope in Him, but through love of

life and despair of recovery; for his only words were: "Alas! I must die so young! I must leave forever my companions; never again shall I take part in their games, their feasting, dances, theatrical entertainments! No; instead of these things all that now remains to me is the grave." From these examples we can see what sources of comfort and hope they have who lead bad lives and never think of death. Such people do not even dream of doing penance; and if they attempt it, how could they manage it successfully at so unsuitable a time?

All the circumstances of the case prevent such repentance.

For when the weakened body is filled with pain and anguish the sick man's only thought is how to procure some alleviation; the doctor is at hand to prescribe medicines for him; his friends are there to see that he is in as comfortable a position as possible, and to prevent others from wearying him by talk; his mind is filled with fear, anxiety, care, and terror on account of having to leave the world and bid adieu to his sorrowing relations. Thus, as we have seen in the last sermon, he is so disturbed at the approach of death that, as experience tells us, he is hardly able to say a Hail Mary with due devotion; while his soul is overwhelmed at the thought of his past sins and surrounded by the demons who assail it with the most violent temptations, so that many holy servants of God have had enough to do to prevent themselves from being completely unnerved at the hour of death. Tell me; would you speak to the sick man in such circumstances of an important law-suit on which much depends, and ask him to advise you on it? By no means; he is not in a fit state for that work. Is it then likely that he should be able to manage the most important of all affairs, on which his salvation depends, and of which he has been utterly careless hitherto? That he should be able to settle with God for all the sins he has committed during his whole life, in thought, word, deed, or omission, and in the short time that remains, to arrange the long law-suit that he has been carrying on against God? How then can we believe that he will do true penance and die a happy death? Humanly speaking, and taking all the circumstances into consideration, the thing is impossible.

Generally a death-bed repentance is not supernatural.

Yes, I say again, as I have said already, that the sick man will agree to all the priest says to him; he will express sorrow for his sins; he will kiss the crucifix; he will pray for forgiveness and receive absolution, holy Communion, Extreme Unction, and the general absolution. Do you think therefore that he must

die well? But what else could a Christian do? Do you imagine he must throw away the crucifix with disgust; refuse to express sorrow for his sins, to receive absolution or holy Communion? No Catholic would act in that way unless he were mad and out of his senses. But do you believe that he does all those pious actions with sincerity and from a supernatural motive? "Nay," asks St. Basil, "do you think the dying man knows at all what he does and says?"

It is easy to get an echo even from the hardest rocks and mountains. Call out the name Jesus between the rocks, and they will answer Jesus; not because they understand what they say, but because the echo gives back your voice. So it is generally with such dying people. When a man lives a bad life, and puts off conversion till the last moment, what else is his heart but a rock hardened against the grace of God, as the Prophet Jeremias says: "They have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than the rock."¹ Now a man of this kind is lying on his sick bed; you go to him and say: Jesus! He answers: Jesus! You say: Mary, Mother of mercy! He repeats: Mary, Mother of mercy! Are you not sorry that you have offended God? Yes; I am sorry. If you should be restored to health, will you not serve Him faithfully? Yes; I will! You wish to go to heaven? Yes. O my God, I believe in Thee! O my God, I believe in Thee! I hope in Thee! I hope in Thee! I love Thee! I love Thee! There is nothing more that troubles your conscience? No; nothing more. A person looking on at this might be inclined to say: Thanks be to God! he is well prepared! Simple-minded man! it was, after all, but an echo from the hard rock you heard, and the sick man's sighs and tears were caused merely by bodily pain.

Ask all those who have received the last sacraments in a dangerous illness and have recovered again how they felt on the occasion. Many will tell you that they felt quite stupid; the most will acknowledge that they hardly knew whether they were receiving the sacraments or not. If those people had died they would have been considered as having been well prepared. Well prepared indeed! As far as I myself am concerned, I have been once in danger of drowning, another time of breaking my neck by a fall, and a third time I was grievously ill, and fell into a fainting fit. I thought I was about to die; but I never

Shown by
similes.

By daily ex-
perience.

¹ *Renuerunt accipere disciplinam; induraverunt facies suas supra petram.*—Jer. v. 3.

raised my mind to God on any of these occasions; my only idea was how I might get safely out of the danger in which I was. It is and must be true, my dear brethren, with hardly one exception in a hundred thousand cases; he who lives a bad life dies an unhappy death. It is and must be a false hope of salvation that is founded on a death-bed repentance, for the work of repentance cannot then be duly performed. The grace of perseverance and a happy death is far too great for the sinner who defers repentance to expect it; and, besides, the circumstances in which a man finds himself at the hour of death are too disturbing and distracting to allow of a sincere conversion.

Exhortation
and resolu-
tion not to
defer re-
pentance
any longer.

“Therefore,” Christians, “whilst we have time, let us work good,”¹ according to the salutary exhortation of St. Paul. Now, whilst we are sound in mind and body, let us make use of the golden opportunity and serve God zealously! We must not trust to the time of sickness. Sinners! Now that you can do it conveniently, be converted sincerely to God! You must not imagine that what I have said concerns you little, as none of you may be minded to defer repentance till the last moment, and all of you may be resolved to repent before the hour of death, although not at once. Ah! I believe you. But almost all those who have been surprised by death in the state of sin have been of the same mind as you are now. They have said to themselves: on some future occasion I will go to confession and amend my life; bye-and-bye I will begin to serve God faithfully, etc.; until at last, before their bye-and-bye came, they fell into a mortal illness, so that in reality they deferred repentance to the hour of death. “Be you then also ready: for at what hour you think not the Son of man will come,”² such is the warning given us by Our Saviour Jesus Christ, who means so well with us all. Vain and useless is it to begin to prepare when He is already knocking at the door. No; be you ready, and ready always. Have you not been so hitherto? Ah, then begin at once! Delay no longer! Prepare now while you have the time of grace to dispose of. Think what depends on this. Nothing less than the eternal fire of hell, in which you will burn, if the Lord, when He comes for you at the hour of death, does not find you prepared. Nothing less than the eternal happiness of heaven depends on it, which is promised to you if you repent

¹ Dum tempus habemus, operemur bonum.—Gal. vi. 10.

² Et vos estote parati, quia qua hora non putatis, Filius hominis veniet.—Luke xii. 40.

sincerely and amend in time. Say to yourselves: alas! unhappy me! if I am but a moment too late with my conversion! Therefore I will delay no longer; I have waited only too long already! Now I will begin, O Lord! with Thy help and grace, that during the rest of my life I may serve Thee truly, and die a happy death. Amen.

On Deferring Repentance to a Future Time, see the preceding Third Part.

THIRTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE UNHAPPY DEATH OF THE WICKED.

Subject.

The death of the sinner is full of misery, without help or consolation, 1. from creatures, 2. from God.—*Preached on the twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Filia mea modo defuncta est.—Matt. ix. 18.

“My daughter is even now dead.”

Introduction.

Who would have thought that this maiden should have been hurried off so soon by death in the bloom of youth? Certainly neither her father nor she herself would have imagined such a thing; and yet she died. So true are the words: “At what hour you think not the Son of man will come.”¹ He will come when we least expect, to take us out of this world. Yet this death was in some respects consoling for the father and fortunate for the innocent daughter; consoling for him, because he had at hand Christ the Son of God, from whom he might seek help and comfort; fortunate for the daughter, because she was immediately raised from the dead by the same Son of God and restored to life; and even if she had not been restored to life, her death would have been a happy one, since she departed in her first innocence with a conscience at peace with God. My dear brethren, the death of the just, whether it comes early or late, suddenly or slowly, foreseen or unforeseen, is always a consoling and happy

¹ Quia qua hora non putatis, Filius hominis veniet.—Luke xii. 40.

death; therefore the pious need not fear death, for they are always ready for it, as we have seen on a former occasion. But how will it be with sinners if they are called away without doing penance? Alas! there is nothing more terrible to think of than this miserable death: for there is nothing consoling in it, but everything that is wretched, as I shall now show you by way of meditation.

Plan of Discourse.

The death of sinners and the wicked is full of woe and misery, without help or consolation; such is the subject of the meditation. It is full of misery without help or consolation from creatures; the first part; full of misery without help or consolation from God; the second part; for the encouragement of the good, that they may persevere in the state of grace; as a salutary warning for the wicked, that they may at once repent, lest they should die such a death.

We beg both these graces from Thee, O Lord of life and death! who hast endured the most bitter of all deaths, that none of us might die an unhappy death, and we beg it through that Mother who brought Life into the world, and whom if any one truly loves during his life on earth he will not have to fear an unhappy death; and also through the intercession of those angels who help the just in their last moments.

In nearly all the sorrows of life some comfort and help may be found.

Help and comfort in the hour of need take away half our misery. Nature has given every man a voice, that he may at once call for help when he is in distress. If a child or an old man falls down in the street he calls out for help; if one is in danger of drowning he cries out for help; if one falls among robbers or assassins he cries out for help. Fear and anguish are lessened when there is hope of aid. The first means of succor that nature has given to every one in sorrow is to seek consolation somewhere, either in his own thoughts, or in complaints and prayers addressed to others that they may assist him, or at least speak to him words of comfort. And many a one thinks he has got rid of half the load of his grief when he has revealed it to a good friend. If the father of a family dies, what an affliction for the children! yet they have the consolation of knowing that their mother is still left to them. If a son or daughter dies, what grief for the parents!

but they console themselves with the thought that they have other children. Poverty and destitution are a bitter trial, especially for those who were formerly in a good position and have been reduced to want by misfortune; yet they hope for and find help and comfort in the compassion of their fellow-men. Bodily pains and sickness are a grievous trial; yet there is comfort in the hope that the doctor may do something to give relief. Unjust persecution and oppression are a heavy cross for the innocent; yet their innocence is their consolation. Public shame and dishonor is a terrible thing for a respectable man to bear; but he can console himself with the testimony of his good conscience. Anguish and mental suffering are an intolerable torture for all men; but they look to some future time when they will be at an end, and be succeeded by a period of repose. So that, generally speaking, as long as we live we have consolation mixed with suffering; one finds here, another there something to grieve him, but at the same time, too, something that brings him comfort.

But the death of the unrepentant sinner, oh! that is indeed the misery of all miseries! All those that we have mentioned as occurring to different individuals shall come together and assail him at once. Then will be verified for him the words that the weeping Saviour spoke over the city of Jerusalem, alluding to its future destruction: "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."¹ Wherever the unhappy man turns on his bed of death, he finds nothing but pain and sorrow. If he looks at his friends, oh, what grief! he has to part from them. Good-bye, father, he says with sorrowful heart; good-bye, mother, dear children, husband, wife, sister, brother! I have looked at you for the last time; in a few moments all love and friendship will be at an end between us, and that forever. For I am going to hell, and if you go to heaven, oh, what a great chaos will be fixed between me and you!² There will be no post from one place to the other to bring me news of you; so that I shall have my sufferings embittered by the thought that you are in joys that I too might have had if I had wished, and that you will not have the least sympathy with me. Or if you follow me

The dying sinner is surrounded by anguish on all sides, when he thinks of his friends.

¹ Venient dies in te, et circumdabunt te inimici tui vallo, et circumdabunt te, et coangustabunt te undique.—Luke xix. 43.

² Inter nos et vos chaos magnum firmitatum est.—Ibid. xvi. 26.

to hell, I am sure that we shall curse and revile each other forever with a bitter hatred.

Of his former riches and pleasures, and of his present unhappy state.

If he thinks of the money and wealth that he heaped up with so much toil and labor, or of the pleasures that he still hoped to enjoy, or of the honorable position that made him a great man in the eyes of the world; "O death," exclaims the wise Ecclesiasticus, "how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that hath peace in his possessions!"¹ And if the bare remembrance of it is a torment, what will it be when death really comes and takes him away from everything? I am now to be hunted out of house and home, he will say to himself with sorrow of heart; I am to be driven away from all I possess without the hope of ever coming back again, without being able to bring with me a single farthing of my wealth, a single rag of clothing, a momentary pleasure of all my joys, a single thought of all my honors! Bare and naked I am going into the home of eternal poverty, shame, hunger, and thirst! If he considers the state of his body, he finds nothing but pain and suffering; his head is motionless; his hair is matted with the sweat of death; his eyes sunken and glassy; his lips drawn together; his teeth blackened; his tongue parched; his breast swollen by his efforts to breathe; his whole body is reduced to such weakness that he has hardly strength to breathe forth his miserable soul.

He is troubled on all sides.

But all this is nothing compared to the anguish, fear, and terror that fill his soul. According to the terrible words of St. Augustine, describing the state of a man dying in sin, wherever he turns he finds nothing but objects to increase his anguish and apprehension. "Over him is the angry Judge" who will condemn him; "below him the abyss of hell," ready to swallow him up; "on his right side are his sins which accuse him" and cry out for vengeance on him; "on his left are legions of demons waiting to drag him down to eternal torments; inwardly he is tortured by the worm of conscience; outwardly by the death he cannot avoid. Where can he fly to out of all these miseries?"²

By his own conscience.

How will he defend himself against the voice of his conscience, which represents to him in every detail and with the utmost clearness all his past sins, thus gnawing at his heart and oppressing

¹ O mors, quam amara est memoria tua homini pacem habenti in substantiis suis!—Eccius. xli. 1.

² Superius Judex iratus; inferius horrendum chaos; a dextris peccata accusantia; a sinistris infinita dæmonia ad supplicium trahentia; quo fugiet peccator sic deprehensus?

him more than his sickness? Cæsarius writes of a young man who cried out in his death agony: O my God! why have I been so careless? Why have I lived so long in tepidity, and spent so many years in idleness? Such is the anguish caused the dying man by the recollection of his neglect of the divine service in his youth. Cornelius tells us of an old man, who before his death burst out into the following sighs: O wretched man that I am! why have I been so diligent in temporal things, so anxious to provide for my wife and children, and so careless of myself and my salvation? Of what use to me now is all the toil I have undergone during my life? Such is the anguish caused the dying man by the cares he had during life which were not directed to heaven. A young man, who was led astray into sins against holy purity, cried out in a terrible voice as he lay on his death-bed: wo to him who has led me astray! Such is the anguish suffered by the dying man who has allowed himself to be seduced by bad company. Berengarius said on his death-bed: Alas! unhappy me! I must now appear before God my Judge! As far as my own sins are concerned, I hope to obtain pardon for them, because I sincerely repent of them; but I am terribly afraid on account of the sins I have made others commit by my heretical doctrine and evil life. Such is the anguish caused the dying man by the scandal he has given during life and the teaching and example by which he has led souls into sin. And indeed it must be a terrible thing to think on one's bed of death: I have led a soul into sin; perhaps it is now lost or will be lost; now I have to give an account of it before the judgment-seat of God. A religious suffered the acutest remorse on his death-bed because he had lost but one hour in unnecessary sleep; what confusion and distress must then fall to the lot of those worldlings who spend whole days, weeks, months, and years in idleness? Another young man when in his death agony stretched out his tongue, and pointed to it, saying: this wicked tongue of mine is the cause of my eternal damnation; for he remembered all the unchaste conversations he had carried on during his life. Another on his death-bed began to cry most piteously, and said: it is all over with me! I am lost forever! I did not follow the divine vocation! Alas! what have I done! Now I hear those dreadful words: "I called, and you refused. I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock."¹ Another young

¹ Vocavi, et renulistis. Ego quoque in interitu vestro ridebo; et subsannabo.—Prov. i. 24, 26.

man was reproached by his conscience that he had neglected his school now and then, had not attended the meeting of the sodalities, nor received holy Communion often enough, and had omitted his usual prayers; these reproaches filled him with such terror that he almost despaired of his salvation. Many other examples I omit. Meanwhile I am forced to this conclusion: if those apparently slight faults and sins can cause such terror in the hour of death even to holy souls who desire their salvation, how great must not be the anguish caused to one who is dying an enemy of God by the many crimes he has committed? Ah, such a one shall cry out to still the reproaches of conscience, have I not enough to suffer? Leave me in peace. No! You shall never have peace from me! You shall die; but not I; I will follow you to the very pit of hell, and there I will be your tormentor forever. Such shall be the answer of his bad conscience.

By other
circumstan-
ces.

What anguish will be caused too by the demons standing round the dying man in troops, open-mouthed and with fangs whetted like those of ravening wolves, lying in wait for his poor soul, to hurry away with it the moment it leaves the body. I imagined a scene like this once when I happened to see in a forest two greyhounds chasing a cat, that had tried to escape them by climbing a tree; the hunter, instead of shooting her, threw stones at her at my request, until he dislodged her; but she had not time to touch the ground; the dogs had her in their teeth while she was still in the air. "O my soul!" cries out St. Bernard, "what will be thy terror when, having left all things, thou shalt enter alone into an unknown country, where crowds of the most horrible monsters shall come to meet thee?"¹ What terror shall invade the sinful soul when the angry Judge shall refuse to allow it any more time, and shall give it over to the hunter death, to be driven by him into the fangs of the hellish wolf! And what horror shall take possession of it when it sees hell open beneath, certain that it is to be its dwelling-place forever!

Shown by a
simile.

Imagine how it must be with the wizard condemned to the wheel; how terrified he must be when he hears the bolts of his prison drawn that he may be led forth to execution. But that is not even a shadow of the anguish of the sinner when he sees that his soul is about to leave the body and to be precipitated into the place of eternal torments. Unhappy mortal! wherever

¹ O anima mea, quis erit ille pavor, cum dimissis omnibus sola ingrediens regionem penitus incognitam, occursantia tibi catervatim deterrima monstra videbis?

you turn you are caught and devoured. The Prophet Amos has described this miserable state of the soul in the figure of a man, who while running away from a lion is attacked by a bear or bitten by a serpent: "As if a man should flee from the face of a lion, and a bear should meet him: or enter into the house and a serpent should bite him."¹ Would it be a wonder, my dear brethren, if such a soul should be a hundred times on the point of departing, and should retreat again each time terrified into the body? Is it any wonder that the death sweat pours down in thick drops from the tortured frame? O misery above all miseries!

And is there then no help nor comfort for the unhappy man? Alas, no! He is most in need of help; but his misery is that of which the Psalmist says: "For tribulation is very near: for there is none to help me."² Help him, you men and women for whose sake he has so often sinned and bartered heaven! But their answer resounds in the heart of the dying man in the terms in which the high-priests answered the despairing Judas: "What is that to us? look thou to it,"³ we cannot help you. Husband, wife, father, mother, dear children, for whom I have worked so hard, to whom I have left all I had; help me! help me! What is the matter? Can we do anything for you? Shall we arrange the pillow under your head? Ah, no! no! take this load off my conscience! that is the rest I require. But we cannot do that; do you wish to have some strengthening medicine? Ah, I want comfort and strength for my poor soul! We cannot give you that.

In all this anguish he finds no comfort.

O ye saints and angels of God, come to his assistance! *subvenite sancti; occurrite angeli.* But even that prayer is of no use, and the sick man hears the voice that was heard in the temple of Jerusalem before its destruction: "Let us go from here! away from this place!"⁴ The time of our office has expired. For thirty, forty, fifty years we have tried to help you in every possible manner, and to bring you with us to heaven; but you would not have our help, and now our time is at an end. We have failed in our efforts, and must go and leave you to the demons. "See ye that I alone am," says the Lord in the Book of Deuteronomy; that there is nothing to be hoped from creatures; "and there is no other God besides Me: I will kill and I will make to live: I

Neither from heaven.

¹ Quomodo si fugiat vir a facie leonis, et occurrat ei ursus; et ingrediatu domum, et mordeat eum coluber.—Amos v. 19.

² Quoniam tribulatio proxima est, quoniam non est qui adjuvet.—Ps. cxi. 12.

³ Quid ad nos? tu videris.—Matt. xxvii. 4.

⁴ Migremus hinc! migremus hinc!

will strike, and I will heal.”¹ But the most terrible of all his woes is that the sinner shall then be abandoned by God Himself; and therefore the death of the sinner is a misery in which there is no help or comfort from God, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

The worst suffering is to suffer without God.

“Suffering, no matter how great, is tolerable, nay, even grows sweet, when one has God as a Companion and Comforter. Such was the case with Job in his great affliction, David in the midst of his enemies, Daniel amongst the raging lions, Joseph in the hands of his brethren, Lazarus in his poverty, Paul in the most violent persecutions, Lawrence on the gridiron, the martyrs in their torments. What did their sufferings matter to them? All they had to do to comfort themselves was to remember the words of the Lord: “I am with him in his trouble,”² and they were able to laugh and rejoice in the midst of their tortures. Say to some pious servant of God: your father, your mother, your friends have abandoned you; be it so, he will answer quite composedly; “the Lord hath taken me up,”³ and that suffices for me. Hence there have been many servants of God (and there are such still) who congratulated themselves as on a piece of unexpected good luck when assailed by tribulation, who prayed to God most earnestly for the cross, and complained when it was taken away from them. St. Teresa preferred to die rather than to be without suffering.⁴ Oh, to suffer with God is a sweet suffering! Even death itself, terrible as it is, has no terrors for the just man who has God at his side. Let whole legions of demons surround his bed, as some holy hermits have experienced in their last hour, he will not fear: “For though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death,” he will think and say with the Psalmist, “I will fear no evils: for Thou art with me.”⁵ But to suffer without God, to endure anguish without God, to be in the hands of the devils without God; that is the greatest and most terrible of all suffering! The human mind can do without all created comfort, and without any help from creatures; but to be excluded from the comfort and help that God can give is that wo which the Lord threatens the

¹ Videte quod ego sim solus, et non sit alius Deus præter me; ego occidam, et ego vivere faciam; percutiam, et ego sanabo.—Deut. xxii. 39.

² Cum ipso sum in tribulatione.—Ps. xc. 15.

³ Dominus assumpsit me.—Ibid. xxvi. 10.

⁴ Aut pati, aut mori.

⁵ Et si ambulavero in medio umbræ mortis, non timebo mala, quoniam tu mecum es.—Ps. xxii. 4.

people with by the Prophet Osee: "Wo to them when I shall depart from them."¹

Poor sinner on your death-bed! "where is thy God?"² Look around you; turn from one side to the other: "where is thy God?" Ah, He is not with you! He whom you have rejected during your life has now abandoned you and cast you off forever. If you hear His words in your heart, they will be only words of scorn and mocking laughter, with which He will rejoice at your misery, and mock your helplessness. You have neglected all My graces, inspirations, exhortations, patience, and mercy: "You have despised all My counsel, and have neglected My reprehensions. I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock, when that shall come to you which you feared."³ Cry out to heaven as loud as you please; O my God! O merciful God! in what a miserable state my soul is! Help, ah, help me, my God! What! your conscience will answer in His name, your God! whom you have not sought by true contrition even in your last illness? Your God! Look for him in your coffers among your gold; that is the god you have adored. See that woman whom you have worshipped; that man whom you have served more zealously than Me; those comrades of your debauchery, with whom you have often mocked at holy things. What have I to do with you? What are you to Me? Go to the goods and joys of earth, in which you have hitherto sought your pleasure. "Where are their gods, in whom they trusted? Let them arise and help you: and protect you in your distress."⁴ Call on them to help you now; for you did not accept My aid when it was time to do so. Thus, not only is there no help or comfort from God for the dying sinner; but the very thought of God only makes his misery greater.

How must the living soul feel in that almost dead body, when it sees itself abandoned by all in heaven and on earth! What a terrible sight for it is the priest with the crucifix, saying those last prayers which fill the just with indescribable joy, but the wicked with despair; for there is not a word in them that does not announce eternal damnation to the sinner. "Go forth,

The dying sinner will be completely abandoned by God.

The prayers of the priest shall be terrible to him.

¹ Vae eis cum recessero ab eis!—Osee ix. 12.

² Ubi est Deus tuus?—Ps. xli. 4.

³ Despexistis omne consilium meum, et increpationes meas neglexistis. Ego quoque in interitu vestro ridebo; et subsannabo cum vobis id quod timebatis advenerit.—Prov. i. 25, 26.

⁴ Ubi sunt dii eorum, in quibus habebant fiduciam? Surgant, et optulentur vobis, et in necessitate vos protegant.—Deut. xxxii. 37, 38.

Christian soul, out of this world, in the name of God the Father, who created thee; in the name of Jesus Christ the living Son of God, who has suffered for thee; in the name of the Holy Ghost, who has been infused into thee," etc. Oh, all these words are so many thunder-bolts in the heart and conscience of the sinner! Go forth! Ah, where? To hell! Christian soul! Swinish soul rather, answers the conscience, whose God was your belly, who lived only to gratify your brutal lusts. Christian soul! Where are the marks of the Christian? Have you not thousands of times disgraced and renounced the holiness of your baptism, the vows made to God therein, and the law of your faith? Christian soul! which lived after the manner of the heathens! Christian soul! Ah, it would be far better it were the soul of a blackamoor, a Turk, or an infidel; for then, not having received so much light, it would not have such a strict account to render. Christian soul! Far better it were the soul of a horse, a dog, or a swine; for then it would die with the body, and would not burn forever. Go forth out of this world! O sorrowful words! Out of this world, to which your heart and its desires were attached, whose customs and laws had more influence with you than the infallible truths of the Gospel of Christ! In the name of the Father, whom you have so scornfully despised! In the name of the Son, whom you have crucified again so often by your sins! In the name of the Holy Ghost, whom you have constantly saddened and driven out of your heart! In the name of God! In the name of the devil rather, will be the answer of your conscience, for you have had that foul spirit more constantly in your mouth by your abominable habit of cursing and swearing. Look down, O Lord! continues the well-meaning priest, on this Thy servant, and hear him who with all his heart now implores Thee for the remission of all his sins. What, the conscience will say; do I not know that the contrary is the truth? that I am a servant and slave of the devil? Have not my confessions for some years been only a mere outward show of repentance, without true conversion or amendment, a mere piece of hypocrisy? I have deferred repentance to my death-bed; and now I have to depart like a brute beast, that has never known or loved its Creator. "Have mercy, O Lord, on his groans; pity his tears!" What tears? Those that he shed when he could not take vengeance on his enemy, or gratify his lusts? "May his dwelling this day be in peace!" Peace for him who is actually a rebel

against God? in whose hands death still finds the weapons he used in his war against the Almighty? Can he dwell in peace, amongst the chosen saints of heaven? No; all law and reason are against it.

Cease, O priest of God! repeating those prayers that the Church has appointed only for her God-fearing or truly repentant children, for I am not one of them. Cry out rather in a voice of thunder: depart, accursed, wicked soul! depart from the body which you have used only for sin! depart from this world, which you have defiled by your crimes! Separate yourself from the creatures whom you have scandalized and betrayed by your bad example! Go forth in the name of the Father, to whom in a moment you shall have to give a strict account of your life; in the name of the Son, who will upbraid you with the blood He has shed for you, which you have trampled under foot; in the name of the Holy Ghost, who will accuse you of having rejected so many graces and inspirations. Go forth, unhappy soul! Away with you! It is time for you to become the victim of the just vengeance of God, and to know how great is that Lord whom you have treated so contemptuously! Away with you! There is no room for you here any longer! Alas! and must I go? Come, ye demons, and take my soul into everlasting fire! O death of the sinner! O misery of all miseries! in which there is neither comfort or help from heaven, on earth, from nature, from grace, from God, nor from man! Call out, O Prophet! in the ears of all men: "The death of the wicked is very evil;"¹ it is the most terrible of all.

And drives him to despair.

Be not frightened, pious Christians! I have been speaking only of one who is hardened in sin to the end, of the impenitent sinner, of the sinner on his death-bed. This subject is not for you, except to console you with the thought that if you continue to serve God faithfully you shall not have such a death to fear. This subject is not for you, except to give you a greater knowledge and appreciation of the divine mercy, which has allowed you time for repentance after you have perhaps committed many grievous sins. This subject is not for you, except to encourage you and give you a fresh impulse to serve the good God with still greater zeal, and to prepare yourselves for the consoling and joyful death of the righteous. As a man lives, so shall he die; death is an echo of life. If you call out "A" into the forest,

Consolation for the good and pious.

¹ Mors peccatorum pessima.—Ps. xxxiii. 22.

the echo will not answer "wo;" if a man always keeps on the right road to Jerusalem he will not find himself in Babylon at the end of his journey; he who tries to serve God faithfully during life will never find himself abandoned by God in death. I never could find any reason for believing those stories that we read sometimes about people who have spent years serving God in solitude, and who yielded to temptation in their last moments and died an unhappy death. Nonsense! the promises of the God of truth cannot be broken. If those tales are true, as far as the end of them is concerned, then I say that it is not true that those men lived really holy lives, but for a long time they must have been subject to pride or other secret vices that were hidden from the eyes of men, and that laid the foundation of an unhappy death. I cannot form such a despicable opinion of my heavenly Father as to think that He would be capable of throwing one of His dear children off His lap at the last moment, and casting him into the jaws of the hellish wolf. Nor can I think any man such a fool as to change all of a sudden, when the gate of heaven is actually open for him, to renounce God and give himself to the devil, damn himself forever after having worked so long and so hard to get to heaven. No; as a man lives, so shall he die. Continue to serve God, and that with joyful hearts; you need not fear death, no matter how, when, or where he comes for you. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints;"¹ "With him that feareth the Lord it shall go well in the latter end, and in the day of his death he shall be blessed."²

Folly of sinners in not being converted in time.

Sinners, it is to you that my sermon is principally directed; not through dislike, but through sincere and well-meant love for your souls; not to drive you to despair, but to induce you to amend; not to announce to you such a terrible death, but to give you a paternal warning against it, while you still have time (and who knows how long that time will last?). Tell me; is it really your wish to die such an unhappy death? Do you indeed desire to go into eternity in that manner? Ah, if so, of what good to you is a handful of money, a bit of ground, a short-lived pleasure, a point of honor, or the joy you find in a creature? And that is all for which you abandon your God and commit sin. I ask you again: do you mean to die a bad death for such trump-

¹ *Preciosa in conspectu Domini mors sanctorum ejus.—Ps. cxv. 15.*

² *Timent Dominum bene erit in extremis, et in die defunctionis sue benedicetur.—Ecclesi. i. 13.*

ery? No, you think; God forbid! Yes; but see how you are living; and as you live so you shall die without the least doubt. Of a hundred thousand who put off repentance to the hour of death there is hardly one who repents sincerely. You are minded to amend before death; but when? After a time. Have you a document to show how long your time is to last? There are millions of souls in heaven who would not be there now if they had deferred their conversion never so little. Millions of souls are burning in hell forever, because they have thought and acted as you do now, and have deferred repentance though only for one hour. Oh, how stupid we mortals are! We are certain that we have grievously sinned; we are certain that we have merited an eternal hell; we are certain that we must die; we are certain that we may die at any moment; we are certain that most people die unhappily; we are certain that the same fate may be ours this very night, this day, this hour even; and yet we remain for hours, days, weeks, years, in the state of sin, although if death surprises us in that state we shall be dragged down to hell by the demons! Good God! what blindness and folly!

Ah, sinner, if it were only probable that we should die, what depends on death is so weighty that it should be our greatest care not to die unhappily. If there were but one of us here in church who had such a death to fear, it would be reason enough to make us all shudder with terror, and to say to ourselves: perhaps it is I. O sinner, do penance! penance! and do not delay about it, "for tribulation is very near."¹ Well-known and remarkable is the picture of human life given us by St. John Damascene. A traveller, he says, runs as hard as he can off the road in pursuit of game into the desert. While running he falls into a trap covered with leaves, and as one naturally does when falling, he stretches out his hands, and happens to catch hold of a bush growing on the side of the hole. Meanwhile he sees at the bottom a terrible serpent, ready to devour him as soon as he falls. But the worst of all is that two mice, one white, the other black, are gnawing at the weak roots of the bush he is holding. What his thoughts are likely to be in those circumstances is easy to imagine. O sinner! such is the state in which we all are. Death is the poisonous serpent that awaits us in the grave; the weak thread of our life is the only thing that supports us; at this thread are constantly gnawing two mice, one black and the

Exhortation
to them not
to defer re-
pentance.

¹ Quoniam tribulatio proxima est.—Ps. xxi. 12.

other white; that is, day and night; the past night has already gnawed away its part, and the thread is so much eaten away. Who knows how long they still have to gnaw? Who can know it? Perhaps this very evening they may have finished with you or me; and wo then to him who falls, not merely into the jaws of death, but into the abyss of hell! “Except you do penance, you shall all likewise perish.”¹ Oh, yes, merciful God! I will now take to penance as the surest means; now I already begin to bewail my sins and to lead a different life. I must die; but I am determined not to die unhappily, and therefore I shall lead a better life. I cast myself into the arms of Thy fatherly mercy; do with me what Thou pleasest; this one request is all I make of Thee: “Let my soul die the death of the just;”² let my death be happy, holy, and precious in Thy sight. Amen.

FOURTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE COMFORT OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE IN DEATH.

Subject.

First; a good conscience takes away all that death has terrible in itself. Secondly; a good conscience takes away all that it has terrible in its circumstances.—*Preached on the feast of the Purification of the B. V. M.*

Text.

Nunc dimitti servum tuum, Domine.—Luke ii. 29.
“Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord.”

Introduction.

Remarkable and extraordinary is this canticle of the aged Simeon. How few there are amongst men who through sheer joy wish for death, and sigh and long for it! How many who are terrified at its very name! Even old people have generally some desire to live longer; if, they say, I could only see my children settled, I should willingly die. And when that wish is granted, ah, they exclaim, if I could only live till an heir is born to one of my sons! And when the heir makes his appearance, ah, they wish to finish a law-suit, or a building they have begun, before leaving this world. And if that too is granted them, they are

¹ Sed si pœnitentiam non egeritis, omnes similiter peribitis.—Luke xlii. 5.

² Moriatur anima mea morte justorum.—Num. xxiii. 10.

still afraid to leave the world and to enter into a long eternity, because they do not know how things will be with them there. In a word, death is bitter and unwelcome to all. Simeon's only wish was to see the Redeemer of the world, the promised Messiah; when that wish was gratified and he held the Saviour in his arms, he had nothing more to desire, and at once, without fear or anxiety, began to invite death: "Now," he said, "Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word in peace: because my eyes have seen Thy salvation." Now let me die and go to the other world, since I have nothing more to desire in this. He was like one who lights a candle to find a piece of money he has dropped; when the money is found, the candle is blown out. Simeon kept alive the flickering light of his life to find the Messiah; he has found Him, and now he wishes the light to be extinguished; "now Thou dost dismiss," now I am willing to die. But what do I wonder at? What reason had Simeon to fear death? Should he not rather long for it with desire? He was a pious, holy man, as the Gospel says: "This man was just and devout, and the Holy Ghost was in him." My dear brethren, death is a bitter, dreadful, and fearful thing, but not for pious and just servants of God. The pious man has good cause to rejoice at the thought of death, and to await its approach with exultation; for a good life and conscience take from death all its terrors, as I shall now prove to the consolation of all good Christians.

Plan of Discourse.

A good conscience takes away all that is terrible in death itself, as I shall show in the first part. A good conscience takes away from death all that is terrible in its circumstances; this I shall prove in the second part.

Immaculate Virgin Mary, who through humility didst obey the law of purification, and you, pure spirits of heaven, obtain for us the grace to cleanse our consciences by true repentance, and to avoid all sin in future; so that on the approach of death we may say or think with joyful hearts: "Now Thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord!"

If I prove that neither in death itself nor in its circumstances there is anything fearful or terrible, save and except a bad life and the bad conscience it leaves behind it in the dying man, then I shall have made my subject sufficiently clear, that, namely, a

All the terrors of death come from a bad life.

good conscience takes away from death all its terrors. Is not that so, my dear brethren? There cannot be a doubt of it. For if I ask a doctor why the pills he gives me are so bitter, and he tells me that the bitterness comes solely from the wormwood in the pills, it follows that if it is taken away the pills will lose their bitter taste. Now see whether I shall not prove what I say.

Otherwise we have no good reason to fear death, as it is not terrible in itself. Shown by a simile.

How comes it that we are so afraid of death? Gloomy death! sorrowful death! bitter death! painful death! the most terrible of all terrible things! so we generally represent it in our imaginations whenever we think of it; these are the epithets we apply to it when we speak of it. Hence arises such an aversion to it in the minds of men that most of them cannot hear of it without feeling sadness, fear, and anguish; nay, many purposely avoid sermons in which death is treated of, and the great majority of men try not even to think of it. But when we consider the matter duly, we find that we do death a great wrong when we paint it in such black colors, and apply such opprobrious epithets to it. Our ideas of death are mere fancies; for there is in it nothing more fearful than in life; nay, it is less to be feared, although we give life such sweet names. Does it take much to frighten a child? Let its father only cover his face with a mask, and the child will run off at once crying and screaming to its mother's lap, as if to hide itself from the horrible spectre. But, you little goose, what are you afraid of? It is only your father; see here, and taking off the mask he gives it to the child. At once there is an end to its fear; the child seeing that the mask is harmless, begins to play with it, to turn it around, and cries if some one tries to take it away. So it is with us, says the wise Seneca; "our fear of death is ridiculous,"¹ for we know not what it is. Let us only remove the black mask that the imagination of men has covered it with, and look at it in the clear light; then we shall see that it has nothing terrible, and must acknowledge that we have been of the number of those of whom David says: "There have they trembled for fear where there was no fear."²

The death of the just is certainly not terrible.

What, then, is death? Do you think it perhaps a grisly skeleton such as it is generally painted? Not by any means! It is simply the end of life. Now I can find nothing bad or terrible in that. For, either the life that comes to an end has been a

¹ Nos mortem ridicule timemus.

² Illic trepidaverunt timore, ubi non erat timor.—Ps. xlii. 5.

good and pious one, or else a wicked, godless one. If it has been good, pious, regulated by the law and will of God, and is found at the end with a good conscience in the grace and friendship of God, truly, no one can then say that its end is evil or terrible. For if we have but a spark of Christian faith left, what more can we desire than such a death? What can we more hope for or rejoice in than such a death, which changes our mortal life into an immortal one, and makes us infallibly sure of our salvation, which was before always a matter of doubt, and brings us without fail to the end for which we are created. Is it then a terrible thing for the traveller to reach the end of his journey, and to arrive in good health and spirits at his father's house, where he can repose after the fatigue of the road? Is it a terrible thing for the sailor, after having escaped the dangers of the sea, to arrive in port with a richly-laden ship? Is it a terrible thing for the soldier to return in triumph after having conquered the enemy? Oh, truly, that is a joyful ending of the journey, the voyage, the battle! And still more joyful is the ending of a pious life.

Must you not acknowledge this, my dear brethren? Could I bring you more joyful news than if I were now authorized by divine revelation to assure you that you shall end your lives in the state of sanctifying grace? You often see little children dying in their cradles; the father and mother weep for the loss of their child, and it is only natural they should do so; but who will say that such a death is bitter or terrible? Oh, how happy that child is! such are the exclamations of the bystanders, and many of them experience a secret envy in their hearts; oh, they say, I wish I had died in the same state! Is it not so? And why? Is not the child dead? Is not its life ended by death just as if it were a grown person? Not a doubt of it. And why then do not people look on such a death as bitter or terrible? Nay, why are there so many who long for such a termination to their lives? Because, you say, that child died in its first innocence, and is perfectly certain of its eternal salvation, and rejoices with the angels and saints in heaven. From this I conclude that death, or the end of a good life, has nothing bitter or terrible in itself; and, further, if there is anything bitter or terrible in death it comes not from death itself, no matter what its nature may be, but simply from a wicked and sinful life; hence, not death is to be feared, but a bad life.

As we ourselves acknowledge.

Even the death of the wicked is not in itself bad or terrible. Shown by a simile.

Death, I say, is not to be feared in itself; for not even the death of the wicked, considered in itself, is terrible or evil. Suppose a thief breaks into your house at night, and succeeds in carrying off some of your things; at last your servant awakes, runs after the thief, and, since he cannot get him into his power otherwise, kills him. What would you think of that servant? Would you call him a wicked murderer? No; he is a faithful servant, who protects his master's property, and prevents it from being stolen. But the poor thief fared badly enough at the hands of the servant. True; but whose fault was it? The servant's or the thief's? The former only did his duty, and in fact could not have saved his life otherwise; while if the thief had kept his hands off other people's property he would not have suffered as he did. Nay, under the circumstances the thief came off better than he otherwise might have done; for if he had fallen into the hands of justice he would have died a shameful and public death on the gallows.

For it ends a bad life, hinders many sins, and lessens eternal punishment.

What is the man, my dear brethren, who leads a wicked, godless life? He is a thief and a robber, who wrongs his neighbor taking away his property unjustly, or lessening his good name by detraction, calumny, or contumely, by cursing, swearing, hatred, revenge, thus depriving him of rest and peace, or by improper conversations, caresses, or allurements, or bad example, thus robbing him of his innocence; he wrongs himself by depriving himself of his health through drunkenness; he robs the Almighty of the honor due to Him; he robs his own soul of grace and merit by impurity and other sins. He has continued in this wickedness for one, two, three, or more years without doing penance; if he goes now and then to confession, no improvement follows, and he continues on in the old way. Now, when God has looked on at all this with patience for a time, death comes like a messenger from the Almighty, and seizes on the guilty man in the midst of his sins, so that, although he might have recovered the grace of God at any moment, he dies in his sins. What is the terrible part of all this? That the man is dead? No; for we must all die. But is death frightful or terrible in itself? By no means! It is rather good and advantageous, because it puts an end to a wicked life, and thus prevents many sins, and moreover it has hindered the sinner, who would not in any case be converted, from adding to his eternal torments in hell.

But, you say, it is a terrible and bitter thing to die in the state of sin; to leave this world a sworn enemy of God, and immediately after death to fall into the hands of an angry and living God, and to become the object of His vengeance. There is no doubt of this; but what is the cause of it? Not death; for death does not place men in the state of sin, nor make them enemies of God. It is a man's own sinful life that is to blame. And, again, if he persists in wickedness to the end, that is not death's fault. Death puts an end to life just as he finds it; if he finds it good, he finishes a good life, otherwise he terminates a bad one. "Death itself," says St. Ambrose, "is not terrible, but the opinion that each one forms of it according to the state of his conscience; for there is nothing we need fear in death if we have done nothing to make us afraid during life."¹ What? you exclaim; and must I not fear death when I have committed a grievous sin? Certainly; for there is nothing more dreadful than to die with a bad conscience, in the state of sin; but, answers St. Ambrose, you must blame yourself and your sins for your fear; it is guilt alone that renders death terrible. But if you continue to live as you would not willingly be when dying, then do not say: how awful it is to die an enemy of God! but rather: how terrible it is to have lived and still to live as an enemy of God! Do not say: how fearful the torments that follow a bad death! but, how fearful the torments that follow a bad life! "Therefore," concludes the Saint, "let each one accuse the wounds of his own conscience, not the bitterness of death."² The only thing that is bitter or terrible in death is a bad conscience; and hence, O pious Christian! who have a good conscience, you need not fear death, nor expect to find anything ghastly in it. Nor is there anything bitter or terrible in the circumstances of death, except a bad conscience; and that bitterness and terror are taken away by a good conscience, as we shall see in the

Therefore it is not death, but a bad life we should fear.

Second Part.

Some of the circumstances of death refer to the things that are left behind here, and others to what is coming in the future life; for death is partly a separation from earthly things and partly

Separation from the world is not terrible in itself.

¹ Non mors ipsa terribilis, sed opinio de morte, quam unusquisque pro conscientia sua perhorrescit; non enim habemus, quod in morte metuamus, si nihil quod metuendum sit, vita nostra commisit.

² Suae igitur unusquisque conscientiae vulnus accuset, non mortis acerbitatem.—S. Ambr. L. de Bona Morte, c. viii.

an entering on a long, unknown eternity. Neither of these classes of circumstances has anything bitter or terrible; or if it has, it comes only from a bad conscience and a bad life led by the dying person. But am I not daring to speak against the generally received opinions and judgments of men in this matter, nay, against our own natural instincts? Is it not a hard and bitter thing for the soul to leave the house which has sheltered it so long; that is, to be forced to quit the body with which it has been intimately connected? Is it not hard for a man to leave house and home, money and wealth, honors and dignities, for which he worked so long, and to leave them forever? Is it not hard to be separated from father, mother, husband, wife, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, friends and acquaintances? Is it not hard to look at the dear ones for the last time with glazed eyes, and to bid adieu to the world with a tongue that can hardly articulate any more? I acknowledge, my dear brethren, that when we consider all these things together it is a hard and bitter thing, and one well calculated to inspire fear and sadness. But what is the cause of that? This fear, dread, sadness, springs from our weak faith; from our ignorance regarding the great goods that await us in the next life; from an inordinate attachment that binds our hearts to earth; from stupidity and blindness, that leave us so incapable of appreciating future joys, and make us so fond of this miserable, wretched life. "This is not the fault of death," says St. Ambrose, "but of our weakness; for we are captivated by the enjoyments of this life, and are afraid to end it, although it has more bitterness than pleasure."¹

For our lives
are full of
misery and
wretched-
ness.

Such we shall find to be really the case if we judge the matter, not from mere outward appearances, but according to the dictates of sound reason. For, what is our life on earth? After that irrevocable curse pronounced on all the children of Adam, what else does it bring us but misery and suffering? It is a constant state of imprisonment; a banishment from our fatherland; a hospital for poor sick people; a vale of tears and sorrow, etc. Such are the terms in which the holy doctors, the apostles, and God Himself in the holy Scripture speak of this earth. And we know by daily experience that what they say is true. If we enjoy some small pleasure now and then, are there not a hundred

¹ Hoc non mortis vitium est, sed nostræ infirmitatis, qui delectatione hujus vitæ capimur, et cursum hunc consummare trepidamus, in quo plus est amaritudinis tuam voluptatis.

annoyances that spoil that very pleasure and change it into bitterness? How long does laughter last without being disturbed by tears and sighs? Heat and cold, hunger and thirst, toil and labor, countless illnesses and diseases of the body, fear, anguish, disturbance, care and sorrow in the mind, constant dangers and temptations in the soul, treachery and unfaithfulness in friends, misfortunes in temporal affairs, troubles from masters, servants, neighbors, false brethren, one's own children, ourselves, and a thousand other trials and crosses; it is in these things that human life mostly consists. Go through the wide world, and find me out one of the most fortunate of men who can say with truth, as far as the comfort and pleasure of the body are concerned: I am always well off; I have everything I desire; I want nothing more. You will not find one to say that, unless some faithful servant of God, who in all circumstances and occurrences is satisfied with the divine will and continually rejoices in the Lord; otherwise, I say, you will not find even amongst the most fortunate one who is not unhappy in many respects, and I almost believe in what Seneca says, although he was a heathen: "No one would receive the gift of life if he knew what it is."¹ His meaning is, that if each one before entering on life could look out from his nothingness into the world and see how things will be with him in life, and how many sour morsels he will have to swallow, "no one would receive the gift of life."

How comes it, then, that we are so afraid of that which puts an end to such a miserable and wretched life? It is death alone that frees us from this misery; why should we be so frightened at it?—"Wo is me!" exclaims David, that great king, in his eagerness to be free from this life; "wo is me, that my sojourning is prolonged; . . . my soul hath been long a sojourner."² Ah, when shall my misery end? O wished-for moment in which I shall go hence and see my God! "My soul hath thirsted after the strong, living God: when shall I come and appear before the face of God?"³ But we, if the least sign of sickness threatens us with removal from this scene of misery, are more inclined to cry out: Wo is me, that my sojourning is shortened! Ah, must I die so soon? Must I now appear before the face of God? "Arise ye,

Hence we should wish for the end of our lives.

¹ Nemo vitam acciperet, si daretur scientibus.

² Heu mihi, quia incolatus meus prolongatus est! Multum incola fuit anima mea.—Ps. cxix. 5, 6.

³ Sitivit anima mea ad Deum fortem, vivum. Quando veniam? Et apparebo ante faciem Dei?—Ibid. xli. 3.

and depart," says the Lord to us by the Prophet Micheas, "for there is no rest here for you."¹ There is a better land of peace for you in eternity. Nevertheless we cannot think of leaving this world, of changing joy for sorrow, time for eternity, without sadness and anxiety.

And we act unreasonably in fearing it. Shown by a simile.

How comes that? It is the fault, not of death, I repeat with St. Ambrose, but of our own weakness. We love only what we see before our eyes and perceive with the other senses, no matter how worthless it is. We have only a weak desire for future eternal joys, because we have never seen them, and know but little about them. In this we resemble little children. Ask a small boy for a nut or a toy that he has, and tell him you will leave him a rich legacy for it; the boy will keep fast hold of his nut or plaything, and let you do what you please with your legacy, for he does not yet understand what that is worth. A peasant girl who has been brought up in her father's cabin, and has seen nothing of the world but the frolicking of the calves and lambs, heard nothing but the piping and whistling of the shepherds, admired nothing more than the verdure of the fields and meadows, would be with difficulty persuaded to go to a palace to live, and only with the utmost reluctance would she suffer herself to be brought away. You may describe to her as well as you can the magnificence and splendor of her future residence; the gorgeous clothes with which she shall be decked out; the costly food and drink that she shall daily enjoy; the numerous lackeys and attendants who shall be there to wait on her; the pleasures she shall find in hunting, in going to balls and theatres; she will listen open-mouthed, but will not know of what you are speaking. Her peasant's cot and sheep-fold, the red and blue ribbons with which she binds her hair, the songs of the shepherds, her innocent amusements in the fields and gardens, her milk, butter, and cheese, are all dearer to her than the splendor you have described. Why? Because the simple maiden does not know what that splendor is.

We should rather rejoice when death comes.

My dear brethren, where is our faith? our hope? our love of God? Nay, where is our reason, if we are so frightened at the idea of leaving this world by death? How can a workman be troubled when the time comes for him to receive his wages? What conqueror can be sad when the day of his triumph arrives? What traveller can be sorry when he is on the point of returning

¹ Surgite, et ite, quia non habetis hic requiem.—Mich. ii. 10.

to his fatherland? He who dies in the state of sanctifying grace goes to receive his reward, to be crowned with the laurel of victory; he is about to enter into that land to which alone he has been journeying; he loses a life, and receives a better one; he leaves a house to win a kingdom; he quits a transitory joy for eternal happiness. And we are afraid of this! Where is our common sense? I ask again. Our reason inspires us with a vehement desire for happiness; our experience teaches us that we cannot have true and lasting happiness in this world; our faith assures us that we can find it only in heaven. Here we live far more miserably than in a poor peasant's cot, if we compare our present state with heaven. Heaven is our true country, for which we are created; our departed brothers and sisters await us there to share in their eternal joys, and they are saints of God. The God of all happiness is our Father, and from the throne of His glory He calls out to us and invites us to His eternal kingdom to share in His own everlasting happiness. Should we not be rejoiced at this, and sigh and long for it with earnest desires? Now reason as well as faith teaches us that we cannot arrive at this desirable consummation, that we cannot possess God in His kingdom of joys, unless after death. "Man shall not see Me and live,"¹ said God to Moses; no one can enjoy the beatific vision as long as he lives on earth. Why then do we not long for and desire death? Nay, why do we shudder at the thought of it, as if it were the worst and most cruel monster on the face of the earth? How inconsistent our wishes and opinions in this matter! We desire eternal happiness, and are at the same time afraid to tread the only path that can bring us to it. Our daily prayer is: "Thy kingdom come," and yet we banish from our thoughts the only thing that can open to us the door of the kingdom. Either let us renounce our faith or else moderate our fears; either cease to long for heaven or to fear death which can fulfil our longing and bring us to heaven.

Yes, you say, if I only knew that death would be for me the entrance into heaven, I should be most willing to leave this earth, where I am not so very well off; I should joyfully welcome death; but who shall assure me of that? How many there are whom death sends from temporal misery into eternal suffering! And that is the very thing I fear most of all; that is what makes me tremble; for on my last moment depends a twofold eternity of

The entrance into eternity is not in itself terrible, but joyful for a good conscience.

¹ Non enim videbit me homo, et vivet.—Exod. xxxiii. 20.

happiness or misery, and I know not which shall fall to my lot. Is that all? Have you nothing else to be afraid of? Then I shall not have much trouble with you; your fear helps me to prove my proposition that there is nothing in death itself or its circumstances that is terrible, except a bad conscience. You acknowledge, then, that you would rejoice at the arrival of death if you were sure of going to heaven? Now if you doubt of that, why do you doubt? Have you lived hitherto according to the Christian law without committing any grievous sin? Or even if your sins have been countless, have you repented of and confessed them as well as you could? And if your conscience does not now reproach you with any mortal sin, a testimony, as I have shown elsewhere, that is humanly speaking infallible as to your being in the state of grace, how can you doubt about going to heaven if you die with such a conscience? Where are your hope and faith in God? Can He become a liar, a traitor? Can He break His promise? Has He not pledged His infallible word that heaven is opened to all who die in the state of sanctifying grace? If you end a pious life by death, your salvation is as certain as that God is in heaven. Therefore if you have nothing else to object, give up that fear and rejoice at the thought of death.

It is only a bad conscience that makes this entrance terrible.

But if you have lived a wicked life, in the state of sin; if after due consideration your conscience warns you that you have a mortal sin on your soul, or if you are minded to commit one; then indeed you have good reason to doubt as to the nature of your death. Fear! Fear and tremble lest it should be for you the beginning of an unhappy eternity! "You may now see clearly," says St. Chrysostom, "that it is this one thing alone, a bad conscience, that makes the circumstances of death bitter."¹ And hence I repeat that the conclusion is inevitable: death in itself is not terrible, nor is the separation from the world fearful, nor is the entry into eternity a cause of terror. O accursed sin and sinful conscience! you and you alone are the bitter wormwood, the intolerable, infernal poison that makes death so terrible and so grisly!

Exhortation to sinners to amend.

Truly it is a bitter and terrible thing to die in sin! to die at enmity with God! to die with a conscience which cries out to the poor soul: you are a child of destruction! to die without comfort from creatures, who have to be abandoned with all

¹ *Vides non esse mortem, quæ dolorem affert, sed malam conscientiam.*

worldly joys and goods forever! to die without mercy from God, who awaits the departing soul to pronounce on it the sentence of His wrath! to die without receiving help from Mary our Mother, in whose intercession the impenitent sinner has no share! to die without help from the angels, who now abandon the soul! to die without pity from the saints, who accuse it before the judgment-seat of God! to die in the clutches of demons, who drag the soul away with them! to die without any claim to heaven, which there is no hope of ever seeing! to die and at once to go down to hell and burn there forever! O sinner! are you afraid of such a death? Ah, good reason you have to fear it! And why do you not change your wicked life, which is the only thing that can cause you to die such a death? It is a wonderful thing, exclaims St. Augustine; "you fear to die a bad death, but not to live a bad life."¹ Let this fear of death at least impel you to repent of your sins and to amend your evil ways. And let this fear be always your companion, especially during this season of Shrove-tide, that it may restrain you within the bounds of the divine law, and that you may do nothing against your conscience.

But for you, pious Christians, I have no message but the joyful one of the Apostle: "That you be not sorrowful, even as others, who have no hope."² Rejoice in and on account of your pious lives, which take all the bitterness out of death and convert it into sweetness. Rejoice in Lent as well as in Shrove-tide. Rejoice in the Lord whom you serve, whom you love with your whole hearts, and who loves you! Rejoice in your good conscience, which gives testimony that you are children of God! Rejoice in death too, for it will put an end to all your trials, and be for you the beginning of all imaginable joys. Infallibly true are the words of St. Bernard: "A good conscience shall be safe when the body dies; safe when the soul appears before God."³ Be still then in future, you philosophers! Do not calumniate death by your foolish saying: death is of all terrible things the most terrible! It may be terrible to them who make it so by their bad lives. But as long as I keep in the friendship of God, vain is the fear I have had of death hitherto. My only care in future shall be to keep my conscience pure, to serve God faithfully; and then, O death! thou shalt become dear and desirable

Consolation for the just, and conclusion always to keep the conscience pure.

¹ *Mori male times, et vivere male non times.*

² *Ut non contristemini, sicut et ceteri qui spem non habent.*—I. Thess. iv. 12.

³ *Bona conscientia secunda erit, cum corpus morietur; secunda cum anima coram Deo presentabitur.*

to me. I will serve God and will await thee at any moment with joy; and when thou comest to call me away, I shall say, trusting in God and with joyful heart, if I cannot say it with the lips: "Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord! according to Thy word in peace, because my eyes have seen Thy salvation." Amen.

On the Comfort of a Good Conscience during Life, see several sermons in the foregoing fourth part.

FIFTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE JOYFUL DEATH OF THE JUST.

Subject.

It is a great consolation for the dying just man to think: first, I have accumulated good works and merits for heaven; secondly, the merits I have thus acquired are now in safety, and I am not in danger of losing them.—*Preached on the feast of St. Joseph.*

Text.

Beatus ille servus, quem, cum venerit dominus, invenerit ita facientem.—Luke xii. 43.

"Blessed is that servant whom, when his lord shall come, he shall find so doing."

Introduction.

"Blessed is that servant whom his lord shall find so doing." And what has the servant done? He was placed as steward over the household of his lord, as we learn from the preceding verse: "Who thinkest thou is the faithful and wise steward, whom his lord setteth over his family?" Oh, blessed is that servant, when his lord shall come, after he has faithfully fulfilled his duties, to demand an account from him! My dear brethren, we need not here ask the question: "Who thinkest thou is the faithful and wise steward?" for this day reminds us of him that we may honor him—namely, St. Joseph. He it is whom the Lord has set over His family, and over the holiest and most amiable family that the world ever saw; for to his care were entrusted Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, and Mary,

the immaculate Mother of that Son. It is not necessary to dilate on the fidelity and prudence with which Joseph fulfilled the duties of steward; with what fatherly care he looked after the Child and His Mother on the journey to Bethlehem; how he took the Child in his arms and cared for Him in the poor crib; how he brought Him by night into the pagan land of Egypt to save Him from the cruelty of Herod; with what sorrow he afterwards sought for the Child in Jerusalem; and how he supported the Holy Family by his labor in Nazareth. "Blessed is that servant whom, when his lord shall come, he shall find so doing." Oh, truly happy is that servant at the end of his life, when the Lord shall come to call him! And who could have had a more happy or joyful death than St. Joseph, who breathed forth his blessed soul in the hands of Jesus and Mary? There is no one amongst us, my dear brethren, who does not wish and desire that when the Lord comes to take him away by death he may have a holy and a happy death. Now we can and shall have such a death if we are only faithful servants and stewards during life, and perform many good works and acquire many merits. And it is this faithful service rendered to God, and the merits we have accumulated, that will make our death happy and joyful, as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

It is a great comfort for the dying just man to think: I have laid up a store of good works and merits in heaven. Such shall be the first point. It is a great comfort for the dying just man to think: the merits I have acquired are now in safety, and I shall not be in danger of losing any of them; the second point. Let us live piously, that we may have that consolation; such shall be the conclusion.

O holy St. Joseph! obtain for us from the Divine Child and thy most chaste Spouse Mary the grace to do this, that we, too, may have a happy death. Help us herein you, too, holy guardian angels.

To represent to myself the joy which the dying just man feels at the thought of the merits he has gained, I imagine that I see a merchant who has been away in a foreign land for a whole month, has finished his business, and after much trouble, discomfort, and annoyance, has at last reached his home in the

The trader rejoices when contemplating his profits.

evening. Having rested a while, he opens his books, examines the packages of goods he has brought with him, and compares his purchases with his sales. What joy for him to see the great profit he has made in a short time! With what eager pleasure he counts the money he has made! If his wife asks him: how did things go with you while you were away? See, he will answer, what a lot of money I have brought back. Ah, she replies, but I am afraid you must have plagued and worried yourself considerably. Oh, that matters not, is his answer; only look at what I have made. But eat something, at all events, or else the food will grow cold. Let it grow cold! The treasure he has before him is sweeter to him than food or drink, and makes him forget all the toil and labor he has gone through.

The just man amasses great treasures during his life.

A very incomplete picture, my dear brethren, of that joy which the soul of the just man shall feel in its last moments, when its thoughts revert to the past. What else are we but merchants, who are sent into the world to work diligently to perform good works and accumulate merits for heaven? Our Lord uses almost the same comparison when giving a picture of our life in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke, where He speaks of Himself in the person of a lord who gives money to his servants and says to them: "Trade till I come,"¹ then I shall require the capital back with interest. How confidently those two servants went to their lord when the time came for them to give in their account: "Lord, thou didst deliver to me five talents, behold I have gained other five over and above."² And the other came in an equal state of exultation: "Lord, thou deliverdst two talents to me: behold, I have gained other two."³ But the worthless servant stood there covered with shame and confusion, because he had hidden his talent in the ground instead of using it.

So that he has good reason to rejoice at the hour of death.

If, then, there is any comfort or joy to be hoped for in death—and the holy Scripture infallibly assures us that such is the case with the death of the just, which it calls precious: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints;"⁴ a blessed death: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."⁵ "With him

¹ *Negotiamini dum venio.*—Luke xix. 13.

² *Domine, quinque talenta tradidisti mihi, ecce alia quinque superlucratum sum.*—Matt. xxv. 20.

³ *Domine, duo talenta tradidisti mihi, ecce alia duo lucratum sum.*—Ibid. xxv. 22.

⁴ *Pretiosa in conspectu Domini mors sanctorum ejus.*—Ps. cxv. 15.

⁵ *Beati mortui qui in Domino moriuntur.*—Apoc. xiv. 13.

that feareth the Lord it shall go well in the latter end, and in the day of his death he shall be blessed"¹—then great indeed must be the joy of the soul when it sees that the evening of life is approaching, when it beholds the treasure of merits and good works it has amassed. Origen, speaking of the words of the Psalmist, "He will bring forth thy justice as the light,"² uses these words by way of consolation to the dying just man: "God shall bring forth into the light your justice, even that which you have done in secret, and He will show that you are just."³

You shall see all the years, and in the years so many months, weeks, days, hours, and moments that you have spent in the service of God, in the state of sanctifying grace, from which grace even the most trivial and apparently worthless of your actions, provided they were done with a good intention, acquired such great worth and value that for each one of them you are justly entitled to an eternity of glory and happiness. You will count all the Masses, confessions, Communions you have offered to God, partly through obedience to the law, partly of your own free will; all the sermons you have heard through a desire to understand better and do with more zeal the will of God; the frequent visits you have paid the churches, disregarding heat and cold, rain and wind, in order to perform your devotions and adore your God; the usual morning and evening prayers, the rosaries and litanies, the examinations of conscience, which you had the holy habit of making every evening on your knees with all the members of your household; countless acts of virtue, of faith, hope, charity, Christian mercy, patience, and humility that you have made during your life; in a word, each and every good work shall come forward like a blaze of light, and say for your consolation: "we are your works." Do you know me? I am that grief and sorrow with which you repented of your sins on that occasion. I am that victory you gained over yourself when you conquered your feeling of false shame and disclosed the hidden wounds of your soul in confession. I am that act of self-denial and mortification by which you restrained your eyes from looking at curious or dangerous objects; closed your ears, not to hear unlawful, unchaste, or uncharitable discourse; kept

When he thinks of all his good works.

¹ *Timent Dominum bene erit in extremis, et in die defunctionis suæ benedicetur.*—*Ecclesi.* i. 13.

² *Educet quasi lumen justitiam tuam.*—*Ps.* xxxvi. 6.

³ *Tuam justitiam, quam fecisti in abscondito, hanc producet quasi lumen Deus, et ostendet te justum.*

your tongue in check lest you should injure your neighbor's good name; tamed your body by mortification and fasting so as to keep it in continence and temperance. I am that fortitude with which you opposed those temptations and allurements in this or that dangerous occasion, so as not to allow any man or any worldly custom to make you unfaithful to God. I am that meekness with which you heard so silently that sarcastic laugh, those biting remarks, those insulting words, pardoned your enemies and opponents, and gave up all idea of revenge for God's sake. I am that Christian patience with which you so constantly bore so many trials, crosses, misfortunes, sufferings, and so much pain and poverty. I am that resignation with which you always submitted so completely in all circumstances to the will of God. We are your works. Rejoice at us now, and bless the time in which we were accomplished!

This thought fills him with unspeakable comfort.

These are the treasures that a good conscience shall show the dying man and lay before him as a provision for his journey. "As they that dig for a treasure: and they rejoice exceedingly when they have found the grave,"¹ and when the time of their departure approaches. Truly it is a joyful thing for a soul to bring such treasures to the Lord when the account is to be rendered, and like the faithful servant to be able to say: "Lord, Thou didst deliver to me five talents;" namely, a reasoning soul with its three powers, a sensitive body with its five senses, temporal goods to support my life, supernatural grace to keep me from evil and help me to do good. Behold I have not allowed those gifts to lie idle; so much have I gained with them! Sometimes, it is true, I might have used them better and more profitably; oftentimes, I must confess, I have committed sins and faults; but eternal thanks to Thee! as far as I know I have repented of and washed them away by sincere sorrow; I hate and detest them with my whole heart, and because Thou hast given me such a living proof of Thy mercy I will praise and bless Thee all the more for all eternity. What shall I now say of that exceeding great consolation which the dying man shall experience when he remembers all the poor and needy he has so often helped out of his own pocket through Christian charity; the hungry people he has fed; the sick he has visited; the sorrowful he has comforted by help and counsel; the souls in purgatory whose

¹ Quasi effodientes thesaurum; gaudentque vehementer cum invenerint sepulchrum.—Job iii. 21, 22.

pains he has alleviated and taken away altogether by his prayers and works of devotion? "Never have I found," says St. Jerome, "that he has died an unhappy death who readily performed works of charity and mercy." What joy and comfort it will be for him to remember Mary, the Mother of salvation, to whom with child-like confidence he has entrusted his life and the end of his life; St. Joseph, the Patron of the dying, to whom he had a special devotion; his holy guardian angel and other patrons, who will then take their place at his side to accompany him into heaven?

Oh, joyful and consoling the death of the just man who dies with a good conscience! "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord," cries out St. John in his Apocalypse. And why are they blessed? "For their works follow them,"¹ their virtuous works accompany them into eternity. During their lives they often went sorrowing and weeping to sow their seed with toil and labor: "Going they went and wept, casting their seeds," says the Psalmist. "But coming they shall come with joyfulness, carrying their sheaves."² This was the consolation that so cheered pious souls on their death-bed, when they brought to mind how they had served God. Hear what St. Paul says, although he was for a long time a persecutor. He writes to his disciple Timothy: "For I am even now ready to be sacrificed, and the time of my dissolution is at hand." I feel my strength going, my hour is near and I shall soon reach the end; yet I await it without fear, and with joy and desire. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course." I have always sought to work for the glory of God; "I have kept the faith;" I have maintained the fidelity I promised to Christ, when I did penance for my former sins; therefore all I have now to do is to await the reward and recompense of my merits: "As to the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just Judge, will render to me in that day."³

Hence the death of the just is joyous, and pious servants of God longed for it.

With the same consolation St. Hilarion addressed his departing soul: "Go forth, my soul; thou hast served Christ for nearly seventy years, and dost thou now fear death?" When the holy

And they rejoiced at the hour of death on ac-

¹ Opera enim illorum sequuntur illos.—Apoc. xiv. 13.

² Euntes ibant et flebant, mittentes semina sua; venientes autem venient cum exultatione, portantes manipulos suos.—Ps. cxv. 6, 7.

³ Ego enim jam delibor, et tempus resolutionis meae instat. Bonum certamen certavi, cursum consummavi, fidem servavi. In reliquo reposita est mihi corona justitiae, quam reddet mihi Dominus in illa die justus iudex.—II. Tim. iv. 6, 7, 8.

count of
their good
works. .
Shown by
examples.

Bishop Martin saw his death-bed surrounded by demons who tried to frighten and tempt him, he comforted himself with the thought of the faithful service he had rendered to God. "Why art thou here? bloodthirsty beast," he said with the utmost confidence; "thou shalt not find anything in me that deserves damnation," and with these words he breathed forth his soul. A certain young man who was dying, wishing to comfort his mother, who was weeping at his bedside, said to her in these joyful words: "Bless God, O mother, through whose grace I have preserved my innocence, so that I die cheerfully."¹ Justus Lipsius, being asked what he thought would be a comfort to him on his death-bed, replied: "It will comfort me to think that I have been a sodalist of the great Virgin Mary, and that I have tried to be her true servant." The holy youth John Berchmans, of our Society, in his last moments used to embrace and kiss with the utmost tenderness the crucifix, rosary, and book of the rules, and he said with cheerful countenance to the bystanders: "These three things are most dear to me, and I willingly die with them."² Another religious named Pambo said when dying: "I joyfully leave this life, because I do not remember having said a word of which I had to repent."³ "O happy hours!" cried out a dying nun; "O happy hours that I consecrated to my God!"⁴ St. Jerome writes of the happy death of St. Paula, at which he had the good fortune of being present. This pious lady was attacked by a grievous illness, or rather she found in that illness what she was long wishing for, namely, a means of leaving this world, and of being perfectly united with the God whom she loved so fervently. She knew from the increasing coldness of her limbs and her decreasing strength that death was very near, and as if she were on the point of leaving a foreign land to visit a well-beloved friend, she often repeated with her dying voice the words of the psalm: "I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of Thy house and the place where Thy glory dwelleth."⁵ "How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts: my soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord."⁶ Thus she kept on giving expression in those loving words to her consolation and holy desires; nor

¹ Deum lauda, O mater, cujus beneficio innocentiam conservavi; et hinc lætus morior.

² Hæc tria mihi sunt charissima; cum his libenter morior.

³ Lætus ex hac vita abeo, quia nullum mihi verbum excidisse scio, cujus me poeniteat.

⁴ Felices horæ quas Deo meo consecravi!

⁵ Domine, dilexi decorem domus tuæ, et locum habitationis gloriæ tuæ.—Ps. xxv. 8.

⁶ Quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Domine virtutem! Concupiscit, et deficit anima mea in atria Domini.—Ibid. lxxxiii. 2, 3.

would she speak or answer anything but these or similar words. St. Jerome asked her why she refused to speak; was there perhaps something that troubled her? And she replied that she had not the least trouble, but rather the greatest repose and an almost heavenly consolation. At last she heard the beloved voice of her celestial Bridegroom calling to her: "Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come."¹ "I believe," answered Paula, "to see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living,"² and therewith she breathed forth her happy soul. There are countless similar examples in the Lives of the Saints. "O happy conscience," exclaims St. Jerome, "which in the time of affliction remembers its good works!"³ And thrice happy those who die, not on a magnificent bed of state, and after having left great legacies behind them, but who die in the Lord with a good conscience and with a treasure of merits that they bring with them into heaven.

Ah, how unlike to this and how sad will be the wicked when they think of the past in their dying hour! If ever the worm of conscience gnaws and disquiets the heart of man, it will then whet its teeth to inflict a most intolerable torture on the already uneasy and troubled soul, and will keep before it constantly the sins it has committed and not repented of. While we are still in the vigor of life our numerous and unruly desires, as we have seen before, make us look on even grievous sins as mere bagatelles; the conscience becomes seared by the frequency and habit of sin, so that like a chained dog it can neither bite nor assert itself; the sins, too, creep away and hide themselves to such an extent that sometimes the sinner has a difficulty in finding them when he desires to confess them; they fly out of his memory so that he cannot easily recall them. St. Chrysologus assigns a reason for this; he who tries to remember his sins in order to confess them seeks for them to kill them; the devotion of the penitent is a sharp knife that gives the death wound to vice,⁴ and therefore they hide so as not to be caught; but when the man goes on sinning to the end, and is about to leave this world, then all his sins creep out of their hiding-places, and seek for the sinner in order to kill him; then they show themselves to him in all their deformity, and call out in a terrible voice: we are your

On the other hand, the death of the wicked is rendered terrible by the thought of their sins.

¹ Surge, propera, amica mea, columba mea, formosa mea et veni.—Cant. ii. 10.

² Credo videre bona Domini in terra viventium.—Ps. xxvi. 13.

³ O felix conscientia, quæ tempore afflictionis bonorum operum recordatur!

⁴ Interfectoria peccatorum pletas.

works! I am the injustice that you were guilty of on that occasion, in that usury, and have not yet made restitution for! I am that bitter hate, that revenge, that you have cherished against your neighbor. I am that impurity, that adultery, that shameful pleasure that you so often committed in act, thought, and desire! I am that sinful amusement that you so often indulged in in company. I am the sins that you caused others to commit by your bad example. I am the hidden filth that you were ashamed to disclose in confession! We are your works! Ah, wretched conscience, will the sinner then say, leave me in peace! No; never will the sound of my voice be absent from your ears; I have already often enough exhorted you and given you salutary admonitions; but you have never hearkened to me; now it is my turn; you must die; but I shall never die. "Their worm dieth not."¹ I will follow you even to hell, and there you will find in me an eternal enemy, who will torture you worse than the flames of that prison even! See, O wicked man! the treasure you now heap up for yourself by your sins, and lay aside for your dying hour, as the Apostle says: "According to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath."² But I will no longer interrupt my description of the consolation of the just. Place your conscience in good order at once; go back to that Heart whose yoke is sweet and whose burden is light, if you wish to share in the joy of the just at the end and to be able to say to yourself: I have collected treasures of repentance and good works for heaven, and what is the best of all, the treasures I have amassed I now possess in full security without any fear or danger of ever losing them. Such is briefly the

Second Part.

He rejoices
who pos-
sesses his
gains in
security.

The greater a treasure the more intense the pain and sorrow caused by its loss. Ah, cries many a one who has been attacked by robbers and plundered; ah, they have taken away the most valuable thing I had! If they had only left me that! And the greater a treasure is the more uneasiness does one experience who is always in danger of losing it; thus he who carries a large sum of money on a road beset by thieves hardly dares to put one

¹ Vermis eorum non moritur.—Mark ix. 43.

² Secundum autem duritiam tuam, et impenitens cor, thesaurizas tibi iram in die iræ.—Rom. ii. 5.

foot before the other for fear, and if a dry leaf but falls from a tree he cries out that he is undone; that the robbers are upon him; nor does he feel at ease until he has brought his treasure home safely and put it beyond the reach of accident. Then, and then only, can he enjoy it in peace.

O mortal, who are now so careless, living on in the state of sin with a bad conscience! how will it be with you one day? You are now toiling for treasure on earth; perhaps you have acquired it already; but where? Where the moths shall eat it away, or thieves steal it from you? How long will you retain possession of it? Let me ask you in the words of the Gospel to the rich man: "They require thy soul of thee: and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"¹ You are now amassing gold and silver; whose will they be when you die? "They shall leave their riches to strangers,"² is the answer of the Psalmist, "and their sepulchres shall be their houses forever."³ You now try to make a great name for yourself before men: "They have called their lands by their names;"⁴ but when you die, "whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" What will become of your treasure? "When he shall die, he shall take nothing away: nor shall his glory descend with him."⁵ No matter how great he is in the sight of men, he will be unknown in darkness after death: "He shall never see light."⁶ You now seek bodily comforts, and the pleasures and delights of sense; even if you have enjoyed them in superfluity, "whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" What will become of all your joys when you die? "Under thee shall the moth be strewed, and worms shall be thy covering."⁷ You seek to curry favor with some rich man; of what use will that be to you on your death-bed? "The rich man when he shall sleep shall take away nothing with him: he shall open his eyes, and find nothing."⁸ All his treasures must remain behind: "Poverty like water shall take hold on him. . . A burning wind shall take him up and carry him away, and as a whirl-wind shall snatch him from

The sinner loses by death all he formerly possessed.

¹ Anímmam tuam repetunt a te; quæ autem parasti, cujus erunt?—Luke xii. 20.

² Relinquent alienis divitias suas.—Ps. xlviii. 11.

³ Et sepulcra eorum domus illorum in æternum.—Ibid. 12.

⁴ Vocaverunt nomina sua in terris suis.—Ibid.

⁵ Cum interierit, non sumet omnia, neque descendet cum eo gloria ejus.—Ibid. 18.

⁶ In æternum non videbit lumen.—Ibid. 20.

⁷ Subter te sternetur tinea, et operimentum tuum erunt vermes.—Is. xiv. 11.

⁸ Dives, cum dormierit, nihil secum auferet; aperiet oculos suos, et nihil inveniet.—Job xxvii. 19.

his place;"¹ all his honors, goods, and wealth shall be violently taken from him. Oh, if you would now use only a little care to amass a treasure of good works, how much more likely would you not be to rejoice in your last hour! But even the good works you do now and then; whose shall they be? What will become of them if you die unrepentant, in the state of sin, with a bad conscience? For they will be of no good to you in eternity. "If the just man turn himself away from his justice, and do iniquity," such is the threat of the Lord by the Prophet Ezechiel, "all his justices, which he had done, shall not be remembered: in the prevarication, by which he hath prevaricated, and in his sin, which he hath committed, in them he shall die."² The only treasure you can take with you is sin, but it will be at the same time the source of your greatest unhappiness, as St. Augustine says: "The goods he has collected he shall lose; but he shall bring his sins with him;"³ the gold for which you sinned you must leave behind, but the sin you shall take with you; you sinned for a farm, you shall lose the farm; you sinned for a woman, you shall lose the woman, but you shall take your sin with you;⁴ and what is worse, you shall have neither time nor hope of getting rid of your burden, or of ever recovering what you have lost.

The just man at the end of his life finds everything he has gained in security.

Good and just Christians! you too will one day hear the words: "This night," this day, this hour, "do they require thy soul of thee;" thou must leave the world; "and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" To whom will belong all that you have amassed? Rejoice and be glad! Not an iota of them shall be taken from you; the whole treasure of good works and merits that you are now collecting shall, if you only persevere and die with a good conscience, all belong to you alone and shall be yours for eternity. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." Why? "For their works follow them." I go from this world, you will then think to your great consolation, poor and naked, not taking with me the least earthly thing; but what is that to

¹ Apprehendet eum quasi aqua inopia. Tolle eum ventus urens, et auferet, et velut turbo rapiet eum de loco suo.—Job xxvii. 20, 21.

² Si autem averterit se justus a justitia sua, et fecerit iniquitatem; omnes justitiæ ejus, quas fecerat, non recordabuntur; in prævaricatione qua prævaricatus est, et in peccato suo quod peccavit, in ipsis morietur.—Ezech. xviii. 24.

³ Quæ comparavit bona, hæc dimittit; sed secum peccata portat.

⁴ Pecunia tua propter quam peccasti, dimittenda est; sed peccatum tuum tecum portas; propter villam peccasti; villam dimittes; propter mulierem peccasti; mulierem dimittes; sed peccatum tuum tecum portas.

me? Was I not poor and naked when I came into the world? Yet I am not destitute; I am bringing something very good with me; namely, my profit, the merits I have gained during my life; my good conscience comes with me; I have a document in my hand which entitles me to an eternal inheritance. And, moreover, what I was never sure of before and what was always wanting to make my joy complete, I am now about to place my treasure in perfect safety, without fear or danger of ever losing it.

As long as I lived I was like the soldier on the battle-field, who has to defend himself against the assaults of his enemy, and knows not how he will come out of the affray. Now I see the enemies of my soul take to flight on all sides; now the day is mine, and I have only to receive the crown of victory. As long as I have lived and served my God I was like a well-laden ship, sailing on with a fair wind, but still in a dangerous sea, having often to contend with the tossing waves and howling storms; now I am about to enter the haven of security. A philosopher was once asked what was the safest kind of ship, a small or a large one, a ship of war or a merchant vessel, a racing ship or a ship of burden. "The safest of all," he answered, "is the one that lies uninjured in harbor." His meaning was that no ship, no matter of what kind, could be safe on the high seas; for it is always in danger of striking a rock, or running on a sand-bank, or foundering in a gale. So it is with us, my dear brethren. While we are on this earth we embark like traders with our merchandise on a stormy and dangerous sea; there are temptations, assaults, thieves and robbers without number that seek nothing but to rob us of our innocence and holiness. "We have to fight with avarice, with lust, with anger, with ambition,"¹ says St. Cyprian. The devil with his satellites lies in wait for us like a cruel pirate, to lead us into sin, and drag us down with him into hell. No matter how holy and pious we may be, if we once consent to a mortal sin, all our treasure, all our holiness is gone; nor are we certain of escaping that danger until we land on the shore of eternity, that is, until the hour of our death. St. Ambrose, speaking of those words of St. Paul, "To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain,"² says: "It is a gain to be beyond the danger of sinning any more."³ This gain is the lot of the just man when he is at the point of death; for death changes all fear into secur-

To his great
joy.
Shown by
smiles.

¹ Cum avaritia nobis cum impudicitia, cum ira, cum ambitione congressio est.

² Mihi enim vivere Christus est, et mori lucrum.—Philipp. 1. 21,

³ Lucrum est evasisse incrementa peccati.

ity; and therefore such a dying man will think with exultation: O my God! in how many dangers of sin have I not been! how often might I not have lost heaven! Eternal thanks to Thee that Thou hast saved me by Thy grace! Now all danger is happily over; my voyage is ended; I should indeed be a fool if I were now to turn back when in sight of the harbor and leave my God! No; I will rather run with a well-laden ship into the haven of eternity.

Exhortation and conclusion for the just to serve God zealously, that they may have a happy death.

O happy and joyful death of the just man! I conclude in the words of St. Bernard: "The death of the just is happy on account of its peacefulness; but it is best of all on account of its security."¹ This should and must encourage us, my dear brethren, to labor diligently to avoid all sin, to serve God zealously, to bear patiently all difficulties, annoyances, and troubles of life, and to heap up rich treasures of good works while we still have time. Let the wicked now ridicule and laugh at us, and vaunt and boast, falsely imagining that the joys and happiness of life are theirs alone, while nothing but weeping, mourning, and melancholy falls to the lot of the servants of God; we can give them the same answer that the ants gave the grasshopper in the fable. A swarm of ants were running about in the field during the summer, busily engaged in collecting the scattered grains of corn and bringing them to their store. The grasshopper looked on for a time; "O you poor fools," he said at last, "why do you plague yourselves the whole day long? Look at me and see what a pleasant life I have; all I have to do is to whistle, sing, and hop from one blade of grass to the other." "That is all very fine," said one of the old ants; "hop and sing while you may; the spring and summer will not last always; the winter is coming on, and then we shall have in our stores of corn sufficient food to support us, while you, who have gathered nothing during the summer, must then die of hunger." Such, too, may be the thought of the pious Christian: laugh now ye wicked, and indulge your passions! it will not be always summer with you; the autumn must come; the day must decline, life must end: "The night cometh when no man can work."² Then you will begin to tremble with fear, and I shall laugh with joy; your conscience will reproach you with your sins; you will think with despair: alas! how much evil I have done! while mine will represent to

¹ *Bona mors justī propter requiem; optima propter securitatem.*

² *Venit nox, quando nemo potest operari.—John ix. 4.*

me my good works, and I shall be able to say with confidence: Oh, God be praised! how much good I have done! Your riches and pleasures shall abandon you; mine shall accompany me to heaven, where I shall enjoy them forever. Therefore I shall be steadfast in my resolution; I shall now labor to purify my conscience and keep it always free from sin, and serve God with cheerful heart during my life, that I may die with a cheerful, quiet heart. Amen.

Another introduction to the same sermon for Ash Wednesday.

Text.

Thesaurizate vobis thesauros in cælo.—Matt. vi. 20.

“Lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven.”

Introduction.

Human life consists in care, labor, trouble, and work. But how much care is useless? how much labor in vain? how much work utterly unprofitable, that brings in nothing or next to nothing? This is what Our Lord complains of in to-day’s Gospel. Many, He says, fast and macerate their bodies; but why? To gain an empty name before men. Be not so foolish! “When you fast, be not as the hypocrites, sad; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward,”¹ and they need not expect anything from Me. Many busy themselves amassing wealth and riches; but what kind of riches? Those that can be consumed by moths and stolen by thieves. Be not so foolish! “Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth: where the rust and moth consume, and where thieves break through and steal;” employ your labor to more profit: “but lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven: where neither the rust nor moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.”² Try to gain treasures that will be useful to you in eternal life, so that you may always rejoice in the possession of them. This, my dear brethren, is the true consolation of the just Christian in this life, to know that his conscience gives testimony that he is amassing rich treasures of good works and on his death-bed to think back, when his conscience will remind him that he can enjoy those

¹ Cum autem jejunatis, nolite fieri sicut hypocritæ, tristes; exterminant enim facies suas, ut apparent hominibus jejunantes. Amen dico vobis, quia receperunt mercedem suam.—Matt. vi. 16.

² Nolite thesaurizare vobis thesauros in terra, ubi ærugo et tinea demolitur, et ubi fures effodiunt et furantur. Thesaurizate autem vobis thesauros in cælo, ubi neque ærugo neque tinea demolitur, et ubi fures non effodiunt, nec furantur.—Ibid. 19, 20.

treasures in heaven without the least fear of ever losing them. This thought not only takes away all fear from death, but makes it sweet and joyful, as I shall now prove.—*Continues as above.*

SIXTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE HAPPY END OF OUR YEARS.

Subject.

A wish for a happy end of our years. Firstly; what this wish means. Secondly; how it is to be realized by each one according to his state in life.—*Preached on the Sunday in the Octave of the Nativity.*

Text.

Ubi venit plenitudo temporis.—Gal. iv. 4.

“When the fulness of the time was come.”

Introduction.

These words have been used and will be used as long as the world lasts of all men: “When the fulness of the time has come.” Thus with the child the fulness of time may come in two or three years; that is the end of its years. The fulness of time for the youth or maiden may be in ten or twenty years, for the man or woman in thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty years; then comes the end of their years. The same words, my dear brethren, shall one day be used of us too; but we cannot say how many years must elapse till then. To-day all of us here present, when the fulness of the time was come, as the forty-third year of the century came to an end and the forty-fourth was about to begin, we all assembled in the church at Treves to hear a sermon; whether we shall be able to say that, when this year that is so near its end shall have fully run its course, we know not. Perhaps then or sooner the end of our years may have come for some of us. Let it be as God has decreed in His inscrutable designs. Happy shall we be if the end of our years is a happy one. And that is what I wish myself, you, and every one from my heart at the end of this year. Namely, I do not

wish in the common mode of expression, a happy end of the present year and beginning of next; but I wish for you and myself:

Plan of Discourse.

A happy end of our years. In the first part I shall explain what this means. That it can and should be realized by every one, and how that is to be done, I shall show in the second part.

Give us Thy grace to this end, O Infant Saviour; we beg it of Thee through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and our holy guardian angels.

But, you will think, what a sad and melancholy wish for the year! Friends generally wish one another many years of life and happiness on this day; but you talk of the end of our years. Do you then wish us to die? Is it your desire to make an end of our lives? That is a thing that most men cannot think of without fear and trembling; a thing that is looked on generally in the world as the most terrible of all.¹ For then we must separate from all men, leave all that we loved in the world, and thus, stripped of everything, go into the unknown land of a long eternity. Truly your wish is a melancholy one, and you had better have said nothing about it. Yet, my dear brethren, I repeat it, and wish you and myself from my heart a happy end of our years. Mark the terms I use. I wish to each one the end of his years, but a happy end; I wish you death, but a happy death, and one that shall not come until the years of life determined for each one by the all-wise providence of God shall be accomplished; then I wish you a just, holy, and happy end of your life, that your death may be precious in the sight of God and of His saints and the elect in heaven.

The object of this wish is a happy death.

Could I desire anything better for you than this? Is there anything in the world more important for us than a good and happy end to our lives? For what else do we live and spend our years in this world than that we may die well and happily? What should be the object of our greatest, nay, only care, if not to gain heaven by a happy death, and there rejoice with God and the elect for all eternity?

No one can wish us anything better.

It is true that at the end we must leave all things; but is that so very terrible? What is the value of all that trumpery if we

For it matters little to lose this

¹ *Terribilium omnium terribilissimum mors.*

life. Shown
by similes.

receive eternal goods instead? The loss of a penny is a grievous one for a poor workman who has a wife and children to feed, and to rob him even of that small amount is as much as to condemn him to fast for the whole day; yet if the good man was sure of gaining two ducats for the penny, would he much regret the loss of it, or be very unwilling to pardon the thief who stole it from him? No, indeed! he would be only too glad to suffer such a loss every day on similar conditions. Take from your servant's hand his bit of bread and cheese, and give him instead a piece of roast meat and a bottle of wine; he will thank you most heartily for your seeming rudeness in snatching the food out of his hand. We readily suffer an old coat to be torn if we hope to get a new one in place of it. Is not that so? Now, my dear brethren, what is it that we must leave behind us on earth, when we come to the end of life? The most precious thing of all that death takes from us is life, and that is very short, uncertain, and inconstant. St. James compares it to a vapor that is seen for a time and suddenly disappears: "For what is your life? It is a vapor which appeareth for a little while, and afterwards shall vanish away."¹ It is a life of misery and suffering, as the Prophet Job complains: "Man born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries."² But we need not dwell longer on this truth, which we know well enough already from experience.

And still
less to lose
worldly
goods.

And what else is taken from us by death? He who dies has been either a poor or a rich man. If he has been poor, he leaves nothing he need trouble about. He who has nothing can lose nothing. Has he been rich? Then, though his wealth was enormous and like Solomon he had all the pleasures of the world, he has to bid good-bye to everything; but what is that to him if he has lived piously and has a happy end? What is all he has left compared to what will be given to him in eternity? Ah, the just man will think on his death-bed when he reflects on the surpassing great reward that awaits him, and when he almost grasps it at the end of his life: Ah, if death means nothing more than leaving those miserable things in order to go to God in heaven, why should I hesitate about dying? Come, death, and strip me bare. Formerly I thought temporal goods worth a

¹ Quæ est enim vita vestra? Vapor est ad modicum parens, et deinceps exterminabitur.—James iv. 15.

² Homo, natus de muliere, brevi vivens tempore, repletur multis miseriis.—Job xiv. 1.

great deal; it seemed to me a hard thing to have to leave parents, children, husband, wife, dear friends, money, house and home, and the whole world; now I see that all this is easy enough; I did not know it then as I do now.

I have been like a little child. Before a child comes to the use of reason, it generally thinks more of its nurse than of its parents. If you ask it whom it likes best, it will indeed point to its father or mother, because it has been taught to do so; but all the time it loves the nurse more than either. In the father's arms it cries; in the nurse's it laughs again. Why? Because the child is better off with her; she feeds it, dandles it in her arms, dresses it and plays with it in different fashions; while the father, who has serious business to mind, has no time for such trifles. But when the child begins to understand a little, then it changes its mind, then it loves father and mother more than a hundred nurses; for it sees then that the nurse is but a poor servant who works for wages, and has nothing more to expect, while its parents are rich and will at some future day leave it a good legacy. So it is with us, my dear brethren; as long as we are in health and strength we have a great opinion of what we possess in and of the world; the earth is, as it were, our nurse that feeds us, that has to do with us always, giving us food and drink, clothing and occupation, according to the decrees of the Creator; it presents to our eyes, ears, and other senses all sorts of agreeable objects, as the Prophet Baruch writes: "For I nourished them with joy,"¹ like a nurse. Therefore we love the world, and have a natural inclination to love it more than we love God, although He is our true Father, from whom we receive everything, and from whom we expect an eternal inheritance in heaven. What is the cause of that? Because we have but a dim knowledge of God by faith. We acknowledge indeed that God is to be prized and loved more than all the world can give us; we show this too in reality when we serve God and keep His commandments, and profess that we are willing to lose all rather than offend Him grievously; because we have been taught this from our youth upwards and have heard it so often. Yet as far as the natural inclination is concerned, we fear and shudder at the idea of being separated from the world and its goods, no matter how worthless they are, and of going to our Father in heaven.

We think much of those things now, because we do not understand matters clearly. Shown by a simile.

But when the eyes of the mind are properly opened for the The just

¹ Nutrivit enim illos cum jucunditate.—Baruch iv. 11.

man will
leave all
things with
joy at his
happy
death.

first time at the end of life, then we shall see and know with what a poor handmaid we have had to do, and how wretched and miserable life is in this world. And he who dies a happy death will then be able to say with joy: oh, how vile the things I leave behind me; and how precious the treasures I am about to receive in exchange for them from the faithful God whom I have served! My money and all my possessions I willingly leave to those who are to come after me; I have brought nothing into the world, I shall take nothing out of it. But oh, what happiness! In a short time I shall hear the joyful invitation of the Lord: "Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things I will place thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."¹ Enter into the city whose pavement is of pure gold, whose walls are of diamonds and precious stones, as St. John describes heaven in the Apocalypse. There there will be abundance without want; treasures and riches without end, and no fear of ever losing them. My honor before the world, my dignity and reputation I leave to another, who will take my place; it is not worth much in any case, and in exchange for it I shall receive the crown of glory to reign with the sovereign Monarch of heaven and earth, according to His own promise: "Where I am, there also shall my minister be;"² I shall become like to Him, as the same St. John says: "When He shall appear, we shall be like to Him."³ Could I wish for a greater honor and dignity?

No matter
how dear
they may
have been
to him.

I leave what I hitherto loved: parents, children, friends, and relations; I have seen them for the last time in this mortal life; but after all that is no great hardship! For what delightful company awaits me in heaven in the many millions of angels, holy martyrs, confessors, and virgins, who rejoice together with the most perfect mutual love in God! I shall see Mary, the most pure virgin, my dearest Mother, whom I have so longed to behold; nay, I shall rejoice forever in the most intimate friendship of infinite beauty, God Himself. I must leave, once for all, all earthly delights, such as those I found in eating, drinking, amusing myself; but what miserable things those are in comparison with the indescribable joys that await me at that table of which Our Lord speaks: "And I dispose to you, as My Father

¹ Euge, serve bone et fidelis, quia super pauca fuisti fidelis, super multa te constituam; intra in gaudium domini tui.—Matt. xxv. 21.

² Ubi sum ego, illic et minister meus erit.—John xli. 26.

³ Scimus quoniam cum apparuerit, similes ei erimus.—I. John iii. 2.

hath disposed to Me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom.”¹ I shall no longer see the light of the sun with my bodily eyes, nor have sensible experience of how my descendants shall fare on earth after my death; but everything that occurs in heaven and on earth I shall know and understand incomparably better by the beatific vision of God. My body, that has hitherto served my soul as a sort of garment, and is torn by death, and the life that I have tried so hard to preserve by minding my health, these shall be taken from me; but neither is that a great hardship. For my soul shall be clad with the shining robe of glory and will live forever without fear of illness or fatigue. Farewell, then, O world, with all your fripperies! I leave you with joy! Go forth, my soul, from this emaciated, miserable body; leave it to the earth to be eaten by worms in the grave. The time shall come in which this very body shall rise up out of the dust in the general judgment, to be again united to thee, and to share forever in thy eternal joys. Good-bye to everything on earth! My banishment is at an end; the business of my life happily accomplished; I am going to the land of joys where it shall be always well with me! These are the joyful thoughts of the man who dies a happy death. See, my dear brethren, the end of your years that I wish each and every one of you from my heart. And such an end we can all have if we only strive for it earnestly, no matter what our state or condition; that we may all do this, is the wish I shall briefly express in the

Second Part.

My first care shall then be for myself, that my years may end happily, and in this you, reverend members of the clergy, are all concerned. This firm resolution of mine shall constantly remind me of the duties and obligations imposed on me by God in my state of life, so that I may always try to fulfil them as I shall wish on my death-bed to have fulfilled them. It will help me, whenever I appear before the face of God to announce His praises in the divine office and other prayers, to show to such a great Lord all due reverence, and to be modest and attentive in His presence, in the hope that at the end of my years I may praise Him forever with the angels. It will remind me, when I

Exhortation
to the
clergy to
work for a
happy
death.

¹ Ego dispono vobis, sicut disposuit mihi Pater meus, regnum, ut edatis et bibatis super mensam meam in regno meo.—Luke xxii. 29, 30.

stand at the altar to offer to the Eternal Father the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, to treat that sacred mystery, before which the angels tremble, with becoming respect and in a holy manner, to behold with chaste eyes, to touch with pure hands, to receive with stainless heart those accidents that conceal the body of my future Judge. It will impel me, when I have to instruct other souls according to the requirements of duty, to be filled with an unwearied zeal and to have a pure intention for the greater glory of God. It will remind me, when I am alone at home, to be always united to God; when I am in company with others, to give them good example; wherever I am, whatever I do, to keep my heart free from earthly attachments and have it always fixed on heaven and eternal goods, that I may thus have a happy end of my years.

To the laity. The same thing I say to you, gentlemen of the laity, according to your different states. See that you follow the wise adage: "in all things look to the end."¹ Whether your office or employment is a lucrative one, whether the lawsuit or other important undertaking you have commenced is likely to succeed, what your superiors think of you, how people look on you, whether you give satisfaction to your inferiors; these are considerations and cares that cannot be found fault with; but whether and how far all these things can help to the comfort and merit of your soul in the home of its long eternity, that should indeed be your first and most important care. I must and will have a happy end. That should be your firm resolution, and it will teach you the art of speaking, reading, and writing well; that is, it will teach you how to govern your tongue, how to speak out what your duty requires at the proper time, how to be silent, to advise, to exhort, to punish, to further, to hinder, to refuse, according to the requirements of the law of God and the conscience of each one; it will guide your pen to uphold justice, to protect innocence, to defend the poor, the destitute, and the oppressed; it will guide your hands, that they may remain closed to treacherous, dangerous, and often unjust presents and bribes; it will order all your studies and occupations, that you may seek to further the glory of God and the salvation of your souls rather than your temporal gain, so that at the end of your years you may leave this world with joy and go to heaven.

To married people.

You, married people, parents, fathers and mothers! pay at-

¹ In omnibus respice finem.

tion to these words of St. Augustine: "Know and understand," he says, "that we are not Christians to think of this world alone, but to have our thoughts always fixed on the next life;"¹ our sole care should not be as to how we can live and bring up children, and clothe and feed them according to our station, but we are Christians especially that we may prepare for the next life. For that reason the supreme Lord of heaven and earth has placed you over your domestics as masters and mistresses, and over your children as parents, that you may so rule them and bring them up that not one of them may be lost at the end of his years through your fault. Ah, parents! think of it often, and think on it deeply: what a dreadful thing it would be for a loving father or mother to bring a child into the world that is to fall into the clutches of the devil at the end of his days! And what should not parents do to avert such a dreadful calamity! And what a happiness it is for a loving father or mother to bring into the world a child that at the end of its days shall be brought by the angels into heaven! What should not parents do to secure such happiness for their children! Make a resolution to work for a happy end of your years, and it will keep you up to your duty with regard to your children. Let the husband then often say to his wife, and parents to their children: Dear wife! we are now living together, but we know not for how long; the time shall come when we shall have to separate; one of us must go first and the other follow. My dear children! it will be the same with you; but, wife, what a terrible thing it would be for us to be separated at the end of our years forever, for one to be in heaven and the other in hell! Children, if I have a happy end and you an unhappy one, what a terrible separation that would be. God has given us the means of living well and respectably; but how will that help us at the end if we do not now make good use of those means? If on the other hand we now suffer poverty, what worse shall we be for that at the end, if we only serve God truly in our want? Let us then so live together that we may have a happy end, and rejoice together forever in heaven.

Young men and women! I am afraid my wish is not a very pleasant one to you; yet it is all the more necessary for you the less you are wont in your young years, eager as you are after

To the unmarried.

¹ Agnoscite et intelligite; non ideo Christiani sumus, ut de hac tantummodo vita solliciti simus; sed ut semper de futuro sæculo cogitemus.

pleasure, to think of how it may be with you at the end of your years. "Remember thy last end" is the advice the wise Ecclesiasticus gives each and every one of you ;¹ in all your works, in all your days, think of what you would wish your last end to be. That thought will make you careful to avoid the occasions of sin, to keep away from dangerous places and company, to restrain the outward senses, and especially the eyes and ears, that you may do nothing even in thought or desire that could make your end unhappy. That thought will remind you to take timely council with God regarding your future state in life, and in the choice of that state, on which generally depends the happy or unhappy end of your years, not to be led by the senses or by what seems agreeable to you, but to consider what state is the most likely to make the end of your years happy. In all doubts that occur to you, as to whether you should do this or that, or permit it, go to this or that place or company, act or act not according to this or that worldly fashion—in all such circumstances think of the end of your lives; ask yourselves: will this company, or conversation, or fashion bring me comfort on my death-bed, or make me more sure of heaven? or will it, on the other hand, perhaps increase my death-bed anguish? May I not, perhaps, wish to have lived more carefully, humbly, modestly, and so on? Think often in that way of your last end, that my wish may be fulfilled in your regard: happy be the end of your years!

To widows
and the af-
flicted.

Joy and consolation for you, widows and orphans, desolate, sorrowful, and afflicted Christians! Joy and consolation, I say, will be brought to you by the thought of the happy end of your years, provided only that you are minded to work for it earnestly. The Prophet Daniel, describing the many tribulations and afflictions that were to visit different peoples, adds: "And this until a time."² Poor, oppressed souls! only be patient and resigned to the will of God! Think how short is this uncertain time; what you are now enduring shall last only until a time; it will soon come to an end! Your poverty and want shall last only for a time; they will come to an end. Your trouble and desolation shall last only for a time: they shall come to an end; your sighs and tears shall last only for a time: they shall come to an end; and if you keep always in the friendship of God it will be a most happy end, of which you can be far more sure than any one else. For there is no other

¹ Memorare novissima tua.—Eccles. vii. 40.

² Et hoc usque ad tempus.—Dan. xi. 24.

way to heaven but the way of the cross, of penance, of mortification, of self-denial, of humiliation. Oh, with what joy will you be able to think on your death-bed: now I have suffered what God willed me to suffer, and how small it was! it is all over now, and I am going into heavenly, eternal joys that shall never end!

Sinners—if any of you here, as I trust not, deserve that name—To sinners
you who are still in the state of sin, do you think you will be able to say the same on your death-bed at the end of your years? Truly you will then know how small is that which you now esteem so highly, for the sake of which you leave your God. But what will remain to you of it all? Nothing. What am I saying? It would be well for you if you had nothing to expect after death, if your souls were capable of crumbling into dust with your bodies! But where shall you go then? Alas! into poverty without end, into hunger and thirst without end, into wailing and gnashing of teeth without end, into hell without end, into that lake of burning pitch, into everlasting fire amongst the demons! See, that will infallibly be the end of your years, if you finish your lives in the state in which you are now. Will you persist in that state? Ah, no! Rather make with me quite a different resolution.

No, O God of goodness and mercy! I am not so far gone as Conclusion
to work for
a happy
end.
that yet! I acknowledge that I have deserved a bad end a hundred, a thousand times. I have to thank Thy goodness and mercy alone that Thou hast not called me away in my sins, while during those years that I have been Thy enemy so many others have been carried off by an unhappy death! Now that I still have time, and I know not how long that time may be, without further delay I will return to the lap of Thy fatherly mercy, I will repent of and detest my sins and confess them. With the beginning of the new year I shall begin to lead a new life, one in which I shall not cease to serve Thee until I shall have arrived at the happy end of it. Now, my dear brethren, is not such the resolution you all make with me? Then I can confidently promise you and myself what I wish from my heart; a happy end of our years! Amen.

SEVENTEENTH SERMON.

ON PURGATORY AFTER DEATH.

Subject.

There is none of us who has not just reason to fear a severe purgatory after death; therefore we should show mercy to the poor souls because they who refuse to do so will have to expect a purgatory without mercy.—*Preached on the twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Et iratus dominus ejus tradidit eum tortoribus, quoadusque redderet universum debitum.—Matt. xviii. 34.

“And his lord being angry delivered him to the torturers, until he paid all the debt.”

Introduction.

This was a hard sentence for that poor servant, to be thrown into prison and be given over to the torturers. Yet in my opinion it was a merciful punishment for that merciless, ungrateful man, who deserved to be treated with far greater severity; for though he was to be punished, yet it was only until he should pay the whole debt. Hence his chastisement was not to last always, but till he should have paid all he owed his lord; thus he had the hope of being one day freed from prison and torture. Here, my dear brethren, we have a vivid picture of the prison which we Catholics call purgatory, in which the just God confines the souls of those who have not sufficiently satisfied for their sins, that they may be tortured, not forever, but only for a time and until they have completely paid all they owe the divine justice. Poor souls! I cannot help thinking how hard it must be for you! But be comforted; your torments in that prison will come to an end; and the duration of your chastisement can be curtailed by the living, if we only wish to show you that mercy. O Christians! so should each one of us think, how will it be with me after my death? Shall I be sent to that prison to be tormented? In all probability such will be the case. And that thought should urge us to do all we can to help the poor souls who are actually there now.

Plan of Discourse.

There is none of us who has not just reason to fear a severe purgatory after death; therefore we should show mercy to the poor souls; because they who refuse to do so may expect a purgatory without mercy. Such is the whole subject.

That we may not be in the number of these latter, grant us Thy grace, O Lord, to lead holy lives and show mercy to the poor souls; this we beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

He who is in the habit of thieving has reason to fear the gallows if he is caught; and he who often does what deserves to be punished in purgatory has reason to fear purgatory when he falls into the hands of God's justice. And if that is the case, who of us, my dear brethren, will dare to say that he will escape that fire? For what are we, and where are we now on this earth? Poor, frail mortals, inclined to evil, exposed to countless dangers and occasions of sin, nay, we stain our lives with many actual sins and faults; for we are of the number of those of whom St. John says: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."¹

There is no one who does not daily do something to earn purgatory.

And in truth if we go through the whole day, from morning till night, we shall hardly find a quarter of an hour that is quite free from some fault or another. Curiosity of eyes and ears, sensuality of taste and touch, want of restraint over the tongue, idle, flattering, lying, fault-finding, quarrelsome, sarcastic, contradictory talk; proud, ambitious, suspicious, impure thoughts, that are fully or half deliberate; intemperance in eating, drinking, and sleep; discontent and impatience in adversity; a wrong intention in outward actions; vanity in dress, manners, and demeanor; want of restraint and consideration in company; human respect, that drives us to do or omit what we should not do or omit; useless squandering of precious time, culpable ignorance, neglecting the duties of our state although in small things; not fulfilling the obligations of Christian charity; leading others into sin, giving scandal through carelessness, rejecting the divine inspirations, etc. These are small things according to our ideas; but our lives are filled with them; they are as it were the daily bread of even pious Christians. Wherever one turns he finds some fault or

By small faults.

¹ Si dixerimus quoniam peccatum non habemus, ipsi nos seducimus, et veritas in nobis non est.—I. John 1. 8.

other that he has committed. And how many sins do we not commit that escape our notice, that we do not acknowledge and are not aware of, although they are all clearly recognized by the all-seeing eye of God and written down in the great account-book in their minutest details, like those notes that pass before our eyes, which we cannot see until the rays of the sun fall on them. Even our good works, if we consider them closely, as they will be examined by the strict Judge when He will judge justices, even they will be found to be mixed with faults and imperfections. Prayer said with fully or half deliberate distractions; devotions performed with coldness and tepidity; visits to the church, hearing Mass, and receiving holy Communion with little attention, reverence, or fervor; the works of charity and mercy, of zeal for souls, done with vain complacency, or to seek praise, or without a pure intention for God's honor; these pious exercises that we daily perform to honor God to increase our merit, and to gain heaven—these very works serve at the same time to fan the flames of purgatory in order to chastise us.

By mortal sins that have been confessed and repented of.

I will say nothing of the grievous sins that are committed from the first dawn of reason, through the succeeding years of youth and manhood; sins of all kinds in thought and desire, in word, and act, and conversation, and omission. How many adults are there who can say that they are of the number of those happy souls who have never been guilty of a mortal sin in their lives? I will suppose that we have blotted out of the book of God's justice all the mortal sins of our past lives by true, supernatural repentance, sincere contrition, and a candid confession, and that we have fully appeased the divine anger, so that we are now admitted to the favor and friendship of God, and are called and are in truth dear children of God. Oh, what a happiness is ours! All our debt is forgiven; the eternal pains of hell that we had deserved are remitted to us, and as far as we are concerned the fire of hell is extinguished. O God of goodness, what do we not owe Thee for such a benefit! But meanwhile, my dear brethren, what becomes of the terrible temporal punishment we still owe the divine justice for those sins that we have committed and repented of?

Now God requires full satisfaction, either in this life

Now the God of holiness and justice requires for these and even for the small daily faults we fall into, the most complete and perfect satisfaction, without the least oversight or remission on His part; and no fault is so small as not to deserve its pun-

ishment. If we do not make this atonement during life, either by patiently bearing many trials and torments, or by voluntarily chastising ourselves by works of mortification and penance, or by gaining indulgences granted by the Church, or by hearing Mass and performing other devotions (although so great is the number of sins and faults daily committed by even the most pious and holy that a complete satisfaction is hardly ever accomplished), then we must atone for those sins in the next life by suffering in our own persons and by purgatorial punishment. For no one can be admitted into heaven and to the sight of God who is not perfectly free from even the least stain. Alas! what will become of us? Is there any one who will dare to say that he shall escape purgatory?

And what do we imagine we shall have to suffer for those almost countless sins and faults? Do we think they are but small matters, and that God does not consider them so exactly? Ah, no! The God of mercy and goodness, even in this life, where mercy holds the foremost rank, where punishments willingly endured are united with the infinite merits of the Passion and Death of Our Lord, and therefore have a great atoning power over and above their own merit—even in this life God has sometimes punished most severely small sins committed by faithful servants of His. Thus, for instance, a half deliberate doubt on the part of Moses, who hesitated about striking the rock with his rod, was the cause of his being excluded from the promised land; an act of curiosity on the part of Lot's wife, who looked round to see the burning city of Sodom, was enough to cause her to be turned into a pillar of salt. The carelessness of Oza in putting forth his hand to support the ark of the covenant drew down on him the punishment of a sudden death. The silly vanity of King David, who wished to know the number of his people, brought the plague amongst them, which in three days carried off seventy thousand men. Now, I say, if God, who is otherwise so merciful, inflicts such severe punishments on even His faithful servants for small faults, alas! I cannot help thinking, how strict He will be in the next life, where His justice alone untempered by mercy shall wield the rod? where suffering is not united with the merits of Christ, but is simply endured by a mere creature, a suffering that, no matter how keen it is, can hardly be compared to an offence offered to a God of infinite goodness? Alas! cries out St. Augustine; "wo to even

Or in the next by severe punishment.

the praiseworthy lives of men, if Thou dost examine them without mercy!"¹

Examples showing how severe that punishment is.

We can learn something of the intensity of the pains endured in the next life from one who suffered them for a day. St. Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, in a letter to St. Augustine, relates how three dead men, whose bodies had been touched by the hair-shirt of St. Jerome, came to life again; one of them he met and had a chance of speaking with. "This man," writes Cyril, "seemed quite discomposed and almost exhausted by the quantity of tears he had shed." "I asked him," continues the Saint, "why he wept so extravagantly; and after a long silence and with many sighs, he finally yielded to my importunity and answered my question. 'If you knew, holy Bishop,' he said, 'what I suffered yesterday you would not be surprised at my tears, but would acknowledge that I have cause to weep for the rest of my life. What do you think of the pains of purgatory? If you put together all the torments, pains, punishments, and sufferings that I will not say are actually endured on earth, but that can be imagined, they are nothing but a cool, refreshing dew compared to the least pain of purgatory. There is no man in the world who would not rather suffer all that people have ever suffered from the beginning of the world till now, and suffer that to the end of the world, rather than undergo the least pain of purgatory if he had experience of it even for one day. If you ask me then why I weep so much, I confess that it is for fear of the punishment that every sinner has reason to dread in the next life. There is no difference between the pains of hell and those of purgatory, except that the latter will one day come to an end; but in hell there will never be an end or alleviation to the torments of the damned.'" Such is the testimony of one who was an eye-witness of the pains of purgatory, and we have it on the authority of St. Cyril. St. Augustine paints in lively colors the cruel torments that the martyrs had to undergo during the persecutions; but he goes so far as to assert that all those torments put together are far less than those suffered by the souls in purgatory. "Never could such punishment be inflicted on a mortal body, although the martyrs suffered atrocious torments."²

Cantipratanus writes of a sick man who was so impatient at the length and severity of his illness that he earnestly begged

¹ *Væ etiam laudabili vitæ hominum, si remota misericordia discutias!*

² *Numquam in carne tanta inventa est pœna, licet mirabilia martyres passi sunt tormenta.*—St. Aug. L. de pœn.

of God either to restore him to health or to take him out of the world altogether. God sent an angel to say to him that he might choose whether he would suffer the pains of purgatory for three days or those of his sickness for another year. The sick man thought to himself that the three days would soon be over, while a whole year of illness meant a long trial of one's patience. He therefore chose the three days in purgatory. According to his wish he died and went to purgatory, but was hardly an hour there when he imagined the three days and even more had expired; he grew exceedingly anxious, sighed, suffered, and wept; "ah," he said, "I must be more than a month here, and yet the door is not opened to let me out! I am afraid that he who gave me that choice was not an angel in reality, but one disguised as an angel who has shamefully deceived me." While busied with these thoughts the angel came to comfort him and to congratulate him on having accomplished the third part of his atonement. "What!" exclaimed the suffering soul; "the third part! No more than that?" "Yes, you have been here but one day; your body is not yet buried; they are now on the point of carrying it to the grave." "Ah, dearest guardian angel!" cried out the poor soul; "ah, help me to return to my body and my former suffering; I would rather endure them patiently for ten years than stand these pains for two days more!" Ah, my God! how we deceive ourselves when we think little of venial sins and make nothing of them almost! when we do not true and heartfelt penance for our mortal sins! when we blindly look on them as altogether remitted, and forget all about the terrors of purgatory!

I tremble when I read in the Lives of the Saints how severely even the holiest and most faithful servants of God had to suffer for the smallest sins and imperfections. In the Chronicles of the Friars Minor we read of one of their number who died at Paris, and who on account of his angelic purity and holiness was looked on as more angel than man. In the same convent there was at the time a very learned theologian, who was also most enlightened in spiritual matters. He deliberately omitted to say Mass for his deceased brother because he thought it unnecessary to help one who, as he certainly believed, was already high in glory, so great was the fame for sanctity that the deceased had gained during life. But in a few days' time the latter appeared to him and said in a mournful voice: "Dear master,

Examples showing that even the holiest suffer it.

for God's sake, have pity on me!" The other, terrified, exclaimed: "Holy soul, what do you want from me?" "Masses! Masses!" was the eager answer, "that I may be released from my torments!" "What? You in torments! You who have led such an angelic, innocent, and penitential life? Was not that sufficient purification and atonement for you?" "Alas!" sighed the soul, "no one believes how strictly God judges, and how severely He punishes!"¹ No one believes it! O my dear brethren, how many are there not in purgatory who are thought to be in heaven! St. Antoninus relates in his *Summa* that a preacher of his Order appeared a month after his death to the infirmarian of the convent in which he had lived and told him that he had been kept in purgatory all that time for no other reason than that he had been too familiar and jocose in his conversations with seculars.² A whole month he had to suffer because he had not observed that gravity of demeanor that becomes the religious when in the society of seculars. And how many Masses and prayers had not been offered for him by his brethren in the meantime?

Confirmed
by others.

Baronius, writing of the year 498, and St. Gregory in his *Dialogues*, mention with astonishment the case of Cardinal Paschasius, who was a great friend to the poor, a generous almsgiver, a most courageous despiser of himself, and a brave champion of the Catholic faith. He died in the odor of sanctity, and the mere touch of his coffin was enough to drive out devils, so that no one doubted that he was already in possession of heavenly glory. But how different the judgments of God from those of men! The same Paschasius, a long time after, as St. Gregory says,³ appeared to Germanus, the holy Bishop of Capua, and mournfully begged his help that he might at last be freed from his torments and be admitted to the beatific vision. When asked why he was detained so long in purgatory he said: "For nothing else than my obstinacy in persisting in my opinion that Lawrence was more worthy of the papacy than Symmachus, although Symmachus had been unanimously voted to the Apostolic See." Still more wonderful is what we read in the *Annals of the Capuchin Fathers*, under the year 1548, of Brother Anthony Corio, who was renowned in the Order for his extraor-

¹ Eheu, nemo credit quam districte iudicet Deus, et quam severe puniat!

² Propter familiaritatem quam cum sæcularibus habui, et interlocutiones solatio et lepore penas.—St. Antonin. in *Summa*, parte 4, c. x.

³ Post longum tempus.

dinary penances. Besides the austerities prescribed by the Order, he wore day and night a hair-shirt made of horsehair, the sharp points of which constantly wounded his body; in the winter time he clothed himself with an old, ill-mended mantle, that he might feel the cold more severely; he slept only for three hours, and spent the remainder of the night in meditation; his food was generally dry bread; for a long time he ate nothing more than four ounces of dried figs; as he advanced in years he increased his mortifications to such an extent that during a whole week he would eat only three times a little bread and water. Every night he disciplined himself to blood in honor of the Passion and death of Our Lord, and once a year he prolonged the scourging for five whole hours. In a word, according to his biographer, "he had determined not to allow himself any repose in this life."¹ You might perhaps imagine, my dear brethren, that this man was a notorious robber or murderer, or at all events a great sinner before entering the Order, and that he must have had fearful crimes to atone for, since he was so terribly severe towards himself. But quite the contrary; he brought his baptismal innocence with him into religion. His humility was so great that he thought himself worthy of nothing but to be trodden under foot by all. God gave him such a great grace of contemplation that he was often rapt into ecstasy out of himself, and could only sigh forth seraphic aspirations of love to God. Would you not think, my dear brethren, that such an innocent, holy, and at the same time so mortified a soul must at once after death be carried by the angels into heaven? But you must know that he had to suffer a great deal in purgatory. For he appeared to the infirmarian of the convent, and being asked how he was, said: "I have indeed saved my soul; but I am condemned to purgatory till I have fully atoned; my fault was against holy poverty; for when the convent was being founded I sought for certain means of support without having first asked permission to do so. I did not look on it then as a sin, although I had a doubt about it now and then; but through carelessness I disregarded the doubt, and this carelessness is now severely punished by the divine Judge, who so strictly examines each and every fault."

Well known is what St. Peter Damian writes of St. Severinus, Archbishop of Cologne. His holiness of life was known everywhere, as well as the miracles he wrought; yet he was detained

Further examples.

¹ Pactum inierat, ne ullam in hoc sæculo requiem ei præberet.

some time in purgatory, and had to ask help from a certain Canon of Cologne, because when at the imperial court he did not recite his office at the proper time, or with due attention, on account of the number of things he had to attend to. Surius relates in the Life of St. Ludgard, that Innocent III., that Pope who did such great things for the Catholic Church, appeared to this Saint after his death surrounded by flames, and said: "I have indeed escaped eternal fire through the mercy of Mary, who obtained for me the grace of perfect contrition on my death-bed; but the divine justice has condemned me to severe torments in purgatory till the end of the world, unless I get help from the living." Cardinal Bellarmine, reflecting on this terrible example, says: "This instance fills me with dread; for if a pope, who was looked on as a saint, deserved to suffer purgatory to the end of the world, what superior has not reason to fear and to scrutinize the inmost recesses of his conscience?"

We have just reason, then, to fear and to live cautiously.

And, alas! my dear brethren, what are we to think of ourselves, if those holy servants of God have been chastised so sharply for such seemingly small faults? We who think so little of venial sin and commit it almost every hour? We who often order our lives only according to our sensuality, to the requirements of bodily comfort, and the vanity and customs of the world? Let us think of this every day, and think deeply on it; for that thought will make us avoid venial sin and not think too lightly of it; it will make us patient in crosses and trials, so that we shall be ready to thank God for sending us a short suffering here to atone for our sins, that we may not have to suffer so severely for them in the next life; that thought will inspire us with Christian humility, and impel us to restrain and mortify our senses, to frequent the sacraments, to gain indulgences, to be zealous in the practice of virtue, that we may daily wipe out some of our debt, and reduce our obligations to the divine justice. St. Catharine of Genoa used to say that he who tries to atone for his sins in this life pays a debt of a thousand ducats with a few pence; but he who defers atonement till the next life must pay a thousand ducats to clear off a debt of a few pence. Her meaning was that in this life a slight penance can atone for many sins, but in the next small faults must be atoned for by long and severe punishments. Let no one depend on the help of others after his death, if he neglects to help himself now; for it is much better to say once during life: My God, have mercy on me! than to cry out a hun-

dred times after death to our living friends: Have pity on me, at least you, my friends!

Yet, my dear brethren, there are friends on whose help we can confidently rely, if we take care to make them our friends during life, namely, the poor souls in purgatory. For the very reason that we have such cause to dread a sharp purgatory we should try to help those souls in every possible manner, that they may be released all the sooner, so that afterwards, when they are in heaven, and we take their places in torments, they may in turn help us by their prayers: an act of charity that these souls are wont to perform out of gratitude for their benefactors, as I have shown on a former occasion, when I proved that they who show no mercy to the poor souls during life have least mercy to expect when they go to purgatory. So it is, my dear brethren: "For with the same measure," says Christ, "that you shall mete withal, it shall be measured to you again."¹ If you have shown no charity towards the suffering souls, there will be no one after your death who will think of showing mercy to you. There are many examples to prove this, which time does not allow me to adduce. For instance: we read of souls that have been over a hundred years in purgatory and had not one to pray for them, and that through a most just decree of God; and of souls for whom many prayers and masses were offered without doing them any good, because they had not helped the poor souls during their lives. Mark this well, my dear brethren: not every good act that is done for the benefit of a certain soul actually helps that soul, otherwise the rich, and especially kings and princes, would be well off indeed, for sometimes a thousand masses are said for them. Ah, no! quite different is the distribution made by the justice of God, who is not bound to accept the payment offered by a stranger for the debt contracted by any soul. You, He will say, who during your life did so little for the poor souls, you do not deserve this mass, this alms, those prayers that your friends are now sending after you; all these things shall be given over to others who are more deserving of them on account of the charity they practised during their lives; but you must pay at your own cost the debts you have incurred.

For that very reason we should be more active in helping the poor souls, for they who show no mercy to them shall be punished without mercy in purgatory.

Such was in truth the experience of that religious named Edelhard, who belonged to the Abbey of Fulda. It was a pious custom in the convent when one of the brethren died to give to

Examples to prove this.

¹ *Eadem quippe mensura, qua mensi fueritis, remetietur vobis.—Luke vi. 38.*

the poor for the good of the suffering soul the food and drink that would have fallen to his share for thirty days if he had been still alive, a praiseworthy custom that is still observed in many religious houses. Now this Edelhard was procurator, and through avarice and excessive parsimony he had frequently omitted to give the usual alms according to this custom; but how dearly he paid for his neglect! Besides a severe punishment that he underwent from a deceased person whom he had defrauded of this alms, a punishment that caused his premature death, on the thirtieth day after his decease, although many prayers and twice as much alms as usual had been offered for him, he appeared to his abbot in woful plight, and made the following bitter complaint: "Alas! what terrible torments I am suffering! and I cannot obtain full remission until all my brethren, who are detained in purgatory through my neglect, are released; for the prayers and alms that are offered for me are by a decree of divine justice given, not to me, but to them." Thus writes Trithemius in his *Life of Rabanus Maurus, Abbot of Fulda*. Thomas Cantipratanus tells us of a soldier who on his death-bed asked his grandson to sell his horse, and have masses said with the money for the repose of his soul. The grandson, partly through neglect and partly because he wished to keep the horse for himself, as it was a fine one, did not fulfil his grandfather's request. After a lapse of six months the deceased appeared to him; "you faithless fellow," he said to him with an angry countenance, "on account of your negligence I have had to suffer in purgatory all this time, and now the mercy of God has caused me to find help elsewhere. But as for you, by a just decree you will die soon, and your soul will come to this place of torments, where it will suffer until you have atoned, not only for your own sins, but also for mine, for you will have to complete the punishment that I should have suffered, if God's mercy had not found means to help me." This threat was fulfilled to the letter; the grandson died soon after, having made his confession. This should be a lesson to those children and heirs who neglect to carry out the pious wishes of their deceased friends, or for some cause or another defer complying with them. In the same measure will chastisement be measured out to them. "Judgment without mercy to him that hath not done mercy;"¹ purgatory without mercy to him who has not shown mercy to the poor souls.

¹ *Judicium enim sine misericordia illi qui non fecit misericordiam.*—James ii. 13.

To avoid this severe sentence, my dear brethren, the surest means will be to help the souls in purgatory with charity and mercy, so that when we in turn shall be in need of help those souls who have been relieved by us may come to our assistance. Truly, so should each one of you think and resolve with me: I have just reason to practise this charity, when I consider my past life and the many mortal and venial sins I have committed! What else have I to expect but a long and severe purgatory after my death, if that death by the divine mercy is to be a happy one? Holy souls and children of God in purgatory! I place great confidence in you! I will never forget you all the days of my life; not a day shall pass in which I shall not keep my promise of performing some work of devotion for you; thus when I am lying groaning in the place of torments and you are rejoicing in heaven, I shall be justified in sending forth my petition to you in the words of Joseph to his fellow-prisoner: "Only remember me, when it shall be well with thee, and do me this kindness: to put Pharaoh in mind to take me out of this prison."¹ So shall I be able to say to you one day: Only remember me! holy, glorious souls, whom I relieved from suffering in purgatory! Ah, think now of me! do me this kindness, and speak to God a word in my favor, that I may soon be released out of this prison and be received with you into the eternal tabernacle, where we shall rejoice together and praise the goodness of God forever! Meanwhile I will still continue to pray: God grant you eternal rest. Amen.

Conclusion
and exhortation to
show this
mercy to
the de-
parted.

On Mercy towards the Poor Souls in Purgatory, see several sermons in the first and fourth parts.

¹ Memento mei, cum bene tibi fuerit, ut suggeras Pharaoni ut educat me de isto carcere.
—Gen. xl. 14.

ON THE RESURRECTION AFTER DEATH.

EIGHTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE HOPE IN AND TRUTH OF OUR FUTURE RESURRECTION.

Subject.

We shall all rise again from the dead; this is the foundation of our hope.—*Preached on Easter Sunday.*

Text.

Surrexit.—Mark xvi. 6.
“He is risen.”

Introduction.

Ye holy women, said the angel, why do you spend so much time seeking Jesus amongst the dead? He has indeed suffered much; He was nailed to the cross, and at last died on it; He was buried, too, in this place; but all that is at an end. “You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified,” in order to show to Him as to one deceased the last honors; but in vain do you seek Him here: “He is risen: He is not here;” you will see Him, as He Himself told you, in Galilee. “Go, tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee: there you shall see Him as He told you.” My dear brethren, Christ is really risen from the dead; no true Christian has the least doubt of that. But how can that be a comfort for us? Our Head may be in glory, really living again; what better are we, the members He has left behind, if we have to rot away in the grave and remain dead forever? But, Christians, this latter is not the case. Our bodies shall indeed decay in the grave; but that we shall die forever according to the soul is not true by any means, as I now proceed to show.

Plan of Discourse.

We shall all truly rise again from the dead. That is the foundation of our hope, and the subject of this sermon.

O dear Lord, risen from the grave, encourage us all by this hope to do good according to the law of our faith; this we beg of Thee through the merits of Mary and the intercession of our holy guardian angels.

Just as the foundation of our faith is the resurrection of Our Lord from the dead according to the body, so the foundation of our hope is our own resurrection from the dead according to the body. A Christian, says St. Peter Chrysologus, should always keep this truth deeply impressed on his mind; for it assures him that if he serves his God faithfully here below he shall one day be happy, body and soul, with the same God for all eternity. This truth is the bridle which powerfully restrains us from evil, the spur which drives us on to do good. This is the truth which, when well considered, embitters to us all the foolish joys of earth, and sweetens the sorrows and trials of this short life. And what would it profit us to live even for a moment amongst the troubles of this life, if we had not the hope of living forever in heaven? Who would have the courage to take crosses and trials from the hand of God and bear them with patience and cheerfulness, or to inflict voluntary penances on himself, if the mortified and emaciated body must rot forever in the grave and never get any reward for its penitential practices? Then should the poor and persecuted be—contrary to what Our Lord says of them—the most unhappy creatures on earth, for whom there is nothing in store but sighs, tears, and despair. Then might we say with the fools in the Book of Wisdom: “We are born of nothing, and after this we shall be as if we had not been.” Why, then, should we trouble ourselves? “Come, therefore, and let us enjoy the good things that are present. Let none of us go without his part in luxury: let us everywhere leave tokens of joy: for this is our portion, and this is our lot;”¹ let us eat, drink, and enjoy ourselves while we have time; for when death comes we shall have neither joy to hope for nor sorrow to fear.

But we have a far better assurance than that from our faith in the resurrection of our Redeemer, and we know that we shall

Our resurrection from the dead is the foundation of our hope.

The truth of it proved from St. Paul.

¹ Ex nihilo nati sumus, et post hoc erimus tanquam non fuerimus. Venite ergo, et fruamur bonis quae sunt. Nemo nostrum exorsis sit luxuriae nostrae. Ubique relinquamus signa laetitiae, quoniam haec est pars nostra, et haec est sors.—Wis. ii. 2, 6, 9.

live forever body and soul, according to the words of St. Paul: "And we will not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep, that you be not sorrowful, even as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them who have slept through Jesus will God bring with Him."¹ "For the Lord Himself shall come down from heaven with commandment, and with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead who are in Christ, shall rise first. . . We shall be taken up together with them in the clouds to meet Christ, into the air, and so shall we be always with the Lord. Wherefore comfort ye one another with these words."²

It was announced by the prophets in the Old Law.

And who could doubt of this truth who has once believed in the resurrection of Christ, by which He proved Himself to be the God of infallible truth; especially since He has so often taught it by His own word and by the testimony of His prophets? God showed the Prophet Ezechieh in a vision a vast field filled with bones scattered in all directions: "The hand of the Lord. . . brought me forth in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of a plain, that was full of bones. . . Now they were very many upon the face of the plain, and they were exceeding dry. Son of man," said the Lord to him, "dost thou think these bones shall live?" But that you may know who the Lord is, only say in My name: "Ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will send spirit into you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to grow over you, and will cover you with skin: and I will give you spirit, and you shall live." Hardly had the Prophet spoken these words at the command of God, when he saw the bones moving of their own accord, coming together covered with flesh and skin, and standing up a great army. "And as I prophesied there was a noise, and behold a commotion: and the bones came together, each one to its joint, . . . and the spirit came into them, and they lived: and they stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army." Do you know what this signifies? asked the Lord. "All these bones are the house of Israel: They say: Our bones are dried up,

¹ Nolumus autem vos ignorare, fratres, de dormientibus, ut non contristemini, sicut et ceteri qui spem non habent. Si enim credimus quod Jesus mortuus est et resurrexit, ita et Deus eos qui dormierunt per Jesum adducet cum eo.—I. Thess. iv. 12, 13.

² Quoniam ipse Dominus in jussu, et in voce archangeli, et in tuba Dei descendet de cœlo. et mortui qui in Christo sunt resurgent primi. . . Rapiemur cum illis in nubibus obviam Christo in æra; et sic semper cum Domino erimus. Itaque consolamini invicem in verbis istis.—Ibid. 15, 16, 17.

and our hope is lost, and we are cut off," separated from the land of the living; but go and tell them: "Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves, and will bring you out of your sepulchres, . . . and you shall know that I am the Lord,"¹ and that it is I who have done it.

What God showed in a vision to His people in the Old Testament Our Lord declares still more clearly in the Gospel of St. John: "Amen, amen, I say unto you, that the hour cometh. . . . when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God. All that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God: And they that have done good things shall come forth unto the resurrection of life: but they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment."² And again in the same gospel: "This is the will of my Father that sent Me: that every one who seeth the Son, and believeth in Him, may have life everlasting, and I will raise him up in the last day."³ These prophecies are as certain to be fulfilled as it is certain that God cannot lie.

And in the New by Our Lord.

All that Our Lord prophesied in the gospel has been fulfilled so completely hitherto that even His most bitter opponents cannot with any show of reason deny its fulfilment; much less can there be any doubt regarding His prophecy concerning the resurrection of the body, for that is the foundation of the whole gospel. He had foretold that the service that Magdalene rendered Him by pouring the precious ointment over His head should become known throughout the whole world, wherever the gospel was to be preached: "Amen I say to you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, that also which she hath done shall be told for a memory of her."⁴ But

All that Christ prophesied has been exactly fulfilled.

¹ *Eduxit me in spiritu Domini, et dimisit me in medio campi, qui erat plenus ossibus. . . erant autem multa valde super faciem campi, siccaque vehementer. Fili hominis, putasne vivent ossa ista? Ossa arida, audite verbum Domini. Hæc dicit Dominus Deus ossibus his: Ecce ego intromittam in vos spiritum, et vivetis. Et dabo super vos nervos, et succrescere faciam super vos carnes, et superextendam in vobis autem, et dabo vobis spiritum, et vivetis. Factus est autem sonitus prophetante me, et ecce commotio; et accesserunt ossa ad ossa unumquodque ad juncturam suam. . . et ingressus est in ea spiritus, et vixerunt; steteruntque super pedes suos, exercitus grandis aimis valde. Ossa hæc universa, domus Israel est; ipsi dicunt: Aruerunt ossa nostra, et perit spes nostra, et abscissi sumus. Hæc dicit Dominus Deus: Ecce ego aperiam tumulos vestros, et educam vos de sepulchris vestris, et scietis quia ego Dominus.—Ezech. xxxvii. 1-7, 10-13.*

² Amen, amen, dico vobis, quia venit hora, quando mortui audient vocem Filii Dei. Omnes qui in monumentis sunt, audient vocem Filii Dei; et procedent qui bona fecerunt, in resurrectionem vitæ; qui vero mala egerunt, in resurrectionem judicii.—John v. 25, 28, 29.

³ Hæc est autem voluntas Patris mei qui misit me, ut omnis qui videt Filium, et credit in eum, habeat vitam æternam, et ego resuscitabo eum in novissimo die.—Ibid. vi. 40.

⁴ Amen dico vobis, ubicumque prædicatum fuerit hoc Evangelium in toto mundo, dicetur et quod hæc fecit in memoriam ejus.—Matt. xxvi. 13.

was that such a great work? Did it contribute so much to the spread of the faith? And yet Our Lord's words regarding it have been strictly fulfilled to the very letter, and shall be fulfilled to the end of the world. More important than that was His prophecy concerning the triumph of His Church over the gates of hell, the persecution of tyrants, and the attacks of heresy: "Behold," He said to His disciples, "I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves;"¹ and in those words He alluded to the persecutions they would have to suffer when He sent them into the world to preach the gospel. They will drive you from one city to another; "they will deliver you up in councils and they will scourge you in their synagogues. And you shall be hated by all men for My name's sake."² They will crucify you and put you to death; nevertheless My kingdom shall thrive and shall never be overcome in the midst of the fiercest persecutions. And this prophecy has been literally fulfilled, as is proved by the thousands of martyrs who have shed their blood for their faith, and by the progress the Church has always made in spite of heresies and persecutions; and in future heresies and persecutions she will remain just as unshaken in her faith.

It is then infallibly certain that we shall rise again, although we do not understand how that shall be.

Now can Our Lord, who has carried out all His prophecies to His apostles, martyrs, confessors, and servants regarding the combats and martyrdom that was in store for them—can He deceive them in what concerns their reward and resurrection to eternal life? Utterly impossible! We have a faithful God, who cannot otherwise foretell things but as He knows they will occur. Nor should we pay the least attention to heathen philosophers, and the many worldly-wise Christians, who are really atheists, who try to measure all truths by their poor human reason, or to speak more correctly, who deny all truths that might disturb them in the enjoyment of forbidden lusts and pleasures. Who can understand, they ask, how the soul can be reunited to the body, once it has left it? Who can understand how the same body, after it has lain in the grave for hundreds or thousands of years, and has been turned into dust and ashes, or has been devoured by fishes or birds of prey or wild beasts, so that not a particle of it remains, can be restored to its former living state? That seems impossible; therefore what we hear about the

¹ Ecce ego mitto vos sicut oves in medio luporum.—Matt. x. 16.

² Tradent enim vos in conciliis, et in synagogis suis flagellabunt vos. Et eritis odio omnibus propter nomen meum.—Ibid. 17, 22.

resurrection of the dead cannot be true. Such is the whole basis of their argument. O great Apostle St. Paul, come and preach to those people! But they will be like those to whom thou didst preach at Athens: "And when they had heard of the resurrection of the dead," so we read in the Acts of the Apostles, "some indeed mocked, but others said: We will hear thee again concerning this matter."¹ Truly that is a clever argument: we cannot understand it, therefore it cannot be true! As if God had to limit His Almighty power by the narrow bounds of human understanding! Truly He would be a poor, weak God if He could do nothing except what we could understand!

Listen for a moment, you who argue in that manner. There is a peasant sowing rye and wheat in his field; ask him why he does that? to what purpose is he scattering the good grain over the ground? It will certainly rot away and die. Yes, indeed, he will answer, and that is the reason why I am scattering it. What? you reply; would it not be wiser for you to make it into bread? No, he answers, it is clear you do not know what you are talking about; if we peasants did not act as I am acting now neither we nor you should have any bread for a long time. Come back in a few months, after the scattered grain has had time to rot in the ground; then you will see the whole field covered with stalks grown out of the dead seed, and each bearing thirty, forty, fifty such grains. But, you exclaim, I do not see how that can be. Nor I either, answers the peasant; still there is not a doubt about it. Now if you continue your former argument, and say no, that cannot be, for I do not understand it, the peasant will laugh at you, and think to himself: that must be a most learned doctor who will not even believe that corn grows! What do you say to this? continues the peasant. The tree you see over there was not there twenty years ago; I put a small, dry kernel in the ground, and now it has become that tree. Can you understand how a small seed as big as a pea can conceal the force necessary to produce so many boughs and branches? Tell me why the branches bend? why the trunk and the roots are immovable? why is the rind hard? the leaves green? the fruit soft and full of sap? All this comes from the virtue of the little seed that died in the ground. Can you understand how all that happens? Yet you may prove it yourself; if you take the trouble to plant

There are many natural facts we do not understand.

¹ Cum audissent autem resurrectionem mortuorum, quidam quidem irridebant, quidam vero dixerunt: Audiemus te de hoc iterum.—Acts xvii. 32.

and sow you will have the same result of your labor as I have had. You must know that above in heaven there is an Almighty God, who can do much more than we two can understand. And the peasant would be perfectly right. We daily see miracles performed by nature before our eyes, but we cease to wonder at them on account of their frequency and our long experience of them. And because we cannot understand how they are done, must we therefore deny their existence, and say that they are mere deceptions, ocular illusions? No; our common sense forbids us to say that! If, then, we must acknowledge that our poor, weak intellect is unable to cope with mere natural phenomena of daily occurrence, how much more readily should we not submit our reason in things that the Author of nature has undertaken to perform by His almighty power in the last days of the world?

God has wrought many miracles we do not understand; it will be just as easy for Him to raise the dead to life.

And to stick to our subject, do you wish to learn the wonderful might of the voice of the Son of God over the dead? Then go in thought to the dead daughter of the ruler of the synagogue, to the widow's son of Naim, to Lazarus, whose body had already begun to decay in the grave. The first of these Jesus took by the hand while He was still in the mortal body: "And taking the damsel by the hand, he saith to her: Damsel (I say to thee) arise."¹ The second case cost Him just as few words: "And He came near and touched the bier. And He said: Young man, I say to thee, arise."² In the third case He only spoke somewhat louder: "He cried with a loud voice: Lazarus, come forth."³ The command of this voice was enough to bring back the souls and unite them with the bodies they had left, and they who were dead became alive again in the presence of many spectators. Of the ruler's daughter St. Mark says: "And immediately the damsel rose up, and walked."⁴ Of the young man St. Luke says: "And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak."⁵ Of Lazarus St. John says: "And presently he that had been dead came forth."⁶ At the death and resurrection of Christ did not many bodies of the saints, which had already long crumbled into dust, and whose ashes had been scattered over the earth, come out of their graves and appear living in the city of Jerusalem?

¹ Et tenens manum puellæ, ait illi: Puella (tibi dico), surge.—Mark v. 41.

² Accessit, et tetigit loculum. Et ait: Adolescens, tibi dico, surge.—Luke vii. 14.

³ Voce magna clamavit: Lazare, veni foras.—John xi. 43.

⁴ Et confestim surrexit puella, et ambulabat.—Mark v. 42.

⁵ Et resedit qui erat mortuus, et cepit loqui.—Luke vii. 15.

⁶ Et statim prodit qui fuerat mortuus.—John xi. 44.

“And the graves were opened,” says St. Matthew; “and many bodies of the saints that had slept arose, and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection, came into the holy city and appeared to many.”¹ If the Son of God was then able to do so much by merely speaking a few words; if the servants of God afterwards had the power of raising the dead by the bare mention of the name of Jesus Christ, must the same Son of God have less might and power over the dead when He will cite them before His judgment-seat, although we cannot understand how He will do that? Again; consider the stars in the firmament, the birds in the air, the fishes in the sea, the animals and men on earth, and yourself amongst them; where do they come from? A few thousand years ago they were not. Ask them who is the Master of all those creatures, and they will all answer you: “Know ye that the Lord He is God: He made us, and not we ourselves.”² But who can understand that? “He spoke and they were made: He commanded and they were created;” it was all He required to do.³ And is it not the same Architect who has fashioned the wonderful edifice of the human body, and who can rebuild it after it has been destroyed? If He has done the one without asking your advice, and without your intellect being in the least able to understand how He did it, can He not do the other also without you and your intellect? If the Almighty God could give being to man when the latter was a mere nothing; why should He not be able to give life again to his body after it has crumbled away into dust?

Oh, the Prophet Job did not require all those proofs! Hear this wonderful man preaching from his dung-hill as from a pulpit: “Who will grant me that my words may be written?” so that all may be able to read them. “Who will grant me that they may be marked down in a book with an iron pen, and in a plate of lead, or else be graven with an instrument in flint-stone?” that they may never be obliterated or forgotten. Mark, my dear brethren, with what dignity this holy man commences his discourse. Certainly the doctrine he is about to deliver must be most weighty and worthy to be deeply impressed on the minds of men. And what is it? “For I know that my Redeemer

And we must believe it firmly, simply because God has revealed it, after the example of Job.

¹ Et monumenta aperta sunt, et multa corpora sanctorum qui dormierant surrexerunt. Et exeuntes de monumentis post resurrectionem ejus, venerunt in sanctam civitatem, et apparuerunt multis.—Matt. xxvii. 52, 53.

² Scitote quoniam Dominus ipse est Deus; ipse fecit nos, et non ipsi nos.—Ps. xcix. 3.

³ Ipse dixit, et facta sunt; ipse mandavit, et creata sunt.—Ibid. xxxii. 9.

liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth, and I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God." I know this; I am sure of it; I cannot doubt it. But what art thou saying, holy Prophet? Art thou really to rise again? and in thine own flesh? Thou seest that it is already being gnawed by the worms. Art thou to see thy God in that body of thine, which is already corrupting, so that thou hast to scrape off the putrid matter? And is that to happen on the last day, when thou shalt have been long turned into dust and ashes? Perhaps thou art speaking of another skin, another body like the one thou now hast, in which thou shalt see thy God? No, he answers; "Whom I myself shall see, and my eyes shall behold, and not another."¹ I, who am now sitting on this dung-hill, shall see my God; these eyes and no others shall look on Him; I shall rise again in this skin of mine, and in no other, in this flesh and no other. I know that; I am certain of it. But how art thou so certain of it? Who has taught it thee, since it is not yet written in any law? Reason alone cannot teach such a truth, for it seems contrary to all reason that a body which has once decayed should return to its original form and life again. All the wisdom of the world will cry down this doctrine of the resurrection of the body when it shall be preached, and will declare it impossible. How then canst thou be so certain of it? Truly I am quite certain of it; I know it; I have not learned it in any human school; it is a mystery that God Himself has taught me; that is enough for me to look on it as an indubitable truth. God has indeed set before me countless figures of my approaching resurrection; almost all creatures I see do hardly anything but die and live again; the day dies, as it were in the evening, and comes to life again in the morning; the year dies in winter, and comes to life again in spring; the trees lose their fruit and leaves and die with the year; but in spring they recover their former beauty and life. These and a hundred other natural phenomena place before my eyes the resurrection from the dead; but I am not influenced by those things in my belief. God has revealed it to me, and that is enough. I know therefore, beyond a possibility of doubt, "that in the last day I

¹ Quis mihi tribuat ut scribantur sermones mei? Quis mihi det ut exarentur in libro, stylo ferreo, et plumbi lamina, vel celte sculpantur in siliçe? Scio enim quod Redemptor meus vivit, et in novissimo die de terra surrecturus sum; et rursum circumdabor pelle mea, et in carne mea videbo Deum meum. Quem visurus sum ego ipse, et oculi mei conspecturi sunt, et non alius.—Job xix. 23—27.

shall rise out of the earth: and I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God." God has revealed it. This alone, my dear brethren, should suffice to make us believe in the resurrection from the dead.

But where am I? What sort of hearers are present? Am I amongst heathens and idolaters, who do not believe in the resurrection, that I have taken so much trouble to convince them of the truth of this mystery? Have I not on another occasion shown that Jesus Christ really rose from the dead; and must I now go to such lengths to show that all men shall rise again from their graves on the last day? Are we not all good Christians here? Why then have I wasted so much precious time, that might have been better employed for the good of souls in treating of some more practical subject? There is none of us here who doubts of this truth, or has ever doubted it; why then go so far to prove it? Ah, would to God that your complaint were justified; that I were wrong in this matter; that we were all in truth faithful Christians, who show in our lives what we profess with the lips, that, namely, we shall one day rise again body and soul! But how do the lives of many harmonize with this doctrine?

Many Christians do not believe in the resurrection.

The holy apostle of the Indies, St. Francis Xavier, once came into a certain town of India, where there were some Christian merchants who had come from Europe to trade. He began to preach to the heathens about Jesus the Crucified, His death, resurrection, ascent into heaven, His holy law, His promises, the rewards He holds out to those who keep His law, and the eternal life that is to be their lot. What do you think that Xavier effected by his preaching? Xavier, that great apostle whose words had already converted cities, islands, kingdoms to the Catholic faith? Nothing at all, as he sorrowfully admits in his letter to Europe. Why? What was the stone that blocked his path? Alas that I have to say it! It was the Christians; the Christians, and no others! If none of them had come to the place the heathens would have been converted. The God of whom you are preaching to us (so they said to Xavier) cannot be so holy, so just in chastising, so generous in rewarding, so faithful to His promises as you say; the law He has left, the religion He has founded, cannot be so perfect as you pretend; and it would be useless for you to try to change our opinion in this respect, because it is justified by the lives of the Christians who

Explained by an example.

are in our midst and who profess to believe in the crucified God and His religion. They live just as we heathens do; they gratify their lusts as we do, who believe in no future state; they are vindictive, as we are; intemperate, avaricious, treacherous, unjust, even worse than we; therefore there is no difference except in name between us and you Christians; our manner of life is the same. Preach then first to your own people who believe in Christ; and then you can preach to us. You try to persuade us that we cannot be happy in the next life if we continue in our present religion; will the Christians, living as we know they do, be happy? If we are to be damned because we lead bad lives, and they are to be damned because they lead bad lives, does not that come to one and the same thing? We gratify our lusts as long as we can, because we do not expect another life after this; but we are not so bad as those who gratify their lusts as we do, and yet believe that, as you describe to us, there is after this life an eternal one of joy in heaven or suffering in hell. Thus the well-meant efforts of St. Francis were frustrated and his preaching rendered fruitless.

For their works are not consistent with such a belief.

My dear brethren, might not Jews and infidels make the same objection to some Christians in this country that those heathens made to St. Francis? "Tell me," said St. John Chrysostom to his hearers, "tell me by what sign I shall know you to be Christians; show me a proof of your faith," that I may distinguish you from Turks and heathens.¹ Show me that you believe in eternal life. Where is your Christian faith? On your tongue? But no one can find it there. You calumniate and detract, you vilify, and swear, and curse, and blaspheme worse than many a Turk. Where is your faith? In your hands? No; many a Turk is more just in his dealings, more generous in alms-giving than you. Where is your faith? In your mind and imagination? No; there is too much self-conceit there, too much ambition, which cannot harmonize with the humility of Jesus Christ, and is more opposed to it than even the pride of an infidel. Is it in your eyes? No; they are too curious, vain, unchaste, like the eyes of those who have no hope of seeing their Redeemer after death. Is it in your heart? No; that is full of envy, hatred, revenge, impure love, and bad desires; it is as bad as any heathen's. In your body? No; you gorge it with excess in eating and drinking; you gratify its lusts as much as any infidel does. In

¹ Dic mihi in quo te deprehendere poterō Christianum, ostende mihi fidem tuam.

your dress? No; the Jews are less scandalous than you in that particular. Tell me in what I can see your Christianity? By what sign can I find that you believe in the resurrection of the body? By the diligence you show in heaping up merits and good works for the next life? No; we see no such thing in you; quite the contrary; all your care is devoted to temporal goods to which your heart is fettered, as if you had to spend a long eternity here on earth. Perhaps in the patience you show in bearing crosses and trials? in the voluntary penances you practise in the hope of receiving an exceeding great reward for them in the next life? By no means; the least discomfort is intolerable to you; you hardly know what it is to mortify your senses. Perhaps in the fortitude with which you await death, hoping by it to obtain a better life? Still less. The bare thought of death fills you with terror, like those of whom St. Paul speaks: "That you be not sorrowful, even as others who have no hope."¹ Show me your faith, Christian! Let me see some sign to prove that you believe in the resurrection. Where shall we find it? In the Baptismal Register in which your name is enrolled amongst the names of other Christians? Yes. In the sign of the cross, which you make now and then? Yes. On your lips, by which you profess to be a Christian? Yes. Nothing more? No; that is all. O poor faith! wretched Christianity! How can this dead faith in the resurrection help you, since you live like a beast of the field, whose soul perishes with its body? Such is the sense in which St. Chrysostom speaks. But I have a better opinion of those here present than to think such a sharp reproof necessary for them.

I turn then to true Christians, and conclude in the words which St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians after he had explained to them the resurrection of the body: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast and immovable: always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not vain in the Lord,"² that it will not perish with this life. I add, moreover, the exhortation that he gave his disciple Titus: "Denying ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live soberly, and justly, and godly in this world; looking for the blessed hope and coming of the glory of the great God and Our Saviour Jesus

Exhortation
and con-
clusion,
founded on
the hope of
the resur-
rection, to
serve God
zealously.

¹ Ut non contristemini, sicut et ceteri qui spem non habent.—I. Thess. iv. 12.

² Ita que, fratres mei dilecti, stabiles estote, et immobiles; abundantes in opere Domini semper, scientes quod labor vester non est inanis in Domino.—I. Cor. xv. 58.

Christ.”¹ Upwards with your thoughts and desires! “Seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God; mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth.”² Why do we grub so long like moles in the mud of this vale of tears? The earth is not our lasting habitation; we have a far happier fatherland, to which we approach as travelling pilgrims nearer and nearer every day, to live there forever. If things go well with us for a time here below let us say to ourselves: after all what is the good of all this? These are not the joys that can content me; unhappy indeed should I be if I had nothing better to expect! And if what the world calls adversity assails us, then let us think: after all, what does it matter? This is not the place where I am to find happiness, and my tears shall not flow very long; the resurrection, the divine life, a blissful immortality which Jesus Christ has won for me by His Passion and death awaits me. With this hope I will console myself in the time of suffering; with this hope I will arm myself against all temptations, that I may never offend my God; with this hope I will daily spur myself on to serve God truly and constantly to the end according to my state and condition, that after my resurrection I may go body and soul “where Christ is sitting on the right hand of God.” Amen.

NINETEENTH SERMON.

ON THE CONSOLATION TO BE DERIVED FROM THE RESURRECTION IN THE TRIALS OF LIFE.

Subject.

Faith and hope in the future resurrection can and should encourage us to overcome all difficulties, and to bear with cheerfulness all trials and voluntary mortifications.—*Preached on the first Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Ostendit eis manus et latus.—John xx. 20.

“He showed them His hands, and His side.”

¹ Abnegantes impietatem, et sæcularia desideria, sobrie, et juste, et pie vivamus in hoc sæculo, expectantes beatam spem, et adventum gloriæ magni Dei, et salvatoris nostri Jesu Christi.—Tit. ii. 12, 13.

² Quæ sursum sunt querite, ubi Christus est in dextera Dei sedens; quæ sursum sunt sapite, non quæ super terram.—Coloss. iii. 1, 2.

Introduction.

In spite of the frequent assurances given by Our Lord that He would rise from the dead; in spite of the testimony of the angel, of the holy women, of the soldiers on guard, that He had really risen, that they had seen Him, that He was no longer to be found in the grave; in spite of the number of disciples who had seen Him alive and spoken to Him after the resurrection, the apostles were still so filled with doubt and fear that they hardly knew what to think. Could He be really risen? They half doubted, half believed it. Thomas had fully made up his mind not to believe: "I will not believe,"¹ he said. Then Jesus, to remove all hesitation from their minds, appeared to them again and "showed them His hands and His side," as if to say: do you not yet believe? See, here are My hands with the wounds made by the nails which fastened Me to the cross; here is My side pierced by the lance, with My heart still open. Then at last the disciples were convinced. "The disciples therefore were glad when they saw the Lord." My dear brethren, Christ is truly risen; we have no doubt of it; we all acknowledge and confess it; nor can any Catholic doubt that it is an equally certain truth and proved by as cogent arguments that, as Christ is risen from the dead, so we too shall one day arise from the dead. What lesson profitable for our souls shall we now draw from this truth, my dear brethren? Oh, what a comfort for us in adversity and tribulation, what an encouragement in all the difficulties of life, to think: I shall one day arise to everlasting life! And this is the consolation I mean to speak of to-day.

Plan of Discourse.

Faith and hope in the future resurrection to eternal life can and should encourage us to overcome all difficulties, and to bear cheerfully all trials and voluntary mortifications. Such is the whole subject.

That we may in future be encouraged by this hope, give us Thy grace, O Lord, risen from the dead; we ask it of Thee through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

If the hope of recovering his health, suggested by the doctor who gives him the medicine, is a source of consolation to the

Many disregard suffering and

¹ Non credam.—John xx. 25.

death,
through a
false idea
that they
shall revive
in another
body.

sick man who has lain in bed for whole months, and gives him courage to bear the discomforts of illness for a time longer; if the promise of freedom causes such joy to the prisoner that he bears much easier the severities of his prison, how much more should not a believing Christian be encouraged by the certain and infallible hope of a resurrection to an eternal, immortal, and perfectly happy life; so that he should bear with consolation and joy for a time longer the miseries of this short life, and willingly suffer with his suffering Lord? There have been people, and it is said there are still some in England, and especially in India, who believe that as soon as a man dies his soul does not go into eternity, but enters again into a human body and begins life afresh. This superstition makes its advocates so reckless that soldiers rush fearlessly into the midst of swords and spears, fire and bullets, and many merchants if they become bankrupts put an end to themselves at once without hesitation by hanging or shooting themselves. What does it matter, they think, if the body is wounded or mangled here? Elsewhere I shall get another, and perhaps a better one than this. And although I die by a violent death here, I shall come to life again in another country and begin a new existence.

The mere
belief in the
immortal-
ity of the
soul takes
away all
fear of
death.
Shown by an
example.

Seneca writes that Cato, one of the most renowned of the ancient Romans, after he had read a certain book of the philosopher Plato, thought so little of his life that when he saw the freedom of Rome on the point of being destroyed, and the commonwealth going to ruin and likely to be trampled under the feet of an emperor, took a sword and without the least hesitation stabbed himself to the heart with it, lest he should live after his country had lost her freedom. Some of his friends ran up, took the sword out of his body and bound the wound; but they could not alter his determination; for after having rested for a time, Cato, summoning up all his remaining strength, tore off the bandages, and widened the wound with his own unarmed hands; thus not so much giving up his magnanimous spirit, as compelling it to escape through the wide gate he opened for it,¹ are the words of Seneca. I know well that moralists are not agreed in their opinion of this act of Cato's. Some of them say that his contempt of death arose from a weakness and cowardice of mind, caused by the fear lest the triumphing Cæsar might treat him as a slave, and that it could by no means be traced to the bravery or forti-

¹ Spiritum non emisit, sed eiecit.

tude of a mind superior to all temporal evils. But others with Seneca maintain that this act was heroic, praiseworthy, and the proof of a really invincible heart. Be that as it may, what I am most eager to know is what he found in that book that could give him such a wonderful contempt for his own life, which is after all the best thing we can enjoy in this world? The book treated of the immortality of the human soul, and Cato was convinced by its teaching that the soul cannot die with the body, but that after it has been separated from the body by death it is as it were released from the bonds and chains which fettered it, and gains true freedom and a place among the great heroes forever as the reward of a well-spent life. If that is the case, he thought, I can easily allow one part of me, the body, to go, provided the other, the soul, lives forever.

My dear brethren, I do not cite this example as one worthy of imitation; God forbid that we should think of such a horrible crime! That we shall rise again after death in another body elsewhere is a false and erroneous doctrine, with which the devil deludes poor people that he may bring them down to hell all the sooner; the immortality of the soul is a divine truth; but it is a horrible crime to take away one's own life on account of it. What I conclude from the examples adduced is this: if the belief that after death the soul enters a new body gives such great courage as to take away all fear of wounds and of death itself, although they who believe this have no idea of where their souls will start the new life, whether it will be in a beautiful land or in a rugged desert among wild barbarians, nor what sort of bodies they will have, whether strong or weak, sickly or healthy, ugly or handsome, crippled or stately; and if the mere belief in immortality made Cato despise his own life, and all the comforts he might still have enjoyed, so that he gave them all up forever, although he did not know how or where his immortal soul was to live hereafter; what would both these classes of people do if they were quite certain that they would lose neither body nor soul, but that they would again receive their very own bodies, and live with them forever in a land full of all imaginable joys and pleasures without any fear of sorrow or loss? What would they do in such a case?

Christians! where is our faith, our hope? What should they effect in us? We must die, it is true; but what of that? If we were allowed to do so, would we not almost be inclined to imitate

What would such people do if they were fully certain of rising again, body and soul?

What should not we Christians do,

since we know that the just shall rise in bodies like to Christ's in glory ?

Cato and compel the soul with violence to leave the body? We have sometimes many discomforts and miseries to suffer here, it is true; but what does it matter? Our suffering lasts but for a short time; so that we have just reason for adding to the discomforts of the body every day; for we are assured, not by Plato, but by the infallible word of God Himself that we shall rise again in the same bodies and live forever. And provided we have suffered here with our suffering Lord, what shall the bodies be like in which we shall arise? They shall not be mortal, corruptible, faulty, subject to heat, cold, hunger, thirst, weariness, and countless maladies and miseries, as they are now; but hear what the holy Apostle St. Paul says of them: "The dead shall rise again incorruptible: and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption: and this mortal must put on immortality."¹ The weak body shall become strong, the sickly healthy, the deformed beautiful, the wasting incorruptible, the suffering impassible; to say all in a few words: our bodies shall resemble the glorified body of Christ Himself, as the same Apostle assures us: "We look for the Saviour, Our Lord Jesus Christ, who will reform the body of our lowness, made like to the body of His glory."² Mark well the magnificent words of our most faithful God: "made like to the body of his glory." These bodies of yours and mine, O Christian, provided we serve our dear Lord truly and walk in His footsteps, these bodies, I say, that are now only masses of filth and rottenness, shall then be in glory and perfection like to the body of Him who is seated on a throne of glory at the right hand of His heavenly Father, surrounded by countless myriads of angels and princes of heaven, who adore Him with the utmost humility, whose beauty forms a paradise of exultation for the elect.

That is, in most beautiful and glorious bodies.

By a single ray that the soul of Jesus Christ allowed to fall upon His then mortal body on Mount Thabor, His face, says the Scripture, shone like the sun, and His garments became white as snow: "His face did shine as the sun: and His garments became white as snow,"³ so that Peter, ravished out of himself at the sight of such transcendent beauty, wished to remain there for-

¹ Mortui resurgent incorrupti, et nos immutabimur. Oportet enim corruptibile hoc induere incorruptionem, et mortale hoc induere immortalitatem.—I. Cor. xv. 52, 53.

² Salvatorem exspectamus Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum, qui reformabit corpus humilitatis nostrae, configuratum corpori claritatis suae.—Philipp. iii. 20, 21.

³ Resplenduit facies ejus sicut sol; vestimenta autem ejus facta sunt alba sicut nix.—Matt. xvii. 2.

ever: "And Peter answering, said to Jesus: Lord, it is good for us to be here; if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles."¹ This, my dear brethren, was but a figure of the beauty of Our Lord's body after His resurrection from the dead. "The city hath no need of the sun," says St. John in the Apocalypse, speaking of the dwelling-place of God, "nor of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God hath enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof,"² who makes the clear day of heaven. Our bodies in the resurrection shall be like this most beautiful body. What more glorious lot can be imagined, what greater happiness can a poor mortal wish and hope for? But, O dear Saviour, is it not enough, for the poor service that I can render Thee here below, to give an immortal life to my soul? No; the body, which is its companion in labor, shall also accompany it in glory, and that too after it has been made like to the body of His glory, "like to My body." Like Mine in brightness, it shall outshine the sun; like Mine in agility, it shall be able to go anywhere in a moment; like Mine in subtlety, it shall be able to pass through stone and iron; like Mine in majesty and glory, it shall cause the demons to tremble; like Mine in impassibility, it shall be incapable of feeling pain or discomfort; like Mine in immortality, it shall live forever.

And where shall my body thus live in beauty and glory? In what land shall it dwell? Our Saviour Himself answers us: "Where I am, there also shall My minister be;"³ namely, in heaven, in the land of those joys and pleasures that no human eye has seen or heart can conceive; in riches without any fear of losing them; in dignity without envy; in rest without disturbance; in sweet love without jealousy; in authority without care or trouble; in satiety without disgust. Where I live, there must My servant live with Me. Oh, what a consolation for Christians! Should not this hope impel me to crucify and chastise my body with its sensuality, after the example of the crucified and suffering Jesus, that I may be admitted to the companionship of His glory and majesty? Should not this hope at least encourage me to bear all the crosses and trials of this life with cheerfulness and patience for God's sake? What harm can all human suffer-

And they shall live with those bodies forever in heaven.

¹ Respondens autem Petrus, dixit ad Jesum: Domine, bonum est nos hic esse; . . . si vis, faciamus hic tria tabernacula.—Matt. xvii. 4.

² Civitas non eget sole, neque luna, ut luceant in ea, nam claritas Dei illuminavit eam, et lucerna ejus est Agnus.—Apoc. xxi. 23.

³ Ubi sum ego, illic et minister meus erit.—John xii. 26.

ing and misery do me since I expect such a great and glorious happiness? What injury have I to fear from any accident or misfortune since in the next life I shall possess all goods in abundance? What can death with all the illnesses that may precede it take away from me, since I have the certain hope that this very body of mine, although it must decay in the earth for a time, shall rise again complete and live forever in a glorious eternity?

This
thought
consoled
holy Job in
his great
affliction.

Go again in thought, my dear brethren, to holy Job, who, although he lived long before the time of Our Lord, was not only infallibly certain in his faith, as we have heard already, but was also filled with consolation by his hope. What made him so patient and undaunted under his many sufferings and calamities, the least of which could have vanquished the greatest hero and thrown him into despair? What else but the hope of his future resurrection placed him on a throne as it were like an exultant champion triumphing over all his miseries? Come here, all ye men of the world! Consider for a moment that wonderful man who was renowned in the whole East: "This man was great among all the people of the East,"¹ whom the world for a long time beheld in the enjoyment of all its goods and riches, its honors and comforts, surrounded by an illustrious and numerous family, waited on by a crowd of servants, honored by strangers as well as friends, in a word, fenced in, as Satan reproached him with in the presence of God, by temporal prosperity and happiness: see how in a moment he is reduced to beggary, all his cattle driven off by the enemy, his property destroyed by fire, his servants gone from him to find other masters, his houses thrown to the ground by the wind, his children crushed to death, he himself abandoned to all the rage and wantonness of the devil, and stricken in his body with such a grievous sore that he looked like a monster of deformity and a mass of corruption. In this extreme necessity, abandoned by his friends, mocked and cursed by his own wife, he was forced by the intolerable smell of his sores to go forth from the house and sit on the dung-hill and scrape off with a potsherd the matter that flowed from his suffering body. Even the very stones might have pitied his miserable state! And yet in the midst of all these calamities, the bare mention of which makes us shudder, he sat there consoled and contented, blessing and praising God! Go some one, with his wife and jeering friends, and reproach him with his vain hope on

¹ Eratque vir ille magnus inter omnes Orientales.—Job 1. 3.

God: "Dost thou still continue in thy simplicity? Bless God and die."¹ Compelled by a natural feeling of sorrow, Job will indeed sometimes groan and sigh and complain and long for death; but never will he forget his dutiful obedience, submission, and respect for the Almighty God. He will encourage himself with his hope, and say: I can see the dung-hill on which I am sitting, the worms that creep out of my sores, and the decaying flesh that falls from my bones; I can see and know all that; but at the same time "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth: and I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God."² It is this hope alone that comforts me in my misery; therefore I do not mind the loss of my goods, the misfortunes that have crowded on me, and the bodily pain I suffer. But, holy man, how can that hope help thee? The comfort thou expectest is still a long way from thee; many hundred years must pass away before thy resurrection takes place! And meanwhile thou art lying there in torment! No, answers Job; my comfort is not far from me; my pains torment me only outwardly, while inwardly my heart is filled with consolation: "This my hope is laid up in my bosom;"³ it is hidden in my heart; it sits with me on the dung-hill, and with that I am more contented in all my sufferings than a king on his throne. I shall rise out of the earth and shall see my Redeemer! Blessed be the name of the Lord!

What do you think of this, delicate Christians! who are so diligent in seeking your comfort, and cannot bear the least mortification? What do you think, pusillanimous and despairing souls, who complain so impatiently under the trials and crosses of life, as if all were lost? If misfortune or poverty deprives you of some temporal good, if sickness attacks and confines you to bed, if father or mother, husband or wife, child or friend is carried off by a premature death, or if the danger of death threatens you yourself, is all lost therefore? Nay, have you suffered any loss whatever? Let those complain of whom the Apostle speaks, those who have no hope, no expectation of a happy resurrection. Truly they have reason to complain, to murmur, to despair. But you, my dear brethren, who bear this hope about with you, why should you be disturbed at the loss of worldly goods, of earthly

And St.
Paul.

¹ Adhuc tu permanes in simplicitate tua! Benedic Deo, et morere.—Job ii. 9.

² Scio enim quod Redemptor meus vivit, et in novissimo die de terra surrecturus sum; et rursus circumdabor pelle mea, et in carne mea videbo Deum meum.—Ibid. xix. 25, 26.

³ Reposita est hæc spes mea in sinu meo.—Ibid. xix. 27.

comforts, of a fickle health, of a mortal body? All these things are “momentary and light;”¹ they will be restored to us hereafter in far greater perfection with the assurance of never losing them for eternity. “In all things we suffer tribulation, but are not distressed: we are straitened, but are not destitute; we suffer persecution, but are not forsaken; we are cast down, but we perish not;” we are wearied out with labor, with dangers, persecutions, hunger, thirst, imprisonment; but we are not distressed, nor disturbed at heart: “Always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus.” But all this does not disturb or annoy us. Why, holy Apostle? What medicine do you use to sweeten such bitter trials? “Knowing that he who raised up Jesus will raise up us also with Jesus.”² There is the reason why I reckon as nothing all that I can suffer here; for what is it all compared to the future glory that awaits me in eternity?

The holy
martyrs.

Consider the many martyrs of Jesus Christ; nor do I speak now of adult, strong, able-bodied men, but of weak, delicate maidens, little children who ran joyfully to the cross that was held out to them, and who in the midst of torments and flames, and under the very hands of the executioner, mocked at their torments and defied the tyrant; what thought gave them such strength and courage, and heroic constancy? None other than the certain hope that their bodies, which they were about to lose for a time by the sword, by water, or by fire, would be restored to them in a far happier life: and therefore they acted up to Our Lord’s teaching: “Fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul.”³

Even in the
Old Testa-
ment.

What an agreeable sight it must have been before heaven to behold the seven Machabees, maimed in hands, feet, ears, and tongue, joyfully offering their mutilated bodies to be roasted alive! You cut my tongue out, cried the first, and cut off my arms and legs; do so; I give them to you with pleasure; for you must know that I shall get them again from my God. The second, as he lay maimed in the frying-pan, exclaimed: “Thou indeed, O most wicked man, destroyest us out of this present life: but the King of the world will raise us up who die for His laws, in

¹ Momentaneum et leve.—II. Cor. iv. 17.

² In omnibus tribulationem patimur, sed non angustiamur; aperiimur, sed non destitui-
mur; persecutionem patimur, sed non derelinquimur; deieciimur, sed non perimus; semper
mortificationem Jesu in corpore nostro circumferentes. Scientes quoniam qui suscitavit
Jesum, et nos cum Jesu suscitabit.—Ibid. 8, 9, 10, 14.

³ Nolite timere eos, qui occidunt corpus, animam autem non possunt occidere.—Matt. x. 28.

the resurrection of eternal life." The third when told to stretch forth his tongue cried out undismayed; here it is, and my hands too: "These I have from heaven, but for the laws of God I now despise them, because I hope to receive them again from Him." And the fourth: "It is better, being put to death by men, to look for hope from God, to be raised up again by Him." And so with all the others down to the very youngest. The mother looking on at the martyrdom of her sons, not like the mothers of to-day who weep and moan if the least accident happens their children, kept on crying out to them full of joy and consolation: Raise your eyes to heaven, my dear children! let them burn and maim you as they will: "The Creator of the world, He will restore to you again in His mercy both breath and life, as now you despise yourselves for the sake of His laws."¹

Christians, what a shame for us! They had but the light of the Old Law, and we in the full blaze of the noon-day sun of the Gospel show by our actions that we are blinder than they! What a shame for us who make profession of a religion which adores a crucified God who rose again from the dead, to be so weak and tender about ourselves, so anxious to fly the cross, so fearful of the least discomfort, not to speak of death itself, as if we had no faith in the resurrection! I am ashamed of myself when I read even of the heathen philosopher Anaxagoras; he was called on to defend himself against a man who wished to deprive him of a splendid property he had. "What!" he exclaimed; "are a few acres of land worth so much trouble? If I have to go to law it must be for something worth while." All his friends were indignant that he was so careless in such a matter, in which others were wont to spare no trouble; whereupon he raised his eyes to heaven, and pointing upwards, said: "That, that is my country, that is my inheritance; it is for the things that are there I care, not for those that are on earth."² Could a Christian have given a better answer than that heathen? Meanwhile many of us have fine words on our lips, but quite different desires in our hearts, showing that we care far more for the things of earth than for the eternal goods that we have to expect in heaven.

Nay, even
heathens.

¹ Tu quidem, scelestissime, in presenti vita nos perdis; sed rex mundi defunctos nos pro suis legibus in æternæ vitæ resurrectione suscitabit. E cælo ista possideo, sed propter Deum leges nunc hæc ipsa despicio, quoniam ab ipso me ea recepturus spero. Potius est ab hominibus morti datos spem expectare a Deo, iterum ab ipso resuscitandos. Mundi Creator, spiritum vobis iterum cum misericordia reddet et vitam, sicut nunc vosmetipsos despicitis propter leges ejus.—II. Mach. vii. 9, 11, 14, 23.

² Illa, illa patria mea est, illa hæreditas mea; illa ego curo, non ea quæ super terram.

If we had true Christian faith, we should rather rejoice in suffering, after the example of good Christians.

O Christian faith! how art thou become so weak and wavering! Christian hope, how uncertain thy foundation in many people! Might we not think of some that they acknowledge no other life than the present, which we have in common with the beasts of the field, like that old woman whose epitaph was: "I have lived, and have believed in nothing except life"?¹ Oh, if we only had a lively faith and hope in the glory of the resurrection, we should rejoice when poverty takes away our temporal goods, or sickness or voluntary mortification weakens our bodies. We should think and say with that leper of whom Rodriguez writes: "See, the fetters that keep me on this wretched earth are loosened more and more every day, so that I shall arrive in my fatherland all the quicker." A nobleman who had lost his way out hunting found himself alone in a forest, and knew not how to get out or what to do. Suddenly he heard a most sweet voice singing. Where can the song come from? he thought. Is it an angel's voice or that of a human being? He spurred on his horse and rode towards the voice; and behold there came out of the thicket a poor, ragged leper, so misshapen and deformed that the nobleman could hardly bear to look at him; meanwhile the leper kept on pulling off the decaying flesh from his body. "Poor wretch!" exclaimed the noble; "who was singing so sweetly in the forest a few moments ago?" "It was I, sir," answered the leper. "What!" said the other; "can you, who have such cause to weep and lament, sing so cheerily?" "Yes, indeed! I have been singing through sheer joy and consolation; do you wish to know why? I know that the only wall that keeps me from heaven is this miserable body of mine; now the more I see it decay the nearer I come to the fulfilment of my hope that the wall will soon fall down altogether, and so I shall gain the rest and repose I long for. That is the reason why I sing so cheerily and bless God who now mortifies my flesh, that He may restore it to me afterwards in another guise."

But we are wanting in faith.

Ah, my dear brethren, I again repeat, would that we had only a lively faith and hope! But there is where we are at fault! The inordinate love we have for our flesh and sensuality, the inordinate desire of temporal things has so dimmed the faith in our hearts, that the future glory of the resurrection awakens in us but little pleasure, desire, or courage; or else if faith has still left some hope in us we try to persuade ourselves that we may

¹ *Vixi, et ultra vitam nihil credidi!*

arrive at that glory by an easier, more comfortable way than the rude way of penance and the cross, which Christ our Head and all His saints have travelled. Oh, truly that is a self-deception that brings many a soul on the broad way that leads to the abyss of hell! If Christ had found a more comfortable way to heaven than the way of penance and the cross He would certainly have chosen it, or at least have pointed it out to us, whom He loves even to death. But, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so to enter into His glory?"¹ Then have we nothing better to hope for? Certainly not; the Apostle assures us: "If we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection."²

So that I must necessarily suffer here below? Yes. Then I will suffer here, either by voluntary mortification of my body or by patiently bearing the crosses and trials which God will deign to send me; and I shall be comforted and strengthened in this resolution by the certain hope of a resurrection to eternal glory. O death! how little I have to fear from thee, if I only serve God faithfully, for thou wilt transport me into a land of joy where I shall find my body again. O poverty! now I know what a rich treasure I owe thee, and I would not change thee for all the riches of earth. Sorrow and trials! would that I had known it sooner! you are now so desirable to me, that I can heartily thank God for you. Weakness and sickness! I knew it not before how good you are to me in depriving me of my bodily strength, and preparing me to receive still greater beauty in the resurrection. Dying friends, parents, children, why have I afflicted myself so much on your account? For I shall see you again in a far better place! Be sorrowful now, my soul! because there thou shalt swim in an ocean of delights! Eyes, ears, tongue, taste, touch, why do you seek pleasures here? Mortify yourselves and wait for the eternal pleasures that are coming! What would I say to the peasant who for the sake of seeing his casks filled with wine a little sooner begins the vintage in the month of July or August, and thus cuts off the green, unripe, and sour grapes? Wait, I should say to him, O foolish man! Do you wish to have wine? You shall have enough of it; but wait a few months, and then instead of a small quantity of sour,

Conclusion and resolution to bear all suffering with joy, in the hope of a glorious resurrection.

¹ Nonne hæc oportuit pati Christum, et ita intrare in gloriam suam?—Luke xxiv. 26.

² Si complantati facti sumus similitudini mortis ejus, simul et resurrectionis erimus.—Rom. vi. 5.

immature, ill-flavored wine, you shall have an abundance of sweet, healthy wine that will always increase in goodness, to put in your cellar. The same I should say to him who plucks off the apples or pears before they are ripe and when they hardly have the proper shape of pears and apples; or to one who cuts his corn while the ear is still in formation: wait, put off your harvest for a time; then you shall have all and much more than you desired. So I will say to myself: this is not the time to enjoy the pleasures of sense; I will put them off to the harvest-time, when I shall rise again with those who sowed in tears and reaped an eternal harvest of joy. Yes, O Lord! "I believe to see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living,"¹ where I shall be able to say with that Saint who appeared to St. Theresa after his death: "O fortunate penance, which has merited for me such great glory!"² This my hope is laid up in my bosom. Amen.

TWENTIETH SERMON.

ON THE PROFIT WE CAN DERIVE FROM THE CONSIDERATION
OF THE TRIALS OF THE JUST AND THE PROSPERITY
OF THE WICKED, AS FAR AS THE RESURRECTION
IS CONCERNED.

Subject.

First: that the pious in this world live in afflictions, while the wicked live in prosperity, should strengthen our faith in a resurrection to heaven. Secondly: it should strengthen our hope in a resurrection to heaven. Thirdly: it should inflame our love and desire for a resurrection to heaven.—*Preached on the second Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Ego sum pastor bonus, et cognosco meas, et cognoscunt me meae.—John x. 14.

"I am the Good Shepherd: and I know Mine, and Mine know Me."

¹ Credo videre bona Domini in terra viventium.—Ps. xxvi. 13.

² O felix poenitentia! quæ tantam mihi promeruit gloriam!

Introduction.

Where the shepherd is there are the sheep also; where the shepherd leads the sheep follow, whether he leads them into a green, pleasant meadow, or to the top of a barren mountain. My dear brethren, Jesus Christ is our Shepherd, and as He says Himself, He is our good Shepherd, who gives His life for His flock. Now if we wish to be good sheep we must follow this Shepherd, no matter where He leads us, through thistles and thorns as well as through flowers and roses. This Shepherd has gone before us suffering and sorrowing; we must be ready to follow Him, as the Apostle warns us in to-day's Epistle: "Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps."¹ But let us be comforted! The same Shepherd has also gone before us in His glorious resurrection to eternal joys; if we follow Him in the path of suffering we shall also follow Him in the glory of His resurrection to heaven, and that is the end our well-meaning Lord has in view when, as is generally the case, He sends the good and pious many trials and crosses, while He allows sinners and the wicked, who, as the Apostle says, have no hope of a glorious resurrection, to abound in temporal prosperity. Nay, that very decree of divine Providence should confirm our faith and hope in the future resurrection to the joys of heaven, as I shall now show; and I take as the basis of my discourse the two contraries, namely, the trials of the just and the seeming happiness of the wicked, as follows:

Plan of Discourse

That the good in this world live in suffering, while the wicked abound in prosperity, strengthens our faith in the future resurrection to heaven: the first point. It confirms our hope in the resurrection to heaven. second point. It inflames our love and desire for the resurrection to heaven: third point. Be comforted then, pious and suffering Christians!

I rely, in what I have to say, on the light of the Holy Ghost, which I implore through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

It will perhaps at first seem strange to you that I should bring forward as a proof of our faith what appears, humanly speaking,

The wickedness of

¹ Christus passus est pro nobis, vobis relinquens exemplum, ut sequamini vestigia ejus.— I. Pet. ii. 21.

the sinner
comes
chiefly from
want of
faith in a
future life.

utterly subversive of that faith. For the fact that pious servants of God generally had sorrow and tribulation to suffer while the wicked servants of the world lived in peace and plenty was the very circumstance that in former times led heathens and infidels, who followed the light of reason alone, to this conclusion: either Christians had not the true God, or else their God was blind and forgetful of them. The sufferings of the good and the prosperity of the wicked seemed even to St. Augustine difficult to harmonize with faith; and even King David and other Prophets seemed to have experienced the same difficulty almost to the point of wavering in their belief as to whether such an arrangement could really come from divine Providence. But, my dear brethren, you will soon be of my opinion when we have duly examined the matter. Give me your attention now. How comes it that we find so many, even amongst Catholics, who are at least half atheists? I allude to those who live according to the senses, who trouble themselves least of all about how they stand with God, who put in an appearance at church through worldly motives and for fashion's sake, while they remain in the state of sin from year's end to year's end. How does that occur? I ask. Why are these people found in such numbers? My idea is that they have no faith, or at all events a very weak and cold faith, in a future life, in which the just shall have eternal joys in heaven while the wicked shall be tormented forever in hell. They know by daily experience that we must all die; but they imagine that death is the end of all things, and hence they say with the wicked in the prophecy of Isaias: "Let us eat, and drink, for to-morrow we shall die;"¹ let us enjoy the good things of this world as long as we can, for we may soon die, and then we shall have nothing more to expect. They often indeed read, or hear in sermons, when they come to listen to them, of a happy or unhappy eternity after death; but they imagine those things to be an empty dream, or idle threat, or a baseless fiction. They have gone so far in sin and the blindness it causes that they are like the wicked of whom David speaks: "God is not before his eyes: his ways are filthy at all times."² What is the result of that? "Thy judgments are removed from his sight."³ If they had a lively faith in an eternal heaven and an

¹ Comedamus et bibamus, cras enim moriemur.—Is. xxii. 13.

² Non est Deus in conspectu ejus; iniquitatæ sunt viæ illius in omni tempore.—Ps. x. 5.

³ Auferuntur judicia tua a facie ejus.

eternal hell, how could they thus possibly squander away their short lives in sin, and pay for a fleeting pleasure by an eternity of pain? No; you may say what you please; it is clear that in those people there is a want of lively faith.

Now if I had not the express and infallible word of God to assure me that there is another life after this, that the soul shall not die with the body; if I had not the divine promises of a reward hereafter for the good works of the just, nor the divine threats of a punishment for the sins of the wicked; if all men were to rise up against me, and cry me down, I would still brave them all and maintain the same truth, and an all-sufficient reason for my doing that would be that I see the good suffer and the wicked rejoice in this life. I have no wish to dispute with infidels, idolaters, or atheists; I believe and am infallibly certain from what heaven and earth place before my eyes, that there is one God, and since He is one, I am certain that He is a just Lord. Hear now how I am convinced of the truth in question from the unequal lot of the just and the wicked.

Now the prosperity of the wicked and the trials of the just confirm us in the belief that there must be a future life.

First: it is certain that the wicked man commits many sins and that the just man does many good actions in his life. Good works merit a reward, and bad ones punishment even in worldly justice, as we know by experience. God could not be God if He were not just; He could not be just if He allowed sin always to go unpunished, if He allowed supernatural good works to go always unrewarded. Now many sinners live in prosperity and joys, in riches and abundance, a fact of which we complain, so that they are evidently not punished here below for their sins. On the other hand, a fact which we deplore, many good people live in sorrow and suffering, in poverty and distress, so that they are not rewarded for their good works here below; therefore there must necessarily be after this life another life in which the former shall be punished and the latter rewarded.

For the good must be rewarded, and the wicked punished: since that is not done here, it must be done hereafter.

Again, it is certain that no sinner is so utterly reprobate as not to do some good act now and then. If his wickedness consists in brutal lust, he is at least careful not to violate justice; if it consists in injustice, he lives soberly and chastely; if in cursing, swearing, or drunkenness, he is not ambitious or self-conceited. Whatever may be his vice, he says an Our Father now and then, he sometimes hears Mass, he observes the fasts of the Church, gives alms, and so on. Mark now the designs of God. Although after the first mortal sin all the sinner's former good works, no

Besides, as the good works of the wicked are rewarded here, and the sins of the just punished, the former must expect punishment, the

latter
reward else-
where.

matter what they were, are mortified, and all those he performs in the state of sin are and remain dead, and therefore God is not bound to give any reward for the former merits, unless the sinner does penance, nor for the latter good works; yet He is such a liberal, generous God, that He will not allow even such works as these to be unrewarded, but repays them in abundance, and as He cannot do that in the next life, where hell awaits the unrepentant sinner, He does it in this life, by granting the sinner prosperity, riches, the joys and pleasures of the world, so that no one may ever reproach Him with receiving a service for nothing. On the other hand, there is no just man who has not either sinned formerly in his youth or does not now and then commit some daily venial sin; I am afraid that none of us will be able to boast to the contrary; now divine justice requires full satisfaction for these sins, and since the just man pays this by patiently bearing trials and by other good works, and so gets rid of a great part of the punishment he deserves, I am again led to the conclusion that after death there must be a joyful life for him, in which the reward he has not received here for his good works awaits him.

From this
the Doctors
of the
Church
prove clear-
ly that
there must
be another
life.

It is not I alone, my dear brethren, who have found out this argument; it has been used already by the holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church against those heretics who denied the immortality of the soul. Hear what William of Paris says against an error of this kind. You acknowledge that there is an Author of things by whom the world was made; you acknowledge that there is one God; now I ask: has this God any pleasure in those who faithfully serve Him, who for His sake abstain from forbidden delights, who love Him above all things, and always try to do His holy will? If He has no pleasure in them, where is His goodness and holiness? But if He has, where does He show it? Not in this life; for, as you object to me, He leaves His servants to suffer here below; nor, according to you, shall He show it after this life, for you maintain that the soul dies with the body. Say what you will to this, you shall not solve the difficulty until you confess that the soul is immortal, and that after death there is another life in which a just God rewards every one according to his works. If this be not true, then, contrary to the generally received belief of all men and to the express word of God, all holy and enlightened men must be looked on as the greatest fools; while the wicked, who wallow in

filth like swine, must be esteemed as truly wise. Why so? Because the latter look for and enjoy temporal pleasures and goods, and profit by them as long as they live; while the just mortify themselves, suffer many trials and discomforts, and voluntarily undertake most laborious tasks, and all this in the hope of an imaginary reward they expect hereafter. There you have an argument that convinced even heretics, and reduced them to silence.

St. Augustine used a similar proof to console and encourage a distressed soul who complained to him of having so much to suffer that faith was in danger and despair at hand. You are quite wrong, said the Saint, and have made a great mistake in allowing yourself to be disturbed because virtue is ill-treated and vice rewarded in this world; for you only consider what your eyes can see; you regard only this short life, and the few days that make it up, and you wish God to fulfil all your desires in that fleeting moment.¹ Is it not your desire that God should bless with prosperity in this world all His faithful servants, and chastise the wicked, and that He should thus pronounce His final sentence in this short time? Truly that is the meaning of your words! But God will not take much notice of them! Wait a little; everything shall come in due time.² God will see to everything; when? In His own time. And what is God's time? Eternity. Therefore if you wish to strengthen and comfort yourself in your faith, direct your thoughts to God's eternity, and when you see the apparent injustice with which He acts towards men on this earth, by being so liberal to His enemies and so stingy and harsh to His friends, conclude that He has an eternity for the former as well as for the latter in which He will give both what belongs to them by right, since He does not do so in this life. Such is the argument used by St. Augustine.

St. August-
tine.

St. John Chrysostom speaks in the same sense: "Where are they who do good here to enjoy their reward, and where are the wicked to receive punishment?"³ "Son, remember," shall God say to the sinner as Abraham said to the rich glutton in hell, "that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime," "therefore thou hast no further claims now; and if thou hast done

St. John
Chrysostom.

¹ Attendis ad dies tuos paucos, et diebus tuis paucis vis impleri omnia.

² Implebit Deus in tempore suo.

³ Ubi, qui bene hic operati fuerint, bonis fruuntur; ubi autem mali contrariis: nisi ut futura vita post hanc?—St. John Chrys., Hom. 9, in II. Cor. iv.

⁴ Illi, recordare quia recepisti bona in vita tua.—Luke xvi. 25.

any good on earth thou art already rewarded for it. Thou hast received wealth, health, pleasures, honors.¹ I owe thee nothing further; thou hast received what thou didst seek. But now dost thou know how many sins thou art guilty of, for which thou hast not been paid during life? Now therefore it is thy turn to be in My debt; therefore thou art now tormented, and shalt remain so during My time, that is, for all eternity. But, thou sayest, why does Lazarus sit in Thy lap and rejoice? Has he not also sinned? Yes, he has; but remember how things went with him during life. While thou wert enjoying prosperity, Lazarus sat before thy door a poor beggar amongst the dogs, suffering hunger and thirst, full of wounds and sores; thus he atoned for his sins, while he had not as yet received anything for his patience in bearing poverty and affliction, and for the other good works he performed for My sake; therefore “now he is comforted,”² therefore now during My time he shall enjoy consolation and an exceeding great reward. Try to understand this, ye vain children of the world, who live in wealth, honor, and prosperity on earth, and yet do not serve God zealously in your good fortune, as you ought, but commit many sins; conclude from this that after this life an eternity of pain awaits you. So far, Chrysostom. See, my dear brethren, how the mystery of the unequal fate of the just and the wicked, which seems so hard to explain, actually helps to strengthen the basis of our faith in the resurrection to heaven. But besides that, it strengthens our hope in the resurrection to heaven, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

Already in the Old Law the just grounded their hopes of an eternal life on the trials of this. Holy Job.

Already in the Old Law just and holy people used to build their hopes on the trials of this life, and to strengthen them by suffering. I hear Job speaking of the happiness of the future life as if he were already assured of it and had the title to it in his hand. “I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth, and in my flesh I shall see my God.”³ Where? when? in what circumstances did he use those words? When he was the richest and greatest of the land? No, although he then served God in his first innocence, but when he was de-

¹ *Recepisti opes tuas, sanitatem tuam, delicias tuas, honorem tuum : nihil debetur, recepisti bona tua.*

² *Idecirco nunc iste consolatur.*—Luke xvi. 25.

³ *Scio quod Redemptor meus vivit, et in novissimo die de terra surrecturus sum ; et in carne mea videbo Deum meum.*—Job xix. 25, 26.

prived of house and home, abandoned by all, lying on a dung-hill, covered with putrid sores, and bitterly complaining of his lot. The hand of the Lord has touched me; "He hath stripped me of my glory, and hath taken the crown from my head. He hath destroyed me on every side." He has slain my children, taken my goods from me, and reduced me to extreme want. "His wrath is kindled against me, and He hath counted me as His enemy. He hath put my brethren far from me, and my acquaintance like strangers have departed from me. My kinsmen have forsaken me, and they that knew me have forgotten me. They that dwell in my house and my maid-servants have counted me as a stranger, and I have been like an alien in their eyes. I called my servant, and he gave me no answer, I entreated him with my own mouth;" and he did not even deign to take notice. "My wife hath abhorred my breath;" she laughs at and mocks me. "The flesh being consumed, my bone hath cleaved to my skin, and nothing but lips are left about my teeth." Yet after enumerating all those evils, he adds: "Who will grant me that my words may be written? who will grant me that they may be marked down in a book with an iron pen, and in a plate of lead, or else be graven with an instrument in flint-stone?"¹ For I know that my Redeemer liveth; I do not only believe it; I know and am sure of it; I know that I shall come to Him, and that I shall see God in this flesh. "Whence had he that certainty?" asks St. Gregory. "He found it in his great misery, in the harshness with which God treated him here."

When did Tobias count himself amongst the chosen children of God? "We are the children of saints, and look for that life which God will give to them that never change their faith from Him."² Was it not when, after a holy life filled with works of mercy, he lay down to rest wearied with burying the dead, and the swallow's dung fell into his eyes and blinded him, while his friends came and mocked and ridiculed him? When did David

Tobias and David.

¹ Spoliavit me gloria mea, et abstulit coronam de capite meo. Destruxit me undique. Iratus est contra me furor ejus, et sic me habuit quasi hostem suum. Fratres meos longe fecit a me, et noti mei quasi alieni recesserunt a me. Dereliquerunt me propinqui mei, et qui me noverant oblitii sunt mei. Inquilini domus meæ, et ancillæ meæ, sicut alienum habuerunt me, et quasi peregrinus fui in oculis eorum. Servum meum vocavi, et non respondit; ore proprio deprecabar illum. Habitum meum exhorruit uxor mea. Pelli meæ consumptis carnibus, adhæsit os meum; et derelicta sunt tantummodo labia circa dentes meos. Quis mihi tribuat ut scribantur sermones mei? Quis mihi det ut exarentur in libro, stylo ferreo, et plumbi lamina, vel celte sculpantur in silice?—Job xix. 9-11, 13-17, 20, 23, 24.

² Filii sanctorum sumus, et vitam illam expectamus quam Deus daturus est his qui fidem suam nunquam mutant ab eo.—Tobias ii. 18.

receive such a clear knowledge and, as it were, a foretaste of heavenly goods that he cried out as if he could behold them with his eyes: "I believe to see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living."¹ This was the time when he was still innocent and had to fly from the fury of Saul, and was even forced to beg his bread; but he consoled himself with the thought that he should see the good things of the Lord. But, holy Prophet, how is it that thou seest those things already? Persecution, misery, hunger, and want surround thee on all sides, and thou pretendest to see the goods and joys of the Lord? Truly, answers St. Chrysostom, it was those very trials that made him certain of possessing the good things of God in the next life. For he knew well that the persecution of his innocence was contrary to justice; and therefore he came to the conclusion, and it was a certain one, that divine Providence had appointed another place in the next life, where his innocence would be brought to light and his patience crowned.

Much more should we Christians be encouraged by this hope in trials.

O Christians! if the just in the Old Law found such a sure foundation for their hope in the trials they suffered, how strong should not be the hope of pious Christians, since their trials are stamped and sealed by Jesus Christ Himself, the King of the suffering, who by the testimony of His blood as well as by word of mouth assures us that crosses are title-deeds to the joys of heaven, and a sure pledge of eternal salvation? If our dear Lord had said in His Gospel that all who follow Him and serve Him zealously should escape discomfort and trouble, and be endowed with wealth, honor, and pleasure, while He should reserve His trials for the wicked alone, then if I saw sinners enjoying prosperity and the good groaning under the weight of affliction, I should begin to wonder, to lose courage, and to despair of salvation. Why, I should say, has the Son of God betrayed us? for I see the contrary happening to what He has led us to believe, and therefore I cannot trust in His promises about eternal life.

For Christ has expressly promised that the afflicted shall rejoice.

But when I read the Gospel and find that things are stated there quite differently; when I hear my Saviour saying clearly to His disciples: "You shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice;"² when I hear Him enumerating all the persecutions, calumnies, scourgings, crosses, and torments in store for

¹ Credo videre bona Domini in terra viventium.—Ps. xxvi. 13.

² Plorabitis, et flebitis vos, mundus autem gaudebit.—John xvi. 20.

them, and at the same time exhorting them to remember His words that they may not be disturbed: "These things have I spoken to you, that you may not be scandalized; . . . that when the hour shall come you may remember that I told you of them"¹—when I remember all this, and at the same time see by experience that those words are literally fulfilled, for as a general rule I find that the just are afflicted, while the wicked live in prosperity, then indeed I fear nothing as long as I serve God zealously; and even if I should be overwhelmed with afflictions I should not therefore lose hope, but rather comfort myself all the more in the thought of eternal life and a glorious resurrection. For I think to myself: the same Son of God who has said to the just, "You shall lament and weep," says immediately after: "But your sorrow shall be turned into joy. . . I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice: and your joy no man shall take from you."² The same Son of God who has said to the just, "You shall weep," says also: "Blessed are ye that weep now, for you shall laugh."³ The same Son of God who says, "You shall be hated by all men for My name's sake,"⁴ says also: "Blessed shall you be when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Be glad in that day and rejoice: for behold, your reward is great in heaven."⁵ Now the Son of God is in all cases infallible, and as His prophecy concerning the trials of the just is true, so also must be that regarding the eternal joys reserved for them. Therefore as experience tells us that what He said about the trials of His servants is fulfilled to the letter, we shall with equal certainty experience the truth of His words concerning the reward in the next life. Therefore in future I shall say in affliction with St. Paul: It is true that I suffer and groan and weep, yet I am not disturbed, nor do I complain or lose hope: "I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed. For I know whom I have believed, and I am certain that He is able to keep that which I

¹ Hæc locutus sum vobis, ut non scandalizemini; ut cum venerit hora eorum, reminiscamini quia ego dixi vobis.—John xvi. 1, 4.

² Tristitia vestra vertetur in gaudium; iterum autem videbo vos, et gaudebit cor vestrum; et gaudium vestrum nemo tollet a vobis.—Ibid. 20, 22.

³ Beati qui nunc fletis, quia ridebitis.—Luke vi. 21.

⁴ Eritis odio omnibus propter nomen meum.—Ibid. xxi. 17.

⁵ Beati eritis, cum vos oderint homines, et cum separaverint vos, et exprobraverint, et ejecerint nomen vestrum tanquam malum propter Filium hominis. Gaudete in illa die, et exsultate, ecce enim merces vestra multa est in cælo.—Ibid. vi. 22, 23.

have committed unto Him against that day.”¹ Not only do I hope, but I am assured and certain that the just Judge is able and willing to keep His promise regarding the reward in store for me on the day when I shall come to Him. And what reward is that? An eternal one in heaven, the desire, longing for, and love of which is inflamed in me by the difference of the lot of the just and the wicked on earth, as we shall briefly see in the

Third Part.

Our desires for heaven are inflamed by the afflictions we suffer.

It is natural for one who is confined in a gloomy dungeon to long and sigh for his release all the more eagerly the greater the hardships and discomforts he has to endure. And it is also beyond a doubt that the trials and crosses of this life, in which we are confined as in a prison and vale of tears, excite a love and earnest desire for the joys of heaven, especially in those who groan most under the weight of affliction. Is it surprising that heaven should be so insipid and earth so agreeable to one who enjoys all the delights of the world according to the wishes of his heart? But on the other hand, consider the poor, oppressed servant of God sighing and moaning under the weight of the cross like another Job; you will hear him saying: “My soul is weary of my life.”² The day and night seem to me as long as a year; when shall it all have an end? When shall I attain the repose I long for? The persecuted David cries out: “When shall I come and appear before the face of God? My tears have been my bread day and night, whilst it is said to me daily: Where is thy God?”³ St. Paul, overwhelmed with various trials, exclaims: “I am straitened: having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ.”⁴ And one of the reasons that God has for leaving His faithful servants in affliction and suffering is, that they may grow tired of and disgusted with earth and turn all their desires and aspirations to heaven. But I will dilate no longer on this.

By the joys in which the wicked live.

And strange as it seems, even the prosperity and happiness of the wicked, when we consider the matter aright, can and should awaken in our minds a love and desire of heaven. How so? The greater the good one expects as a reward the greater his

¹ Hæc patior, sed non confundor. Scio enim cui credidi, et certus sum quia potens est depositum meum servare in illum diem.—II. Tim. i. 12.

² Tædet animam meam vitæ meæ.—Job x. 1.

³ Quando veniam? et apparebo ante faciem Dei? Fuerunt mihi lacrymæ meæ panes die ac nocte, dum dicitur mihi quotidie: Ubi est Deus tuus?—Ps. xli. 3, 4.

⁴ Coarctor: desiderium habens dissolvi, et esse cum Christo.—Philipp. i. 23.

desire to get possession of it. That is a statement that requires no proof. O goods and joys of the Lord! you that the faithful servant of God has to expect, how great will you be? Ye angels of heaven, I do not ask you to answer me this! Nor do I require one of you, O saints, to be sent down to us to tell us what is to be found in that land of joys! Nor will I ask you, holy St. Paul, to make known to us what you saw in the third heaven! nor you, St. John, to explain what God revealed to you of the heavenly Jerusalem in the Apocalypse. Sinners! children of the world, who live here in abundance and delight! it is from you that I wish to learn this; tell me, what and how great is the reward that awaits the just man, whom you now hardly deign to look upon? But to no purpose should I expect an answer from you, for like brute beasts you are sunk in vice, and are blind to heavenly things. I take the matter then into my own hands, and look on for a time at your prosperity; I represent to my imagination the magnificent houses, the rooms hung with damask, in which you live; the gardens in which you spend your time in idleness during the pleasant spring weather; the down beds in which you repose so comfortably at night; the costly array in which you appear in public; the crowd of lackeys and servants that await your least nod; the number of people who honor you on account of your prosperity, and almost pay you a sort of adoration; the costly viands on which you regale every day; the gold and silver from which you eat and drink; the musical voices and instruments that delight your ears; the theatres, dancing, and gaming houses in which you enjoy yourselves; the pleasant company you revel in; the round of pleasures that follow each other from morning till night, in which there is always something new to tickle your fancy. (I do not even wish to allude to the impure delights of the flesh in which you place your heaven.)

When I have considered all this with wonder and without the least envy, I reason thus: if the just God is so liberal, so generous, nay, so prodigal, so to speak, with His goods as to reward a few natural good works, stained as they are with sin and imperfection, in such a magnificent manner, what must the goods be, the joy, the glory that the same God will bestow in return for perfect supernatural good works, performed in the state of grace, that is, in union with the merits and blood of Jesus Christ? If He is so generous to His sworn enemies who daily ill-treat and insult Him, what sort of a crown will He prepare for those who

From which we may understand how richly God will reward the just in the next life.

truly love Him? What sort of an inheritance will He leave to His faithful servants, His intimate friends, His dear children? If He is so lavish with His goods to those who hardly deign to bestow a thought on Him during the day, what will He not give to those who for His sake have endured hunger and sorrow, trials and crosses with patience? If, in a word, He gives so many joys to sinners in this vale of tears, what will He not give to His elect on the eternal hills, in the very dwelling-place of joy, in the kingdom of heaven, where, as the prophet says, there are rivers and fountains of joys that inundate the city of God? O heavenly Jerusalem! holy city of God! wished-for fatherland! how shall I imagine what thou art like? For the only measure of thy glory will be the infinite God Himself, and that alone must be an endless infinite joy of which I can form no idea, until I actually, as I hope, partake in it.

Hence the wicked have reason to fear.

Sinners! vain children of the world! mark this, if you have any common sense left: you have not the least title to this eternal joy, if you live as you have hitherto done; you have received your good things in this life. Oh, how poor you will be on that day! How confused you will be to see a poor peasant, or workman, or servant, a desolate widow, an orphan child whom you despised, nay, perhaps oppressed and persecuted, to see them entering into the house of God and gaining possession of everlasting joys, while you shall not be allowed to stand even behind the door, but shall have to suffer in flames like the rich glutton, and to sigh when too late, like those of whom the Wise Man speaks: "These are they whom we had sometime in derision and for a parable of reproach;" whom we looked on as the dust under our feet, or as silly people who did not know how to live in the world: "Behold, how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints."¹ Fools that we are! we must lie in the midst of flames covered with shame and confusion!

And the afflicted just reason to rejoice.

Pious, suffering Christians! to you I address my last words. Is there any of you who desires to receive from God the reward for his good acts in this life? Is there any one of you who would be willing to forfeit the future goods of eternity, if he might here share in the prosperity of the wicked? I can hardly think that any one in his right senses would be guilty of such folly. Is there any one of you, then, who would give away a part of his

¹ *Hi sunt quos habuimus aliquando in derisum, et in similitudinem impropert. Ecce quomodo computati sunt inter filios Dei, et inter sanctos sors illorum est.—Wis. v. 3, 5.*

heavenly glory to be freed from the cross, and to enjoy a share in the goods of the world? Even that I should not expect any one to do who considers how short and momentary is the joy of the present life, how lasting that of the future. Have you then a great desire for heaven? Then do not complain; be satisfied with what the well-meaning Lord decrees for you; rejoice although sometimes your eyes shed tears on account of your sorrow; rejoice with an undisturbed mind, and with a joy founded on faith and Christian hope, and say with me: now do I thank Thee, O God, for that which formerly gave me occasion for impatience and murmuring because I did not then understand the fundamental rules of our faith and hope; now I resign myself willingly to the cross which Thou wilt lay on my shoulders, and I acknowledge that it is most useful to my soul; I do not desire my reward on earth, but according to Thy will, I wish to have all my sorrow here and all my joy hereafter. Amen.

TWENTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON THE JUSTICE AND SHORT DURATION OF THE TRIALS OF
THE JUST AND THE PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED.

Subject.

1. That the just should live in afflictions here below and the wicked in prosperity is according to God's decree: therefore no just man should complain and no sinner should continue in his evil ways. 2. The afflictions of the just and the prosperity of the wicked last only a short time: therefore no just man should envy sinners their luck and no sinner should boast of it.—*Preached on the Third Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Plorabitis, et flebitis vos, mundus autem gaudebit.—John xvi.
20.

“You shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice.”

Introduction.

And is that right? “You shall lament and weep.” Who are they to whom Our Saviour says that? His apostles and disciples, and with them all pious, just, and chosen servants of God.

You, My dear friends, says Christ, you My adopted brothers and sisters, My chosen children who observe My law exactly, and walk in My footsteps, and love and honor Me: "You shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice." What is that world? The wicked, perverse world, and all those who are attached to it and to its sinful customs, while they resist the holy teaching and maxims of the Gospel of Christ; that is, sinners and the wicked; they shall live in joy and abundance. But, I ask again, is that right? To weep and lament; is that the reward our dear Lord promises to the good? Joy and abundance; is that the punishment with which He threatens the wicked? If He had said quite the contrary—for instance, you, My children, shall enjoy prosperity, while the wicked, who despise Me, shall suffer affliction—then we might have understood Him. So we often think, my dear brethren, with secret envy and discontent, when we judge according to the dictates of the flesh and our sensuality. But we should not think so. That this decree of divine Providence is right and just, and that we have no reason to complain of it or to envy others on account of it, I mean to show to-day to the greater honor and glory of God. I ground my argument on the Gospel of to-day: first, it is the Lord who has said it: "Amen, amen, I say to you that you shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice;" thus it must and shall be. Secondly, "a little while;" this difference shall last only a very short time. There you have the heads of my sermon; namely:

Plan of Discourse.

That the just should live in afflictions here below and the wicked in prosperity is according to God's decree: therefore no just man should complain; but neither should the sinner persist in his evil ways: the first part. The afflictions of the just and the prosperity of the wicked last only a short time: therefore no just man should envy sinners their luck; but neither should any sinner boast of it: the second part. Both are intended to terrify the wicked and to console the good.

Give us all Thy light and grace to this end, O God! We ask it of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

Sin is not a
cause of
prosperity.

Are the wicked then the only ones who can be happy and prosperous here below? Are we actually to believe that sin and

vice is the road to temporal well-being? Yet it is from the hands of the great God that all blessings and goods must come. Without His favorable co-operation not a blade of grass can exist in the field, not a leaf on the tree, not an herb in the garden, not a stone on the mountain. What more contradictory, then, than to maintain that to attain prosperity we must despise and offend Him from whom all goods and graces must come. And if they alone who offend God enjoy wealth, health, and the esteem of their friends, what poor, distressed mortal would not prefer to live in sin, that things might go better with him? If the pious, who serve God with zeal, are to be the only ones to suffer poverty, sickness, and contempt, what rich man would venture to do penance and run the risk of living in misery? But, my dear brethren, that is not the case at all. I maintain quite the contrary: that sin and wickedness is the source from which all the miseries and troubles of life come. The Lord has nothing but woes for the sinner in the mouth of the Prophet Isaias: "Wo to the sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a wicked seed, ungracious children."¹ "Let it not be well with the wicked," says the Wise Preacher; "neither let his days be prolonged, but as a shadow let them pass away that fear not the face of the Lord."²

Did not Saul in olden times gain a royal crown by his virtue and piety and lose it by becoming wicked? If King David ever had to suffer misfortune, it was when he forgot his God and committed the shameful crimes of adultery and murder. When and how did the wonderful good fortune of Solomon begin to decline? Was it not when that king and his successors began to practise idolatry? "As long as they sinned not in the sight of their God it was well with them: for their God hateth iniquity," so said Achior to Holofernes of the Jewish people; "But as often as beside their own God they worshipped any other they were given to spoil, and to the sword, and to reproach."³ So that it is not alone those who lead bad lives who enjoy prosperity, although the world nowadays is apt to have recourse to unjust means to secure it; and the same just God still lives and rules

But brings
on men even
temporal
misfortune.

¹ *Væ genti peccatrici, populo gravi iniquitate, semini nequam, filiis sceleratis.—Is. i. 4.*

² *Non sit bonum impio, nec prolongentur dies ejus, sed quasi umbra transeant qui non timent faciem Domini.—Eccles. viii. 13.*

³ *Usquedum non peccarent in conspectu Dei sui, erant cum illis bona; Deus enim illorum odit iniquitatem. Quotiescumque autem præter ipsum Deum suum, alterum coluerunt, dati sunt in prædam, et in gladium, et in opprobrium.—Judith v. 21, 18.*

the world, and iniquity is still hateful in His sight. And, alas! how many are there not in the world who have hardly a bit of dry bread to eat, and lead wretched lives in sorrow and affliction, hunger and want, and yet, because they are wicked and sinful, shall be cast into hell when the time comes to separate the wheat from the chaff! Wo to the sinful nation, no matter who or what they are! Wo to them! O sinners! do not persist in your evil ways! Wickedness is not the door to good luck and prosperity!

Yet many of the wicked abound in prosperity, while many of the just are severely tried.

Meanwhile experience teaches us that although not all, yet many, and very many, and generally speaking the greater number of those who lead a pleasant, comfortable, idle, and apparently happy life are those who give least signs of Christian devotion and piety, and are frequently addicted to the worst vices, such as pride, avarice, injustice, gluttony, impurity, etc.; and in spite of their wickedness things prosper with them and they get what they wish. On the other hand we see and experience that many, very many, and generally speaking the greater number of those who live piously, serve God faithfully, and regulate their actions by the laws and maxims of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, are visited by all sorts of crosses, trials, and adversities, as the Prophet David said long ago: "Many are the afflictions of the just;"¹ those whom God loves He is wont to chastise.

An inequality that to us seems unjust.

It is this inequality that generally causes us to murmur as at a thing that we cannot understand. Is it right, we ask, to see the rich glutton, whose only care is to gratify his appetites, seated at a well-spread table, while the righteous Lazarus lies at his doorstep, perishing with hunger and begging for the crumbs from the rich man's table, a charity that is cruelly refused him? What an intolerable thing to see men who have nothing of the Christian but the bare name, while they are no better than heathens in their lives and actions, enjoying such an abundance of all things, while true servants of God, who mean so well towards their Lord, have hardly enough clothes to enable them to make a decent appearance in church! How exasperating to behold so many impious men whose sole delight is to jeer at religion and what belongs to it sitting in high places, honored by all, endowed with the best of health, and spending their lives in peaceful, undisturbed enjoyment of their pleasures, while many a good Christian has to plague himself and toil day and night, and yet can

¹ Multæ tribulationes justorum.—Ps. xxxiii. 20.

hardly find enough to keep himself alive, and is moreover despised and contemned, perhaps by those very godless people themselves who live in prosperity! Can such an arrangement come from a God of infinite wisdom, holiness, and justice? Or does that God really interest Himself in even the most minute of our affairs, as we are taught to believe? Is He capable of acting so harshly towards His friends, while He is so generous to His enemies? Truly that father has a hard heart who admits his disobedient, obstinate servants to his own table, while he drives away from it his children who love him and are ready to obey his least sign, and allows them to suffer the pangs of hunger! How can we dare to attribute such a mode of action to the God of goodness and mercy to whom we daily cry out: "Our Father who art in heaven"! And what could possibly be the result of it, if not to make virtue and goodness detestable, and sin and vice agreeable and laudable?

We are not the only ones who entertain such thoughts. Even the holiest servants of God have sometimes had a difficulty in finding a reason for the action of the Almighty in this respect. "I see," says the great and enlightened St. Augustine, "before my eyes a most difficult problem"¹ to understand, namely, how to reconcile the justice of God and His all-ruling providence with the claims of equity and right, when I behold sinners generally prosperous on earth, while the good are tormented by temptations, persecutions, and trials. "It is a most difficult thing to explain."² And I believe you, great Saint! Many centuries before you the prophets of God studied the same point, and had to confess that it puzzled them. "Why," asks Jeremias in astonishment, "why doth the way of the wicked prosper; why is it well with all them that transgress and do wickedly?"³ Why is this, O Lord? The same difficulty made David totter in his faith and hope. Hear what he says in the seventy-second Psalm. "But my feet were almost moved: my steps had well-nigh slipped." Why? "Because I had a zeal on occasion of the wicked, seeing the prosperity of sinners. They are not in the labor of men, neither shall they be scourged like other men," so that they may do whatever pleases them. But, thought I to myself, how is that possible? "Behold! these are

Even the holiest have found it hard to understand this.

¹ Ante faciem meam laborem inextricabilem video.

² Magna difficultas est hoc scire.

³ Quare via impiorum prosperatur? bene est omnibus qui prævaricantur et inique agunt?

~Jerem. xii. 1.

sinner, and yet abounding in the world, they have obtained riches. And I said: Then have I in vain justified my heart, and washed my hands among the innocent: and I have been scourged all the day, and my chastisement hath been in the mornings. I studied that I might know this thing, it is a labor in my sight."¹

And the heathens were scandalized at it.

This was the very thing that the heathens of old upbraided the Christians with. What sort of a God have you? said they. Where are His justice and goodness towards you? You are poor and despised; hunted from one city to another, tortured and persecuted and crucified alive. Is your God blind that He does not see those things? Or has He forgotten you, that He takes such little interest in you? He must be either unwilling or unable to help you; if He is unable, He is no God; if He is unwilling, it is to no purpose you serve such a merciless Lord. But enough of such blasphemous talk! It is fit only for blind heathens, who know nothing of the inscrutable decrees of divine Providence.

But we Christians look on that inequality as just, because God so wills it.

Far from the Christian be such thoughts and complaints! Sufficient for us to keep us resigned should be the words in which the Prophet David speaks of his doubts in this matter: "I studied that I might know this thing," I tried to find out the reason of it, but in vain; therefore I determined to suspend my judgment, to submit humbly to the divine decrees, and to wait "until I go into the sanctuary of God, and understand concerning their last ends."² One thing I believe, and that is enough for me, that Thou, O Lord, hast so willed and ordained; for it is Thou alone who exaltest and humblest man as Thou pleasest; Thou castest him down and liftest him up again: from Thy hand comes adversity as well as prosperity; and Thou givest to every one as seems good in Thy sight. Therefore whatever Thou dost must be right and just; but what Thy reasons are we must not be too anxious to discover. We shall find them out hereafter, when we shall appear in Thy sanctuary, "and understand concerning their last ends." Then shall we see and know everything clearly in Thee as in a beautiful mirror; we shall un-

¹ Mei autem pene moti sunt pedes, pene effusi sunt gressus mei. Quia zelavi super iniquos, pacem peccatorum videns. In labore hominum non sunt, et cum hominibus non flagellabuntur. Ecce ipsi peccatores, et abundantes in sæculo; obtinuerunt divitias. Et dixi: Ergo sine causa justificavi cor meum, et lavi inter innocentes manus meas, et fui flagellatus tota die, et castigatio mea in matutinis. Existimabam ut cognoscerem hoc; labor est ante me.—Ps. lxxii. 2, 3, 5, 12, 13, 14, 16.

² Donec intrem in sanctuarium Dei, et intelligam in novissimis eorum.—Ibid. 17.

derstand why this just man was poor, and that wicked man rich; why that pious woman was persecuted, and had to spend her days in weeping in the bitterness of her heart, while that vain worldling abounded in pleasures; why, in a word, Thy servants have to weep and mourn here, while Thy enemies rejoice and make merry; then shall we see that all this has been arranged and permitted by Thee for most just reasons.

Such, my dear brethren, should be the tenor of our thoughts in circumstances which to our weak understandings appear strange and incomprehensible, so that we may be always undisturbed and content with the will of God. Many other mysteries still more difficult of comprehension are proposed to me by our faith: for instance, the Blessed Trinity of Persons in one Nature, and that there is one only God in the three Persons; that Jesus Christ is here present in His own house in the smallest particle of a consecrated Host. How can such things be? is the question that my understanding sometimes asks. I cannot comprehend it. But is my not understanding it a reason for saying that it is not true, or for wavering in my faith? God forbid! I need only say to myself: God has said it; and then I can at once conclude with certainty that it must be true. Now I am just as certain that God cannot ordain anything that is not right and just as He cannot say anything that is not true. Therefore when I sometimes feel an inclination to bitterness of spirit on considering the prosperity of the wicked and the trials of the just, and am not able to explain the cause of either, must I then murmur and say that an injustice has been committed? May God preserve me from such thoughts! I should rather at once say to myself: God has so ordered it; it is His will; therefore it must be good, right, and just. I am satisfied with Thy will, O Lord! Thou art most just and givest to each one whatever he has; Thou art most provident and givest to each one what Thou knowest to be most fitting for him; Thou art most holy, and dost nothing without good reason. I do not understand some things, but I do not want to understand them here; I can wait till I come to Thee in heaven, where I shall see everything in its cause, that is, in Thee, O God, "and understand concerning their last ends." The world then may rejoice, while I mourn with Thy servants; let it laugh while I weep; let it abound in wealth, while I suffer poverty; let it live in pleasure, while I endure crosses and trials. I do not complain; I will be

And hence we must not complain of it.

satisfied with everything; all is right since it is according to Thy will! "Yea, Father, for so hath it seemed good in Thy sight."² But I need not dwell longer on this point, as I have already explained it in detail. And in fact when I consider how short is the miserable joy of the wicked, I find that I have not merely no cause to complain, but also no reason for congratulating them, or envying them in the least. This, my dear brethren, we shall see in the

Second Part.

Our discontent generally comes from envy. Shown by a simile.

Generally speaking, the complaints we utter and the discontent we feel do not arise from our own wants nor from temporal goods as they are in themselves, but rather from a secret envy and spirit of grudging. If we men were alike in all things, and no one had more than his neighbor, then we should all be satisfied, although no one might have much; for every one would think: it must be so. Again, if each one imagined he had something more or better than others, he would be not only content, but would esteem himself very fortunate. The peasant who never left his native village, and who on account of the extent of his lands is obliged to keep a horse more than his neighbors, looks on himself as the richest and most fortunate in the whole place; but if he goes into the town and sees the rich equipages of the wealthy, alas! he thinks, poor man that I am! how rich the people are here! And he who was so happy before goes home discontented. Why? He is just as well off as before. Yes, but now he sees that others have more than he; and therefore his own condition now seems despicable to him.

Further explained by another simile.

In this matter we resemble little children. Suppose there are four or five of them together in a household; their mother gives them their breakfast as usual in the morning; each one gets a piece of rye bread rather thinly spread with butter, but all receive the same; for none of you would advise her to be more generous to one than to another. They are all quite satisfied and fall to with great gusto, munching their bread with such eagerness that it quite gives one an appetite to look at them. But suppose now that one of the children, a brother or sister, perhaps on account of being more delicate than the others, gets a piece of white bread instead of rye, and may be a morsel of meat in addition, oh, what a to-do there is in the house about

² Ita, Pater, quoniam sic fuit placitum ante te.—Matt. xi. 26.

it! All is upset and in disorder; the little ones begin to cry and howl, and look with disgust on what they before liked so well. Why so? Is the rye bread more insipid to them or coarser than before? No; but the bit of white bread or meat given to one excites the jealousy of the others. Be still! children, says the mother; your brother is sick, and must perhaps soon take to his bed and die; and what more has he had than the rest of you, except a bit of meat? And as he has eaten it in a hurry, he has just as little as you now. Be satisfied with what you have. But it is all to no purpose; the brother may be sick or not; the others make no account of that, and they would rather be sick themselves, or pretend to be so, than get less than he.

Such is the way, my dear brethren, in which children act; but old people are often not much better, as Seneca says: "We have the authority of age, the vices of youth."¹ Our great Father in heaven distributes daily to us mortals His food and other goods, according to His own will; to one He gives more, to another less, and indeed, as we have seen already, those who seem to deserve it least receive the greater portion, that is, sinners and the wicked; and thereby arises much envy, grudging, and discontent. Why does he get so much, asks the dissatisfied man, and I so little? He has white bread, while I have hardly enough black bread to still my hunger. He can drink the best of wine, while I have to be content with water. Everything prospers with him, while nothing goes right with me, although I have hitherto tried to serve my God faithfully. But, my dear children, you should be satisfied with what you have received, says the heavenly Father by His Prophet David: "Envy not the man who prospereth in his way: the man who doth unjust things."² Do not grudge him his good luck; he to whom I have given something on earth is weak and sick in his soul; he will soon die of his illness, and that too an eternal death: "For they shall shortly wither away as grass: and as the green herbs shall quickly fall."³

And what has he received more than you, after all? Only a trifle! Oh, how false and wretched the happiness that disappears so speedily! With reason does St. Augustine exclaim:

Envy comes from considering the prosperity of sinners and the trials of the just.

We should remember that it all lasts but a short time.

¹ *Authoritatem habemus senum, vitia puerorum.*—Senec., Ep. 4.

² *Noli æmulari in eo qui prosperatur in via sua, in homine faciente injustitias.*—Ps. xxxvi. 7.

³ *Quoniam tanquam fœnum velociter arescent, et quemadmodum olera herbarum cito decident.*—Ibid. 2.

The wicked man is in truth never happy, "but he is thought so, because we do not know what happiness is."¹ But we will not dispute this point with him to-day. If the sinner prospers while the just man suffers, do not be uneasy on that account; for, I ask again, how long will it last? A very short while. "For yet a little while," says David, "and the wicked shall not be, and thou shalt seek his place, and shalt not find it."² You will look around for some traces of his former prosperity, but you shall not find any. This very day, if I wish, I can put an end to it; all I need do is to visit him with some unforeseen calamity; then there will be an end to his riches; he will lose the favor of the great; his authority in the world will be at an end; a fever, a toothache, a pain in the head will suffice to rob life of all its joys for him. "See how fleeting that happiness is," says St. Augustine.³ Does that deserve to be envied by a reasoning man whose end is to possess an infinite Good in the kingdom of heaven? Let the supposed happiness of the wicked last as long as it may; the end must come; at the approach of death, and it is following our every footstep, there will be an end of all pleasure, and nothing of the things that made up their happiness here shall go with them into the next life. When a great lord visits a town in state he has in his train a number of led-horses gorgeously caparisoned with gold and silver trappings, while the horse of the poor peasant groans under the weight of the heavy wooden wagon. Truly there is a great difference between the two animals. But wait a little, till evening comes; then the grandly-equipped horses will be stripped of their trappings, and will appear just as bare as the peasant's poor animal; nay, the former, since they are better fed, lose their value sooner, and are sent sooner to the knacker. So will it be with the wicked, whom David compares to horses and mules: "Do not become like the horse and the mule, that have no understanding."⁴ Many of them now abound in splendor and magnificence, in honor and authority, in joys and pleasures, in riches and wealth; they are heavily laden with those things, and strut about with them for a short time; their mangers are always ready for them, and are well filled: "They take the timbrel, and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They

¹ Ideo magis felix putatur, quia quid sit felicitas ignoratur.

² Adhuc pusillum et non erit peccator, et quæres locum ejus, et non invenies.—Ps. xxxvi. 10.

³ Ecce volaticam felicitatem.

⁴ Nolite fieri sicut equus et mulus, quibus non est intellectus.—Ps. xxxi. 9.

spend their days in wealth.”¹ Pious, just Christians, many of you on the other hand are poor and despicable in the sight of the world; you are oppressed with labors and trials, and have to earn your bread in the sweat of your brow, and you are, so to speak, harnessed to a wretched peasant’s wagon.

But be not troubled at this. Wait till the end, till evening comes, till the hour of death, and then you will find that the difference between you and the wicked will be a consoling one for you, but a very deplorable one for them. When your souls, laden with the merits you have acquired by your patience and good works, are awaiting joyfully to have the gates of heaven opened to them, the wicked shall against their will be stripped of their gorgeous trappings, and be thrust naked and wretched into a place where they never thought of entering. The goods they possessed in life will, although dumb, cry out to them on their death-beds, to their great terror and despair, what Our Lord says to His disciples in to-day’s Gospel: “A little while, and now you shall not see Me.”² For a little while, shall cry out the lusts and delights of the world, we have served for your comfort and enjoyment; now we can remain no longer; our successors shall be pains and torments, which are already knocking at the door and turning us out of the house. For a little while, the money shall cry out, I still regard you as my master; afterwards I shall belong to others, and not a farthing of me shall you be able to take with you on your journey to eternity. In a little while, honor shall say, I shall leave you; my years of service are at an end, and presently there will be no more thought of you. Truly those are bitter words for him who has set his heart during life on such things, and forgotten his God! Too faithfully will be fulfilled in his regard the words that Baruch spoke in the person of the world: “I nourished them with joy;” I have kept them well for a short time, and fed them with sugar and honey: “but I sent them away with weeping and mourning.”³ I dismissed them at last, sad and sorrowful. And, most terrible of all for the wicked at the end, where shall they go to after death, when their short career of happiness is over? Into a stable like the horse stripped of his trappings? Ah, they would wish to have even as good a place as that to re-

This inequality will be quite different at the end.

¹ Tenent tympanum et citharam, et gaudent ad sonitum organi. Ducunt in bonis dies suos.—Job xxi. 12, 13.

² Modicum, et jam non videbitis me.—John xvi. 16.

³ Nutrivi enim illos cum jucunditate, dimisi autem illos cum fletu et luctu.—Baruch iv. 11.

main in. But it is too good for them. "They spend their days in wealth,"—and what becomes of them afterwards?—"and in a moment they go down to hell."¹ The moment the breath leaves their bodies their souls are buried in hell. Oh, truly that is a sudden and a terrible change! From a place of honor to a pit of infamy! From a splendid dwelling to the prison of hell, where they shall lie packed together like herrings! From a well garnished table to a lake of brimstone, where hunger shall be their food, molten lead and the gall of dragons their drink! From the soft down-bed to the burning coals, where their covering shall be flames of fire! From laughter and amusement to eternal weeping and gnashing of teeth! From joys to eternal woes! From the midst of their dear friends to the company of the demons and goblins of hell! How strange their first entry shall be to them! How long eternity shall appear to them, when their short-lived joys and pleasures have come to an end!

Hence the just must not envy the wicked their prosperity, but rejoice in their own trials.

My dear brethren, do we require anything beyond the consideration of these points to convince us of the false nature of the prosperity of the world? If it comes to such a wretched end with the wicked, who then should envy them on account of it, or complain that he has no share in it? "Do not envy men the happiness they enjoy in this life," says St. Peter Damian with reason; be not grieved if you have but a small share in it; "but rather condole with them, for like dumb brutes fattening on the pastures, they are hastening to the butcher."² No, no! if that is the way with the joys and prosperity of the world I want none of them, and willingly leave them to whoever desires them! Just servants of God, rejoice even in the midst of your sufferings, in your poverty and persecutions! Much more desirable are your tears than the laughter and rejoicings of the world! Much better your poverty and destitution than the wealth and abundance of sinners! What you suffer will also last but a little time; only be satisfied, and do not complain. The true God whom you serve calls out to you: "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee."³ For a short time, that is but a moment compared to eternity, I have appeared to abandon you; afterwards I shall invite you in My great mercy to

¹ Ducunt in bonis dies suos et in puncto ad inferna descendunt.—Job xxi. 13.

² Noli hujus vitæ felicitatem hominibus invidere; sed condole qui nimirum velut bruta animalia ad macellum edendo properant.

³ Ad punctum in modico dereliqui te, et in miserationibus magnis congregabo te.—Is. lii. 7.

a glorious banquet in heaven. "A little while, and you shall see Me,"¹ and see Me in everlasting joys! Oh, truly a most desirable change!

Yes, my God, I will be satisfied with Thee now, no matter what Thou dost with me here on earth. "Better is one day in Thy courts above thousands," and therefore with my whole heart I say with Thy servant David, "I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God, rather than to dwell in the tabernacles of sinners."² Better to be the poorest and most abject amongst Thy suffering and weeping children than to dwell in the most magnificent palace amongst all the pleasures and enjoyments of the wicked! Thee will I serve and serve faithfully and zealously, and this shall be my only care, this the only thing for which I shall implore Thy grace. Then may the world go with me well or ill as it pleases! As long as I am Thy friend it matters not; I am rich enough, and have joys and everything else in abundance. My riches, repose, and joys I reserve for the next life, where, as Thou sayest to me in to-day's Gospel, my heart shall rejoice, and no man shall take my joy from me, and my happiness shall never end. Amen.

For other motives to bear trials with patience, and to be resigned to the will of God, see several sermons in the first, third, and fourth parts.

¹ Modicum, et videbitis me.—John xvi. 16.

² Melior est dies una in atrils tuis super millia. Elegi abjectus esse in domo Dei me¹, magis quam habitare in tabernaculis peccatorum.—Ps. lxxxiil. 11.

Conclusion
and resigna-
tion to the
will of God.

ON THE LAST GENERAL JUDGMENT.

On the Reasons for the Last Judgment.

TWENTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON THE FIRST REASON FOR THE LAST JUDGMENT.

Subject.

There must necessarily be a day of general judgment; first, that God may make good in the sight of the whole world His lessened honor; secondly, that God may publicly justify His now incomprehensible Providence.—*Preached on the eighth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Redde rationem villicationis tuæ.—Luke xvi. 2.

“Give an account of thy stewardship.”

Introduction.

These very words shall be said to all of us when the last trumpet shall resound in the graves of all, with the words, “Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment.” Then shall the Judge say to each one of us in particular: O man, give an account of thy stewardship: tell Me how thou hast lived, what thou hast thought, said, and done all the time thou hast spent in the world. But, we might ask with reason, is it not an article of faith that every man shall be judged immediately after death, and sent into eternal glory or eternal torments? Why then should men appear again to hear another sentence? Is not the first one good and just enough, as it is pronounced by an infallible Judge? Not a doubt of it! What is, then, the object of a new examination and judgment? Will the last judgment perhaps make some change

in the first? Not at all; the sentence once uttered shall not be recalled. On the last day each one shall hear the same sentence that was pronounced on him at the particular judgment on the last day of his life at the moment of death, and no other, says St. Augustine. If I am then condemned to hell, then shall I certainly hear in the last judgment the words: "Depart, accursed!" If I am then admitted to the kingdom of heaven, I shall certainly hear on the last day the words: "Come, ye blessed!" What is then the use of a general judgment? My dear brethren, St. Thomas and other holy Fathers assign several reasons for it, from which I shall select two principal ones, the first of which concerns God, and the second us mortals. The first shall furnish me with matter for this and the two following sermons.

Plan of Discourse.

There must necessarily be a general judgment. Why? That God may publicly in the sight of the whole world make good His lessened honor. Such shall be the first part. There must necessarily be a general judgment. Why? That God may publicly, in the sight of the whole world, justify His now incomprehensible providence. Such shall be the second part. Let us now faithfully honor God, and bow down in humble reverence before all the decrees of His providence, such shall be the conclusion.

We beg of Thee, Jesus Christ, the future Judge of the living and the dead, to give us Thy grace to this end, through the merits of Mary and of the holy angels.

The reason why most men on earth give God so little of the honor due to Him, and are so backward in fearing and loving Him, is that they have but a dark knowledge of His majesty. We do not know what a great Lord He is, and how worthy of honor, fear, and love. It is true that an infallible faith represents all this to us; but how weak, languid, and neglected is not this knowledge of the faith in most men? Must we not acknowledge, my dear brethren, that such is the case? God, says our faith, is the absolute Lord and Master of all time, of every moment of our lives. We often refuse to act on this truth; we show by our conduct that we believe quite the contrary, for we misspend our precious time given us by God in a most foolish manner, wasting it in idleness, vanity, gluttony, avarice, the lusts of the flesh, gaming, and useless amusements. God, says our faith, is al-

God's honor is disregarded because He is not properly known.

mighty, and present in all places; at any moment He has the power of reducing us to nothing if such is His will. We often refuse to act on that knowledge; otherwise should we, poor, despicable creatures as we are, so often rebel against Him, offend Him so audaciously, and before His very eyes trample His law under foot? God, says our faith, is the sworn Enemy and Chastiser of sin, and His infinite justice will not allow the least transgression to go unpunished, unless it has been fully atoned for. We often refuse to act on that knowledge; otherwise should we dare to offend Him so presumptuously? Do we not falsely imagine that we are free from all punishment when we spend whole weeks, months, and years in sin, calmly and quietly, as if there were no one in heaven or on earth from whom we have anything to fear? We separate the divine mercy and justice from each other, and imagine that justice must always give way before and yield to mercy; as Tertullian says, we look on justice as an idle attribute of God, that never upholds its rights and leaves everything to mercy. God is good, we say; God is patient; God is tolerant of the sinner; He is ready to forgive, and therefore it makes little matter how one lives. Thus, through want of a proper knowledge of God, His honor is often lessened and despised.

On the last day He will show to the world what He is, and prove His absolute power.

Hence there must come a time in which God will avenge His honor, and publicly show before the world what He is. And that will be the last day of general judgment, which is therefore called in Holy Writ "the day of the Lord." "The loftiness of men shall be bowed down," says the Prophet Isaias, "and the haughtiness of men shall be humbled, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."¹ The Prophet Osee calls this day a public festival of the Lord, on which God, not rightly known before, shall declare Himself publicly. Then the reprobate as well as the just and elect shall acknowledge His supreme right and absolute power to rule over all the elements, and the living and the dead, who will come forth from their graves at His command. For if, according to the opinion of St. Paul, it is an evident sign of the almighty power of God that He can destroy great things, and again restore what He has destroyed, showing by the first that all creatures have their being from Him, and by the second that He alone can replace them in their former state; on the last day He will give supreme proof of this twofold power in

¹ *Incurvabitur sublimitas hominum, et humiliabitur altitudo virorum, et elevabitur Dominus solus in die illa.—Is. li. 17.*

the sight of the whole world. The sun shall be darkened; the moon shall refuse to give her light; the powers of the heavens shall be moved; the stars shall fall from the sky; fire shall precede the coming of the Judge and destroy everything on earth. How great must be the might of God in thus reducing the world to ashes! And the same might shall appear just as great in the restoration of so many creatures in the general resurrection. Imagine, my dear brethren, if you can, each and every human being who has ever lived from the time of our forefather Adam to the present day; imagine the countless millions who have lived till now in the four quarters of the globe, those who are still actually living, and those who are still to live on earth till the last day, in all countries and nations; imagine that vast number of human beings without a single exception rising from their graves in a moment, as the Apostle St. Paul says: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, the dead shall rise again incorruptible,"¹ and they shall all assemble in the valley of Josaphat when the angel shall sound his trumpet and call out: Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment. How many men shall be amongst them whose bodies have been devoured by wild beasts! How many who have been drowned and eaten by fishes! How many whose remains have decayed in the earth! And all that shall remain over of their bodies shall be burned up by fire; and yet those same bodies shall rise again in their former stature, such as they were in this life, and thus come again to life. Thus the same God who shall show His power by the destruction of creatures shall give still clearer proof of it in their resurrection, and publicly show that He is absolute Lord and Master over His whole creation; for He can create and destroy it when, where, and how He pleases.

Moreover, on that day the justice of God, which is now so often overlooked and frequently despised by men, shall be most gloriously proved before the whole world. Then shall all see how bitter is the hatred God has against sin and the sinner, and how He will not allow the smallest transgression to go unpunished; for He will demand an account even of an idle word or thought; nay, He will judge the justices and holiest works of men, and put them to the proof to see if they are according to His will and pleasure. All shall then see that God has no respect for

And His
justice.

¹ In momento, inictu oculi, in novissima tuba, mortui resurgent incorrupti.—I. Cor. xv. 52.

persons; rich and poor, noble and lowly, prince and peasant, master and servant, mistress and maid; great and small shall be cited before Him in the same order, without distinction of rank, and each one shall receive the reward or punishment due to his works. Therefore the Prophet Isaias calls this day cruel: "Behold, the day of the Lord shall come, a cruel day, and full of indignation, and of wrath, and fury, to lay the land desolate, and to destroy the sinners thereof out of it."¹ The Prophet Joel calls it great and terrible: "The day of the Lord is great and very terrible: and who can stand it?"² "A day of darkness, and of gloominess, a day of clouds and whirlwinds: the like to it hath not been from the beginning, nor shall be after it."³ In the same sense the Prophet Amos speaks of this day: "Wo to them that desire the day of the Lord: to what end is it for you? This day of the Lord is darkness, and not light."⁴ Sophonias calls it a day of wrath and misery: "The great day of the Lord is near." And what sort of a day is it to be? "That day is a day of wrath, a day of tribulation and distress, a day of calamity and misery, a day of darkness and obscurity, a day of cloud and whirlwind."⁵ In a word, it shall be a day on which the strict justice of God shall rule untempered by mercy, in order to humble the pride of men and to avenge His injured honor and glory.

Christ was
despised
and con-
temned by
the world.

Besides, how has not the honor of Jesus Christ suffered; how does it not still suffer among most men? Despised and contemned, publicly persecuted, unjustly condemned, He was seen hanging on a disgraceful cross in the presence of a multitude. The Jews still look on Him as a blasphemous impostor, who was justly sentenced by their forefathers on account of His crimes, and nailed to a cross; infidels refuse to acknowledge Him as their God; and how many wicked, proud, and tepid Catholic Christians are there not who are ashamed of Him and of His humble Gospel? Who hardly deign to bend the knee before His altar in the public churches where He is exposed for adoration?

¹ *Ecce dies Domini veniet, crudelis, et indignationis plenus, et iræ, furorisque, ad ponendam terram in solitudinem, et peccatores ejus conterendos de ea.—Is. xlii. 9.*

² *Magnus enim dies Domini, et terribilis valde; et quis sustinebit eum?—Joel ii. 11.*

³ *Dies tenebrarum et caliginis, dies nubis et turbis: similis ei non fuit a principio, et post eum non erit.—Ibid. ii. 2.*

⁴ *Væ desiderantibus diem Domini! Ad quid eam vobis? Dies Domini ista, tenebræ, et non lux.—Amos v. 18.*

⁵ *Juxta est dies Domini magnus. Dies iræ dies illa, dies tribulationis et angustiae, dies calamitatis et miserie, dies tenebrarum et caliginis, dies nebulae et turbis.—Soph. i. 14, 15.*

Who in His presence, by their talking, laughing, and disrespectful demeanor, show Him far less reverence than they would to a mortal man from whom they might have a favor to expect? Who think it would be degrading in them to accompany Him publicly in the Blessed Sacrament? It is but right, then, that Christ should one day appear on His throne of glory and honor before the whole world, and receive the homage due to Him from all creatures.

Truly that must and shall be the case. "He," says St. Augustine, "who has been unjustly judged shall one day judge the world in justice."¹ For the same reason He has selected the valley of Josaphat as the scene of this judgment, as the holy Fathers and interpreters of Scripture infer from the words of the Prophet Joel: "I will gather together all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Josaphat: and I will plead with them there."² For that place is in the neighborhood of the scene of Jesus' sufferings for the salvation of the world. There men have seen Him in the extremity of torment and degradation; and in the same place He must be seen in the height of honor and glory. To this the Prophet Elias alluded when saying in a mysterious sense to King Achab: "In this place, wherein the dogs have licked the blood of Naboth, they shall lick thy blood also;"³ that is, as the Gloss says, in the place where the Jews and soldiers shed the blood of Christ, there the demons shall still their thirst with the blood of those who put Christ to death. "And then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud with great power and majesty,"⁴ in order to take vengeance on His enemies for the injuries they inflicted on Him. Then shall all peoples and nations adore Him whom before they either did not know, or did not wish to know, or having known Him, did not honor as they should have done. "Every knee shall bow to Me," in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, "and every tongue shall confess to God."⁵ There, my dear brethren, we have the first just reason why there should be a general judgment appointed for the whole world; namely, that restitution of His injured honor

His lost honor shall be restored on the last day.

¹ Ipse sane qui injuste judicatus est, judicabit orbem terræ in æquitate.

² Congregabo omnes gentes, et deducam eos in vallem Josaphat, et disceptabo eum eis ibi.—Joel iii. 2.

³ In loco hoc, in quo lixerunt canes sanguinem Naboth, lambent quoque sanguinem tuum.—III. Kings xxi. 19.

⁴ Et tunc videbunt Filium hominis venientem in nube cum potestate magna et majestate.—Luke xxi. 27.

⁵ Mihi flectetur omne genu, et omnis lingua confitebitur Deo.—Rom. xiv. 11.

may be made publicly to our God and Saviour. "The Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." And at the same time He will publicly justify His admirable providence with which He governs the world. And this is the second reason for the general judgment on the part of God, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

The provi-
dence of
God seems
to us in-
consistent.

Nothing is more incomprehensible to us mortals than the manner in which God acts with us in this world; and again, there is nothing that gives rise to more complaints, doubts, murmuring, nay, even blasphemies, not merely amongst heathens and heretics, but Catholics too, than the wonderful inscrutability of the divine decrees. Nay, this very circumstance is the cause of there being so many atheists in the world, who think and say that there is no God, or that, if there be one, He takes no concern about the affairs of mortals; He allows things to go as they please; He permits the crooked to appear straight; everything in the world happens according to the free will of men; wind and weather, heat and cold, rain and sunshine, peace and war, happiness and misery, health and sickness, a short or a long life—all these things are the result of chance, or else of the action or wickedness of men. It is true, my dear brethren, that many things are ordained that seem quite irregular and unjust according to our ignorant views, so that it appears impossible that they should come from a God of infinite wisdom, justice, mercy, and love.

As it or-
dains such
incompre-
hensible
things in
the world
amongst
men.

For we see, says St. Augustine, and learn by daily experience that, for instance, a young, clever, and learned man dies prematurely, although his life would have been useful and necessary; while on the other hand an old, worn-out man continues to live, although he is good for nothing, and only a burden to himself and others. We see a father in the bloom of age and health hurried off suddenly by death from his wife and children, the latter thus becoming poor orphans who have great difficulty in finding bread enough to keep off the pangs of hunger; but another remains alive who is like a roaring lion in his home, ill-treating wife and children, drinking all their earnings, and reducing them to beggary. The poor laborer is cast down on a bed of sickness for a long time, although his work is the only means he has of procuring a livelihood; while another who has no need to work is kept in good health, although he makes a bad use of it

for sin and vice and public scandal. One abounds in wealth and makes a wrong use of it; another is poor who, if he had riches, would do much for the honor and glory of God. The rich man, the prince, the king, the emperor, whose sole desire is to have an heir for the good of the family and of the whole nation and kingdom, receives no children from God, although he may weary Heaven with prayers for years; while poor people who have hardly enough to eat have children enough, more than they can feed. The best, dearest, and most beautiful child, the one whom the parents are most anxious to keep alive, dies; while the stupid, ugly, decrepit child remains alive, although they would readily have given him to God. Children die before baptism, although if they had been kept alive for the space of one Our Father they would have been freed from original sin and have been happy in heaven; and on the other hand a young man dies in the state of sin who if he had been taken off at an early age would not have been lost forever.

We see, says St. John Chrysostom, not a few who, having attained a high degree of perfection, fall into grievous sin and are lost eternally; while on the other hand many who have for a long time led bad lives are converted and go to heaven. We see how God chastises and punishes a man, although He allows another, who is equally deserving of punishment, to get off scot free. In all public calamities the good and pious, who try by their prayers to avert the scourge from their fatherland, are generally much more severely smitten than the rich and the wicked, whose sins and vices have caused God to draw the sword of vengeance and to afflict the whole country with a plague. We see and generally experience that many sinners and wicked men enjoy prosperity, wealth, and honor in the world, and live in pleasures and delights; while most of the good and pious, who try to serve God faithfully and zealously, and to fulfil His holy will in all things, spend their days in poverty, misfortune, contempt, and sorrow, overwhelmed with trials, persecuted by others, and oppressed on all sides; and there are countless similar dispensations of Providence.

O my Lord and my God! what a wonderful arrangement is this! For it is Thou alone who hast so ordered things! Art Thou not the common Father in this great household of the world? Are not all men the works of Thy hands? Of what kind, then, is this providence of Thine? What are we to think of

Amongst
sinners and
the just.

An arrange-
ment that
seems un-
just.

Thy manner of acting? Such are the exclamations of the Prophet Jeremias, evoked by the consideration of only this last arrangement of Divine Providence. "Thou indeed, O Lord, art just if I plead with Thee: but yet I will speak what is just to Thee," with Thy permission I will ask Thee a question. "Why doth the way of the wicked prosper: why is it well with all them that transgress and do wickedly? Thou hast planted them, and they have taken root: they prosper and bring forth fruit."¹ Why is that? Why dost Thou decree that he who serves Thee truly should live in sorrow and affliction, while he who contemns and despises Thee passes his life in repose, joy, and pleasure? "How long," asks David with astonishment, "how long shall the wicked, O Lord! how long shall the wicked make their boast? How long shall they utter and speak wrong things? How long shall all the workers of iniquity talk?"² How long shall they exult in honors and riches? The drunken glutton sits at table clad in purple, and enjoys himself although he is a great sinner; while the just Lazarus is poor and despised, and cannot obtain even the crumbs thrown to the dogs. Why is that so? Why is virtue laughed at and oppressed, and vice exalted and honored? Why does wickedness sit on a throne, and justice lie on the bare earth? Why is this, O Lord? What is the meaning of this decree of Thine?

Hence there will be a general judgment, that God may justify His wonderful decrees.

But David decides the matter for himself without waiting for an answer from God. "I studied that I might know this thing, it is a labor in my sight;" but I will wait until I enter the holy place of God; then I shall know all about what I cannot now understand: "Until I go into the sanctuary of God: and understand concerning their last ends."³ It will all become clear to me at the last end of all things. So it is, my dear brethren; this is a reason why there must be a general judgment; namely, that the Lord God may publish and justify in the sight of heaven and earth the hidden decrees and dispositions of His Providence; that He may answer the questions and complaints that arise from the ignorance or wickedness of men, who do not now understand His arrangements; that He may show each one the weighty reasons

¹ Justus quidem tu es, Domine, si disputem tecum; verumtamen justa loquar ad te: Quare via impiorum prosperatur? bene est omnibus qui prævaticantur, et inique agunt? Plantasti eos, et radicem miserunt; proficiunt, et faciunt fructum.—Jerem. xii. 1, 2.

² Usquequo peccatores, Domine, usquequo peccatores gloriabuntur? Effabuntur et loquentur iniquitatem, loquentur omnes qui operantur injustitiam?—Ps. xciii. 3, 4.

³ Existimabam ut cognoscerem hoc; labor est ante me, donec intrem in sanctuarium Dei, et intelligam in novissimis eorum.—Ibid. lxxii. 16, 17.

He had in acting as He has done; in a word, on that day He will cause all presumptuous blasphemers to wonder at the justice and holiness of those decrees that they looked on as unjust. He will cause all the angels of heaven, all men on earth, all the demons in hell to cry out with David: "Thou art just, O Lord, and Thy judgment is right."¹ "Thy testimonies are justice forever;"² all Thy decrees are and always have been just; Thou couldst not have governed the world wiser, better, or with more equity than Thou hast done; formerly many things that we could not understand seemed to us inconsistent and wrong, nay, unjust and scandalous; but now we acknowledge their holiness and justice. "Thou art just, O Lord!"

Now while we are on earth God speaks to us, as Our Lord did to Peter at the Last Supper, when that apostle, surprised at the humility of his Master, refused to allow Him to wash his feet: "And Peter saith to Him: Lord, dost Thou wash my feet? Jesus answered, and said to him: What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter,"³ and thou shalt know what good reason I have for acting in such a way. This is what St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "Therefore judge not before the time, until the Lord come," before forming an opinion on what you see; wait till the coming of the Lord at the end of the world, "who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts."⁴ Mark the words "bring to light the hidden things of darkness;" that is, as Cajetan says, He will make clear what is now dark. Then you will understand why the Prophet Malachy, speaking of Christ as our future Judge, calls Him the Sun of justice: "Unto you that fear My name the Sun of justice shall arise."⁵ How so? Will the Judge come like the sun? You know, my dear brethren, what occurs at sunrise. While night lasts one cannot distinguish one thing from another, nor tell what is white or black, green or red; for the darkness takes the color away from things and hides it from our eyes; but when the sun rises at the break of day we can easily distinguish objects as they appear in their own colors. So shall it be also with the Sun of justice;

We must defer gratifying our curiosity on this point.

¹ *Justus es, Domine, et rectum judicium tuum.*—Ps. cxviii. 137.

² *Æquitas testimonia tua in æternum.*—Ibid. 144.

³ *Dicit ei Petrus: Domine, tu mihi lavas pedes? Respondit Jesus, et dixit ei: quod ego facio, tu nescis modo, scies autem postea.*—John xlii. 6, 7.

⁴ *Itaque nolite ante tempus judicare, quoadusque veniat Dominus, qui et illuminabit abscondita tenebrarum, et manifestabit consilia cordium.*—I. Cor. iv. 5.

⁵ *Orietur vobis timentibus nomen meum sol justitiæ.* Malach. iv. 2.

when He appears at the last day we shall see clearly in the works of Divine Providence what the night of this life renders us blind to now.

Afterwards
we shall see
that God
does all
things well.

In the beginning of the world, when God created light, He went, as the Scripture says, to see and examine it: "and God saw the light that it was good."¹ He acted in the same manner with regard to His other works, the earth, the animals, the moon, the stars; each one He examined in particular and found it good. And when all things were created He looked at them all together: "And God saw all the things that He had made: and they were very good."² Why so? Why did He examine all together after He had seen each one in particular and found it good? "This," says Hugo of St. Victor, "was an image of what He is to do at the end of the world." At first God looked at each work in particular and then He considered all His works in general, and gave testimony that they were all very good; at the end He will show His works to men to be examined and considered: "He will bring forward His every work to judgment," says Hugo, but with this difference: in the particular judgment, which takes place immediately after the death of each one, He will show to the soul what He did specially for it, while on the last day He will bring on the stage all the works of His Divine Providence, and present them to men to be examined publicly, so that every one, convinced of their justice and wisdom, may confess that they are very good, that all that God has done with us from the beginning of the world is very good. Parents! you lost your beloved child by a premature death, while the decrepit one remained alive; but on that day when you shall examine the works of God you will confess that it is very good. O my God! you will exclaim, how well and beautifully Thou hast ordained this! Children! you have lost father or mother and have become poor orphans; on that day you will acknowledge that this decree of the Almighty was very good. That this man is rich, that one poor; this one healthy, another sickly; one well-formed, another crippled; one held in honor, another despised; one a servant, another the master; one leads a laborious, the other an idle life—oh, truly, I cannot now explain this difference of conditions. But wait; wait till the works of God are all placed before our eyes on that day, then at last we shall confess that they are very good, that

¹ Et vidit Deus lucem quod esset bona.—Gen. 1. 4.

² Vidit que Deus cuncta quæ fecerat; et erant valde bona.—Ibid. 31.

everything has been rightly and justly ordained, and that the world could not have been governed better. Pious Christians, who in the midst of your crosses and trials must see the wicked prospering, and all their affairs apparently succeeding, be comforted with the thought of that day! Now you cannot see everything; but then you will understand all, and will say: now I behold all the works of God, and they are very good; everything without exception is most right and just. Then you will rejoice with the Prophet David: "We have rejoiced for the days in which thou hast humbled us: for the years in which we have seen evils,"¹ and have had much suffering to bear. Now we rejoice at the happy days in which we were chastised and humbled by Thee, O Lord! All that the Lord has done with us and in the whole world, is well done! Thus, my dear brethren, will God justify the providence with which He rules the world; and this is the second reason why there must be a general judgment.

And what conclusion shall we now draw from this for our instruction? It follows of itself; namely, that we must in the first place not scrutinize curiously the decrees and providence of the Almighty, much less should we murmur or complain on account of them, for we are now incapable of investigating or understanding them thoroughly, as we shall see in another sermon. In the next place, that we should always submit ourselves and all belonging to us in all circumstances to the holy will of God and to His all-wise Providence, perfectly confident that whatever He does with us must be for the very best, as we have heard already in a sermon on conformity with the will of God, and shall hear again in the two following sermons. Yes, O Lord! such is my firm resolve; I give myself to Thee completely; do with me as Thou wilt! I do not now wish to see the reasons of Thy decrees, although on account of my ignorance they sometimes seem strange to me; but I know that all Thy works and dispensations in my regard could not be better than they are, simply because they are Thine; it is enough for me that I shall understand them all clearly on that day. Only grant me now Thy powerful grace, that I may begin and continue so to serve my future Judge that on the last day I may not only know and confess the holiness and justice of Thy Providence (for even the damned must do that), but that with Thy elect I may praise and glorify that

Exhortation and resolution not to scrutinize the divine decrees, but to submit to them humbly.

¹ *Lætati sumus pro diebus quibus nos humiliasti, annis quibus vidimus mala.—Ps. lxxxix. 15.*

Providence in the joyful exit from the valley of Josaphat to Thy eternal kingdom. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the first Sunday of Advent.

Text.

Et tunc videbunt Filium hominis venientem in nube cum potestate magna, et majestate.—Luke xxi. 27.

“ And then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud with great power and majesty.”

Introduction.

It seems at first rather strange that the Son of God should come down from heaven at the end of the world to judge and pronounce sentence on men in such a public manner. For we might reasonably ask why, etc. *Continues as above.*

TWENTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON PRESUMPTUOUSLY SCRUTINIZING THE DIVINE DECREES.

Subject.

It is folly and presumption to examine and pronounce upon the decrees and arrangements of Divine Providence, much worse still is it to criticise or find fault with them; therefore we should humbly reverence them.—*Preached on the ninth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Nunc autem abscondita sunt ad oculis tuis.—Luke xix. 42.

“ But now they are hidden from thy eyes.”

Introduction.

Glorious temple of Solomon! Magnificent palaces and edifices! Towers and walls of the city of Jerusalem! is it over your impending destruction that Jesus weeps? No, indeed! These things are far too vile to force a tear from the eyes of the Son of God, who as absolute Lord and Master has all the king-

doms of earth in His hands. It was the precious souls of the inhabitants that forced Him to weep; for He foresaw that in spite of the frequent lights granted them, and the many mercies they had experienced, they would remain obdurate in their wickedness and be lost forever. But why so? Could not the Almighty Son of God, who is so desirous of our salvation, give to those people more powerful graces, which, as He could foresee, would enable them to repent and be saved? No doubt He could have done so, for He has infinite treasures of grace at His disposal, by which He might draw even the hardest hearts to Himself. Why then did He not give those graces? But still! why do I, a poor mortal, dare to examine the hidden decrees of the Almighty God, since He wishes to conceal them from the eyes of men? My dear brethren, on the last occasion I explained to you the first reason of the necessity of the general judgment, namely, that God may publicly in the sight of all men justify the incomprehensible decrees and dispensations of His providence in the government of the world. The conclusion that follows therefrom I have given in a few words; that, namely, we must not be too curious in examining those decrees, much less should we complain of or find fault with them, but rather humbly submit to and adore them. Still there are many Christians who cannot reserve their curiosity and judgment on them till the last day; now already they begin to criticise them in thought, and to ask why does God do this or that in such a manner, and not otherwise. Nay, they even find fault with Him, and say that He acts unjustly. This is evident from their frequent complaints. What have I done to God that He should punish me thus? Is it right that I should have so much to suffer? that God should permit things to take such a course? etc. Ah, let me beg of you to refrain from such thoughts! Be not scandalized at the most holy works of God! Who art thou, poor mortal, that thou shouldst dare to criticise and condemn God and His inscrutable decrees, the knowledge and understanding of which He has chosen to keep from thee till the last day? This question, my dear brethren, I shall now consider more in detail, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

It is folly and presumption to examine and pronounce upon the decrees and arrangements of Divine Providence; much worse still is it to criticise or find fault with them; therefore let us hum-

bly revere them. Such is the whole subject. The object of this sermon is to inspire us with complete resignation to all the decrees of the Almighty.

Grant us that, O God of infinite justice, wisdom, and goodness, through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

To condemn what one cannot and should not understand is folly and presumption. Shown by a simile.

What a man cannot and should not understand he should let alone; and it would be folly for him to try to indulge a useless curiosity regarding such a matter, and still worse for him to presume to condemn it. What would you think, asks St. Augustine, of a man born deaf, who sees a man speaking and moving his lips, or a choir of musicians of whom one is playing the organ with his fingers, another is blowing a horn, a third opening his mouth and singing, a fourth playing the fiddle, a fifth moving his arms and beating time; what would you think if the deaf man were to condemn those different movements and gestures of the musicians as a useless and foolish piece of nonsense, for he knows not what music is? What would you say of a blind man, who, hearing of the beauty of a certain palace, examines it with his hands, and finding open places for the windows while groping around, criticises and condemns them as blemishes, as if the walls should be everywhere the same, and present no opening whatever? Would not both these men be looked on as not merely ignorant, but also presumptuous? Truly, and with justice. For what can a blind man know of color, or a deaf one of sound? They have both reason to wonder; the deaf man at seeing the musicians, the blind man at feeling the different openings in the palace walls; but if they had common sense, they would refrain from all criticism, for they do not understand the matter, and on account of the deficiency in their senses are unable to comprehend it in spite of any explanations that may be given them. And would it not be an intolerable thing for an uneducated peasant to dispute long about the course of the stars, or for a student to discuss the best system of tillage?

Confirmed by examples.

Alexander the Great, as Pliny writes, used often to visit the celebrated painter Apelles; on one occasion, as he was discussing the subject of painting with more earnestness than usual, Apelles took him aside and whispered to him to drop the matter, lest the boys who were mixing the colors should laugh at him. His meaning was that Alexander, no matter how well he might understand the art of war, knew nothing about painting, and therefore

could not talk sensibly about it. It is recorded of Father Adam Tanner, a celebrated theologian of our Society, that he was once seized by a grievous illness while on a journey, and took refuge in a peasant's hut. His illness grew worse, and the people of the place, seeing that he was about to die, began to examine his effects, and amongst other mathematical instruments they found a glass containing a fearful and terrible monster, completely equipped with horns, wings, darts, and spear, and resembling a dragon in its appearance. The simple people at once called out with one voice: "That is the devil in the glass! the man is surely a wizard!" And together with their pastor, whom they called in to advise them, they resolved that after the man's death they would not bury him in consecrated ground; and they would most certainly have carried out that determination had not one come up who understood the matter better, and explained to them that the dragon they took for the devil was nothing more than a beetle enlarged by a microscope, a kind of glass that makes small things look large, and thus apparently increased in size the beetle that seemed so terrible in their eyes. It is impossible for a man to pronounce a sensible opinion on a thing that he does not understand, and if he goes so far as to blame and find fault with it, he is guilty of rashness and presumption.

There, my dear brethren, you have an example of the foolish presumption of those men who curiously scrutinize the wonderful works of God's Providence in this life, and try to find out why things are arranged in this or that manner, forming rash judgments about them, and finding fault with them, as if God could or should have managed better. Why is this man born amongst Turks, and that other amongst Christians? Why was the true faith introduced so late into some countries, many souls meanwhile being eternally lost, while other lands received the light much sooner? Why is a country so largely infected with heresy, and another altogether free from it? Why are so many innocent peoples harried by war, while others live in peace? Why must the descendants bear the punishment of the sins of their ancestors, although the latter got off scot free? Why is this man rich, that one poor, etc.? These curious questions and many similar ones often trouble our minds. Why has God made such arrangements? Are they quite right and just?

O poor, blind, deaf, and ignorant mortal! Why do you trouble yourself about things you cannot and should not understand as

They who scrutinize and blame the works of God, are foolish and presumptuous.

For they do not understand them.

yet? God has indeed sometimes revealed things to His special friends; thus He promised Moses to accompany him everywhere: "He hath made His way known to Moses."¹ He told Abraham of His firm determination to destroy the city of Sodom, and to make him the father of a numerous progeny: "Can I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"² He made known to Noe His intention of punishing the world by a deluge: "He said to Noe: The end of all flesh is to come before Me; the earth is filled with iniquity through them, and I will destroy them with the earth."³ In the same manner God made known many things to other prophets and saints. But according to the general Providence by which the world is ruled, the divine decrees remain hidden and concealed from men. "His ways, who shall understand," says the wise Ecclesiasticus; "many of His works are hidden."⁴ And Eliu was quite right when he said to Job: "Who can search out His ways? Remember that thou knowest not His work. Behold! God is great exceeding our knowledge."⁵ St. Augustine commenting on the words of St. Paul, "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"⁶ who are you that you should dare to question your God, and expect Him to give you an explanation of His decrees?—St. Augustine says: With reason has the Apostle begun with the words, O man, for thus he reminds mortals of their ignorance and incapacity, and says to them, as Apelles did to the cobbler who criticised his picture of Helen: "Let the cobbler stick to his last."⁷ O man, exclaims the Apostle, exalt not your understanding above your condition! What do you know about the decrees and dispensations of God's providence? You either understand them, or you do not. If you understand them, you must acknowledge that they are wise and just; but if they are beyond your intellect, as you must confess, why do you examine, condemn, and criticise them? If I speak Latin to you, and you have not studied that language, you know not and cannot guess what I wish to say to you; much less should you venture to find fault with my manner of speak-

¹ *Notas fecit vias suas Moysi.*—Ps. cii. 7.

² *Num celare potero Abraham quæ gesturus sum?*—Gen. xviii. 17.

³ *Dixit ad Noe: Finis universæ carnis venit coram me; repleta est terra iniquitate a facie eorum, et ego disperdam eos cum terra.*—Ibid. vi. 13.

⁴ *Vias illius quis intelligit? Plurima illius opera sunt in absconsis.*—Ecclus. xvi. 21, 22.

⁵ *Quis poterit scrutari vias ejus? Memento quod ignores opus ejus. Ecce, Deus magnus vincens scientiam nostram.*—Job xxxvi. 23, 24, 26.

⁶ *O homo, tu quis es, qui respondeas Deo?*—Rom. ix. 20.

⁷ *Ne sutor ultra crepidam.*

ing; how then can you pretend to criticise the language of Divine Providence, which is much above your comprehension? How can you think or dare to ask whether all that God has done is done well and wisely? With reason therefore does the Apostle reprove you: "O man, who art thou that repliest against God," or darest to examine His hidden decrees? "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it: Why hast thou made me thus?"¹

Did God perhaps consult you when He instituted His all-wise arrangements about yourself and all His creatures? It would be gross insolence and presumption for a subject to presume to investigate or to understand the reason of all the commands, prohibitions, and actions of his prince or king. You do not even tell your neighbor or fellow-citizen, your own equal, your private designs, or why you have made this or that arrangement in your household; and if he were to ask you about those things you would at once tell him to mind his own business, and remind him that you are master in your own house and can do therein what you please. Yet you are presumptuous enough to investigate the reasons which the great common Father of all has in dealing with His vast household, the world! And you expect Him to disclose all His secrets to you, and to explain why He has done so and not otherwise! Remember what you are; forget not that you are a mere mortal, and acknowledge humbly that the wisdom displayed by God in His works is altogether too high for you to understand it.

Nor should they understand them.

Such was the reproof given by the angel to Esdras, who was trying in thought to investigate the hidden decrees of the Almighty: "Dost thou think to understand the way of the Most High?" said the angel. Poor mortal that thou art! "go and weigh for me the weight of fire, or measure for me the breath of the wind. If I were to ask thee how many dwellings there are in the depths of the sea, or how many veins there are over the firmament,"² wouldst thou answer me? Thou wouldst reply to me perhaps: I have never descended into the abyss, nor mounted up to the heights of heaven. Now I have only asked thee about the fire and wind, things of which thou hast daily experience. If thou canst not understand what thou seest and

We cannot understand many natural things, much less the hidden decrees of God.

¹ Numquid dicit figmentum ei qui se finxit : quid me fecisti sic?—Rom. ix. 20.

² Comprehendere cogitas viam Altissimi. Vade, pondera mihi ignis pondus, aut mensura mihi flatum venti. Si essem interrogans te, dicens: Quantæ habitationes sunt in corde maris, aut quantæ venæ sunt super firmamentum.—IV. Esdr. iv. 2, 5, 7.

hearest so often, how canst thou dare to examine and scrutinize the ways of the Almighty God who so far surpasses thy intellect? So far the angel to Esdras. Whereby he wishes to warn all men and to say to them: if we try in vain to comprehend natural things, and if he acts foolishly and presumptuously who ventures to find fault with the fire and the wind as if they were not properly made, because he cannot find out their weight and measure, then much more vain, curious, foolish, and presumptuous is the man who criticises the hidden decrees of God's Providence, and blames them because in many instances they do not fall in with his views.

And He does not wish us to inquire curiously into them.

No, O mortal! you cannot understand such things, and therefore you should humbly adore what is above your comprehension. "Seek not the things that are too high for thee," says the wise Ecclesiasticus, "and search not into things above thy ability: but the things that God hath commanded thee, think on them always, and in many of His works be not curious. For many things are shown to thee above the understanding of men. And the suspicion of them hath deceived many."¹ A certain young man at Cordova was carrying a basket of fruit covered with a cloth; a friend met him and asked him what he had in the basket: "I should not have covered it," answered the young man, "if I had wished people to know what it was."² The same answer was once given to that great friend of God, St. Anthony. He was wondering at the strange dispensations of Divine Providence, and in his simplicity, and with his usual confidence in treating with God, he commenced to complain; "my good God," he said, "why dost Thou permit sinners to live so long, while Thou takest so soon out of the world good men, whose lives might be useful? These good people in whom there is not the least harm are often severely punished by Thee for small faults they commit now and then; while others whose lives are scandalous are free from chastisement, and since they can do as they please, they are encouraged thereby to sin all the more, etc. How is that?" And he heard the following answer: "Anthony, what is it to thee? Look to thyself. These are decrees which God wishes to keep from the eyes of men, and it is not for thee to find fault

¹ *Altiora te ne quaesieris, et fortiora te ne scrutatus fueris; sed quae praecipit tibi Deus illa cogita semper, et in pluribus operibus ejus ne fueris curiosus. Non est enim tibi necessarium ea quae abscondita sunt videre oculis tuis. Plurima enim super sensum hominum ostensa sunt tibi. Multos quoque supplantavit suspicio illorum.*—Ecclesi. iii. 22, 25, 26.

² *Non velassem si sciri vellem.*

with them. God would not have concealed them from thee if He had wished thee to know them."

In royal courts what is debated on in privy council is kept secret most religiously, and no one is allowed to hear a syllable of it; it is in fact considered treasonable to try to find out any of those secrets. Majolinus writes of a merchant who on one occasion gave vent to his curiosity merely by saying: oh, how I should like to see the council chamber of the Turkish sovereign. These few words, being carried to the authorities, cost the unfortunate merchant his life. And what would be done to a stable-boy who should dare to enter the bed-chamber of his king, or even to tamper with his seneschal in order to find out state secrets? He would be sentenced to death as a traitor of the worst kind, and would be quartered alive. Now if it is such a crime in the eyes of men to meddle with the secrets of earthly potentates, which after all cannot always be kept so private that they are not somehow or other brought to light, how deserving of punishment must not that curiosity be which inspires a poor, miserable mortal with the audacity to enter with his fault-finding and murmuring into the council-chamber of the great Monarch of heaven, there to pry into hidden decrees of Providence that God does not wish any man to know?

Hence it is a great presumption to pry into them.

Therefore we must in this respect humbly acknowledge with Salvianus: "I can always and with reason say that I know not the secret, and the divine decrees are hidden from me."¹ Hence if any dispensation of Providence seems strange to me, and I begin to doubt of its justice, I cannot think anything more reasonable than: I know not the secret; I do not understand the divine decrees. And if any one asks me why God has ordained or permitted this or that; why the wicked man is rich, the good man poor and despised; why the poor laborer has many children, the mighty prince none; I can give no better answer than to say: I know not; the decrees of God are beyond my understanding; nor do I now wish to know them, since God is not pleased that I should do so. Nor is this ignorance unbecoming even to the most learned and the wisest of men; for it is necessary to know what we can and ought to know, but it is presumption and folly to seek to find out what is beyond our ken. Livia, the wife of Octavianus Augustus, being asked how she gained the favor of

We must humbly acknowledge our ignorance in this respect.

¹ Possum constanter et rationabiliter dicere: nescio secretum, et consilium divinitatis ignoro.

the emperor to such a degree that she seemed to command him, answered: "By being modest and faithful, and not trying to pry into his secrets."¹ By the same means men can gain the favor and grace of the supreme Emperor of heaven, and keep it constantly, namely, by being faithful to Him in all things, by obeying all His commands, and submitting to the hidden decrees of His Providence without murmuring against or prying into them curiously.

And not judge of the divine decrees until their justice shall be shown to us on the last day.

The time shall come when we shall know all about them, namely, on the last day, at the end of the world, as we have seen already, when the Almighty shall publicly, in the sight of all men, angels, and demons, justify the dispensations of His Providence. Now He acts like a painter or tapestry hanger; while these artists are actually engaged in their work, and the painting or tapestry is yet unfinished, they do not wish any one to see it; therefore they close their workshops, or else hang a screen before the work, that no one may look at it. If a person were to steal into the workshop he would see all distorted figures, here half a man's face, there the head of a horse, on one side the horns of an ox, on another the trunk of a tree, the paws of a lion, etc. An ignorant man looking at those unfinished figures would be inclined to find fault with the artist, and to turn his work into ridicule: Oh, he would say, what laughable figures! what distorted pictures! Why is that body without a head? what is that foot doing there? where are the nose and ears of that face? who ever saw a man's head without a body? and so on. What would the artist answer to such a critic? Full of just indignation he would show him the door and say: fools and children should never be allowed to see unfinished paintings; wait till my work is completed and exposed in public, then come back and see how those distorted figures will turn out, and you shall have reason to praise what you now find fault with. See, exclaims St. Augustine, speaking against those over-curious individuals who dare to measure with their weak understandings the works of Divine Providence, and think that this or that is not ordained rightly or justly—see how presumptuous the human mind can be! Poor mortal! who has made you so insolent? "No one would dare to blame the work in the artist's workshop; but you do not hesitate to blame the Almighty in what He does in the world!"²

¹ Pudicitia et obsequio, nulla ejus arcana scrutando.

² In officina non audet reprehendere fabrum; et audet reprehendere in hoc mundo Deum!—S. Aug. in Ps. cxlix.

Hear the warning that St. Paul gives: "Judge not before the time, until the Lord come,"¹ wait till the work of God is completed. If many things now seem inconsistent and incomprehensible to you, remember that the work of this world is not by any means finished; there is still much to be done on it, as if it were a piece of tapestry or a painting. Since you cannot and should not now understand the design of the Almighty Artist, wait till the last day of the world, on which God will show in public in the valley of Josaphat the whole work of His Providence, and will allow everyone to see how admirably and wisely everything has been done; then we shall all see to our great admiration what a beautiful work it is.

Let us then, my dear brethren, ascribe everything that happens in the world, sin alone excepted, to the Providence of God, and since we cannot understand His decrees submit humbly to them without further question or doubt, and resign ourselves and all belonging to us with contented minds to the divine will. In this respect we should imitate King David, who speaks thus to his God: "I am become as a beast before Thee. Thou hast held me by my right hand: and by Thy will Thou hast conducted me."² In the same sense we should say: O Lord, I am just as a beast of burden before Thee, that allows its master to place on it what load he pleases, and then goes wherever he leads it. Our only care in this life should be to know the will of God and to fulfil it exactly in all circumstances, as Christ Our Lord has taught us by His example, for He says of Himself: "In the head of the book it is written of Me that I should do Thy will. O my God, I have desired it, and Thy law in the midst of My heart."³ Here we should profit by the beautiful words of St. Augustine when examining and speaking in the person of Adam of the command not to eat the forbidden fruit. He says: if the tree is good, why may I not eat of its fruit? But if it is bad, why is it in paradise? God might answer both these questions by saying: the tree is in paradise because I have chosen to place it there; but I do not wish you to eat its fruit, because I desire to have in you an obedient and not a disobedient servant. But why so? Because you are the servant and I am your Lord; this sole reason should

Conclusion and exhortation to resign ourselves and all belonging to us to God's Providence and to do His will in all things.

¹ Nolite ante tempus judicare, quoadusque veniat Dominus.—I. Cor. iv. 5.

² Ut jumentum factus sum apud te. Tenuisti manum dexteram meam, et in voluntate tua deduxisti me.—Ps. lxxii. 23, 24.

³ In capite libri scriptum est de me, ut facerem voluntatem tuam. Deus meus, volui, et legem tuam in medio cordis mei.—Ibid. xxxix. 8, 9.

suffice for you. It was only the hellish serpent that said cunningly and craftily: "Why hath God commanded you, that you should not eat of every tree of paradise?"¹ He should have said: why do you not eat of this tree? Then Eve might easily have answered him: because God has forbidden us. But the deceitful hellish foe put the question another way: "why hath God commanded you?"

Without prying into the reasons why God so ordains things.

No, my dear brethren, whenever we know that God wishes us to do something, it is not for us to ask why He so wishes it. The most powerful reason for anything is that God so wills it; God has decreed it; God has ordained it; God has done it. The highest justice, as Salvianus rightly remarks, is the will and ordination of God; the highest wisdom to allow one's self quietly and with confidence to be ruled in all things by His holy will and all-wise providence. Sometimes parents say to one of their children: go to school and study; to another: stay at home and help your father at his work; to a third: come into the garden and take a walk with me. If the children are naughty they will at once commence to murmur and say: why should I study? why must I work, while he goes to the garden? But if they are obedient, well-reared children, as all Christian children should be, they do not hesitate a moment, but at once and willingly fulfil their parents' commands. Yes, they say; I will do whatever my father or mother wishes. In the same manner should we, as obedient children of God in all circumstances, in all dispensations of Divine Providence, think and say with Christ our dear Saviour: "Yea, Father: for so hath it seemed good in Thy sight."² Yes, my heavenly Father! since Thou hast so ordained it, Thy will is a sufficient reason for me to be fully satisfied with it. Yes, Father! Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Second Sunday of Advent.

Text.

Beatus est, qui non fuerit scandalizatus in me.—Matt. xi. 6.
"Blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in Me."

Introduction.

And could any one be scandalized in Jesus Christ, the most perfect Model of all holiness, whose manners, demeanor, words,

¹ Cur præcepit vobis Deus ut non comederetis de omni ligno paradisi?—Gen. iii. 1.

² Ita, Pater, quoniam sic fuit placitum ante te.—Matt. xi. 26.

and works gave not the slightest occasion or excuse for sin, a thing which unfortunately cannot be said of many men? For has not God threatened the man by whom scandal comes? But out of what work of Christ could scandal be taken? "The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the Gospel preached to them."¹ Are these scandalous works? And why then does He add, "Blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in Me"? Truly, in those days many took scandal at those works, for they put a wrong interpretation on them, ridiculed them, and even condemned Our Lord as a sorcerer on account of them. His own disciples, as He Himself foretold, were scandalized in Him on the night when He was led away a prisoner and sentenced to be crucified; for partly they were influenced by fear, and partly by the suspicion that they had been misled by Him by means of false miracles. My dear brethren, on the last occasion I explained a reason that renders it necessary to have a general judgment, etc.

Continues as before.

TWENTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON THE JUSTICE OF THE DIVINE DECREES.

Subject.

We must believe and hold it for certain that everything is good, right, and just in the highest degree that Divine Providence does with us and with everything and everybody in the whole world, although we cannot now understand the reason of this justice and goodness.—*Preached on the tenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Dico vobis, descendit hic justificatus in domum suam ab illo.—
Luke xviii. 14.

"I say to you, this man went down into his house justified rather than the other."

Introduction.

If one of us had seen these two men and the different lives they led, he would most likely have approved of the first, and condemned the second in his own mind. For when a man is

¹ *Cœci vident, claudi ambulant, leprosi mundantur, surdi audiant, mortui resurgunt, pauperes evangelizantur.*

able to declare himself free from so many vices, such as theft, injustice, adultery, to thank God in fervent prayer for benefits received, to fast and chastise his flesh often during the week, to give a tenth part of all his goods to the poor, are not those praiseworthy holy works and occupations which show a man to be a pious, just servant of God? On the other hand, what is more scandalous than to see a man wallowing in all sorts of wickedness, so that he is publicly called a sinner? Yet how different was the judgment pronounced by Our Lord on the two men! "I say to you this man went down into his house justified rather than the other." Who would look on such a judgment as just if he did not know it came from the infallible Truth? My dear brethren, many things of the kind happen in the world, and if we were to dare to condemn them, we should make a grievous mistake; still worse should we err by presuming to murmur against and find fault with the hidden decrees and dispensations of Divine Providence; yet that is an error into which many fall, who seem to themselves learned and clever. These over-curious people I must again address in the words of St. Paul: "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"¹ Who art thou who in a spirit of curiosity darest to investigate the wonderful workings of Divine Providence in the government of the world, nay, to criticise them, murmur against them, find fault with them, and ask why this or that is done in such a manner? Who art thou? A blind, ignorant mortal, who dost not understand, canst not, and what is more, shouldst not understand the reasons of the divine dispensations, which God has determined not to make public till the last day of general judgment. Therefore thy conduct is foolish in scrutinizing or judging those decrees, and presumptuous in condemning them. Wait till the work of the great Master is completed; then there will be full opportunity of seeing it all. There you have, my dear brethren, the whole subject of my sermon on last Sunday. Yet another point remains: may we not, then, express any opinion on the decrees and dispensations of God's providence in this life? Of course we may, and that is not only allowed, but it is even our duty to do so, as we shall now see.

Plan of Discourse.

Our judgment of them should be that everything is good, right, and just in the highest degree that Divine Providence does with

¹ O homo, tu quis es, qui respondeas Deo?—Rom. ix. 20.

us and everybody in the whole world, although we cannot now understand the reason of this justice and goodness, nay, although many decrees may now appear unjust and inconsistent to our understanding, as I now proceed to prove. If we have once rightly seen the matter and formed our judgment on it, the conclusion shall follow of its own accord, that, namely, we must be always completely and quietly resigned to the will of God.

This resolution of our will we expect and humbly beg of Thee, O God of goodness, through the prayers of Thy Mother Mary, from whose hands Thou hast decreed that all graces should come, and through the intercession of our holy guardian angels.

The proverb says that every master should be believed in his own art, and he who sees an artist at work, if he is discreet, must at once conclude that whatever the artist is doing is according to rule, although he who forms that opinion may not be able to see the design of the work; this is especially the case when the artist is celebrated, and still more so when he has said that the work he is engaged on will be a beautiful one. We form the same opinion of works that we may never have seen. Thus if a man says: I have at home a picture by Rubens, every one who hears him and knows anything of Rubens' fame will at once exclaim: What a beautiful picture it must be! But how do you know that? I ask. You have not seen the picture nor the painter, nor do you even know what the subject of the painting is. Why do you not go and examine it before approving of it? No; that is not necessary, will be the answer; I need not see either the picture or the painter, or know what subject he has chosen; if Rubens' name is on the canvas it is enough for me to conclude that the work must be a fine one. When the Indians first saw a clock they were so struck with admiration that they would spend the whole day gazing at it open-mouthed; they saw the pendulum swinging to and fro, and heard the rattling of the wheels when the clock struck; sometimes it struck one, sometimes two or three, and so on. What a strange thing, thought they; there must be something hidden in it! Is it altogether natural? But the simple people nevertheless praised the work, and were of the opinion that great skill was required to complete it; great was their admiration of the man who could make such a wonderful machine, and if they could have got hold of him, there is little doubt they would have looked on him as a kind of god.

We must always give a celebrated artist the credit of working according to rule, although we may not understand the work.

Much more should we have a good opinion of what God's Providence does in the world, although we cannot grasp it.

Now, my dear brethren, if we with good reason form such a favorable opinion of the works of man, although we do not understand them, and form that opinion simply because we trust every master in his own art, what judgment should we, must we, form of the works of Divine Providence? When we consider what goes on in this world, it appears to us not otherwise than as a mighty clock, in which there are many different wheels, some large, others small; some turn here, others there; that is, one man has a wide sphere of action, another a very small one; one is seated on a throne in great honor, another lies on the ground, poor and neglected; one is rich, another poor; one healthy, another sick; one idle, another busy from morning till night, like the pendulum of the clock; one is prosperous and fortunate, another tried with sorrow and affliction; for one the clock strikes too soon, for another too late: many things seem to us inconsistent, many actually unjust, and most things inexplicable; we are quite bewildered at what we see around us; but let us seek out the Master who is still working at this clock and putting each part of it into its place, until it shall be completely finished at the end of the world.

For God is the Master, who arranges all.

Who is this Master and Artist? The almighty, most wise, and most just God, whom we have never seen, but of whom we know for certain that He cannot go wrong in anything, that He is "holy in all His works."¹ Oh, therefore must we think, and firmly believe that whatever this Artist begins and completes must be good and right, and as it should be, and that it could not be done better; and although we may not understand the reason of it, this one fact, God has so ordained it, should suffice to make us form that judgment. One who is making a voyage in a ship begins to doubt if the course steered is the right one; it should be enough to resolve his doubts to tell him that the captain's orders are being followed out, especially when the captain is an experienced sailor who knows his way over the sea, and has often made that voyage before. In the same way when a prisoner is sentenced to death, and you doubt whether his sentence is a just one, it should satisfy you to be told that the sovereign pronounced on the man after having carefully weighed the evidence on both sides, especially when you know the sovereign to be just and upright. In olden times amongst the Grecian philosophers of the school of Pythagoras, all doubtful questions

¹ Sanctus in omnibus operibus ejus.—Ps. cxliv. 13.

and all matters of controversy were solved at once by the sole authority of Pythagoras; if it could be affirmed with certainty that he had said anything, that was enough to confirm it as an indisputable fact. Ah, Christians! why should it not suffice for us in all our doubts about the ordinations of Providence in this world to think: God has decreed it; it is His will; it is He who guides every one on the ocean of life; it is He who has pronounced sentence in this case; therefore everything cannot be otherwise than right and just; for He is an infinitely wise Teacher and Master; He is the most experienced Guide, the most just Judge?

And for a still stronger reason should we form that judgment of Him since He tells us Himself in Holy Writ that He is just in all His decrees and works, and has, as it were, boastingly promised us that on that day when all His works shall be fully completed we shall praise and approve of them. Again, therefore, this one fact should suffice for us, although we see before our eyes things that to our weak understanding appear unjust and inconsistent; this one fact should be enough to convince us even against our reason and the testimony of our senses that all He does is right and just, and could not be done better. In the very same way, although in the Blessed Sacrament of the Alter, I imagine that I see and smell and feel and touch nothing but bread, yet I believe firmly the contrary, and say without the least hesitation: no, it is not bread; it is the body and blood of my Lord and Saviour. I do not understand this mystery, but I believe it; it is true. Why? Because He has said it.

And He tells us too that His works are good and just.

And how many things has not God created in the world that seem incomprehensible, nay, incredible to us? and still we must acknowledge them to be true. Who would believe, if God had not revealed it, that the whole vast mass of the universe was created and furnished by a single word! Who would believe that the sovereign, infinite God became man, was born a little child, grew up to manhood, suffered hunger and thirst, was nailed to a cross, and died? Who would believe that the bodies that we now have, which shall decay in the earth, or be reduced to ashes, or devoured by wild beasts—who would believe that they shall be restored again to the form they now have, and be again endowed with life? Any one would say of these and similar mysteries before they actually occur, or are revealed by God, that they are simply impossible, they cannot be; and yet we now say and acknowledge that they have happened and shall

We believe many incomprehensible things, because God has said them.

happen; God has done as He has said and will do so again, for nothing is impossible to Him.

Especially
the spread
of the Chris-
tian faith.

Consider the beginning and progress of our religion. What a wonderful, incomprehensible thing it is! Who would ever have thought that twelve poor, ignorant, uncouth fishermen, such as the apostles were before their conversion, should be able to change the whole world, and to convince kings, emperors, and philosophers that they had been living in abominable errors, that their gods, to whom most magnificent temples had been erected almost everywhere over the world, were only instruments and tools of the devils? Who would believe that they should be able to persuade the Jews that the religion which they had received from their holy leader Moses, and which was revealed to him by God, was only a figure of ours, and was now of no more value? Who would believe that they should be able to persuade the nations of the world to abjure idolatry, and acknowledge and adore as the true God a poor Man who was crucified as a criminal, to love Him above all things with their whole hearts, and for His sake to suffer all the torments that could be inflicted on them, and a thousand deaths, if it were possible? Who would ever have imagined that those poor fishermen could persuade the world to adopt a religion and faith that appears to contradict natural reason, and comfort, and sensuality, nay, to be opposed to nature itself; a religion in which poverty is more valued than riches, humiliations more than honors, crosses and trials more than all the joys of earth, for Christ's sake, and that too merely through the hope of a future kingdom to be enjoyed after the death and decay of the body, a kingdom that no one has seen, a heaven that no one has ever laid eyes on, a happiness that no one has ever had experience of? Yet those poor fishermen succeeded in doing all this, without as much as a staff in their hands to drive off a barking dog, and that too they did although they were beaten out of one city into another, while all those who accepted their teaching and obeyed the law preached by them were tortured in the most frightful manner, and put to death by tyrants. Who could have believed such a thing possible before it actually took place? If I were to say to you: the great city of Rome or Constantinople shall in a short time be plundered and destroyed by twelve flies, who would credit my words? Certainly not one of you, my dear brethren. For my part I could not believe such a thing. And is it more incredible than that twelve ignorant

men should change the world in such a manner? And yet they did so; no Christian can deny it; God has said it; God has carried His words into effect.

For whenever God does anything we must look, not at the apparent possibility or credibility of the matter, but at the unlimited power of the Almighty, to whom nothing is impossible, although we may not be capable of seeing how the thing is done. Now if we hold everything as true that God has done and said, because He is almighty and infallible, although we may not understand what He has done, why should we not also look on whatever Divine Providence effects in the world as just and right, although we sometimes cannot see how things can be just or right? For God is not less holy and just than powerful, and He has said too that all His decrees are right and just. If the infinite power of God can produce effects that surpass our understanding, why should not Divine Providence also ordain things that we cannot explain, nay, that seem to us inconsistent? If we poor mortals could grasp the works and decrees of God, He would not be a wonderful, incomprehensible God. Meanwhile we are all the more bound to submit humbly our understanding, and to approve of as just and right everything that such a wonderful, incomprehensible, most wise and just and holy God ordains in the world by His inscrutable decrees.

But why do I speak of the works and decrees of God? How many acts and plans of men do we not condemn as foolish, inconsistent, and wicked, because we do not understand the motive of them, while if we happen to have them properly explained to us afterwards we see that they were reasonable, sensible, and holy? The Sultan Amurath, as Nanus writes in his History of the Turks, was attacked by a grievous illness, and as he lay on his bed he commanded all the crystal vessels that he had collected from all parts of the world to be brought before him, and then broken in pieces; nor would he rest until his command was fulfilled to the letter. Now tell me why he acted in that manner? Would you not say that he was in a delirium from the fever, since he gave such a foolish command? Or else that he acted through a spirit of grudging, not wishing that others should have the vessels that he could no longer use? Such should have been our opinion if we had been present on the occasion; but we should have been grievously mistaken. Amurath got well again, and after his recovery explained the reason of his conduct; he had often drunk

Therefore whatever God ordains we must look on as just, because He Himself says it is rightly ordained.

The works of men often seem foolish to us, until we understand them, when we are forced to approve of them. Shown by examples.

to excess out of those crystal goblets, and thereby injured his health; so he made a vow never more to drink wine during his life, and lest the sight of the beautiful goblets should tempt him to break his resolution, he had them all broken. Who would have thought that? And must we not now acknowledge that the emperor, whom we accused as having acted foolishly, was in reality very wise and prudent in what he did?

Confirmed
by another.

Anaxagoras came, one hot summer's day, to the public games, where many people were assembled, with a heavy glazed hat on his head, thick boots, and a warm tunic, over which he wore a heavy mantle, while other people could hardly bear the thinnest garments on account of the great heat. All who saw him laughed at him as a fool, because he took such precautions against the cold in such warm weather. No doubt if we had been present we should have laughed at him also. But the laughter did not last long. In a short time a heavy shower of rain fell from the clouds and inundated the place in which the games were held, so that the people had almost to swim for their lives. Then they saw the wisdom of what they had looked on as folly; for Anaxagoras alone, who had foreseen the storm by his knowledge of the stars, remained dry, and warm, and uninjured. Countless things of the kind are done by men from very good and praiseworthy motives which are condemned as foolish, inconsistent, and superstitious by those who do not understand the reason of them. And therefore it is a Christian maxim that we should look on our neighbor as upright and honest until we find him out to be a rogue. Mark this well, as often as you hear calumnious or detracting talk about others.

It would be
the same
with the
works and
decrees of
God, if we
understood
them.
Shown by
an example.

How much more, then, should we not form that good opinion of the God of infinite wisdom and justice, who cannot err in His judgments and decrees, although we may not understand them? Father Nierenberg tells us of a hermit who used daily to beg of God in fervent prayer to reveal to him some of the secrets of His Providence. An angel appeared to him in the guise of a hermit, and said to him: "Come with me and we shall visit some of our brethren who live in this desert." First they came to a very holy man, by whom they were greeted in a most friendly manner and hospitably entertained. When leaving the place the angel stealthily took up a jar in which the hermit used to carry water, and took it away with him. The pious man, soon after they were gone, sought for the jar, and not finding it, suspected

a theft and sent a boy after them to demand the stolen jar back again; but the angel took his stick and struck the boy dead with it. They then came to the hut of another hermit who gave them a very rough reception, and eventually beat them away from his door. The angel gave to this inhospitable man the jar he had taken from the other hermit. He then said to his companion, who through reverence and astonishment at such conduct had not dared to say a word: "Now I will tell you the reason of all that I have done; the jar was formerly acquired by theft, and it was not fitting that a holy man should have such a thing in his possession, although he knew nothing of its having been unjustly acquired; therefore I took it from him, and gave it to the other, for we must return good for evil. The boy whom I killed would, if he had lived one night longer, have slain his pious master; and to preserve him from such a crime I took away his life while he was still in his first innocence." "These are the judgments of God."¹ The angel then vanished. So far Nierenberg. Now I again ask you, my dear brethren, if we had been present, what would we have thought of the occurrence? Is it not very ungrateful to steal from a holy man, who had shown himself so friendly, the only domestic utensil almost that he had in his possession? And was it not a strange thing to give it to one who deserved nothing but punishment for his rudeness? And was it not a most cruel injustice to kill an innocent youth? Doubtless the hermit, and we with him, would have been of that opinion. For who could have dreamt or imagined that such actions could have proceeded from a just and righteous motive, if God Himself had not revealed it by His angel?

One more point: many considering the case of Lucifer and the host of rebel angels who with him were hurled down out of heaven, pity those spirits, and think the justice of God very strict indeed in not allowing those princes of heaven any time for mercy or repentance, and precipitating them at once into eternal torments, where for one sin of thought they must undergo frightful tortures forever. But if I were to tell you that after their first sin Lucifer and his followers became so hardened in guilt and in the hatred of God that they would not wish to leave hell even if God allowed them to do so, and would not accept His grace and pardon if He offered it to them, would you believe that? And if it be true, would not every one acknowledge that

Confirmed
by another

¹ *Hæc sunt judicia Del.*

it is but right and just that those hardened spirits should be tormented forever in hell? And such, my dear brethren, is the case. St. Brigid in the Book of her Revelations testifies to the fact of having seen a fallen angel at the judgment-seat of God, and heard him say these words to the Almighty: "Even if I could be saved, I should not wish it." Why not? "Lest Thou shouldst have any joy from me on account of my loving Thee for all eternity."¹ Who could think such a thing possible if it were not revealed? Thus we see that the divine decrees and ordinations are always just, holy, and right, once we know the causes and reasons of them.

Hence we should have a good opinion of them, although we do not understand them, simply because they are from God.

But if we are ignorant of the causes and reasons of many other decrees and arrangements of Divine Providence, is that a reason for looking on them as unjust? Do they not proceed from the same infinitely good, wise, holy, and just God? Ah, says Salvianus, and with his beautiful words I conclude, "let the Author and Cause, God, suffice to me in place of all reasons."² Let a man speculate as much as he likes; let him ask me what questions he pleases; why God, who is so good and holy, allows so much evil to exist in the world; why God, who has suffered the death of the cross for us men, should condemn so many millions of souls to hell; why there are so many millions of infidels, heathens, idolaters, Turks, Jews, and heretics to whom the mysteries of our faith have never been preached; why generally speaking the innocent must suffer, while the wicked prosper; why potentates are allowed by God to wage war on each other so often, to the great detriment of harmless people, who have not given the slightest cause for war and are thereby reduced to poverty, etc. Let him ask me these and a hundred similar questions, and my only answer shall be, "Let the Author and Cause, God, suffice to me in place of all reasons." God has decreed it; God permits it; God has ordained it; therefore all is permitted or decreed with the utmost justice, goodness, and holiness. This conclusion is logical enough.

Conclusion and resignation to God's will in all things.

Truly, O Lord, we acknowledge with the Hebrew youths: "Thou art just in all that Thou hast done to us, and all Thy works are true, and Thy ways right, and all Thy judgments true."³ Whatever Thy all-wise Providence does with us and with all in

¹ *Quamvis possem salvari; nollem tamen; ne tu de me aliquod gaudium habeas.*

² *Satis mihi sit pro universis rationibus Author et Ordinator, Deus.—Salv. l. 3. de provid.*

³ *Quid justus es in omnibus quæ fecisti nobis, et universa opera tua vera, et viæ tuæ rectæ, et omnia judicia tua vera.—Dan. iii. 27.*

the world is right, holy, and just; and as we now acknowledge this, we must again repeat the oft-made resolution of committing ourselves to Thee in all circumstances, at all times, with quiet, confident hearts, and submitting cheerfully our will to all Thy decrees, whether they are sweet or bitter to our natural inclinations; and Thy decrees shall be dear to us for the sole reason that they come from Thee, O God! Drexelius writes that when Harpagus had unwittingly eaten some of the flesh of his own son, and the tyrant Astyages, who had prepared the horrid banquet for him, placed the members of the son, such as the head, the arms, and the feet, before the father, and asked him whether he knew the head, and how he had liked what he had already eaten, Harpagus answered with downcast eyes: "All that the king does is well done, and is pleasing to me." The philosopher Epictetus said that he would wish to utter sincerely and fervently these words when dying, directing them to God with an upright intention: "I willingly grew sick because Thou didst wish it; I was poor because it was Thy will; I was never in a position of authority to my great content, because Thou didst so ordain; hast Thou seen me sad on that account? Have I ever appeared before Thee with sorrowful countenance? I am ready for all that Thou wishest to lay on me or to command me. And my wish is that death may find me meditating, and writing and reading these things."¹ O my Lord and my God, that barbarian who to please his king was satisfied to eat the flesh of his own son, that heathen who was so submissive to Thy will, how they put to shame the discontent, impatience, murmuring, and disobedience of which I have been guilty hitherto, whenever Thou didst require anything from me contrary to my inclination, although Thou hast bestowed on me so many marks of Thy favor! Ah, should I not rather therefore think and say: all that Thou, O God, dost is well done, and is pleasing to me too? Yes, so shall it be with me in future; all that Thou, O my God, willest I too shall desire; all that displeases Thee shall displease me too. What pleases Thee shall please me, because it is Thy will. If Thou wilt that I be poor then I wish to be poor, because it is Thy will; that I be despised and persecuted, then I wish to be so, because it is Thy will; that I lie sick and suffering in

¹ Aegrotavi volens, quia tu voluisti: pauper fui, te volente: sed lætus non imperavi, quia tu voluisti; numquid me hac de causa tristiores vidisti? numquid unquam vultu minus hilari te accessi? paratus si quid mandes, si quid imperes. Hæc me cogitantem, hæc scribentem, hæc legentem occupet mors.—Arian. Epist. disput. l. 3. c. 5.

bed, then I wish it, because it is Thy will, and I will imitate St. Francis of Assisi, who, as Nebridius writes, when he was attacked by a grievous illness, threw down his suffering limbs on the ground, and kissing the earth humbly, said: Eternal thanks to Thee, O God, for all the pains Thou hast sent me! Increase them a hundred-fold, if such is Thy will; there is nothing more agreeable to me than pains and sickness which come from Thy holy will! For the fulfilment of that will causes me ineffable joy. ¹ So will I think and say in all circumstances: all that Thou ordainest and commandest for me and mine, both now and in the future, is and shall be agreeable to me, because it is Thy will; therewith I shall be always satisfied; Thy holy will be done! Amen.

Another introduction to the same sermon for the third Sunday of Advent.

Text.

Tu quis es?—John i. 19.
“Who art thou?”

Introduction.

What the Jews said in to-day's Gospel to St. John, “Who art thou?” that I say again with the apostle, “O man, who art thou?” etc. *Continues as before.*

TWENTY-FIFTH SERMON.

ON THE SECOND REASON FOR THE GENERAL JUDGMENT.

Subject.

There must be a day of general judgment, that God may publicly, before heaven and earth, justify and defend His chosen servants.—*Preached on the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Bene omnia fecit.—Mark vii. 37.
“He hath done all things well.”

¹ Quoniam impletio voluntatis tuæ ineffabile meum gaudium est!—Nebrid. Antiq. Monast. Ep. 37.

Introduction.

The same praise shall one day be given to the Almighty by all the angels and men in heaven and on and under the earth: "He hath done all things well." That will be on the last day of general judgment, when God shall in the sight of the whole world avenge His injured honor and justify the ordinations of His Providence, which now appear to us in many cases incomprehensible, nay, often inconsistent and unjust, as you have heard three Sundays ago; and in the two following sermons we have seen that since we cannot understand the decrees of the Almighty, and shall not understand them till the last day, we should not pry into them curiously, and much less blame or find fault with them, but rather, as we know they proceed from a God of infinite goodness, justice, and holiness, look on them as right, just, and holy; the conclusion we deduced from that is, that in all cases we should be completely and quietly resigned to the divine will. There we have the first reason on the part of God which renders a general judgment necessary. There is still another reason that regards us men and especially the elect, which I now intend to explain.

Plan of Discourse.

There must be a day of general judgment, that God may publicly, before heaven and earth, justify and defend His chosen servants. Such is the whole subject. From it the pious may derive consolation; the wicked and the tepid, instruction.

Give us Thy light hereto, O Holy Ghost, which we humbly beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy angels.

That pious and virtuous servants of God are during their lives not appreciated nor honored, but, generally speaking, despised and persecuted unjustly, comes from three causes. The first is their own humility, which impels them to hide their virtue from the world; the second is the wickedness of sinful men, who, by rash judgments, uncharitable talk, and persecution, try to vilify their good works; the third is the false maxims and judgments of vain worldlings, who ridicule and laugh at true virtue and piety as folly. It is then just that there should be a day of general judgment, on which God shall defend His servants against these two latter classes of people, and justify their virtue, and make

During life
the good
are not
duly hon-
ored nor ap-
preciated.

known to heaven and earth the holiness that their humility kept hidden.

Because they hide their virtue from men.

With regard to the first point, my dear brethren, true piety and virtue have this property and inclination, that they are always anxious as far as may be to remain hidden from the eyes of men, and to creep out of the light into the darkness. To wish to be looked on as pious, and therefore to make one's good works public, and to speak and act in a boastful manner, is nothing but hypocrisy and affected piety, of which true goodness, which is founded on humility and self-contempt, knows nothing. Hence saints chose to live in solitude, and made their dwellings in deserts and in caves in the wilderness; and they were wont to go from one country to another, that they might remain unknown and hidden from the eyes of men; for the same reason many of them concealed their noble descent under mean clothing, their great natural gifts under continual silence, the supernatural favors conferred on them by God under the appearance of a childish simplicity, nay, sometimes they actually pretended to be mad and out of their senses.

God has sometimes made known the holiness of His servants.

It has indeed often been the case that God has brought His humble and hidden servants out of the retirement and obscurity they loved so well into the clear light of day, and made them known to the world in order to put the wicked to shame and to encourage the weak by their holy example. Thus the first hermit, St. Paul, after having lived a hundred years in the desert without other company than the wild beasts, was visited and reverently saluted by St. Anthony, to whom an angel had revealed Paul's great sanctity. Thus the humble servant of God, who had disguised himself as a charcoal burner to escape being recognized, was betrayed by a little child and raised to the dignity of bishop against his will. Thus St. Alexius died in his father's house after having spent forty years in it unknown, living as a poor mendicant in a closet under the staircase; if God Himself had not taken care to publish this fact after the saint's death, his heroic humility would have remained concealed from the world. Such too would have been the case with that Mark, who for seven years pretended to be a fool, if his holy wisdom had not been at length discovered; but the day after his secret was found out he was found dead in his hut. In like manner an Egyptian nun named Isidora, simulated folly with such success that for a long time the whole convent looked on her as a fool

and treated her as a beast of burden; she had to do all the work that the others refused, and she pretended that she liked best what was most abhorrent to her nature and her senses. At last a man of great sanctity discovered the secret, and made known the holiness of that heroic virgin.

Meanwhile such cases are very rare. Oh, how many there are of both sexes whose holiness is buried from the light! How many chosen souls there are in religious houses, nay, even in the world, whose great virtue is utterly unknown, because they conceal it so effectually! How many decent poor suffer the privations of their state with the utmost patience for God's sake! How many a workman offers up his daily toil to God with a pure intention! How many a lowly servant-maid spends her life in the meanest occupations, in the stable of some peasant, and her holiness, patience, and resignation to the divine will are known only to the all-seeing eye of God! How many tears of repentance and divine charity are shed in private houses in the secrecy of the bedchamber! How many privately and by night mortify their bodies by the frequent use of the discipline! How many there are who wear hair-shirts and iron girdles under costly robes! How many acts of mortification are practised of which one never hears a word! How much is given and taken in charity without the generous donor's name ever coming to light! It seems to me quite true that there are souls in heaven greater in holiness and higher in glory than many others who have been canonized by the Church and whose relics are honored by the world; and it seems equally certain to me that there are actually many souls on earth who imitate or even surpass the example of the saints, and yet are not looked on as holy.

And must this remain always hidden, and that too from the world out of which the greater number of men shall be condemned to hell? No; it must not and cannot be so. The Lord Himself says to all His servants by the Prophet David: "Commit thy way to the Lord, and trust in Him: and He will do it." What will He do? "He will bring forth thy justice as the light: and thy judgment as the noon-day."¹ For this purpose is fixed the day of general judgment on which all in heaven, on earth, and under the earth shall be summoned to the same place by the sound of the trumpet, and there, as it were, on a vast public stage

Yet in most cases it remains hidden.

Hence there will be a day of general judgment, on which the secret holiness of men shall be published and admired.

¹ Revela Domino viam tuam, et spera in eo, et ipse faciet. Educet quasi lumen justitiam tuam, et judicium tuum tanquam meridiem.—Ps. xxxvi. 5, 6.

shall be exhibited with the utmost pomp and splendor the hitherto hidden virtues and good works of the elect. How the angels will then wonder, as well as men and demons, at the sight of so many unknown souls! Oh, they will exclaim with one voice, "who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising?"¹ "Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved?"² by whom she is led, as it were, in triumph? Who is that soul of whom no one ever heard anything extraordinary during life? See that poor citizen, that simple peasant, that lowly maid-servant; who would ever have thought they had led such holy lives? Their former masters and mistresses, who appeared to do so much for the glory of God, must now give way to them in rank. Many religious even of the strictest orders, who were looked on as saints during their lives, must now occupy a lower place than they in heavenly glory. How have those people managed to do such wonderful work so quietly, and in the midst of a barren and corrupt world to heap up such great merits? Now we see what we never could have imagined during life. Such is the manner in which the virtue that is now hidden through humility shall be brought to light.

The good are generally calumniated during life, so that they lose their good name.

Now, my dear brethren, if justice requires this, is it not still more imperatively demanded by justice that misinterpreted, persecuted, and calumniated virtue should be defended and publicly vindicated? What is more foolhardy, and at the same time more common in the world, than the vice of calumny and detraction? To sneer at, criticise, find fault with, and misinterpret the actions of others, and to spread false tales about one's neighbor is nowadays a privileged and public trade. Amongst all the holy servants of God there is hardly one who has not had to suffer in honor and reputation, and whose good name has not been made the butt of malice. Jesus Christ Himself, the Holy of holies, has not even yet redeemed His good name from the calumnies and aspersions that were cast on it by wicked Jews and envious Pharisees and Scribes during His lifetime; for at the present day He is looked on by the Jews as a seditious and treacherous man. The holy martyrs were condemned to painful deaths as disturbers of the public peace, as sorcerers and dealers in the black art; and as such they are still looked on by all heathens.

Shown by examples

If God Himself had not revealed to Daniel the wickedness of

¹ Quæ est ista progreditur quasi aurora consurgens?—Cant. vi. 9.

² Quæ est ista quæ ascendit de deserto, deliciis affluens, innixa super dilectum suum.—Ibid. viii. 5.

the two elders who falsely accused Susanna, that chaste matron would have been stoned by the people as a guilty adulteress. Joseph languished in prison under the charge of having attempted the chastity of his master's wife, although his only crime was that he resisted her wicked solicitations; if God had not saved him, he would have perhaps died in prison as a criminal. But, alas! how many there are who are publicly decried by a whole city, although they are as innocent as Joseph and Susanna were of the crime of which they are accused, and they never have an opportunity of regaining their good name! And how many are not deprived of their employment, their property, their honor, through ill-founded suspicion, or envious and false accusations, that they never have a chance of refuting? There are few who have not to suffer from the evil tongues of those who envy and hate them and try to blacken their good name behind their backs in all sorts of ways. Nearly every one measures others by his own passions and imagination; the words that are spoken are misinterpreted and taken in an evil sense. And there are some who, if they cannot find anything blameworthy in the outward actions of others, wickedly assail their inward intention, of which they know nothing. Nor are private individuals the only ones who have to suffer from this; whole communities and nations lose their good name through the ill-conduct of some of their members. All the opponents of our holy faith have always looked on the popes as so many Antichrists; they say that our clergy are immoral, wicked, hypocritical, and avaricious in a shameful degree. All our convents they consider as houses of ill-fame, our churches as synagogues, our whole religion as a mass of mummeries and idolatry.

Here again we see how necessary it is that there should be a time in which all these calumnies and falsehoods shall be refuted, and that too publicly, so that all those innocent and injured servants of God may recover their lost honor before the world, and the frightful perversion of truth resulting from wicked tongues be put to rights. Yes, my dear brethren, this time shall come; the Prophet David assures us that "the Lord will not leave the rod of sinners upon the lot of the just."¹ "Now indeed," says St. Augustine commenting on this text, "the just have something to endure, and the wicked domineer over them; but shall it always be the case that the wicked command the righteous? Not

and daily
experience.

To their
great joy
they will re-
ceive back
their in-
jured honor
before the
whole
world.

¹ Non relinquet Dominus virgam peccatorum super sortem justorum.—Ps. cxxiv. 3.

by any means; the rod of the wicked shall be felt for a time upon the lot of the just; but it shall not be left there. The great day is to come when a complete change shall be made. The time shall come when Christ alone appearing in His glory shall assemble before Him all nations, and divide them, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."¹ And that is the last day of the world, when the trumpet shall summon the dead from their graves to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ in the valley of Josaphat. And how great shall then be the glory of the elect, when they see themselves justified from the calumnies they suffered so patiently on earth, while their persecutors are put to shame in the sight of the whole world! What a consolation it is even during this life to see truth sometimes prevailing and injured innocence protected! What joy there will then be on that day for the pious, when their holiness and virtue are made manifest to all, and when they see what treasures of merit they gained by their patient silence, and how their good name and honor are amply restored to them!

The early Christians were comforted by the thought of the last day.

It was, according to Tertullian, the thought of the last day that always comforted the early Christians; it was to that they appealed whenever they were falsely accused before the judges or unjustly condemned to death. "You sentence us," they used to say, as we learn from Tertullian, "without giving us a hearing; the only crime we are guilty of is that we are Christians; but we appeal from your judgments to that of the Almighty God; He will judge us and you at the last day. Now you may hold your heads as high as you please; then you shall not be able to save your necks from the noose, and we shall have our case tried in the sight of the whole world." In the same strain St. Cyprian wrote to a wicked calumniator: You accuse me of words that I never dreamt of uttering; of deeds that I never dreamt of doing; but wait a while; one day we shall both appear in the same place; there we shall have the case tried: "you have my letter, and I have yours; on the day of judgment they shall both be read before the tribunal of Christ,"² and the whole world shall then be able to see who is right.

¹ *Modo quidem justi aliquantum laborant, et modo aliquanto iniqui dominantur justis. Numquid sic erit semper, ut iniqui imperent justis? Non sic erit: sentitur ad tempus virga peccatorum super sortem justorum, sed non ibi relinquetur. Veniet tempus quando unus Christus in claritate sua apparens congregabit ante se omnes gentes, et dividet eas, sicut dividit pastor oves ab hædis.*—S. Aug. in hunc locum.

² *Habes tu literas meas, et ego tuas; in die judicii ante tribunal Christi utraque rectabuntur.*—S. Cypri. advers. detract. Ep. 9.

Finally, there must and shall be a day of general judgment in order to defend and uphold the lives of the just and pious against the erroneous opinions and judgments of vain worldlings. If we contrast the laws and maxims of the Gospel of Christ with the lives and conduct of most Christians, what a discord we shall find between them! It will seem as if Our Lord had preached mere fables to us, or at least as if His truths are not necessary to be practised by Christians who wish to go to heaven. The Gospel blesses the poor in spirit, but threatens woe to the rich who seek their pleasure and consolation in earthly goods; it says that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man, whose heart and desires are attached to temporal things, to enter heaven; it blesses the meek and the peaceful, who give way in silence to their opponents, and repay injuries with prayers and benefits, according to the law which says you must love your enemies and do good to those that hate and persecute and calumniate you; you must refrain from taking revenge under pain of eternal damnation; he who does not pardon his enemy cannot expect pardon from God; he who says to his brother with real, deliberate anger in his heart, "you fool!" is deserving of hell fire, and so on. It blesses those who weep and mourn here, and are tried by all kinds of crosses and tribulations, provided they bear them with patience and resignation to the divine will, while it threatens woe and eternal gnashing of teeth to those who laugh here and lead a voluptuous life. It blesses those who hunger and thirst after justice, while it threatens the tepid and slothful in the service of God, and warns them that God will vomit them out of His mouth. It blesses those who suffer persecution for justice' sake, and are despised and looked down on by others, while it menaces eternal curses to those who are addicted here to cursing. It raises up to heaven the humble, who seek the lowest places here, while it says to the proud that unless they change and become as little children they shall never enter the kingdom of heaven. It treats of self-denial, mortification, crucifying the flesh, moderation in eating, drinking, and sleeping; of taking up and bearing the cross daily; of imitating the life and example of Christ, if we wish to go to heaven, but it holds out no hope of heaven to the voluptuous, to gluttons, and drunkards. It treats of flying the world, whose usages and customs we are forbidden to follow; and it condemns the friends of the world as enemies of God. It points out the rug-

The Gospel of Christ teaches us a holy doctrine.

ged way and the narrow gate that lead to heaven, into which a few elect shall enter; it tells us that we must use violence in order to get there, and warns us against the broad road that leads to eternal damnation, which nevertheless the greater number of men choose to follow. It gives laws and rules to parents, showing them how carefully they should bring up their children for heaven; to children, telling them how to obey and honor their parents; to masters and mistresses, instructing them as to the manner in which they should lead those under their care to the service of God; to servants, showing how they should be faithful to their masters as to Christ Himself; to wives, warning them that they should seek to please their husbands alone with humility and obedience; to husbands, telling them to love their wives; to all Christians of both sexes, advising them to be modest and humble in dress and demeanor, and so on.

But they
who live ac-
cording to
it are rid-
iculed by
the vain
world.

Now, we are all Catholic Christians; we cannot deny the Gospel of Christ; we cannot convict the word of God of falsehood or deceit; but how many are there who are fully persuaded that they are bound to live according to those laws and truths, and to regulate their actions most exactly in conformity with them? Pious servants of God, who are really desirous of salvation, show a ready obedience to those laws and try their best to observe them. But what do the vain children of the world say to them? Oh, they have a far different idea of things! "The sensual man," says St. Paul with reason, "perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God, for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand."¹ The proud ridicule those laws and truths; dissolute and sensual men disregard them, and try to fashion a Gospel to suit themselves; they who live according to the corrupt world look on the pious who follow Christ and His law, and despise the world and its customs, as fanatics; they have a secret pity for what they imagine to be simplicity, for humility and modesty: "The simplicity of the just man is laughed to scorn,"² says holy Job to his false friends. St. Gregory, commenting on this text, uses the following beautiful words: "The wisdom of this world is to hide by deceit the sentiments of the heart; to speak otherwise than one thinks; to prove true what is false, and false what is true; to turn the mantle with the wind; to agree with every one; to seek one's own in-

¹ *Animalis homo non percipit ea quæ sunt Spiritus Dei; stultitia enim est illi, et non potest intelligere.*—I. Cor. ii. 14.

² *Deridetur justî simplicitas.*—Job xii. 4.

terests always; to strive for honors and high places; to tolerate no injury; to return evil for evil, and if one cannot be revenged on one's adversary, to conceal one's hatred and anger by an appearance of politeness; to gratify one's sensuality and love of comfort; to conform to the usages of other men, and to take the world as a guide in all things. This wisdom is imbibed by the young with their mother's milk; they are trained in it during their youth; they who are skilled therein despise others; they who are ignorant of it look up to those who know it with the most profound and reverent admiration." ¹ Thus far St. Gregory. They imagine that the law of the holy Gospel of Jesus Christ, true humility and modesty, the rude, rough way of penance, which alone can lead to heaven, is not for them, but only for religious in monasteries and deserts.

When shall these clouds of darkness be blown away? When shall the truth be disclosed, to show which side is right? Jesus Christ Himself, accompanied by all His angels, shall descend on that day from heaven, and in the presence of all the nations of the world shall erect the standard of the cross, and then pronounce sentence according to the laws of the Gospel on all those who have rejected those laws. The whole world will then have to confess and acknowledge that God revealed to the simple-minded and lowly, as they were imagined to be, what He kept concealed from the wise and the powerful. Then the foolish children of the world shall see, when too late, the grievous error into which they fell, and humbled and filled with shame and confusion, disgraced and outcast, they will stand there crying out in rage and despair those words of the Book of Wisdom: "Therefore 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 So in spite of all our cleverness, we are now found wanting; we have not known the very fundamental truths of the Christian doctrine; like little children we have not learned even the ABC of it! "We fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honor." ³ Now we foolish ones see in the glory of

On the last day the latter shall see their error to their shame, while the former shall be justified to their glory.

¹ Hujus mundi sapientia est cor machinationibus tegere sensum verbis velare, quæ falsa sunt vera ostendere, quæ vera sunt falsa demonstrare, etc. Hæc nimirum prudentia usu a juvenibus scitur; hæc a pueris pretio discitur; hæc qui sciunt, cæteros despiciendo superbiunt; hæc qui nesciunt, subjecti et timidi in aliis mirantur.—S. Greg. Hom. 10, c. 16, in c. 12. Job.

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

³ Nos insensati, vitam illorum æstimabamus insaniam, et finem illorum sine honore.—Ibid. 4.

the chosen children of God those whom we looked on as simple and stupid, while we have to go with the demons into eternal darkness! Then shall the angels launch forth against the world and its vanities that curse mentioned by St. John in the Apocalypse: "Alas! alas! that great city, which was clothed with fine linen and purple, and scarlet, and was gilt with gold," where nothing was to be seen but luxury and extravagance, is now humbled and completely ruined: "For in one hour she is made desolate. Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets, for God hath judged your judgment on her."¹ Rejoice! ye holy servants of God, who have foretold her misfortunes, and have always despised the deceitful happiness of the world, bewailed her blindness, and given such lively expression to your hatred of her by your warnings and example! Formerly her children refused to believe you; they laughed at your admonitions, despised your teachings, well meant as they were, and ridiculed and persecuted you on account of them; now it is your turn to triumph; your cause is gained; the Judge confirms the sentence you long since pronounced: "God hath judged your judgment on her." Oh, how the chosen followers of Christ will then exult and triumph because they humbly walked in the narrow way according to the precepts of the Gospel, and by bearing the cross after their divine Master, found, in spite of its weight, rest for their souls, experiencing to their great consolation that the yoke of Christ is sweet and His burden light! How the poor will thank God for having left them in poverty, and taken from them every occasion of pride by calling them to a lowly state of life! How they will exult when they hear the words fulfilled in their regard: blessed are the poor, the humble, the meek, and those who have suffered much persecution and oppression during life!

Conclusion
and exhortation to
despise the
judgments
of the world
and serve
God zealously.

Pious servants of God! the conclusion is for you. For your advantage, and to justify your virtues that are now hidden, calumniated, and despised, there will be a day of general judgment; rejoice now in this certain hope! Only continue to serve your God; let others judge, criticise, condemn, ridicule, laugh as long as they may; be not disturbed thereat; think to yourselves: I am in this world only for the purpose of saving my soul, and

¹ Vae, vae civitas illa magna, quae amicta erat bysso et purpura et cocco, et deaurata erat auro; quoniam una hora desolata est. Exsulta super eam coelum et sancti apostollet prophetæ: quoniam iudicavit Deus iudicium vestrum de illa.—Apoc. xviii. 16, 19, 20.

living, not according to the customs and usages of the world, but as the law of God prescribes; I am in the world not to act as I see others doing, but as my Lord and Saviour has taught me by word and example! Let me now be poor, unknown, simple, nay, foolish, in the world's estimation: that is nothing to me; the day will come when my innocence, piety, and justice shall be publicly brought to light; that day on which I shall be counted amongst the sheep of Christ, separated from the reprobate goats by the angels, placed in the glory of the elect at the right hand of the Judge; that day on which I shall hear the welcome words: "Come, ye blessed of my Father!" Come with Me into the eternal kingdom of heaven. Amen.

Another introduction to the same sermon for the fourth Sunday of Advent.

Text.

Et videbit omnis caro salutare Dei.—Luke iii. 6.

"And all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Introduction.

All flesh? Yes; all flesh shall see the salvation of God; the souls of all men clothed with their bodies, the elect and the reprobate, shall on that day be summoned by the trumpet before the judgment-seat of God in the valley of Josaphat, and in their Saviour they shall behold their Judge; and although they have all heard their sentence already in the particular judgment immediately after death, they shall again hear the same sentence in the presence of heaven and earth. But why so? That God may avenge His injured honor in the sight of the world, and justify His works that now appear to us incomprehensible, etc. *Continues as above.*

ON THE SIGNS THAT ARE TO PRECEDE THE LAST JUDGMENT.

TWENTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE COMING AND THE CRUELTY OF ANTICHRIST.

Subject.

First, who shall Antichrist be, and what is he to do in the world? Secondly, what should our thoughts now be regarding this? *Preached on the twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Statim autem post tribulationem dierum illorum, sol obscurabitur, et luna non dabit lumen suum.—Matt. xxiv. 29.

“ And immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light.”

Introduction.

Terrible are the signs of which to-day's Gospel speaks as forerunners of the day of general judgment, the last day of the world. There shall be many such signs, some of which are to appear a long time beforehand, while others shall immediately precede the final catastrophe. Of the former class are those we have already known and experienced; such as the destruction of the Jewish nation: a people now without faith or king or commonwealth; the conversion of the heathens to the true religion, which has been already preached and accepted in all parts of the globe; the persecution of the Church by so many heretics as precursors of Antichrist; and besides these we have seen wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, the increase of wickedness and sin, men growing cold in the love of God, the want of rever-

ence towards God in the churches and towards priests and spiritual superiors, and the fall of the Roman empire, which the Apostle St. Paul alludes to, according to Tertullian, St. Jerome, and St. Cyril. All these are signs of the approaching end of the world and the terrible day of judgment. Therefore St. John writes in his first Epistle: "Little children, it is the last hour."¹ These are, as St. Ambrose and St. Chrysostom say, the sickness of the earth which is to precede its death; "because we are in the dying moments of the world, certain sicknesses of the world must go before."² "A sickness of the world is famine, a sickness of the world is plague, a sickness of the world is war and persecution;" by these things God reminds us that it is approaching the end, so that we may not become too attached to it, too fond of it. Other signs of the coming of the last day, besides the fall of the Roman empire, are the advent of Antichrist and the terrible portents in the sun, moon, and stars, and the distress of all nations on earth, of which we read in to-day's Gospel. This latter class of signs I shall take as my subject, my dear brethren, to-day and during Advent, and shall try with God's help to deduce from them some moral doctrine for our advantage. To-day I begin with the first, namely, the coming and the tyranny of Antichrist.

Plan of Discourse.

Who shall Antichrist be, and what has he to do in the world? That I shall explain in the first part. What should be our thoughts regarding this? This shall be the moral lesson of the second part.

Give us Thy light and grace, future Judge of the living and the dead, Christ Jesus; we ask it through the merits of Thy Mother Mary and the prayers of our holy guardian angels.

Who then is Antichrist? Of what nature shall he be? In the Scripture the Holy Ghost never gives him a proper name, because, as St. Irenæus says, He did not wish to mention the name of such a wicked man; therefore He calls him only Antichrist, that is, one who is opposed to Christ in everything. The Prophet Daniel names him "a beast, terrible and wonderful, and

What kind
of a man
Antichrist
shall be.

¹ Filioi, novissima hora est.—I. John ii. 18.

² Quia in occasu sæculi sumus, præcedunt quædam ægritudines mundi.—S. Ambr. L. 10, in Luc. xviii.

exceeding strong.”¹ St. Paul calls him a man of sin, made up as it were of vice and wickedness: “The man of sin, the son of perdition.”² In any case he will be a man of the same nature as we, created by God for the same end, and he shall also have sufficient graces and means given him to save his soul, if he only chooses to make use of them. According to the opinion of St. Augustine and St. John Damascene, this wicked man is to be the offspring of adulterous intercourse, and as St. Jerome and St. Gregory maintain, to be born in the Jewish tribe of Dan at Babylon, and to be secretly brought up by people of the lowest kind: sorcerers and witches. It is easy to imagine the kind of training he is likely to get from such teachers.

At first he will deceive the world by hypocrisy.

When he comes to man's estate he will at first conceal his wickedness and craft under a mask of hypocrisy and apparent sanctity; he will be very zealous for the law of Moses, and pretend to despise all earthly things; to be an enemy of idolatry and a lover of the Sacred Scriptures. Although he will privately wallow in all kinds of impurity, he will outwardly condemn adultery and decry it as most criminal; he will be very charitable to the poor; in a word, he will put on such an appearance of virtue that many nations shall desire to have him as their king. Above all, says St. Anthony, he will try to persuade the people that all that the Prophets have said of the Messiah is fulfilled in him. Thus he will draw the Jews to his side in crowds, and they will soon look on him and adore him as their long-expected Messiah, when they see that he is a sworn enemy of Christ and the Christian law and an upholder of the Jewish law and its ceremonies, and moreover that they can hope to profit by having him in power.

Then he will draw most men after him by gifts and promises.

When he shall thus have raised himself to a high position in the world and secured a great number of followers, then this wicked serpent shall commence to spit out his poison and to spread his authority over the world by craft, promises, and force of arms. Besides Turks, heathens, and Jews, he will attract to his standard and subject to his authority countless numbers of Christians. That he will effect first by the riches, honors, dignities, and sensual delights that he will place in the power of all his followers, as the Prophet Daniel says of him: “He shall increase glory and shall give them power over many, and shall divide

¹ Bestia terribilis, atque mirabilis, et fortis nimis.—Dan. vii. 7.

² Homo peccati, filius perditionis.—II. Thess. ii. 3.

the land for nothing.”¹ For besides the immense revenues he shall have from conquered countries, the devil with the divine permission shall discover to him mines of gold and silver, and treasures hidden in the sea: “And he shall have power over the treasures of gold, and of silver, and all the precious things.”² Alas! what an attractive bait that will be to ensnare the vain, ambitious, and greedy children of the world, who are already only too willing to grasp at such things! How will they be able to withstand this seductive and powerful temptation?

But when Antichrist finds virtuous souls who will not allow themselves to be turned aside from the love of God by promises, flattery, caresses, money, honors, or pleasures, then he will use against them another terrible weapon, namely, tortures such as the most cruel tyrant has never yet even thought of. “For there shall be then great tribulation,” says Our Lord of him in the Gospel, “such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, neither shall be.”³ So that even many just and pious servants of God shall yield under the pressure of tortures and deny their God. “And it was given unto him,” says St. John in the Apocalypse, speaking of the terrible beast, by which he meant Antichrist, “to make war with the saints, and to overcome them. And power was given him over every tribe, and people, and tongue, and nation.”⁴ So that he will overcome even the saints, some according to the body by martyrdom and torturing and putting them to death; and others, which is far more deplorable, according to the soul, by forcing them with cruel torments to deny Jesus Christ and His faith. There will be no choice left between enduring intolerable torture and falling away from the true religion, or else perishing with hunger and want in caverns and deserts.

All that could encourage a pious Christian and console him in such tribulation shall then be removed; for this cruel beast in his daring pride shall set himself up as the true God and claim to be adored and to have churches built in his honor. “And the king shall do according to his will,” says the Prophet Daniel; “and

He will make the good deny Christ by severe tortures.

He will do away with all that might encourage them to do good.

¹ Multiplicabit gloriam, et dabit eis potestatem in multis, et terram dividet gratuito.—Dan. xi. 39.

² Et dominabitur thesaurorum auri et argenti, et in omnibus pretiosis.—Ibid. 43.

³ Erit enim tunc tribulatio magna, qualis non fuit ab initio mundi, usque modo, neque fiet.—Matt. xxiv. 21.

⁴ Et est datum illi bellum facere cum sanctis, et vincere eos; et data est illi potestas in omnem tribum, et populum, et linguam, et gentem.—Apoc. xiii. 7.

he shall be lifted up, and shall magnify himself against every god."¹ All the temples consecrated to Our Lord shall be pulled down and desecrated, the sacred images destroyed, spiritual books burned, all preachers and priests made away with, and the use of the holy sacraments and the celebration of Mass utterly abolished: "And arms shall stand on his part, and they shall defile the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the continual sacrifice: and they shall place there the abomination unto desolation."² Such are the words of the Prophet Daniel. Thus for about four years, the duration of the reign of Antichrist, the public celebration of the holy Sacrifice shall be nowhere tolerated in the whole world; not a single crucifix shall there be that one might comfort himself in his sorrows by looking at it. He will give his followers another sign, which they are to wear on their foreheads or on their right hands, and a man who has not that sign may not buy or sell the least thing, or do any business whatever; and the sign shall be the blasphemous words: *Nego Jesum*—"I deny Jesus." O truly deserving of compassion shall the Christians be who are to live in those troublous times! Alas! how will it be with them? And how clearly they shall see the words of Our Lord verified: "Many are called, but few are chosen."³

He will pervert almost the whole world by false miracles.

And this shall be the case especially when Antichrist shall have recourse to the third and most powerful means he is to use to confirm his false doctrine; for, as St. John testifies of him, he shall by means of witchcraft and sorcery perform countless apparent miracles and wonders. "And he did great signs, so that he made also fire to come down from heaven unto the earth in the sight of men. And he seduced them that dwell on the earth for the signs which were given him to do."⁴ And not only he, but also his servants and followers shall have the power of working those false miracles. Our Lord has foretold that already, as we read in the Gospel: "For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders."⁵ Alas! how many souls shall be misled when this great and mighty monarch,

¹ Et faciet juxta voluntatem suam rex; et elevabitur et magnificabitur adversus omnem deum.—Dan. xi. 36.

² Et brachia ex eo stabunt, et polluent sanctuarium fortitudinis; et auferent jure sacrificium, et dabunt abominationem in desolationem.—Ibid. 31.

³ Multi sunt vocati, pauci vero electi.—Matt. xx. 16.

⁴ Et fecit signa magna, ut etiam ignem faceret de celo descendere in terram in conspectu hominum. Et seduxit habitantes in terra, propter signa, quae data sunt illi facere.—Apoc. xiii. 13, 14.

⁵ Surgent enim pseudo Christi, et pseudo prophetæ, et dabunt signa magna, et prodigia.—Matt. xxiv. 24.

so powerful in the eyes of the world, shall in the presence of Christians, as St. Hippolytus says, cleanse lepers, heal the paralytic, free those possessed by the devil, and even apparently raise the dead to life, and when all these cured by him shall adore him as the true God! How will it be when he commands the sun in the heavens to stand still, and it will obey his command? when he calls forth storms from the sea, and quiets them again? when, as Lactantius says, he shall cause dumb beasts, infant children, nay, even lifeless images to cry out that all that Jesus Christ has taught is false, that He is not the Son of God, but a traitor, who is damned forever? when he shall call down fire from heaven to consume those who oppose him, as the Prophet Elias did in former times; or to burn sacrifices in his honor, or to give his disciples fiery tongues, so that they can speak all languages, as was the case with the Apostles when they received the Holy Ghost in the form of fiery tongues? How will it be when, according to the testimony of Albert the Great, he shall appear to die and to come to life again in three days, and afterwards be carried by the demons heavenwards in the air? How will it be when legions of those demons disguised as angels of light shall assist and serve him in visible form, and sing hymns of praise in his honor, as if he were the true God and promised Saviour of the world?

“Alas!” exclaims St. Gregory, imagining what those terrible times must be, “what a severe temptation that shall be for the human mind!”¹ And in fact it will be so great that, if possible, the elect would be deceived by it, as Our Lord says: “Inasmuch as to deceive (if possible) even the elect.”² Thus shall Antichrist draw to his side almost all the world: the wicked and tepid by riches, honors, and pleasures; the pious and God-fearing by the intolerable torments he will inflict on them; the simple and incautious by the wonderful signs and prodigies he shall perform. “And unless those days had been shortened, no flesh should be saved.”³ Three years and a half shall his reign last, after which this cruel man shall raise himself up in the air from Mount Olivet towards heaven, and there, as some say, Our Lord shall strike him with lightning, or, as others maintain, shall by his mere voice hurl him down to earth and thence body and soul into the abyss of hell. “And then,” says St. Paul, “that wicked one shall be revealed,

After working such fearful wo, he shall be cast down into hell.

¹ Quæ erithumanæ mentis illa tentatio!—S. Greg. L. 32. Moral. c. 13.

² Ita ut in errorem inducantur (si fieri potest) etiam electi.—Matt. xxiv. 24.

³ Et nisi brevitati fuissent dies illi, non feret salva omnis caro.—Ibid. 22.

whom the Lord Jesus shall kill with the spirit of His mouth.”¹ There you have, my dear brethren, a short description of Antichrist as a forerunner and precursor of the last terrible day of judgment, according to the prophets and apostles in the holy Scriptures, and to the holy Fathers of the Church and the commentators on Holy Writ. What do you think of this? What lesson should we draw from it for the good of our souls? That we shall see in the

Second Part.

We now think that under such circumstances we should remain faithful to Christ.

What would you think, I ask again, if, as might easily be the case, Antichrist were to be born soon, so that we should live in his time? For no man knows when that time is to come, as God has reserved the knowledge of it to himself alone. Let us at all events imagine that the cruel man is really in the world, and that we hear and see all that has been said about him; what should we do? Should we dare to renounce Christ and to side with that monster? Should we allow ourselves to be marked with that odious sign: “I deny Christ”? What! each one of you will say, deny Christ? Side with the demons? God forbid that I should think of such a thing! I would rather die a thousand deaths than be untrue to my Saviour and God, or abjure His faith in which alone salvation is to be found! I would laugh at the pretended miracles, and trample on the proffered delights of the flesh, the honors, and riches; I would heroically resist the torture, no matter how terrible, with the divine assistance; all this I would readily do in order not to lose my one immortal soul and the eternal joys of heaven. Oh, truly, that is a beautiful and Christian resolution! And such should be the determination of each one of us even under such terrible circumstances.

But there is reason to fear that we should be deluded by the promises of Antichrist.

But, alas! poor mortals that we are with all our resolutions and professions! God of goodness! take me, take me out of the world before those fearful times come! Alas! what would become of us! It is easy for us to say that we would trample on the proffered riches, honors, and pleasures. Now while we are living in peace and quietness and have every opportunity of considering the matter duly, the least temptation is often enough to make us transgress most shamefully and renounce the friendship of the God who is so worthy of our love. How then can we dare to say

¹ Et tunc revelabitur ille iniquus, quem Dominus Jesus interficiet spiritu oris sui.—II. Thess. ii. 8.

that we should be strong enough to resist the attacks of such a monster? Even now, although we are somewhat humiliated, the breath of human praise and the hope of honor or a high position are capable of so blinding our mind's eye that contrary to the law of Christ we become puffed up with filthy pride and show it in our dress and outward demeanor. How could we then be true to the humility of Our Saviour, if we were exalted by the whole world? Even now, although we learn by daily experience the transitory nature of earthly things, and how soon and easily we can lose them, we are sometimes so beset by the passion of avarice that we sell our souls and our salvation for a miserable coin, we try to make our profit out of public calamities, and when our conscience or the thought of losing our souls troubles us, we dispatch such thoughts by saying to ourselves: what matter how the money is made as long as I succeed in making it! How then could we hope to be able to trample riches under foot if they were offered to us in abundance? Even now, when we have such frequent occasion to bewail and deplore our weakness, with the Christian law painting to us the abomination and deformity of impure love and carnal pleasure, we allow ourselves to be so infatuated and befooled by a friendly look, a laugh, a joking word, a caress, that we forget our God, indulge our lust, and sacrifice recklessly our modesty, purity, honor, and fidelity. What should we do if such pleasures were held out to us as lawful and praiseworthy? Oh, may God grant that such a terrible time may never come for us!

It is easy to say that we should laugh at hypocrisy, false doctrine, and pretended miracles. Even now, while we have at hand countless opportunities of doing good, invited as we are to be zealous in the service of God by so many public devotions, having it in our power to frequent the sacraments almost daily, to cleanse our souls from sin in the sacred tribunal, to feed them with the body and blood of Jesus Christ; having our ignorance enlightened by so many sermons which encourage us to good, warn us against evil, exhort us to avoid the occasions of sin and the evil customs and usages of the world; with all this we still remain so tepid and cold in the divine service, so obstinate in the habits we have once acquired, that sometimes we even attach but little credence to the word of God, or at all events believe no more of it than suits our fancies. What the corrupt world preaches, what we learn from the example of others, what idle people say to us,

By his false miracles.

that must be always true, valid, and lawful; to it must yield the maxims and infallible teaching of the holy Gospel, along with the doctrine of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. If we see one who has the name of being pious, conforming to the customs of the world, we say at once: oh, there can be no harm in it, since such a one does it! If here and there we hear a confessor who is liberal in certain matters in which we do not like restraint, we look on him as if he were as infallible as the Gospel itself, while we laugh at and ridicule all who hold the contrary opinion. So, I repeat, we act in the full light of day. What then should we not do when the use of the sacraments is abolished, public devotions prevented, sermons and instructions prohibited, and in the midst of general corruption and perversion, a new law promulgated to flatter our sensuality and pride, and that, too, confirmed by miracles and supported by a false appearance of godliness and by the approval of the whole world? Oh, no! I repeat, may God grant that we have not to live in such troublous times; we know that we should be too weak for them.

Frightened
by the tor-
ments he
will threat-
en.

It is easy to talk of resisting torments and braving martyrdom! Ah! how could they give up their bodies to the rods, the scorpions, the leaded clubs, the iron hooks, to be torn and flayed, who are now so delicate and tender that they cannot bear the prick of a needle; who find a fast-day intolerable, and are absolutely unable to stand or kneel for an hour in church, or to rise early in the morning on account of the cold? How could they allow themselves to be roasted or boiled alive who, if their beds are the least uncomfortable, cannot sleep for impatience? How could they laugh at torments to whom all crosses are terrible, who sigh and moan at the least trial, and give vent to their feelings in oaths and curses at the most trifling annoyance, expressing their dissatisfaction also by giving up the practice of prayer and devotion and the frequentation of the sacraments? Oh, no! God of goodness! we are not in want of an Antichrist to prove our virtue, our faith, hope, and charity by putting us to the torture! We have daily tribulations enough: more than we wish for, to try our virtue! Would that we could only bear them with patience and resignation for Thy sake and to gain heaven! Every hour of the day we have abundant opportunity of mortifying our eyes, ears, tongue, sensuality, and evil inclinations; but to do so is often for us a bitter martyrdom that, without any tyrant to compel us, causes us to forget the obedience we owe Thy holy law.

A slight chagrin, a word of contradiction, a cross look is sometimes enough to upset our so-called virtue, and change it into impatience, hatred, and anger. What would then become of us in the midst of a terrible persecution, which many even of the holiest and most innocent shall not withstand?

Finally, it is easy to say that we should prefer rather to die a thousand deaths than deny Christ and take sides with His wicked enemy! Already most men are on the side of Antichrist against Jesus, our Saviour. Hear what St. John says in his first Epistle: "Every spirit that dissolveth Jesus is not of God, and this is Antichrist, of whom you have heard that he cometh, and he is now already in the world."¹ "Not in person," says Cornelius à Lapide, "but in spirit; that is, in his precursors."² If you look into the matter, my dear brethren, you will find not one, but many Antichrists. Are not those parents Antichrists, that is, against Christ, who allow their children all license, bring them up to the vanity and filthy pride of the world, to idleness, and keep them from the zealous love of God and true devotion? Is he not an Antichrist who, contrary to the law of God, cherishes revenge against his neighbor and frequents the dangers and occasions of sin? Is he not an Antichrist who tries to lead a maiden astray from the path of virtue by presents and money? Is not that woman an Antichrist who by indecency in dress and dissolute manners leads others into sin? Is he not an Antichrist who gives scandal by sinful talk and bad example? All these, says St. Augustine, are Antichrists and servants of the devil: every one, no matter who he is, priest or layman, who lives contrary to justice and the requirements of his state is an Antichrist and a minister of Satan.³ What better are you for not denying Christ with the lips, or not denouncing your faith, if you deny Him in work, and lose Him by mortal sin? Of what use will your faith be to you if not to serve for your deeper damnation? What else do you do when you allow yourself to be seduced by the antichrists you live amongst but renounce Christ in work? What is the false oath you have taken but renouncing God for the sake of some trifling temporal gain? When you indulge in impure thoughts and desires, what else are you doing but stamping on your heart the words: "I deny Christ"? When you sin by unchaste

For even now most Christians adhere to Antichrist.

¹ Omnis spiritus qui solvit Jesum, ex Deo non est; et hic est antichristus, de quo audistis quoniam venit, et nunc jam in mundo est.—I. John iv. 3.

² Non in persona, sed in spiritu, scilicet in suis præcursoribus.

³ Quicumque contra justitiam vivit, etc., Antichristus est, minister Satanæ.—S. Aug. c. 9. Tract. de Antichristo.

touches, do you not bear that same sign on your hand? In a word, every mortal sin you commit in thought, word, or action, is nothing else but a declaration that although you do not abjure your faith in Christ, yet you refuse Him the love and obedience due to Him, and you refuse it for the sake of some wealth, honor, or pleasure that the spirit of the hellish Antichrist offers you. And, alas! how many mortal sins are not committed daily in the world!

For which
their re-
sponsibility
is great.

Christians! what a responsibility this is for us! Ah, poor, unhappy souls that are to live in those times of Antichrist, how you are to be pitied! But if you, almost forced as you shall be by grievous persecutions, temptations, torments, hypocrisy, and pretended miracles to abandon God, shall nevertheless be condemned by a most just sentence to eternal torments, what excuse shall we have? What sort of a hell awaits us who can so easily enjoy the freedom of the children of God, and who yet allow ourselves to be led astray, to be turned away from God, to be drawn over to the side of the devil, and to live like antichrists, that is, sworn enemies of Jesus Christ?

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion to be
true to
Christ in all
temptations.

Innocent souls who have hitherto remained faithful to your Lord, ah, fly, fly with all possible diligence those who would try in any way whatsoever to lead you to do anything contrary to the law of God! Be firm in all temptations and occasions of evil! Think and say with courage against Antichrist and his followers: Away with you! I love Jesus! This sign shall be in my heart, in my eyes, and on my hands. I love Jesus Christ! Him alone will I faithfully serve; His friendship I will not sell for any worldly goods, honors, or pleasures. I love Jesus Christ, and will love Him while I have breath. I renounce forever all that is opposed to Him. And do Thou, Almighty God! grant us all Thy powerful grace, that we may forestall the terrible times of Antichrist by a true repentance for all our sins, and by flying all those abuses which shall serve that proud, wicked monster to spread his kingdom! Grant that we may serve Thee with greater zeal, with more patience in adversity, with a more fervent love for Thee, O God and Saviour, in our public professions, in our outward actions and demeanor, so that we may have nothing to do with Antichrist and his followers, but persevere in Thy faith and love till death. Amen.

The same sermon with its introduction may serve for the first Sunday of Advent: text from Luke xxi. 25. "There shall be signs," etc.

TWENTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

ON THE TERRIBLE SIGNS THAT ARE TO PRECEDE THE LAST DAY OF GENERAL JUDGMENT.

Subject.

1. There shall be terrible signs in the heavens and in all the elements. 2. These signs shall be for the wicked a source of fear, anguish, and dread; but for the good a source of joy and exultation.—*Preached on the first Sunday of Advent.*

Text.

Erunt signa.—Luke xxi. 25.

“There shall be signs.”

Introduction.

All Catholic Christians believe that in His second advent Jesus Christ shall come as the Judge of the living and the dead into this world; but no man knows the day of His coming. Yet the world shall be able to learn that the day of judgment is at hand from the signs that Christ Himself has announced as fore-runners of the last day. The first sign, namely the reign of Antichrist, and what we have to learn therefrom I have already explained. I now go on to speak of the other signs.

Plan of Discourse.

There shall be terrible signs in the heavens and in all the elements. These and their causes I shall explain in the first part. These signs shall be to the wicked a source of fear, anguish, and dread; but to the good a source of joy and exultation. This I shall show in the second part. Sinners! if you wish that the last day should not be a cause of dread to you, be converted! Just Christians! rejoice if you now have to pass through times of tribulation! Such shall be the conclusion.

Help us, O future Judge, to observe it by Thy grace, which we ask of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

When the three and a half years of the reign of that terrible persecutor Antichrist shall have expired, then, says Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Matthew, “Immediately after the tribula-

Terrible signs shall appear in the planets.

tion of those days, the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be moved.”¹ Mark the word “immediately.” We must not understand by it that the moment Antichrist sinks into the abyss those signs shall be visible. No; for according to commentators the mercy of God shall grant a respite of some months, or, as some say, of years for those who shall be perverted by Antichrist to repent, because then almost the whole world shall return to Christ after their accursed apostasy. But when the time of the general judgment is finally at hand, “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.”² The sun shall be deprived of its brilliancy and make night out of day, like to the darkness of Egypt: “There came horrible darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. No man saw his brother, nor moved himself out of the place where he was.”³ The moon, of a blood-red color, shall appear like some grizzly phantom of night; the stars shall fall from the sky; not indeed the stars that God has placed in the firmament: for where should they fall? Not on the earth, because according to astronomers the smallest star is much larger than the earth. But the stars shall hide themselves as if they had fallen, and at the same time luminous vapor in the shape of stars shall fall in masses on the globe as if to set fire to it.

In the elements.

All the elements shall be disturbed; the air shall resound with fearful storms and thunder; the sea and all waters shall be disturbed by mighty waves rising and falling; the earth shall be shaken and almost riven asunder by earthquakes that shall swallow whole cities, while fire shall burst forth with a great roar from the mountains and caverns. In a word, the wheels of the vast clock of the world shall be all broken and disordered, according to the works of Louis de Ponte, as a sign that the last hour of judgment is at hand, and such shall be the fear, anguish, faint-heartedness, and dread of men and the howling and roaring of beasts, that no one will know where to turn or what to do.

¹ Statim autem post tribulationem dierum illorum sol obscurabitur, et luna non dabit lumen suum, et stellæ cadent de cœlo, et virtutes cœlorum commovebuntur.—Matt. xxiv. 29.

² Erunt signa in sole, et luna, et stellis, et in terris pressura gentium præ confusione sonitus maris et fluctuum.—Luke xxi. 25.

³ Factæ sunt tenebræ horribiles in universa terra Ægypti tribus diebus. Nemo vidit fratrem suum, nec movit se de loco in quo erat.—Exod. x. 22, 23.

Hence the old expression used of very bad weather: it is like the last day.

And what is the meaning of all that, my dear brethren? To what end that great disturbance and consternation of all creatures? First, says Abulensis, it is a sign of compassion, and as it were a fainting and death-agony of all nature at the destruction of the world. When the head of a household is at the point of death the whole family is disturbed and bewildered; the wife weeps and tears her hair in an agony of grief; the children give vent to their sorrow in noisy cries; the relatives weep; the servants run hither and thither sighing and moaning; the death-knell tolls its sorrowful note from the church-tower; friends and neighbors clad in mourning come to the funeral. All is grief and lamentation. So shall it be when the end of the world approaches, and the human race, the head of this household of the world is at the last gasp; all nature shall be stricken with fear and consternation; the sky shall lose its luminaries and put on the sable garb of night; the elements shall, as it were, weep, and become quite bewildered, while the atmosphere resounding with thunder and violent hurricanes shall be, so to speak, the death-knell of the dying world.

They will signify the death-agony of nature at the dissolution of the world.

Moreover, these signs shall show forth the great anger and displeasure of the Almighty at sinful men. The heavens now announce the glory of God, as the Prophet David says: "The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of His hands." ¹ "But then," says Barradius, "they shall declare the anger of God against the wicked." ² For He will cause all creatures to rise up against them; by making the stars to lose their light, He will, so to speak, shut up the windows by which any light might penetrate to the earth, that He may smite in the dark without mercy, as Isaias prophesies: "Behold, the day of the Lord shall come, a cruel day, and full of indignation, and of wrath, and fury, to lay the land desolate, and to destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and their brightness shall not display their light: the sun shall be darkened in his rising, and the moon shall not shine with her light." And what then? "And I will visit the evils of the world, and against the wicked for their iniquity, and I will make the pride of infidels to cease, and will bring down the arrogancy of

And the anger of God against sinners.

¹ Cœli enarrant gloriam Dei, et opera manuum ejus annuntiat firmamentum.—Ps. xviii. 2.

² Tunc vero iram Dei, impiis annuntiabunt.

the mighty.”¹ “The moon shall blush, and the sun shall be ashamed:”² “because,” adds Cardinal Hugo, “they have served such masters,”³ masters who have been ungrateful to their Creator. Now, according to St. Paul, creatures serve sinners against their will and as it were through force and necessity: “For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly;” therefore they groan under the yoke of their slavery, and sigh for the day when they shall be freed from it; “for we know that every creature groaneth, and travaileth in pain even till now.”⁴ Sun, moon, and stars groan and complain at having to give their light to men to be misused in offending and insulting God; the earth, fire, water, air, beg, as it were, the Almighty to free them from the servitude in which they are to sinners.

For He will
arm all
creatures
against
them: the
sun and
stars.

This shall be done at the end of the world, when all creatures are to be set at liberty and released from slavery, and then like a mighty army they will all rush in a body against the wicked to put them to shame, as we read in the Book of Wisdom: “And His zeal will take armor, and He will arm the creature for the revenge of His enemies. . . . and the whole world shall fight with Him against the unwise:”⁵ The sun will declare war, as Tamerlane did of old, with a black banner spread; the moon colored like blood, and the stars disturbed out of their course shall begin the battle. We, they will say, have given our fair light for such a long time to sinners who were unworthy of it; we have marked for them the hours, days, weeks, months, and years; we have by our regularity in our motions set them a good example of the obedience they owe to God; but they preferred to follow the suggestions of the devil, the appetites of the flesh, the customs and maxims of the perverse world, instead of obeying the law of their Creator; they loved darkness more than the light; therefore our period of service is now at an end for them, and we shall be to them henceforth a source of nothing but fear and dread.

¹ *Ecce dies Domini veniet, crudelis, et indignationis plenus, et iræ, furorisque, ad ponendam terram in solitudinem, et peccatores ejus conterendos de ea. Quoniam stellæ cœli, et splendor earum, non expendant lumen suum; obtenebratus est sol in ortu suo, et luna non splendebit in lumine suo. Et visitabo super orbis mala, et contra impios iniquitatem eorum; et quiescere faciam superbian infidelium, et arrogantian fortium humiliabo.—Is. xlii. 9-11.*

² *Erubescet luna, et confundetur sol.—Ibid. xxiv. 23.*

³ *Quod talibus dominis servierunt.*

⁴ *Vanitati enim creatura subjecta est non volens. Scimus enim quod omnis creatura in-gemiscit, et parturit usque adhuc.—Rom. viii. 20, 22.*

⁵ *Accipiet armaturam zelus illius, et armabit creaturam ad ultionem inimicorum, . . . et pugnabit eum filio orbis terrarum contra insensatos.—Wis. v. 18, 21.*

In the same manner the four elements shall take the field The air. against sinners. The air that gave them breath and voice, so that they could breathe and speak; from which they received the fruitful rain; in which the birds dwelt to their delight and nourishment—the air will attack them on all sides; it will throw down buildings by the violence of opposing winds; it will tear up trees by the roots; send down hail-storms to strike the beasts of the field dead, and with thunder and fierce lightnings and terrible apparitions that shall be seen in the air (such as were not beheld even in Egypt in the time of the hardened Pharaoh, nor in Jerusalem when that city was destroyed), it will fill every one with dismay, as if to complain of the sinner and say: “He hath stretched out his hand against God, and hath strengthened himself against the Almighty.”¹

The water that supplied sinners with drink and with fish for The water. their food, and with salt, and that carried them from one country to another in the pursuit of their business, will then overstep its boundaries and inundate the adjoining land far and wide; it will rage and foam against the godless, ready to swallow them up as it did Jonas: “Be thou ashamed, O Sidon! for the sea speaketh.”² Be ashamed, O Christian! the sea shall cry out with its rushing waves; be ashamed that I, who have no understanding like you, for whom God has not died as He has for you, who have neither eternal punishment to fear nor eternal rewards to hope for as you have—be ashamed that I have been for six thousand years obedient to my Creator, and have not gone as much as the breadth of a grain of sand beyond the limits He marked out for me, but have always kept within bounds; while you, on the contrary, endowed with reason and countless benefits, allured by the hope of heaven, terrified by the fear of hell, have yet often and deliberately transgressed the commands of God, and wallowed in a very sea of vice! Be ashamed at being overcome by a senseless thing such as I am, in obedience to God! O Almighty God, the waves will cry out as they rise towards heaven, show forth Thy justice against sinners, and since they have not wished to live in the ocean of Thy mercy and find their salvation, let them now sink into the deep abyss of Thy justice, and feel the weight of Thy avenging arm!

¹ Tetendit adversus Deum manum suam, et contra Omnipotentem roboratus est.—Job xv. 25.

² Erubescet Sidon; ait enim mare.—Is. xxiii. 4.

The whole
earth.

The earth which has hitherto served even wicked men for their nourishment, clothing, dwelling-place, medicine, and pleasure, supplying them with fruit, trees, herbs, and flowers which it brought forth in such plenty—the earth will then open with continual quakings, and as it were cry out for vengeance against the sinner for having so wantonly and ungratefully misused its gifts. The wild beasts will come forth out of their caves and dens with horrible howlings, and follow up the sinner everywhere, filling him with terror. “The whole world shall fight with Him against the unwise;” the universe shall take up arms with the angry God and fight against the foolish sinner, and by its ragings announce to him that the terrible day is at hand on which the Judge shall be revenged on all His enemies; that day which the Prophet Sophonias calls the great day of the Lord: “A day of wrath; a day of tribulation and distress; a day of calamity and misery; a day of darkness and obscurity; a day of cloud and whirlwind; . . . the voice of the day of the Lord is bitter, the mighty man shall there meet with tribulation.”¹ Where will they creep in order to hide themselves, or to find comfort and consolation, when heaven and earth are in such disorder and are uniting their forces to attack them? Our Lord has already told us how men shall feel on that day: “Men withering away for fear and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world.”² But this shall be the case only for sinners; for no matter how terrible the signs that are to precede the last day, the servants of God shall find them an occasion of rejoicing and exultation, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

Shown by a
simile.

Suppose that a Turkish city, say Constantinople, in which many Christians are held captive and groan in chains, is beleaguered by a Christian potentate; the roaring and crashing of artillery resounds the whole day, so that one can hardly hear his own voice; the walls and towers are here and there thrown down by the cannon-balls; fire-spreading bombs and grenades are flying about incessantly in the air, burning and destroying the houses in all directions, and throughout the whole city nothing is heard but the roar of artillery, the crash of tumbling walls,

¹ Dies iræ dies illa, dies tribulationis et angustiae, dies calamitatis et miseriae, dies tenebrarum et caliginis, dies nebulae et turbinis; vox diei Domini amara, tribulabitur ibi fortis. —Soph. i. 15, 14.

² Arescentibus hominibus præ timore, et expectatione, quæ supervenient universo orbi. —Luke xxi. 26.

and fearful howlings and lamentations. Men crawl away and hide themselves in the darkest cellars so as to avoid the cannon-balls; the soldiers in despair cry out: alas! it is all up with us! we must surrender! the city is taken, etc. What do you think, my dear brethren, would be the feelings of the Christian captives on the occasion? Truly, as far as sight and hearing are concerned they are as badly off as the Turks; they too must hide away to avoid the bombs and balls; but how do they feel at heart? There is not a doubt that they rejoice and exult the more vigorously the siege proceeds. The greater the despair of the soldiers engaged in the defence the greater the joy and hope of the Christians. Why? Oh, they think, now the time is at hand when the city must surrender to a Christian power, and we shall be freed from captivity and slavery. There, my dear brethren, you have in some degree a figure and picture of the state of mind of the just and of the wicked at the sight of the awful portents that are to herald the end of the world.

The wicked, those who have a bad conscience, shall indeed wither away with fear and dismay, and seek to hide themselves under the earth; they will howl and moan and lament like the beleaguered Turks: alas! now all is up with us! We must surrender; there is an end to all the pleasures and delights we enjoyed on earth; honor and high places are no more; we must leave our wealth behind us; the last day is at hand; in a short time the terrible trumpet shall sound in our ears the words: arise, ye dead, and come to judgment! Soon shall we appear before our angry Judge, whom we have despised and made our enemy by our sins! Now the time is approaching when the shameful things we have kept hidden from men and not dared to mention even in the tribunal of penance shall be openly declared before the world! Soon shall we hear the awful words: "Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire."¹ And we shall have to bid an eternal farewell to God, our supreme Good, to Mary the Mother of God, to all the angels and elect, and go down to hell with the devils! Alas! how great will be the terror and anguish of the wicked at the sight of the signs and portents of the last day!

But what shall be the feelings of those just servants of God who have either kept inviolable fidelity to their Creator, or by true repentance have washed away their sins, and who have

The wicked shall be frightened by those signs.

The just shall be comforted by them.

¹ Discedite a me, maledicti, in ignem æternum.—Matt. xxv. 41.

hitherto in this vale of tears, amidst so many dangers of soul and body, sighed like prisoners for their eternal home and place of rest! How, I ask, will it be with them? Hear what Christ says to them, after having spoken of the terrible forerunners of the last day: "But when these things begin to come to pass, look up and lift up your heads: because your redemption is at hand."¹ To go with downcast head is a sign of sorrow and fear, and My dear children, that is not for you, but for the wicked who refused to love and honor Me. Let them wither away for fear, because they have no part in My eternal kingdom; but you, just souls! who have kept My law and in all things tried to do My will, "look up, and lift up your heads;" rejoice and be glad; why? "Because your redemption is at hand!" This is the time for which you have been sighing so long; the time for your release from captivity, from all dangers and troubles; the time for you to enter into the eternal repose of the children of God. This is the day on which your enemies and Mine, who have persecuted and oppressed you in so many ways—this is the day for them to lie trembling and shaking under your feet. This is the time when I shall make known to the world your humility and other virtues which men knew nothing of, and vain worldlings despised you for! Rejoice, My children! your redemption is at hand; the kingdom of heaven will soon be opened to you. Come, ye blessed! possess the kingdom that My Father and you yourselves have prepared for you! Come with Me into everlasting joys!

As Christ
tells them.

"See the fig-tree, and all the trees," continues Our Lord; "when they now shoot forth their fruit, you know that summer is nigh," and the cold winter past. "So you also, when you shall see these things come to pass, know that the kingdom of God is at hand."² His meaning is, in winter-time the trees are bare, without leaves or fruit, and covered with snow as with a mourning garment; but when the pleasant springtime comes, what a change takes place in them! They are adorned with the fresh buds, with green leaves and fruit, and the birds sing joyous melodies in their branches. So it is also with you, My faithful servants. Hitherto you have had the cold winter-time; you were hated and despised by the world, which you disregarded for My sake; you have

¹ His autem fieri incipientibus, respicite, et levate capita vestra, quoniam appropinquat redemptio vestra.—Luke xxi. 28.

² Videte ficulneam, et omnes arbores. Cum producant jam ex se fructum, scitis quoniam prope est æstas. Ita et vos cum videritis hæc fieri, scitote quoniam prope est regnum Dei.—Ibid. 29, 30, 31.

often had to groan under the pressure of adversity; but now, when you shall see those signs of the spring and eternal summer, "look up and lift up your heads: because your redemption is at hand." Be ready! Raise your hearts and minds on high! Your redemption is near you; the works of virtue that you performed for Me are now about to bear fruit, and you shall be crowned with a crown of everlasting joys.

It was this thought that brought such consolation of spirit to St. Paul in his manifold trials and persecutions, as he writes to his disciple Timothy: "The time of my dissolution is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." I have been true to my God, and now what have I to expect from Him? "As to the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just Judge, will render to me in that day: and not only to me, but to them also that love His coming."¹ It is for that we should long unceasingly, as Our Lord Himself has taught us to pray daily: "Our Father, who art in heaven; Thy kingdom come!" "Seeing then," says St. Peter, "that all these things are to be dissolved, what manner of people ought you to be in holy conversations and godliness; looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of the Lord." Truly the heavens shall be burnt up, and the elements consumed by heat. "But we look for new heavens and a new earth according to His promises, in which justice dwelleth. Wherefore, dearly beloved, seeing that you look for these things, be diligent, that ye may be found undefiled and unspotted to Him in peace."² Hasten in your desires with joy to meet the day of the Lord.

The saints were consoled by the thought of them.

My dear brethren, what should be our thoughts on this subject? If these awful portents were visible in the heavens this very day to announce to us the end of the world, should we all have occasion to lift up our heads and to await the coming of our Judge with joy and exultation? Would you, O ambitious man, rejoice, who now value the esteem of men more than the grace and favor of your God? Would you rejoice, O avaricious man, whose greatest and only care every day of your life is to amass wealth in every possible way; whose hands and coffers

Instruction and warning to sinners to be converted in time.

¹ Tempus resolutionis meae instat. Bonum certamen certavi, cursum consummavi, fidem servavi. In reliquo reposita est mihi corona justitiæ, quam reddet mihi Dominus in illa die justus judex; non solum autem mihi, sed et iis qui diligunt adventum ejus.—II. Tim. iv. 6-8.

² Cum igitur hæc omnia dissolvenda sint, quales oportet vos esse in sanctis conversationibus et pietatibus, expectantes et properantes in adventum diei Domini. Novos vero cælos, et novam terram secundum promissa ipsius expectamus. Propter quod, carissimi, hæc expectantes, satagate immaculati et inviolati ei inveniri in pace.—II. Pet. iii. 11-14.

are still closed on ill-gotten goods? Would you rejoice, O unchaste man, who have hitherto indulged your foul passions, and by your wicked importunities have seduced many an innocent soul; who still continue to live in unlawful intimacy with one who has captivated your heart in the meshes of impure love? Would you rejoice, O vindictive man, who still nourish anger against your neighbor, and indulge in dreams of revenge? Would you rejoice, O drunkard, who on every occasion that offers itself rob yourself of your reason, and ruin yourself and those belonging to you? Would you rejoice, O vain child of the world, who are still so much attached to the world and know no law but its false maxims, leading meanwhile an idle, tepid life? In a word, all of you who have a mortal sin on your consciences, would you exult at the coming of your Judge? Should one have reason to encourage you in the words of Our Lord when the terrible signs are seen in the heavens: "look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is at hand"? Alas! it is easy to speak to you of joy! Fear, anguish, terror, withering away for fear; such are rather the sad effects that those signs will have on you. Ah, why then do we not fear to offend God? How can we dare to spend even one hour in the state of mortal sin; for if death were to surprise us then, we should have nothing to expect but judgment without mercy and a hell without end.

To the afflicted just to bear their trials with patience.

Just souls who have a good conscience! for you is the joy, the exulting hope! Ah, only continue to serve your God with fidelity and zeal! "We should live soberly, and justly, and godly in this world," such is the exhortation given us by St. Paul, "looking for the blessed hope and coming of the glory of the great God and Our Saviour Jesus Christ."¹ Afflicted Christians, who have to suffer all kinds of trials and contradictions, what are you to think? Troublous are the signs you now see, visited as you are so severely by the hand of God; troublous indeed! But be comforted! For as the terrible signs that are to announce the end of the world shall be forerunners of approaching redemption for the just, and therefore a source of joy and consolation to them, so the sorrows, no matter how great they may be, that now afflict you, if you only bear them with a good conscience and resignation to the divine will, are for you infallible signs of future glory in heaven, as I shall show you on a future

¹ Sobrie, et juste, et pie vivamus in hoc sæculo; expectantes beatam spem, et adventum gloriæ magni Dei, et Salvatoris nostri Jesu Christi.—Tit. ii. 12, 13.

occasion. To comfort yourselves then and alleviate your sorrows, say to yourselves: what I am now suffering shall come to an end; it will not last long; every day brings me nearer to my release. If I am poor and destitute for a short time, this very poverty is a sure sign of future riches in heaven. If I am despised, persecuted by the world, and abandoned by men, this humiliation is a sign of my approaching glory and honor in the society of the elect in heaven. If I now suffer injury and loss in my worldly goods, this loss is a sign of my future gain, of a treasure that awaits me in heaven. If I now weep with sorrow and trouble, it is a sign of my future joy in heaven. If I am now sickly and weak, it is a sign of future eternal well-being in heaven. If I am now obliged to work hard every day in order to support myself and those depending on me, it is a sign and forerunner of future eternal repose in the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, O my God, I will resign myself to Thy will and providence: with the help of Thy grace I will suffer as long, how, and whatever Thou mayest will me to suffer! No matter how great my troubles may be, they shall not be equal to the joys of heaven that Thou hast promised me. "Looking for the blessed hope and coming of the glory of the great God and Our Saviour, Jesus Christ." With this consolation I will rejoice in all my trials, expecting the fulfilment of that most blessed hope and the coming of the great glory of my God and Saviour. "I know," I will say with Job, "that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth. . . . and in my flesh I shall see my God. Whom I myself shall see, and my eyes shall behold: this my hope is laid up in my bosom."¹ This one hope is comfort enough for me. Amen.

Another introduction for the second Sunday of Advent.

Text.

Euntes renuntiate Joanni quæ audistis, et vidistis.—Matt. xi. 4.

"Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen."

Introduction.

All that John required was to know the signs wrought by Our

¹ Scio enim quod Redemptor meus vivit, et in novissima die de terra surrecturus sum, . . . et in carne mea videbo Deum meum. Quem visurus sum ego ipse, et oculi mei conspecturi sunt: reposita est hæc spes mea in sinu meo.—Job xix. 25-27.

Lord in His public mission. John sent his disciples to ask Him: "Art thou He that art to come" into this world as the Messiah and Saviour of the world? To this question Our Lord answered neither yes nor no, but simply said: "Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the gospel preached to them;" from this John must know who I am. My dear brethren, that Jesus Christ in His second coming, etc. *Continues as above.*

TWENTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

ON THE CAUSES OF THESE TERRIBLE SIGNS.

Subject.

First, the signs that are to precede the last day are all effects of the goodness and mercy of God, that sinners being terrified by them may repent, which, however, few of those on earth at the time will do. Secondly, public calamities nowadays are also effects of the goodness and mercy of God, that being chastised by them we may amend our sinful lives, which, however, few of us do.—*Preached on the second Sunday of Advent.*

Text.

Qui præparabit viam tuam ante te.—Matt. xi. 10.
"Who shall prepare Thy way before Thee."

Introduction.

John was the angel who was to make ready the way for the coming of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, into the world. In what manner did he prepare for it? "He came into all the country about the Jordan," says St. Luke, "preaching the baptism of penance for the remission of sins."¹ Everywhere he cried out to men: "Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."² My dear brethren, the Almighty God shall cry out and give similar warnings at the approach of the last day of the world, by those terrible signs that shall be forerunners of the second coming of Christ as Judge. What will those signs say? What John

¹ Venit in omnem regionem Jordanis, prædicans baptismum pœnitentiæ in remissionem peccatorum.—Luke iii. 3.

² Pœnitentiam agite; appropinquavit enim regnum cœlorum.—Matt. iii. 2.

said in his time: "Make straight the way of the Lord;"¹ prepare for the coming of the angry Judge; do penance for your sins; be converted to God, for the last day is at hand. And it is a mark of the great goodness and mercy of God to send those signs to warn the world, as it is also a mark of His goodness and mercy to afflict the world frequently by public calamities. Both these truths I shall now prove.

Plan of Discourse.

The signs that are to precede the last day are all effects of the goodness and mercy of God, that sinners, being terrified by them, may prepare by doing true penance, which, however, few of them will then do. Such is the subject of the first part. Public calamities in our own times are also effects of the goodness and mercy of God, that we, being chastised by them, may amend our sinful lives, which, however, few of us do: the second part.

I will do penance, O God of goodness, with Thy grace, which I beg of Thee through the merits of Mary and the prayers of our holy guardian angels; such is the conclusion that each one should make.

But what am I saying? That the signs that are to announce the coming of the Judge on the last day are signs and effects of God's goodness and mercy? Those awful signs, the mere sight of which shall fill men with terror and dismay? Those signs that, as we have seen already, are ghastly portents showing forth the implacable hatred, anger, and wrath of God against sinners? Are they at the same time to be signs of His mercy towards the same sinners? Truly, my dear brethren, that is the case! They shall be signs of the implacable wrath of God that will be poured out without mercy on all sinners on the day of judgment; but at the same time they will be signs of the present goodness and mercy of God, according to the words of the Prophet: "When thou art angry, thou wilt remember mercy;"² so that the sinners who are in the world in those days, frightened by the signs, may enter into themselves, do penance, be converted, and thus escape the anger of the Judge; as St. Thomas of Aquin says, "that the hearts of men may be prepared for the judgment, being forewarned by those signs."³

Those signs shall declare the mercy of God to the sinner.

¹ Dirigite viam Domini.—John i. 23.

² Cum iratus fueris, misericordiæ recordaberis.—Habac. iii. 2.

³ Ut corda hominum ad iudicium præparentur, hujusmodi signis præmoniti.

Shown by
similes.

“No one,” says St. Augustine, “who wishes to strike you will cry out to you to be on your guard.”¹ I am about to draw my sword to kill you! A man who threatens in that way gives clear proof that he is not in earnest, but that he wishes the other to escape his sword by running away. If a judge were to send to a thief whom he has caught in the act, telling him that when he hears the clang of arms or a certain bell tolling, it is a sure sign that the soldiers are on their way to apprehend him, put him in prison, and when sentence has been passed on him to bring him out to the place of execution, what would you think of that? Would the judge appear to you to be in earnest about putting the thief to death? No; quite the contrary; the judge in such a case must be a good friend of the thief, and would be very glad to see him make his escape. For as the old saying has it, “the cat that mews too much will never make a good mouser.” So it is; he who intends to get hold of his enemy lets not a word of his purpose be known; he hides his weapons and does not draw them until he has the other completely in his power, so that he cannot escape. One of the first and most necessary qualities of a general is silence; he must know how to keep secret the plans he forms against the enemy; he should not reveal them even to his most intimate friends, much less to his own soldiers, that no one may betray them; and if sometimes he publishes that on a certain day, at a certain hour he shall make a sally to surprise the enemy, the latter think at once: “oh, that is only a blind! We need not fear that attack; but there is some other plan in his mind, and we must be on our guard not to be surprised by it.”

For His ob-
ject is to
warn sin-
ners.

Mark, says St. Augustine, and be amazed at the wonderful long-suffering and mercy of God, which He will show even on that day when He will with terrible portents arm all creatures against sinners: “if He really wished to condemn sinners to hell He would conceal His wrath against them,”² and would reserve His vengeance till the very last moment, when He might fall upon them unawares in the midst of their sins and vices. But as it is, He has already warned them long since by His prophets to be on their guard; for “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

¹ Nemo volens ferire, dicit, observa.

² Si damnare vellet, taceret.

the waves;”¹ so when you behold those signs be sure that the angry Judge shall soon come to condemn you to hell if you do not repent and amend your lives. What else, then, do the manifold signs that are to succeed each other signify, if not that God does not wish the sinner to be lost, and that He intends to warn him to do penance in time, so as to escape the divine anger?

When the disobedient Absalom rebelled against his father David with intention of usurping the crown, David at once raised an army and marched against him. Who would not have thought that the father’s intention was to punish his undutiful son and put him out of the way? Yet his loving, paternal heart was quite differently disposed. When he sent out his generals to fight, his strictest injunction on them was, “Save me the boy Absalom.”² Whatever you do, see that he escapes unhurt. His wish was not merely that his son should not be killed, but that he should be taken care of: “Save me the boy!” But did David act consistently in this? If he wished Absalom to be saved, why did he send an army against him? Or was he forced to do so in order to protect himself? Otherwise could he not have kept his army at home if he wished his son to come to no harm? Truly he might have done all that, says St. Augustine; but he wished to humble the pride of his rebellious son. I will show him, thought he, that I am not wanting in the power to punish him, so that, frightened at the sight of my army, he may submit and return to his father; but my generals must know that I do not desire his destruction, and therefore I command them to be careful of him and do him no harm. Such, too, is the reason why the Almighty God will assume the appearance of anger when, as we have seen in the last sermon, He will with terrible portents call all creatures to arms to conquer sinners, His rebellious children. His object, namely, is to chastise their disobedience in such a way that through fear of the impending last judgment and the signs that are to precede it they may humble themselves, and by doing timely penance gain eternal life. “Save Me the boy,” He says in His fatherly, loving heart. Save Me the souls of My children, although they are rebels and disobedient!

And bring them to repentance. Shown from Scripture.

And as we read in Holy Writ, such is the manner in which God acted

¹ Erunt signa in sole, et luna, et stellis, et in terris pressura gentium præ confusione sonitus maris et fluctuum.—Luke xxi. 25.

² Servate mihi puerum Absalom.—II. Kings xviii. 5.

in that way
with the
Ninivites.

God has always acted. When He was forced by the many sins of mankind to inflict some general punishment on the world, He hardly ever did so without having long beforehand announced it by His prophets, or by signs and portents, so that people by doing timely penance might escape the effects of His anger. Thus He acted towards the Ninivites, to whom He sent the Prophet Jonas to announce through all the streets of the city: "Yet forty days, and Ninive shall be destroyed."¹ Who, on hearing this terrible threat, would not imagine that God was exceedingly embittered against the wicked city? Yet it is beyond a doubt that by that very threat He showed Himself most merciful and gracious to it. St. John Chrysostom, considering this circumstance, turns to God in wonder and asks Him: My Lord and my God! what art Thou doing? "Why dost Thou announce the punishment Thou art about to inflict?"² I do so, answers the Almighty, that I may not be obliged to punish; that My threats may not have to be fulfilled. And the Ninivites found out the truth of that; they knew God and were aware that He is a merciful Lord, says St. Ephrem.³ When they heard the sermon of Jonas they entered into themselves, did penance, and thus appeased the anger of God, so that His threats against them came to nothing.

With Pharaoh and the city of Jerusalem.

So He acted towards the wicked king Pharaoh, who so cruelly persecuted the people of Israel. The many and wonderful plagues with which He afflicted the whole land of Egypt are well known from Scripture, yet He did not actually inflict one of them until He had sent Moses to Pharaoh to give him warning. "Behold," says the Lord, if thou wilt not let My people go, "I will kill thy son, thy first-born."⁴ I will send on thy land a plague of grasshoppers, etc. If Pharaoh had submitted, not one of the threats would have been fulfilled. And so the Almighty acted afterwards. When He was minded to give the city of Jerusalem into the hands of its enemies, Isaias had to wander about the streets for a long time beforehand without clothing, to give warning of the impending calamity. When He threatened the Jewish people with slavery under the hard yoke of the Assyrians, He sent Jeremias bound in chains on before. And again when about to punish the inhabitants of

¹ Adhuc quadraginta dies, et Ninive subvertetur.—Jonas iii. 4.

² Cujus rei gratia quæ facturus es mala, prædicis?—S. Chrys. Hom. de Jon.

³ Cognoverunt Deum ut misericordem.

⁴ Ecce ego interficiam filium tuum primogenitum.—Exod. iv. 23.

Jerusalem with famine, Ezechiel had to eat nothing but the dung of cows and oxen for three hundred and ninety days. All these things were signs of the future wrath of God; but at the same time they were proofs of His present mercy. With reason does the Prophet David say to his God: "Thou hast given a warning to them that fear Thee, that they may flee from before the bow, that Thy beloved may be delivered."¹

Now, my dear brethren, you see how it is that those terrible signs that are to announce the wrath of God before the last day are at the same time proofs of the divine mercy and goodness, intended for the conversion and amendment of the sinner. And yet, what should excite our utmost astonishment, a very small number of sinners shall then be moved to bewail and amend their wicked lives. The natural fear and anguish inspired by such awful phenomena will cause them to wither away with terror, that is true; but when their fear is past they will not be a whit better than before; they will be like the people of the time of Noe when he was preparing for the flood; they will not even believe that those signs are to announce the last day, nor that the general judgment is at hand; but will rather laugh at the good who will believe in them, and ridicule their credulity as too simple, and so they will continue in sin until the fire carries them off impenitent before the tribunal of God; and that shall be the case with many. Is not that, I ask, a most astonishing thing? Yet why should we be surprised at it, my dear brethren? Do we not act in precisely the same manner in our own days when the Almighty sends us or threatens us with public calamities? We shall see that in the

Yet very few sinners of those times shall be converted.

Second Part.

Public calamities are to us what the signs that are to precede the last day shall be to those who are to live towards the end of the world. They shall be exceedingly terrified and dismayed, "for there shall be then great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now."² Such, too, is the effect of calamities on us; they terrify us and fill us with anguish; when we feel them we commence to moan and sigh: alas! how wretched we are! etc. And yet, as with the signs of the

Public calamities are also proofs of God's mercy, and of His desire for the sinner's conversion.

¹ Dedisti metuentibus te significationem, ut fugiant a facie arcus; ut liberentur dilecti tui.—Ps. lix. 6.

² Erit enim tunc tribulatio magna, qualis non fuit ab initio mundi, usque modo.—Matt. xxiv. 21.

last day, so with those calamities. For what else are they but proofs of God's mercy and goodness to sinners, whose only object is to humble men, chastise them in a fatherly manner, make them enter into themselves, repent of their sins, amend their lives, and so escape eternal punishment in hell? For public calamities are never sent on a country except on account of the sins of the people, in order to eradicate them and put a stop to them. This truth has often been preached from the pulpit, and therefore it requires no further proof; it is a truth founded on the infallible word of God, and one therefore of which the holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church have not the least doubt.

Shown by
examples.

The seraphic St. Francis, as St. Bonaventure writes in his *Life*, being once on a journey, came to a country where there was nothing but weeping and lamentation among the people because their cattle were devoured by the wolves and their corn was destroyed by constant hail-storms. When Francis heard this he said to the people: "My dear people, do you know the cause of the evils you suffer from? Do you know the hand that inflicts them? It is God, who in His mercy visits you for your sins and misdeeds, that you may not be lost eternally. But do you wish to be freed from this scourge? Then the matter rests with yourselves; remove the cause; repent and amend your lives, and the evil will cease." And wonderful to relate, because it is such a rare experience, this one exhortation was enough to induce the people to amend; they did penance for their sins and humbly begged God to forgive them, when, behold! the scourge ceased at once:¹ the wolves disappeared; the hail-storms, although they came now and then and did some damage in the neighborhood, melted before they arrived at the land of the penitent people, as if to say: we are not any longer commissioned by the Creator to injure this country. When Constantinople was shaken by terrible earthquakes, so that the people, filled with fear and anguish, knew not where to turn, St. John Chrysostom mounted the pulpit and began to preach in the following terms: Blessed be those earthquakes! What you, my brethren, think of them, I know not; the trouble and agitation you manifest give me to understand that you look on them as a calamity; but for my part I praise and bless my God on account of them, and am convinced He merits our sincerest gratitude for having sent them to

¹ Ab illa hora cessaverunt clades.

us. Why so? “You have seen the goodness and mercy of God. The shaking and trembling of the earth is a voice that cries out to our hearts, that being led to repentance by fear we may avoid a far worse punishment.”¹

With a similar reasoning St. Jerome shut the mouths of the Manichæans. These heretics advanced so far in error and malice that they did not hesitate to accuse God of cruelty and tyranny, and they tried to support this blasphemous assertion by the words of the Prophet Amos: “Shall there be evil in a city, which the Lord hath not done?”² See! they exclaimed, what sort of a God is that who causes so much evil in the world by plagues and pestilences, that carry off thousands; by unfruitful seasons, that cause many to be in want of proper nourishment; by wars, that devastate cities and countries, and reduce the inhabitants to the verge of poverty and despair? All these and similar hardships come from God, who persecutes poor mortals; and besides He boasts that He is the Author of them. What tyrant ever acted more cruelly to his unfortunate subjects than this God does to His creatures? O wicked, ignorant, and conceited heretics, cries out St. Jerome, what are you saying? What you call cruelty in the Creator we refer to the multitude of His mercies.³ There is no evil, misfortune, trouble, or whatever else you may call it in the world, that does not come from the Lord. True; infallibly true! But what then? Do you think that God should allow your sins to remain unpunished? Should the God of infinite holiness look on calmly while the world is being turned into a nest of adulterers, drunkards, thieves, and murderers? Where is the righteous ruler in the world who does not ordain just punishment for the vices of his people? It is you, you, O wicked people, who, if there were no other sinners besides yourselves, would force the good and merciful God to have recourse to such chastisements. And besides your sins, what a mass of wickedness is not committed daily in the world? Is it any wonder then that the godless world should be chastised by so many calamities? Let us rather return humble thanks to the Lord whenever He visits us in that way. The punishments are hard indeed, but at the same time they are a wholesome medicine which we can and ought to use for the amendment of our lives and to gain heaven, lest being hardened in sin we should be hurled

Hence we should thank God for them, as the holy Fathers teach.

¹ Vidistis Dei benignitatem; ut timore meliores effecti supplicium repellamus.

² Si erit malum in civitate, quod Dominus non fecerit?—Amos iii. 6.

³ Nos referamus ad magnitudinem misericordie.—S. Hier. in c. 3. Amos.

down to hell. Such was the sermon preached to the heretics by St. Jerome.

But sinners generally refuse to believe that calamities come from God.

Therefore, my dear brethren, in our times, too, public calamities and troubles are proofs and effects of the divine mercy and goodness to sinners. But, alas! I must again ask, how do we receive them? Do we not generally act as the wicked will act towards the end of the world, when they shall behold the portents that announce the last day? The good and pious pray and cry out to Heaven, and redouble their penances and works of devotion to avert the punishments impending over us; but they who are almost the sole cause of the evil, who for years and years have been indulging in sin, how do they act? How are they affected? If there is nothing more than menaces at first; if there are signs of plagues, war, or famine in the distance to warn them to repent and amend, oh, they think, like the incredulous Israelites when warned of impending chastisement by the prophets, "the evil shall not come upon us: we shall not see the sword and famine. The prophets have spoken in the wind."¹ No, there is no danger; preachers are talking of it, but their words are mere empty threats to frighten children; we have heard them often and not seen them fulfilled. We shall go on in the old way; "the evil shall not come upon us." Others may feel the rod a little, but we shall remain unharmed. And if they, too, feel the chastising hand so that they are convinced that the threats are not idle, how do they act then? Do they amend their lives? Very few of them do; the most remain obstinate and refuse to see what is before their eyes. "O Lord, Thy eyes are upon truth," so speaks the Prophet Jeremias to God: "Thou hast struck them and they have not grieved; Thou hast bruised them and they have refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than the rock, and they have refused to return."² But, holy prophet, how is that possible? If they have been beaten, surely they must have felt the blows? How then is it that they had no sorrow or repentance? I will tell you, answers the prophet; "they have denied the Lord, and said: It is not He."³ They feel the rod and it hurts them, but they refuse to believe that it is wielded

¹ Neque veniet super nos malum; gladium et famem non videbimus. Prophetæ fuerunt in ventum locuti.—Jer. v. 12, 13.

² Domine, oculi tui respiciunt fidem; percussisti eos, et non doluerunt; attrivisti eos, et nonauerunt accipere disciplinam; induraverunt facies suas supra petram, et noluerunt reverti.—Ibid. 3.

³ Negaverunt Dominum, et dixerunt: non est ipse.—Ibid. 12.

by the hand of God; they will not acknowledge that it is God who punishes them, who sends them wars, sickness, famine, misfortune, poverty, on account of their sins. "They have said: It is not He;" the Lord has not done this; the sickness comes from the impure air; princes and potentates are the cause of the war; this or that cruel man has brought misfortune on our country, etc. Thus they lay the whole blame on creatures; they try to get hold of the rod that beats them, but they do not look at the hand that wields it.

And why so? For what purpose do they refuse to acknowledge God as the Author and Cause of calamities and troubles? That they may not have to confess that such things are sent as a punishment of their sins, and be not forced to repent and amend their wicked lives. "O Lord, Thou hast struck them, and they have not grieved;" they have not entertained the least thought of repentance; Thou hast pressed hard on them, but they are not convinced; "they have refused to return." Is it not so in reality, my dear brethren? Is the world any better for the troublous times it has been passing through hitherto? Is there any diminution of pride, of vanity, luxury, and indecency in dress? Is avarice a thing of the past? Are people more scrupulous as to how they make money? Are unlawful intimacies given up? Is drunkenness, is the foul habit of cursing and swearing, abolished? Are parents more careful in looking after their children? Alas! is not the world just the same in these respects as it always was? Nay, does it not seem to have grown worse than ever? Must we not acknowledge with the Prophet Isaias: "Behold Thou art angry, and we have sinned: in them we have been always"?¹ O Lord, Thou hast chastised us through mercy, yet we continue to sin; we remain as bad as we were before. There is no denying the evidence of our own eyes.

It seems to me that things are going on as in the ship that was carrying the obstinate Jonas. A furious storm burst upon the sea and exposed the ship to the greatest danger; the sailors and rowers ran hither and thither in a fright; with great trouble they succeeded in taking in sail; they pumped the water out, and cried and groaned to Heaven in their distress. Meanwhile what was Jonas, the sole cause of the disaster, doing? "Jonas," says the Scripture, "went down into the inner part of the ship and fell into a deep sleep." The cries and groans disturbed him not

Because they do not wish to amend.

They continue in the sleep of sin like Jonas in the ship.

¹ Ecce tu iratus es, et peccavimus in ipsis fuimus semper.—Is. lxiv. 5.

in the least, so that the sailors had to awaken him by force: "And the ship-master came to him, and said to him: Why art thou fast asleep? rise up! call upon thy God, if so be that God will think of us, that we may not perish."¹ In the same way, I repeat, we act in the storm of calamity; prayers and sighs and groans, entreaties for mercy and grace are sent up to Heaven; but by whom? Generally speaking by those who are least to blame for the storm; by good, pious souls who have always been zealous in the performance of works of devotion and piety, and faithful in the service of God. But on the other hand, what is done by sinners who alone are to blame for the evil on account of their bad and vicious lives, and for whose sake the innocent, too, have to suffer? Ah, little they care for the cries of the others! Like Jonas they sleep in the depths of their sins; the calamities they suffer do not make them more diligent in visiting the church; they do not dream of trying to avert the divine anger by doing penance for their sins. Nay, some of them are so stupid as to give up praying; their despair drives them to curse when they feel the rod; they seek still more the occasions of sin and bad company, and rejoice when the carnival begins at Shrove-tide. Fine times indeed we have now to think of such things! Sinner, "why art thou fast asleep?" Rise up; call upon thy God! be converted; help us to pray and do penance, for God has visited us on account of your sins! Rise up, O unchaste man! give up your impurity, the intimacy in which you have been living unlawfully with this or that person! Call upon thy God; it is your adultery, your shameful acts, your unlawful love that has brought this chastisement on us! Rise up, vain child of the world! lay aside that scandalous dress and put on the garb of penance! Call upon God; humble yourself before Him whose anger you have aroused by your filthy pride and vanity! Rise up, O vindictive man, and be reconciled with your enemy! Call upon God for pardon of your sins; your hatred, anger, quarrelling, and fighting are the occasion of the evils we are suffering! Rise up, unjust man! give back what you have gained by usury and injustice; your greed of gold has brought us to poverty! Rise up, all of you, and call upon God! Awake out of your sleep; do penance; for God will not relax until they who are the cause of His wrath submit to Him. The

¹ Jonas descendit ad interiora navis, et dormiebat sopore gravi. Et accessit ad eum gubernator, et dixit ei: Quid tu sopore deprimeris? Surge, invoca Deum tuum, si forte recogitet Deus de nobis, et non pereamus.—Jonas i. 5, 6.

sole object of the Almighty in thus chastising us is that we may amend our lives. But there is little use in preaching or exhorting. At the first call Jonas acknowledged that he was to blame: "Take me up," he said, "and cast me into the sea, and the sea shall be calm to you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is come upon you." ¹ But they hear others groaning and lamenting and do not mind it in the least; they keep on in the sleep of sin and never think of repenting. But wo to us if we are not led to repent by the scourge! For what else have we to expect but that after the temporal evil, which is an effect of the divine mercy, we shall have to suffer eternal torments in hell as an effect of the divine justice?

No, O good God, let it not come to that! If I am the Jonas who has brought on the storm, behold! I give myself up to Thee; I acknowledge that I have deserved to be punished; I humbly implore Thy mercy, and kiss the fatherly hand that chastises me here. Truly, O Lord, I thank Thee for having thus awakened me from the torpor of sin! I will atone for my sins; even now I begin to detest them with all my heart; my life and all in me that has hitherto been displeasing to Thee shall with Thy help and grace be completely changed and amended. I only beg of Thee to turn away from so many innocent souls in this city and country the evils that menace them, and to save me from eternal punishment, for the temporal evils that I confess I have deserved I accept from Thee as an atonement for my sins. Amen.

Conclusion to accept calamities with gratitude, and to profit by them.

Another introduction for the third Sunday of Advent.

Text.

Ego vox clamantis in deserto: Dirigite viam Domini.—John i. 23.

"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord."

Introduction.

John as the precursor of the Saviour who was about to come into the world was the voice of God. And what was that voice saying? "Make straight the way of the Lord," prepare yourselves for His coming! "Do penance: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." ² My dear brethren, a similar voice from God shall be heard, etc. *Continues as above.*

¹ Tollite me, et mittite in mare, et cessabit mare a vobis; scio enim ego quoniam propter me tempestas hæc grandis venit super vos.—Jonas i. 12.

² Pœnitentiam agite; appropinquavit enim regnum cœlorum.—Matt. iii. 2.

TWENTY-NINTH SERMON.

ON THE SUDDENNESS WITH WHICH THE LAST DAY SHALL COME.

Subject.

1. After the appearance of the signs the last day shall come upon men quite suddenly and unexpectedly; 2. Therefore we should always hold ourselves in readiness for it.—*Preached on the third Sunday of Advent.*

Text.

Dirigite viam Domini.—John i. 23.
“Make straight the way of the Lord.”

Introduction.

Hitherto we have been considering the signs that are to precede the end of the world and the day of general judgment, and also the persecution that is to be carried on by Antichrist, who will turn almost the whole world away from Jesus Christ by offering worldly goods, honors, and pleasures as a bribe, by deceiving people with false miracles and hypocrisy, and by forcing them to adopt his views, adhere to his side by means of cruel tortures; we have seen, too, what we are to learn from all this. In another sermon we considered the terrible signs that shall be seen in the sun, moon, and stars, and the disturbance that is to take place in all the elements, signs that shall fill the wicked with fear, but the good with consolation; and the same is to be understood of public calamities that afflict the world in our own times. On last Sunday we saw that those signs are proofs and effects of the divine mercy and goodness toward sinners, so that they being terrified may enter into themselves, do penance, and escape the anger of God on the last day; so also the calamities that we suffer from nowadays are warning voices coming from the goodness and mercy of God, to chastise us for our sins, induce us to amend, and so help us to escape the eternal punishment of hell. And what is to happen after all those signs and portents, my dear brethren? “Then they shall see the Son of man;” then the last day shall come, and Jesus Christ in His majesty and glory shall appear in the valley of Josaphat to judge

the living and the dead. But when? Immediately after those signs, or a long time after? But who can tell us that? It is useless to ask, for no one knows it. All we know for certain about the matter is that the last day shall come upon men quite unexpectedly, and therefore we should always be ready for it. This is the subject of my sermon to-day.

Plan of Discourse.

After the appearance of the signs, the last day of judgment shall come upon men quite suddenly and unexpectedly. This I shall briefly show in the first part. Therefore we should be ready for it every hour of our lives: "Make straight the way of the Lord." This conclusion I shall prove in the second part.

That we may observe it carefully, help us with Thy grace, O future Judge of men! We beg this of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

That the day of judgment shall come upon men unexpectedly is evident from the fact that God has reserved the knowledge of it to Himself, and has not and will not reveal it to any of the Prophets or to any mere mortal. There have been many holy friends of God to whom He revealed the day, nay, even the hour, of their death; there have been wicked sinners the time of whose death and eternal damnation has been foretold by the Prophets. The heavenly city of Jerusalem was shown to St. John the Evangelist. St. Paul was rapt up to the third heaven, where, as he himself tells us, he saw mysteries that may not be revealed to men. Jesus Christ often spoke to His disciples about the kingdom of God, about the indescribable joys that there awaited them as the reward of their labors: "But I have called you friends," He says to them, "because all things whatsoever I have heard of My Father I have made known to you."¹ But concerning the time of the end of the world and the coming of the Judge, no one either in heaven or on earth has ever heard a word. "But of that day or hour," says Our Lord expressly to His disciples after having told them of the signs that are to announce the last day, "no man knoweth, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but the Father."² With these words He restrained the curiosity of His disciples regarding the time of

It is clear that the last day shall come suddenly, because God has kept the knowledge of it to Himself.

¹ Vos autem dixi amicos, quia omnia quæcumque audivi a Patre meo, nota feci vobis.—John xv. 15.

² De die autem illo vel hora nemo scit, neque angelus in caelo, neque Filius, nisi Pater.—Mark xiii. 32.

the general judgment, as if He said to them: why should you desire to know what is hidden from the angels and even from the Son of man Himself?

Not even the Son of God has a communicable knowledge of it.

But, dearest Lord, how is it that Thou dost not know this? Art Thou not the Judge of the living and the dead, to whom the Father has committed the supreme power of deciding the fate of mortals at the last day, and therefore is it not for Thee to fix the date, to determine when the judgment shall be held? And art Thou not to know anything about it, although according to the testimony of the Apostle all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God are hidden in Thee? These words of Our Lord, my dear brethren, are interpreted in different ways by commentators, amongst whom are SS. Gregory, Ambrose, Hilary, and Augustine. They say that the Son of man knows nothing about the last day, not that He is absolutely ignorant of it, but that He does not wish to reveal it to any creature; that is, He has not of it a knowledge that He can communicate to others. In the same way a priest if asked what such or such a one has said to him in confession, can with truth answer: I do not know. For in such circumstances the words mean simply: I do not know it by a knowledge that I can communicate to others; or else: I am as little at liberty to speak of it as if I were absolutely ignorant of it. Thus the knowledge of the time of the last day is kept most strictly from men, and therefore that day will come quite unexpectedly, and will fall upon men when they are least thinking of it.

Christ has foretold that He will come unexpectedly.

Again the same truth is evidently proved by the words of Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "For as lightning cometh out of the east, and appeareth even into the west: so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."¹ Lightning, as we know, appears suddenly and before one is aware of it, it shoots out of the clouds and flashes before our eyes; "so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." He will appear to men before they have time to cast a thought on His coming. St. Paul says: "But of the times and moments, brethren, you need not that we should write to you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord shall so come as a thief in the night."² Almost identical are the words we read in the Epistle of St. Peter: "But

¹ Sicut enim fulgur exit ab Oriente, et paret usque in Occidentem, ita erit et adventus Filii hominis.—Matt. xxiv. 27.

² De temporibus autem, et momentis, fratres, non indigetis ut scribamus vobis. Ipsi enim diligenter scitis, quia dies Domini, sicut fur in nocte, ita veniet.—I. Thess. v. 1, 2.

the day of the Lord shall come as a thief.”¹ A thief would never dare to break into a house when he knows the inhabitants to be on their guard. No; he who is robbed is not aware of it until he finds his things gone. Like a thief in the night the day of the Lord shall come unexpectedly. From the words of St. Paul, St. Chrysostom concludes that the coming of the Judge shall take place during the night, when men are asleep and not even able to think of it.

Finally, the same truth is confirmed by the similes used by Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Luke to describe the manner in which the men of those times shall live: “And as it came to pass in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.” “And how did people act then? “They did eat and drink: they married wives and were given in marriage until the day that Noe entered into the ark.” And what then? “And the flood came, and destroyed them all.”² Wonderful was the blindness and stupidity of the men of those days; not the least attention did they pay to the oft-repeated warnings of the Patriarch Noe. He was a hundred years engaged in building the ark; the people went to see his work; they doubtless asked him what the huge structure was intended for; why it contained so many divisions, rooms, partitions, and stables. Noe said to them: do penance; sin no more; appease the anger of God; in a few years the whole world shall be destroyed, for the waters shall ascend higher than the highest mountain, and there shall not be dry land enough left for a little bird to stand on; therefore be converted to God. Oh, fool that you are! they said to him; who put that nonsense into your head? Why do you plague yourself so with that useless labor? Enjoy yourself as we do; eat, drink, and be merry. Meanwhile the time for the flood came; the sky was darkened; the clouds began to collect; the sea swelled up and encroached on the dry land. Poor mortals! do you still refuse to believe? Yes; they are not the least disturbed; they go on as before, as if they were still in the golden age and had no danger to dread. They did nothing but eat, drink, dance, and sing; they had marriage-feasts, and sports, and enjoyed themselves to their hearts’ content: “And the flood came, and destroyed them all;” while they were in the midst of

As the men of old were surprised by the deluge.

¹ Adveniet autem dies Domini ut fur.—II. Pet. iii. 10.

² Sicut factum est in diebus Noe, ita erit et in diebus Filii hominis. Edebant, et bibebant; uxores ducebant et dabantur ad nuptias, usque in diem, qua intravit Noe in arcam; et venit diluvium, et perdidit omnes.—Luke xvii. 26, 27.

their sins the flood-gates of heaven were opened, and the water swept them all away. "Likewise," continues the Evangelist, "as it came to pass in the days of Lot: They did eat and drink; they bought and sold; they planted and built; and in the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all."¹

So also shall they be surprised by the coming of the Judge.

"Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man shall be revealed."² Should we not think that so many signs and portents—wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, the persecutions of Antichrist, the disturbance of the elements—would be enough to make the men of that time watchful and vigilant? But no! When the fear and terror caused by the signs shall be at an end, they shall resume their former mode of life. Following the opinion of St. Jerome writing on the words of St. Paul, "When they shall say peace and security, then shall sudden destruction come upon them,"³ I maintain that when the signs shall have vanished men shall live in peace and quiet for a time (how long no one can say), and will continue in their former mode of life; and although the true faith shall then be general over the world, there shall be sinners who shall lead a very wicked life, and tepid Christians who shall lead a very slothful one. Under those circumstances then, when they least expect it, "in the twinkling of an eye," as the Apostle says,⁴ fire shall fall from heaven and reduce the world to ashes, and then the dreadful trumpet shall resound in all places, and the angel's voice be heard crying out: "Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment!" There, my dear brethren, we have all the preparation that shall be made to introduce the great day of the general judgment. And what conclusion are we to draw from this? "Make straight the way of the Lord;" therefore we should now prepare ourselves most carefully for that day, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

Therefore Christ warns us to be

This conclusion is not mine, but that of Jesus Christ, as He tells us Himself plainly in the Gospel of St. Matthew. For after

¹ Similiter sicut factum est in diebus Lot: edebant, et bibebant; emebant, et vendebant; plantabant, et ædificabant; Qua die autem exiit Lot a Sodomis, pluit ignem et sulphur de cœlo, et omnes perdidit.—Luke xvii. 28, 29.

² Secundum hæc erit qua die Filius hominis revelabitur.—Ibid. 30.

³ Cum enim dixerint: Pax et securitas, tunc repentinus eis superveniet interitus.—I. Thess. v. 3.

⁴ In ictu oculi.—I. Cor. xv. 52.

Suddenness with which the Last Day shall Come. 357

speaking of the uncertainty of the last day, and saying that no man nor angel knows anything about it, He adds: "Watch ye, therefore, because you know not what hour your Lord will come."¹ Be ready like to a householder who expects a thief to break in, and knows not when he will come. "Watch ye, therefore," He says, after having foretold the signs that are to precede, "(for you know not when the lord of the house cometh: at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning), lest coming on a sudden He find you sleeping."² And lest we should think this warning is intended only for the disciples, He adds the following words: "And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch;"³ prepare yourselves for My coming; do penance for your sins; order your lives so now that when the Judge comes He may find you in the state of sanctifying grace; otherwise the fire that consumes your bodies shall be only a prelude to the eternal flames of hell.

But, you think, how does this concern us? It is of interest only for those who shall be in the world after the signs shall have vanished; there is no fear of our living till the last day. But, my dear brethren, who has told us that? Can any one produce a document to certify it? Have not most of the portents that announce the end of the world been seen already? Are they not still to be seen? "Nation shall rise against nation," says Our Lord, speaking of the signs of the general judgment, "and kingdom against kingdom." Has not sad experience already shown us the truth of this prophecy, and do we not even yet see it actually verified? "And there shall be great earthquakes in divers places, and pestilences and famines, and terrors from heaven, and there shall be great signs."⁴ Has not the world already beheld them? "And because iniquity hath abounded, the charity of many shall grow cold."⁵ Alas! is not this only too true, in our days, of many Catholics amongst the chosen people of God? Where do we find any characteristics of the early Christians, who had but one heart and one soul? Their very

prepared
for the last
day.

A warning
that con-
cerns us,
for we may,
for all we
know, live
till the last
day.

¹ Vigilate ergo, quia nescitis qua hora Dominus vester venturus sit.—Matt. xxiv. 42.

² Vigilate ergo (nescitis enim quando dominus domus veniat: sero, an media nocte, an galli cantu, an mane), ne cum venerit repente, inveniat vos dormientes.—Mark xiii. 35, 36.

³ Quod autem vobis dico, omnibus dico: Vigilate.—Ibid. 37.

⁴ Surget gens contra gentem, et regnum adversus regnum. Et terræ motus magni erunt per loca, et pestilentia, et fames, terroresque de cœlo, et signa magna erunt.—Luke xxi. 10, 11.

⁵ Et quoniam abundavit iniquitas, refrigescet caritas multorum.—Matt. xxiv. 12.

name was sufficient amongst the heathens to absolve them from every suspicion of crime. Have not pride, vanity, avarice, treachery, injustice, intemperance, impurity, reached their highest degree? Has not a beginning already been made of the dismemberment of the Roman Empire, which is one of the proximate signs of the approach of the end of the world? What more do we wait for? The coming of Antichrist? But for all we know he may be already in the world. His reign and persecution of Christians will last for three years and a half; we know not how long the interval is to be between that and the last day; and therefore it is quite within the bounds of possibility that some of us shall see the end of the world.

And though we die before it, our death is uncertain, and on that depends our happiness on the last day.

But, be that as it may, perhaps we shall not live till the last day. To keep one's self always prepared for that day means to profit by the warning signs, so as to be ready to withstand the temptations and persecutions with which Antichrist shall try to pervert mankind. But although we may be in no danger from him, and the world may last for another thousand years, yet it behoves each one of us to be always on guard, and to prepare most carefully so that all may go well with us in the general judgment. Hear what St. Augustine says: "In whatsoever state the end of life shall find each one, in that state too shall the last day of the world find him;"¹ for as a man dies, so shall he be judged on the last day. If I die in the state of grace, I need not fear judgment, but rather rejoice at it; the kingdom of heaven, the society of the elect is surely open to me. If I die in the state of sin, I have nothing good to hope for on the last day; the fire of hell amongst the reprobate is and will be my lot forever. Therefore the judgment that awaits me on the last day depends on my death and the last day of my life; hence, as I should always be prepared for that day, so, too, should I be always ready for the hour of death. Now, who can tell me when that hour shall come, or where it shall find me? God alone knows that; to no purpose should I expect a messenger to be sent to warn me. I know not whether it will be after ten or twenty years, to-day or to-morrow, or even in this very hour while I am preaching to you. One thing I know, and that is that the Lord has warned me and all men: "Wherefore be you also ready: because at what hour you know not the Son of man

¹ In quo quemque invenerit suus novissimus dies, in hoc eum comprehendet mundi novissimus dies.—S. Aug. Ep. 80. ad Hesich.

will come.”¹ In the hour when you are not thinking of it, death will come and take you out of the world before the tribunal of God to the particular judgment, and whatever sentence you receive then and no other shall be the one you shall hear in the general judgment.

Therefore, my dear brethren, the conclusion is evident; every one of us who values his soul and its salvation should and must now be ready for the coming of the Judge. And I say “be ready;” for it will be too late to begin to prepare when the Judge knocks at the door; and it will be forever too late. “Watch, therefore,” I say, or rather Our Lord says, “because you know not what hour your Lord will come.” And as you cannot know it, be on your guard at all times; keep in the friendship of God; let no one dare to remain even a quarter of an hour at enmity with Him in the state of mortal sin; for perhaps during that quarter of an hour death may come unexpectedly and hurry you off to the judgment-seat. “If the good man of the house knew at what hour the thief would come, he would certainly watch, and would not suffer his house to be broken open.”² He would take measures to prevent his property from being stolen. And if we knew the hour of our death, would any one of us be so reckless as not to repent of his sins beforehand and be reconciled to God? But since we do not know that hour, and since any hour may be our last, we must be at all times intent on this important business, and be ready for the long journey into eternity.

Keep constantly before your minds the uncertainty of the hour of death, in which you shall have to appear before God to be strictly judged by Him. For the reckless lives that so many Christians lead can be traced to forgetfulness of the last end, and we have the authority of the Holy Ghost for that: “Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin.”³ Hear the cunning yet holy stratagem employed by a certain priest who was well skilled in the art of converting souls. A man old in years and wickedness came to him for confession, and told him a long story of iniquity; the priest, guessing that he had a hard case to deal

Hence we should even now be ready for the last day.

The thought of this will urge us to lead good lives. Shown by an example.

¹ Ideo et vos estote parati, quia qua nescitis hora Filius hominis venturus est.—Matt. xxiv. 44.

² Vigilate ergo, quia nescitis qua hora Dominus vester venturus sit. Si sciret paterfamilias qua hora fur venturus esset, vigilaret utique et non sineret perdiri domum suam.—Ibid. 42, 43.

³ Memorare novissima tua, et in aeternum non peccabis.—Ecclus. vii. 40.

with, imposed on him as a penance a fast of one or two days. "Oh," exclaimed the man, "I cannot fast; it makes me giddy!" "Then," said the priest, "put on a penitential girdle." "A penitential girdle?" replied the other; "what is that?" "It is a belt made of coarse horse-hair or iron, which is worn on the body next the skin," answered the priest. "O Father," said the man, "I am altogether too weak to wear a thing of that kind!" "Well, then, would you like to try a discipline, and flog yourself a few times a week?" "Oh, still worse for a poor old man like me! Please give me a lighter penance." "Then," continued the priest, "say the Rosary once a day on your knees." "But I cannot do that," was the man's reply, "because I am not accustomed to kneeling." "Well, then," said the confessor, "as none of these penances suit you, all I ask you to do is to stand before the looking-glass every morning when you get up, and every night before going to bed, and there stroke your long beard with your hand for a time." The old man laughed at the droll penance, but accepted it, as it seemed a light one. When he had contemplated his beard for a few days in the manner prescribed, he remarked how grey his hair was becoming, and that was precisely what the priest wanted. "Oh ho!" thought he, "it is winter time with me already; I am hastening to the grave and it will be soon time for me to go! And what is to become of me after the sinful life I have been leading? And I have done so little good!" This thought at first filled him with dismay, but the grace of God then touched him and he came back to the priest with tears of contrition in his eyes, repeated his confession with many sighs and groans, and said he: "O Father, I can kneel, and fast, and use a penitential girdle, and take the discipline, and I will do so very willingly; there is no penance too hard for my deserts; none that I am not ready to accept, that I may at least begin to prepare for the death which I now see is close at hand for me." And in future he led such a penitential life that his confessor had to restrain him, instead of urging him on, in the practice of mortification.

No one
should trust
to his youth,
or put off
repentance.

My dear brethren, I cannot give the same advice to all here, for some of us have no grey hairs to contemplate in the looking-glass. And that is the very thing that serves many as an excuse. Oh, they say, I am not old yet; I am still young, strong, and healthy; I am not in danger of death; there is no hurry for me;

I can begin later on to amend my life and prepare for death, etc. Alas! that wretched *later on!* I am not old! I am still young! How many thousand souls have been hurled into hell by those excuses! Do you mean, then, that young people cannot die? But very few attain old age; most people die in their best years; and no one knows the hour when the Lord will come for him; so that young as well as old should be prepared at all times. You will amend later on, you say. What! exclaims St. Augustine, later on? "He who thinks in that way deceives himself, and treats his death as a joke."¹ Consider the great risk of the last day, and what depends on it. Nothing less than eternal joys or eternal torments! It is no child's play! Is heaven such a trifle that it can be allowed to depend on an uncertain "later on"? Is hell a trifle, that the escaping it can be left to a "later on" that you know nothing about? Do you know what is said of that servant in the Gospel who puts off everything to a future time, thinking to himself: "My lord is long a-coming, I can meanwhile enjoy myself and make merry," etc.? But how shall he fare? "The lord of that servant shall come in a day that he hopeth not, and at an hour that he knoweth not, and shall separate him, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."²

Therefore let each one, whether young or old, make this short meditation daily, like that old man; it need not be made before the looking-glass (although that might be good for some who spend the beautiful morning hours curling their hair, or even having it curled by a person of the opposite sex—a scandalous practice that it would be well for them to change for a short meditation); you might say to yourselves: how old am I now? Fifteen, twenty, thirty, forty or more years. Shall I live a year longer? I cannot tell; this very day or hour I may be summoned before the tribunal of the Almighty. If that happened to me this day or hour, should I be ready? Is there anything on my conscience that I should first repent of and confess? If such is the case, oh, go to confession at once! Perhaps in another day or hour it may be too late! A whole eternity depends on this, and I cannot and will not burn forever with the demons in hell. I am fully determined with God's help to go to heaven and be

But every one should meditate daily on death.

¹ Ipse se seducit, et de morte sua ludit, qui hoc cogitat.

² Moram facit dominus meus venire. Veniet dominus servi illius, in die qua non sperat, et hora qua ignorat, et dividet eum, partemque ejus ponet cum hypocritis; illic erit fletus, et stridor dentium.—Matt. xxiv. 48, 50, 51.

happy there with God and His elect. Now, my eternity depends on my last hour, on the state in which it finds me. Therefore, I shall always be ready for it. But, you think, these are sad and melancholy meditations. Not by any means! They are full of consolation for the soul that is determined to work out its salvation; for it must be a great consolation for such a soul to find itself prepared at all times for death. These thoughts are indeed sad and melancholy for those who are not minded to amend; but they should think of the sad and melancholy meditations they will one day make in hell, when they think: I could have been eternally happy, but I did not wish to be so!

Thus sin
will be easily
avoided.

O my good God! if I had during my past life made such a meditation seriously for the space of even one *Miserere*, would it have been possible for me to act so carelessly as I have hitherto done? Could I have spent so much precious time in idleness, vanity, and dangerous company, and so little in Thy service? Could I have committed this or that grievous sin so often, and have remained whole weeks, months, and years in the miserable state of mortal sin? I am terrified now when I think of my negligence, and of the constant danger of eternal damnation in which I was day and night. For I might have died at any hour, and been summoned before Thy strict tribunal. Infinite thanks to Thee, O God of mercy, for having spared me! I now heartily condemn and detest all that I have done during my life to displease Thee.

Conclusion
and resolution
to be always ready
for judgment.

In future I shall always keep before my mind my death and the judgment that awaits me. This will be a check on my evil inclinations and desires; it will spur on my sluggish will to zeal in Thy service; it will detach my heart and affections from earthly goods and pleasures; it will sweeten the short-lived trials of this uncertain life, so that I shall bear them with patience and resignation for Thy sake and to gain heaven; for I shall say to myself: this cross may possibly last only for an hour, and then I shall go to my God and possess Him in eternal joys. Daily, as Thomas à Kempis exhorts me, I will live as if I had daily to die, to appear before Thy judgment-seat. In the morning when I awake I will make such a resolution as I should make if I knew that at evening my body was to be lying dead in the coffin; and at night before retiring to rest I will purify my conscience as if I expected to be found dead in my bed next morning. Thus I shall be ready any moment to meet Thee, my future Judge, whenever it may please Thee to call me from the

world; and I shall meet Thee, not with fear or terror, but with joy and consolation, confident in Thy promise that at the general judgment I shall be among Thy elect on Thy right hand in the valley of Josaphat, and shall hear the joyful invitation: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."¹ Come, My children, enter with Me into eternal joys! Ah! grant me that great grace. My dear brethren, "make straight the way of the Lord," and it shall be done as you wish. Amen.

The same sermon and introduction may serve for the fourth Sunday of Advent, Text: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord."
—Luke. iii. 4.

¹ Venite benedicti Patris mei, possidete paratum vobis regnum a constitutione mundi.—
Matt. xxv. 34.

ON THE PERSON OF THE JUDGE.

THIRTIETH SERMON.

ON THE JUDGE AS GOD.

Subject.

Christ will be a terrible Judge: first, because He is God; secondly, because He shall then be a God without mercy.—*Preached on the feast of St. Thomas, Apostle.*

Text.

Venit Jesus, januis clausis, et stetit in medio.—John xx. 26.
“Jesus cometh, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst.”

Introduction.

There are two circumstances worthy of note in this visit of Our Lord: first, the manner in which He comes to His disciples; secondly, the object of His coming. “Jesus cometh;” how? Quite unexpectedly, when the disciples in all likelihood were not thinking of Him. He did not even open the door of the room, “the doors being shut,” but entered through the closed door, and “stood in the midst,” before they had the least idea of His being there. Why did He come? To comfort with His presence His disciples, who were at the time abandoned, sorrowful, and fearful; and especially to confirm in the faith the doubting Thomas, and bring him back to the right path. Therefore when He had greeted them all with the words, “Peace be to you,” He turned to Thomas and said to him: “Put in thy finger hither, and see My hands, and bring hither thy hand, and put it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing.” Whereupon Thomas, submitting at once, exclaimed: “My Lord and my God!” My dear brethren, hitherto we have treated of another

coming of Jesus in which He shall appear in the midst of all men on the last day of general judgment. Although, as we have seen, many terrible signs are to precede His coming, His advent as Judge shall be quite sudden and unexpected. And for what purpose? No longer to comfort and convert men, but to judge the wicked strictly and condemn them to the fire of hell. Oh, what a terrible coming! With reason does the Church sing: How men shall shudder at the coming of the Judge! And who is that Judge? This I shall partly explain to-day.

Plan of Discourse.

He will be an exceedingly terrible Judge, especially to those who have a bad conscience. Such is the whole subject of this sermon. A terrible Judge, because He is God: the first part. A terrible Judge, because He shall then be a God without mercy: the second part.

To the end that we may all be inspired with a greater horror of sin, and a greater zeal in the divine service. Grant us this by Thy powerful grace, O God, who art still merciful, before the time comes when Thou wilt judge the living and the dead without mercy: we beg this of Thee through the Mother of mercy and our holy guardian angels.

Although God is infinite goodness in His substance and essence; although He is an infinite Good, worthy of all honor and love; although He is the only Good that a creature can long for and desire for perfect happiness, yet His very name is enough to fill the good with reverence and the wicked with fear. When Adam had lost his innocence, the voice of God in paradise filled him with such awe that he hid himself among the trees of the garden: "I heard Thy voice; I was afraid, and I hid myself."¹ "O Lord," says the Prophet Habacuc, a holy friend of God, "I have heard Thy hearing and was afraid."² I was filled with awe and consternation. Although the Israelites in the Old Law were the chosen people and were called the people of God, yet when they heard His voice from afar coming out of the dark cloud, "being terrified and struck with fear they stood afar off, saying to Moses: Speak thou to us and we will hear: let not the Lord speak to us, lest we die"³ through ex-

We have no great reason to fear earthly judges.

¹ Vocem tuam audivi, timui, et abscondi me.—Gen. iii. 10.

² Domine, audivi auditionem tuam, et timui.—Habac. iii. 2.

³ Perterriti ac pavore concussi, steterunt procul, dicentes Moysi: Loquere tu nobis, et audiemus; non loquatur nobis Dominus, ne forte moriamur.—Exod. xx. 18, 19.

cessive awe and terror. Thus they preferred to deal with a mortal like themselves in preference to God, whose greatness and glory they feared and could not endure. And I quite agree with them. Oh, my dear brethren, if mere men were to judge me at the end of my life and on the last day, I should not be half so much afraid of the judgment, although I have often and grievously transgressed, for I should have some hopes of making out a good case for myself and escaping condemnation. If mere men were to be our judges, then you, great ones of the world, princes, kings, and emperors, would have little to fear! Why? Eh! do we not know how partial earthly judges sometimes are?

For they are subject to many defects, by which one may escape them.

In olden times Solon used to say to the Athenians: "Your laws are like spiders' webs."¹ They catch small flies, but allow the large ones to break through. We Germans have a saying to the effect that the little thief is hung, while the big one gets off scot free. Why so? The power and authority of the judge is often not enough to coerce the criminal, for the latter can frequently wield a mightier weapon than his judge; his exalted position, authority, or wealth enables him to pervert the ends of justice and make its officers look on black as white; and even if the sentence is pronounced, it frequently happens that the power of carrying it into execution is wanting. Again, justice is represented with a sceptre in the hand, in which there is an open eye, signifying that the judge must have not merely the power of punishing criminals, but also the wisdom and knowledge required to perform duly the duties of his state. And in this respect, too, there is often a great want, so that earthly judges are not able to inspire malefactors with due fear of punishment, and the latter consequently wax daring and confident in their evil deeds. What a number of crimes are committed in the world and never punished because the judges know nothing of them! What a number of criminals are got free by dint of false swearing, or through want of sufficient proof against them! And how many an innocent man, as St. Augustine complains, is condemned, while the guilty one is pronounced innocent; and this because the earthly judge fails to see the guilt of the one and the innocence of the other!

But Christ, our future Judge, is an Almighty God.

But, my dear brethren, how widely different will be the judgment of which we are speaking! He who will then be seated on the throne is not a weak, fallible man, but God, and therefore an Al-

¹ *Leges vestræ aranearum telis similes sunt.*

mighty and all-knowing Judge. "Then they shall see," says the Evangelist, "the Son of man coming in a cloud with great power and majesty."¹ He will be the Judge of whom Moses has said: "The Lord is as a man of war: Almighty is His name."² A God whose might no one can withstand, whose hand no one can escape: "God, whose wrath no man can resist," so speaks Job, "and under whom they stoop that bear up the world."³ A God whose word and sentence must be fulfilled without delay or opposition: "The word that I shall speak shall be accomplished, saith the Lord,"⁴ as we read in the Prophet Ezechiel. A God before whose tribunal no respect will be had for exalted position, power, or riches, or persons. St. John writes in the Apocalypse that he saw coming from the mouth of the Son of God a sharp sword: "From His mouth came out a sharp two-edged sword."⁵ The justice of the divine Judge is a terrible sword that cuts on all sides; it is the same to Him whether the guilty one is great or small, rich or poor, general or common soldier, prince or peasant. No, O great God! Thy sword is not like that wielded by earthly judges, which the least opposition often blunts and bends; Thine is immovable. "Thou shalt rule them with a rod of iron, and shalt break them in pieces like a potter's vessel."⁶ Thou wilt shatter them: not like a vase of gold or silver, the broken pieces of which are still valuable, but like an earthen vessel that is useless once it is broken. It is not only against poor, weak, and simple mortals that Thou wilt show Thy omnipotence; but above all, the great and mighty ones of earth shall feel Thy anger; in humiliating and annihilating them Thou wilt prove to the world what a great and mighty Lord Thou art, and what poor, mean worms of earth they are when compared to Thee. For Thou sayest Thyself: "To him that is little mercy is granted: but the mighty shall be mightily tormented."⁷ "For God will not except any man's person, neither will He stand in awe of any man's greatness."⁸

The mighty power of this Judge was not visible when He was And He will

¹ Tunc videbunt Filium hominis venientem in nube cum potestate magna, et majestate.—Luke xxi. 27.

² Dominus quasi vir pugnator; omnipotens nomen ejus.—Exod. xv. 3.

³ Deus, cujus iræ nemo resistere potest, et sub quo curvantur qui portant orbem.—Job ix. 13.

⁴ Verbum quod locutus fuero, complebitur, dicit Dominus.—Ezech. xii. 28.

⁵ De ore ejus gladius utraque parte acutus exibit.—Apoc. i. 16.

⁶ Reges eos in virga ferrea, et tanquam vas figuli confringes eos.—Ps. ii. 9.

⁷ Exiguo enim conceditur misericordia; potentes autem potenter tormenta patientur.—Wis. vi. 7, 8.

⁸ Non enim subtrahet personam cujusquam Deus, nec verebitur magnitudinem cujusquam.

show to the world His justice, hitherto unknown.

amongst us on earth as a poor, weak mortal, like to us; but it will appear on that day, when He shall be seen seated on a throne with great power and glory. When He was subject to the judgment of men the world did not know Him; but He shall be known when all men shall have to submit to the sentence He pronounces on them: "The Lord shall be known when He executeth judgments,"¹ when He shall exercise His authority as Judge of the whole human race. Who knew what a great, mighty Lord He was when He was bound in chains and led before the high-priest, and when He stood so humbly before Pilate and Herod? But the day shall come when all mankind assembled in the valley of Josaphat shall shake with fear before His tribunal: "The Lord shall be known when He executeth judgments." Who saw any trace of an Almighty Godhead in Him when He was condemned to death as a poor sinner amid the jeers and laughter of the Jews, and nailed to the shameful cross? But wait till He pronounces the sentence of condemnation on the judges, kings, and emperors of earth: then "the Lord shall be known when He executeth judgments." He still abandons Himself, as it were, to the wantonness and contempt of wicked men, as if He were unable to defend Himself or to restrain their malice; but let them fall into His hands on the day of His wrath: then they shall feel whom they have been fighting against, and what a mighty Lord He is whose anger they have provoked. "If," says the wise Ecclesiastes, "thou shalt see the oppression of the poor, and violent judgments, and justice perverted in the province, wonder not at this matter;" be not surprised at the prosperity of the wicked, the persecutions the just have to suffer, the oppression of poor widows and orphans, the pride and wantonness of the rich; "for he that is high hath another higher,"² who will one day justify His judgments before the whole world, and they who seemed to bear the globe on their shoulders shall have to bow down before Him.

Shown by an example after the manner of a simile.

In the History of Greece we read that the hero Agesilaus was small of stature but great in mind and valor, skilled in arms and generalship, and one of the greatest heroes of his time. King Agis had a great desire to see one of whose exploits he had heard so much; but when he met Agesilaus he began to ridicule him, and said in a mocking tone: "I behold an ant, when I

¹ Cognoscetur Dominus judicia faciens.—Ps. ix. 17.

² Si videris calumnias egenorum, et violenta judicia, et subverti justitiam in provincia, non mireris super hoc negotio; quia excelso excelsior est altius.—Eccles. vii. 7.

thought I should see a lion.”¹ Ready and clever was the answer Agesilaus gave the proud king: “I seem an ant to you,” said he, “but one day you shall find me out to be a lion.”² The same answer is suited to those who now during life do not fear the great God, despise Him, sin recklessly, and remain obstinately in sin as declared enemies of God. They see in our churches pictures or carved images representing our divine Lord in a very lowly and apparently despicable state, as a weak Child in the crib, or as a dying Man hanging on the cross, or else they know that He is concealed under the white Host from which no thunders or lightnings flash forth to announce His majesty, and from this they conceive a low idea of God, and do not fear to offend Him by transgressing His commandments. But He whom we now treat so contemptuously shall one day appear as a lion, and fill all creatures with awe by the might of His greatness. Be comforted, ye just and pious Christians! He who will judge us is an almighty God, and consequently He is able to defend you against those who now oppress you, and it is from Him that you have to expect the reward of your piety. But on the other hand, wo to us, O sinners! if we fall into the hands of this Judge burdened with debt. There is no chance of escape from Him, because He is the Almighty God!

Nor can you hope to hide anything from Him, because He is also an all-knowing God, from whom nothing can be concealed, with whom the rule, “deny, if you have done anything wrong, until the crime is proved,” will be of little avail. “God,” as St. Augustine beautifully says, “is all a hand, and can do everything, and He is also all an eye, and can see everything.”³ When a man commits a sin, he does not believe, or perhaps thinks not for the moment that the all-seeing eye of his Judge is on him. “Who seeth me?” he asks with the wicked man, in the Book of Ecclesiasticus; “darkness compasseth me about, and the walls cover me, and no man seeth me: whom do I fear?”⁴ I am shut in between four walls, and no one is aware of what I am doing. If I have a secret hatred against my neighbor, and try to do him harm here and there when I have the chance, who knows anything about it? I show nothing outwardly; I greet him in the

He is an all-seeing God, from whom nothing can remain hidden.

¹ Video formicam, cum putarem me visurum leonem.

² Videor tibi formica; sed ero aliquando leo.

³ Totus manus, et omnia potest, totus oculus, et omnia videt.

⁴ Quis me videt? Tenebræ circumdant me, et parietes cooperiunt me, et nemo circumspicit me; quem vereor?—Ecclesi. xxiii. 25, 26.

most friendly manner. If I have betrayed my neighbor, and caused him to suffer loss by craft, or bribery, or false testimony, who knows of it? It is all hidden under the mantle of the law. If I avail myself of all kinds of underhand practices in buying and selling, if I lie and cheat in business, who can find me out? So far no one has detected me. If I fish in troubled waters and make unlawful profit here and there, who can accuse me of it? If I amuse myself with all sorts of evil thoughts and desires, and wilfully entertain them, who knows anything about it? No one can suspect me of such a thing. If I entertain an unlawful intimacy and commit many sins in secret, not a soul can know of it; no one can read my guilt on my forehead. My husband thinks that I am true to him at all times; my parents believe that I have not lost my first innocence, that I know not what sin is; in the presence of others I am able to act as if I could not bear the sight of a certain person; all is kept quiet; there is not the least suspicion of anything, etc. So thinks the sinner. But, continues the Wise Man, "he understandeth not that His eye seeth all things;" that the eye of the omnipresent God beholds all things, and that the all-knowing Judge allows nothing to escape Him, but writes everything down in His great account-book: "And he knoweth not that the eyes of the Lord are far brighter than the sun, beholding round about all the ways of men, and the bottom of the deep, and looking into the hearts of men, into the most secret parts."¹

Then we shall be known as we are. Shown by a simile.

These words suggest to me a very apposite simile. Why does the Wise Man say that the eye of God is brighter and more piercing than the sun? Mark what I am going to say. In winter when the sun hardly shines and everything is covered with a mantle of snow, all things on earth appear to have the same white color and outward appearance, so that one is easily deceived in his judgment of them. There stands a tree in the garden; I have no doubt that it is a very fruitful tree, but in reality it is dead and useless. You imagine you see a beautiful pillar on a house, but it is nothing better than a long, black chimney, covered with snow. You think you have a fine, level road before you, but it is only a ravine filled with snow. But wait till the sun comes out again and melts the snow; then you will see all those things as they really are. My dear breth-

¹ Non intelligit quoniam omnia videt oculus illius. Et non cognovit quoniam oculi Domini multo plus lucidiores sunt super solem, circumspectentes omnes vias hominum, et profundum abyssi, et hominum corda, intuentes in absconditas partes.—Eccius. xxiii. 28.

ren, the time of our lives is a cold and stormy winter: "winter is now past,"¹ says the soul of the just man when departing from this world. During this gloomy season everything is under a cloud; most things are hidden by a heavy mantle of snow. We cannot distinguish between the wicked and the just, because we are unable to see their hearts. A man, as long as the contrary is not proved, must appear to us like a fruitful tree that brings forth all kinds of virtuous works daily. He visits the church regularly; he is most attentive to sermons and public devotions; yet in reality and before God he is an unfruitful, barren tree, that produces nothing but leaves; he is a hypocrite and deceiver, in whose good works a bad intention has the upper hand. Oh, what a pious, devout person that is, we often say; she goes frequently to confession and holy Communion! But in reality she is a great sinner, whose confessions and Communions are all sacrilegious, because she conceals a sin through shame, or remains in the proximate occasion of sin. "That man," we say, "is a most charitable man; he does so much for the poor; he has helped unfortunate citizens and peasants who were overwhelmed with debt;" but in reality he is an unjust usurer, whose only object is to get those poor people into his power that he may seize on all they have as payment of what they owe him. Another takes a great interest in the concerns of a poor widow, or undertakes to protect some young girl who has lost her parents; what would be more Christian or charitable? But his only object is to gratify his foul passions, and what can be more detestable than that? How is it that we are so deceived in our judgments? Ah! we cannot see everything; it is winter and the snow covers the earth. But wait a while; the day of the Lord shall come, on which the all-seeing eye of God, more piercing than the sun, shall melt the snow, and then we shall be able to see clearly what every one is in truth. With reason does Tertullian say: "Do what you will, O man, to hide your evil deeds; you must know that the God who shall judge you is an all-seeing Light."² "Nothing is covered that shall not be revealed, nor hid that shall not be known."³

O Christians! let us think and say with St. Bernard: "Great Therefore
is the necessity we are under of leading pious lives, since we act we must

¹ Jam hiems transit.—Cant. ii. 11.

² Quantascunq̄ue tenebras factis tuis superstruxeris; Deus lumen est.—Tertull. de pœnit. 11. c. 6.

³ Nihil enim est opertum, quod non revelabitur; et occultum, quod non scietur.—Matt. x. 26.

fear our
Judge.

before the eyes of a Judge who sees all things,"¹ a Judge who knows all our thoughts, intentions, desires, words, and works. O mortals! think and judge of me as you please, I hold with the holy Apostle, St. Paul: "To me it is a very small thing to be judged by you. He that judgeth me is the Lord."² Think and say of me, if you wish, that I am a good-for-nothing, wicked man; He who has to judge me is an all-knowing Lord. Happy me if I am found good in His sight! Think and say of me that I am a holy man; He who is to judge me is an all-seeing Lord. Wo to me if I am found wicked in His sight! "Therefore," concludes St. Augustine, "fear Him to whom everything is known;"³ fear that Judge who is an almighty, and at the same time an all-seeing God. And there is another point to be considered, which gives us still greater cause for dismay: fear, O mortal! Him who, when He shall judge us, shall be a God without mercy, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

In this life
God shows
His mercy
to men, but
hereafter
they shall
experience
only His
justice.

How can that be? A God, and without mercy? Those are terms which contradict each other. For is it possible to conceive the idea of a God without mercy? Does not the Catholic Church, relying on countless passages of Holy Writ, sing: "O God, of whose mercy there is no measure, and of whose goodness the treasures are infinite"?⁴ Does not the Prophet David call Him often a God of mercy, a gracious God? "The Lord is gracious and merciful, patient, and plenteous in mercy. The Lord is sweet to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works."⁵ Does not St. Paul call Him "the Father of mercies, the God of all comfort"?⁶ It is true, and therefore we often flatter ourselves that we need not fear being too presumptuous with Him. But the mercy of God is only for the time of our lives here on earth; that time past, it has fulfilled its office and gives way to justice alone. Hence the Lord commanded the Prophet Osee to call one of his daughters by the terrible

¹ Magna nobis est indicta necessitas prohibitatis, quando ante oculos agimus Judicis cuncta cernentis.

² Mihi autem pro minimo est ut a vobis judicer. Qui autem judicat me, Dominus est.—I. Cor. iv. 3, 4.

³ Time ergo eum, cui omne apertum est.

⁴ Deus cujus misericordiae non est numerus, et bonitatis infinitus est thesaurus.

⁵ Miserator et misericors Dominus; patiens et multum misericors. Suavis Dominus univ. et miseraciones ejus super omnia opera ejus.—Ps. cxlv. 8, 9.

⁶ Pater misericordiarum, et Deus totius consolationis.—II. Cor. i. 3.

name: "Without mercy: for I will not add any more to have mercy on the house of Israel."¹ Now there is no sin so great that He is not ready to forgive at the first moment of repentance; but hereafter there will not be the least fault that He shall not examine and punish with all the strictness of His justice. Nothing shall remain unavenged:² every farthing must be paid; not an idle word shall be passed over or forgiven without satisfaction. Even the works of the just shall with difficulty be allowed to pass: "When I shall take a time," says the Lord, "I will judge justices."³

And this is but right; the divine honor requires that a time should come in which the severity of His justice shall be made manifest, as His other perfections are shown to the world. In the creation God showed His almighty power; for with one word, *fiat*, He made the universe out of nothing. In the government of the world He shows His admirable wisdom, for His providence has appointed many different states for men to live in. In the Redemption He shows His goodness and mercy, for He offered Himself as a Victim for the salvation of men, and was nailed to a cross for them, and the same mercy is daily made manifest in the patience with which He bears with sinners. His boundless magnificence and liberality He shows in heaven, where every momentary good work shall reap an eternal reward; His hatred and detestation of sin are made evident in the eternal hell, where He punishes even a momentary mortal sin of thought. It is His justice alone that has not been exhibited to the world hitherto. And God has appointed the last day of the world as the time for showing that special perfection to men; and therefore He calls it: The great day of the Lord; the day of wrath; the bitter day; the day of calamity, on which He shall judge all nations in His justice.

The mercy of God itself requires that severity and merciless strictness in the judgment. Why? It has been and is still so often abused by men during life; and what is still more insulting to this divine attribute, sinners take occasion from it to offend God with all the more hardihood. Thus countless millions of sins are committed because God is infinitely good and merciful. Is it not right, then, that this insulted mercy and

And the divine honor requires that.

As also His mercy.

¹ *Voca nomen ejus. Absque misericordia, quia non addam ultra misereri domui Israel.—Osee 1. 6.*

² *Nil inultum remanebit.*

³ *Cum accepero tempus, ego justitias judicabo.—Ps. lxxiv. 3.*

goodness should be fully avenged on the presumption that so recklessly despised it? And that it will surely be. "I have always held My peace," says the Lord by the Prophet Isaias; "I have kept silence; I have been patient."¹ I have long listened to cursing, swearing, blasphemy, detraction; I have seen the pride of My Christians, their injustices, vindictiveness, riotings, impurities, secret adulteries; I have for a long time had to suffer patiently many acts of contempt and disobedience against My sacred laws; I have held My peace all the while; I have kept silence; I have acted as if it did not concern Me; I have restrained Myself from inflicting on men the punishments that I threatened them with in Holy Writ, and that they saw exemplified in the case of other men, as if I were powerless to defend Myself against the wantonness and wickedness of sinners; but when that time comes, that great day of wrath and anger, I will show them what I am. "I will be to them as a lioness, as a leopard in the way of the Assyrians. I will meet them as a bear that is robbed of her whelps, . . . and I will devour them as a lion;"² they will feel the heavy weight of My justice. O my good God! I acknowledge that I have up to the present moment experienced Thy incomprehensible patience and mercy, and it should impel me to love Thee with my whole heart and soul and strength; it should give me hope and courage to work out my salvation; but that very patience and mercy which I have so unjustly misused fill me with a greater dread of the severity of the judgment that awaits me.

Like David
we have
reason to
fear this
Judge.

Ah, my dear brethren, then they will see the Son of man coming; then we shall all behold that almighty, all-wise God, but without mercy: just, angry, and embittered! And how will it be with us then? *Quantus tremor est futurus, quando Judex est venturus!* What fear and trembling there will be among the wicked in presence of their Judge! Who can stand before Him? I consider the case of King David, hurled from his throne by a disobedient son, abandoned and hunted by his own people, and wandering about in misery, and I pity him; but I tremble at the same time when I hear him in the midst of his calamities calling out fervently to God, not for help and alleviation of his sufferings, but for grace in the day of judgment, and that, too, out of sheer fright. "Hear, O Lord, my prayer; give ear to my sup-

¹ Tacui semper, sicut, patiens fui.—Is. xlii. 14.

² Ero eis quasi leena, sicut pardus in via Assyriorum. Occurram eis quasi ursa, raptis catulis. . . . et consumam eos ibi quasi leo.—Osee xlii. 7, 8.

plication in Thy truth; hear me in Thy justice!" And he adds the reason of his earnest supplications: "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight no man living shall be justified."¹ I do not ask Thee to free me from the persecution I have to suffer from my own son, or from the other miseries that afflict me; I should be calm and undisturbed in the midst of any temporal misfortunes and trials if I could only have the consolation of not coming under the strictness of Thy justice, for I know that no man can justify himself in Thy sight.

I hear Job on the dung-hill crying out full of anguish and fear ^{And holy Job.} in the midst of terrible sufferings: "What shall I do when God shall rise to judge? and when he shall examine, what shall I answer Him?"² Ah, innocent and holy man, art thou in doubt as to how thou shalt fare, as to what thou shalt answer? If so, wo to me! for I should be well off if I could answer as readily as thou. Answer what thy own Judge said of thee, and He will not be able to contradict it; for He has given testimony that thou art "a man simple, upright, and fearing God, and avoiding evil."³ Would to God that I could say the same of myself! Answer: "My heart doth not reprehend me in all my life."⁴ Would to God that I could say that, too, of myself! Answer that after the loss of all thy goods, the slaying of thy children, in the torments thou hadst to suffer, thou hast never sinned with thy lips, wert always resigned to the divine will, and didst bless the name of the Lord. Answer that whatever small faults thou didst commit were most amply atoned for by thy generous alms, and by the sufferings thou didst bear with such patience. Ah, would that I could say as much for myself! Answer: "I was clad with justice. . . . I was an eye to the blind and a foot to the lame. I was the father of the poor,"⁵ a comforter of the afflicted. And yet thou art afraid of the judgment of God, and dost not know what to do! Alas! let me and other sinners ask: "What shall I do?" God will come to judge me, and I have done none of the praiseworthy things that stand to thy credit; what shall I do?

¹ Domine, exaudi orationem meam. Auribus percipe obsecrationem meam in veritate tua. Exaudi me in tua justitia. Non intres in iudicium cum servo tuo; quia non justificabitur in conspectu tuo omnis vivens.—Ps. cxlii. 1, 2.

² Quid faciam cum surrexerit ad iudicandum Deus? et cum quaesierit, quid respondebo illi?—Job xxxi. 14.

³ Vir ille simplex et rectus, ac timens Deum, et recedens a malo.—Ibid. i. 1.

⁴ Neque enim reprehendit me cor meum in omni vita mea.—Ibid. xxvii. 6.

⁵ Justitia indutus sum....Oculus fui caeco, et pes claudio. Pater eram pauperum.—Ibid. xxix. 14-16.

From the first dawn of reason I can hardly point to one day of my life on which my conscience has not reproached me with sin: "When He shall examine, what shall I answer Him?" If He asks me for an account of the many graces and benefits He bestowed on me; what shall I answer Him? If He asks me how I have performed the duties and obligations of my state of life; what shall I answer Him? If He asks me how I have spent the precious time for so many months, days, and hours, of which not one moment should have passed without my doing something for my salvation; what shall I answer Him? If He asks me whether I have ordered my whole life according to the law of His holy Gospel; what shall I answer Him? And when in addition to all these questions He will deal with me in the strictness of His justice without any mercy, and not allow an idle thought or a vain word to escape notice; what shall I do?

St. Jerome
and other
hermits.

Alas! I hear, too, in the midst of the desert among wild beasts, a St. Jerome, emaciated with penances, striking his breast with a stone, and crying out: "When I think of that day, my whole body trembles,"¹ and a death-sweat breaks out on my forehead! Whether I am eating or fasting, sleeping or praying, the sound of the terrible trumpet echoes in my ears: "Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment!" If I go in thought farther into the desert, there I find the holiest of the hermits, Hilarion, Arsenius, Agathon, who could not conceal their fear and dismay; and when asked by their disciples what cause they had to fear, "Ah," they replied, "the judgments of God are different from those of men!"² I read of three devout pilgrims who travelled to the Holy Land; they came to the valley of Josaphat, which is surrounded by forests and mountains, and has by no means a melancholy aspect. Wandering to and fro, one of them found a large, flat stone; he considered it for a while and said: as this is to be the place in which the whole world shall be judged on the last day, I will now seek out a suitable position for myself, and take possession of it. He sat down on the stone and raised his eyes with awe-stricken devotion to heaven, when he had a momentary vision of Our Lord as He shall come to judge the living and the dead at the last day. The pilgrim was so terrified thereat that he fell in a swoon from the stone and was picked up half dead. Little by little he came to himself, but from that day forward was never

¹ Quoties diem illum considero, toto corpore contremisco.—S. Hieron. in Matt.

² *Alla sunt iudicia Dei, alia hominum.*

seen to laugh, while the bare mention of the last judgment in conversation or in a sermon was enough to make him shudder and grow pallid, till he resembled a corpse more than a living man.

But, holy friends of God, why are you so fearful and timid? You have always endeavored to do the divine will in all things; for God's sake you have renounced all earthly joys and pleasures; you have lived seventy, eighty, ninety years in strict penance, serving your God, and do you still fear His justice? And why should that be so? Look at that man, that woman, that youth, that maiden; they are not half so frightened as you, although their conscience reproaches them with many sins. Few are the hours they have spent duly serving God; they know naught of self-denial, mortification, chastising the flesh, inflicting penances on themselves; they are not accustomed to bear the least cross with patience; their thoughts are mostly directed to leading a comfortable life, to vanity, and a constant round of pleasures, and with all this they do not even think of the last judgment, to say nothing of fearing it; they eat, drink, laugh, play, and amuse themselves as calmly as if they had not to appear before any Judge. In truth, my dear brethren, I am not able to explain this. Either those holy souls, so enlightened by God, were the victims of an unreasonable fear, or they merely pretended to be afraid, or else many of us do not know what they had to fear. For if David, a man after God's own heart, who washed his couch with tears of repentance, and Job, who had not his equal for piety in his day, and SS. Anthony, Hilarion, Arsenius, Agathon, and others whose austerities were prodigious—if they feared to appear before the tribunal of God, what have they to rely on who devote the most of their time to the service of the world and of their bodies? Who will be safe in Babylon if Jerusalem is to be judged so strictly? If the pillars of the church tremble with fear, what is to become of the worm-eaten timbers? In a word, as St. Peter says, “if the just man shall scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”¹

O my God, what am I to do? Must I lose courage altogether and despair of my salvation? No; for there is still time for grace, and since that is so I will at once appease my Judge with sincere repentance. Now, while the mercy of God surpasses all His works, I will cry out with a contrite heart in the words of the

Much more should sinners and tepid Christians fear.

Conclusion and resolution to appease our Judge by leading better lives.

¹ *Si justus vix salvabitur, impius et peccator ubi parebunt*—I. Pet. iv. 18.

Catholic Church: "O just Judge, forgive me my sins before the day of reckoning comes!"¹ If I have transgressed and transgressed often and grievously, so that Thou hast just cause to condemn me, still Thy goodness is infinite, so that Thou canst heal me and save me! Now while there is time for amendment I will make friends with my Judge by earnest, sincere repentance, by a thorough change of life, by true humility, by renouncing all vain earthly joys, and by the diligent practice of good works; so that when I shall one day see Him coming in great power and majesty, I shall have more reason to rejoice than to dread His strict justice. Amen.

Another introduction to the same sermon for the first Sunday of Advent.

Text.

Tunc videbunt Filium hominis venientem in nube cum potestate magna, et majestate.—Luke xxi. 27.

"Then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud with great power and majesty."

Introduction.

Terrible shall be the coming of the incarnate Son of God on that day of judgment! Signs shall be seen in the sun, moon, and stars; the swollen sea shall fill all hearts with dread by its roaring and rushing waves; men shall wither away with fear! But all that does not frighten me. These things are mere forerunners of the general fear that is to follow. "Then they shall see the Son of man coming with great power and majesty;" that is the sole cause of the dismay that fills my mind. With reason does the Church sing, etc. *Continues as above.*

THIRTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON THE JUDGE AS MAN.

Subject.

He who will judge us is Jesus Christ, a Man like unto us; but He is not less to be feared by the sinner on that account: 1. because the Man who will judge us shall then be quite

¹ *Iuste Judex ultionis, donum fac remissionis, ante diem rationis!*

changed towards the sinner. 2. Because the sinner who shall be judged shall then be unworthy of pity or mercy from that Man.
—*Preached on the fourth Sunday of Advent.*

Text.

Et videbit omnis caro salutare Dei.—Luke iii. 6.

“And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

Introduction.

Dear Saviour! is it Thou who art to be our Judge on that day when all flesh shall rise from the grave? If so, why did I in the last sermon cause such alarm to myself and others by representing our Judge as a strict and merciless God? Thou art Man like to us, and hast loved us even to death. So it is, dear Christians. Rejoice, for we have a good Judge; our case will be tried under favorable circumstances. Rejoice then, pious Christians, who by your virtuous lives remain always in the friendship of your Judge. But sinners, alas! as far as you are concerned, you have just as much reason to fear as ever, unless you turn from your evil ways. He who will judge us is Jesus Christ, a Man like ourselves, that is true; but the sinner has no less reason for fear on that account, as I now proceed to show.

Plan of Discourse.

Because the Man who will judge us shall then be quite different towards the sinner from what He now is: the first part. Because the sinner who is to be judged shall then be unworthy of pity or mercy from his Judge: the second part. Therefore let us change our lives in time if we wish to find our Judge favorable to us: the conclusion.

And we hope that the same Judge will give us grace to observe it, through the intercession of Mary and of our holy angels.

Amongst all the titles that are given to Our Lord in the Gospels, there is none more common than “The Son of man.” He Himself hardly ever speaks of Himself otherwise than as “The Son of man.” Why is that, my dear brethren? To show that, as He has assumed our mortal nature, and become Man like to us, He has also taken on Himself the same tenderness, sensibility, and mildness which urge men to have compassion on those who are suffering. And truly there never was, and never will be a

Christ is the most gentle and meekest of men.

man so mild and compassionate, so friendly and meek, as **Jesus Christ the Son of man**, that is, of Mary. The holy precursor St. John cried out as soon as he saw Him: "Behold the Lamb of God."¹ What is meeker or milder than a lamb, in which there is no guile? When the prophets describe the future Messiah, they all give that as the first mark by which He is to be known: His mildness. "He shall not cry," says Isaias, "neither shall His voice be heard abroad."² He will not even open His mouth to speak in a loud voice. He will be a Man, says the Prophet David, "that hath no reproofs in His mouth."³ "He shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer," says Isaias again, "and He shall not open His mouth."⁴

His life was a constant example of meekness even towards sinners.

Of His own virtues, Christ proposes for our special imitation His meekness and patience: "Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart."⁵ What else has His whole life been but the constant practice of meekness? When did He ever show the least anger or indignation, except in the case of the Scribes and Pharisees, when there was question of His Father's honor? What patience did He not show in His daily intercourse with His disciples, who were still very ignorant and full of imperfections? How friendly and lovingly did He not deal even with the worst sinners, without ever upbraiding them with their wickedness? How often did He not prove the sensibility of His heart for the woes of others, when He met with people who were afflicted and in trouble; when He actually mingled His tears with theirs? Not a single word of complaint did He utter even in His cruel passion against His torturers, but rather prayed for them while He was hanging on the cross, and begged of His heavenly Father to forgive them. And to prove still clearer that He has the greatest love and affection for us, He calls Himself our Friend, our Father, our Brother, our Spouse. To give hope and courage to sinners, He says that He is their Pledge, their Advocate, their Mediator with His angry Father; that He is the Intercessor between God and man to repair all that is broken. "There is one God," says St. Paul, "and one Mediator of God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a redemption for all."⁶

¹ Ecce Agnus Dei.—John i. 29.

² Non clamabit, nec audietur vox ejus foris.—Is. xlii. 2.

³ Non habens in ore suo redargutiones.—Ps. xxxvii. 15.

⁴ Quasi agnus coram tondente se obmutescet, et non aperiet os suum.—Is. lili. 7.

⁵ Discite a me, quia mitis sum et humilis corde.—Matt. xi. 29.

⁶ Unus enim Deus, unus et mediator Dei et hominum, homo Christus Jesus, qui dedit redemptionem semetipsum pro omnibus.—I. Tim. ii. 5, 6.

O sinner! hear the consoling words of St. John: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ." No matter how great your sins are, do not despair; have good hope and courage, for we have as our Advocate the only begotten Son of the Eternal Father, who has gone bail for us, and offered Himself as full atonement: "And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."¹

O meekest Saviour! gentle Son of man! let me here again ask Thee, in the words that Thy precursor St. John said to Thee by his disciples, "Art Thou He that art to come?" Art Thou the Man that art to come as the Judge of the living and the dead? "Or look we for another?"² No, no other; I am the one! "The Father hath given all judgment to the Son."³ To what Son? To that very Son who, meek and patient as a lamb, had not a word of contradiction in His mouth. "Then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud,"⁴ says St. Luke, speaking of the last judgment, as we have seen already. Away, then, with all fear and dread! I repeat: if that Man who has just been described is to be my Judge, I could not have or wish for any one better, or more favorable, or more gracious. No; it is Thou, Jesus Christ, my Saviour, and no other, whom I expect and desire as my Judge!

So that we might imagine we have no reason to fear Him as Judge.

But, alas! I am not over-confident when I consider my own misdeeds, and the possibility of falling unrepentant into the hands even of this Man. O sinner, do not flatter yourself with a vain hope! Yes, it is that very Man who will judge you; but ah, He will be quite changed and altered from what He was before, from what He is at present towards you. All His mildness and tenderness shall be turned into severity and bitterness; all His pity into sternness; all His meekness into anger and indignation, when you shall behold Him coming in His power and glory. All the titles He has assumed out of love for men shall then be no longer used by Him; it will not then be said of Him: "Behold the Lamb of God; behold Him who taketh away the sins of the world,"⁵ but rather: behold "a lion ravening and

But He shall then be quite changed towards the sinner.

¹ Si quis peccaverit, advocatum habemus apud Patrem, Jesum Christum justum; et ipse est propitiatio pro peccatis nostris; non pro nostris autem tantum, sed etiam pro totius mundi.—I. John ii. 1, 2.

² Tu es qui venturus es, an alium expectamus?—Matt. xi. 3.

³ Pater omne judicium dedit Filio.—John v. 22.

⁴ Tunc videbunt Filium hominis venientem in nube.—Luke xxi. 27.

⁵ Ecce Agnus Dei, ecce qui tollit peccata mundi.—John i. 29.

roaring,"¹ who comes to devour His enemies! Father, Brother, Friend, Spouse, Saviour, Mediator, Intercessor, our Pledge with God; alas, there is an end of all that! His only name and title when He shall appear on His throne will be that of a strict Judge, whose duty and obligation it is to condemn those who are convicted of guilt, and sentence them to public execution, but in no way whatever to intercede for them or obtain a mitigation of their sentence.

Shown by
an example
after the
manner of a
simile.

A Greek philosopher was offered the position of judge, and as is usual in such cases, his wife, children, friends, and neighbors came to congratulate him; but all he said to them was: "In future I look on myself as a stranger to all of you."² Wife, thou knowest my heart and affections, and how I have loved thee hitherto. Children, you know that I have cared for you up to this as for myself. Friends, I have always been faithful to you, as you are well aware. But pardon me if I now speak the truth to you; I must be a stranger to you henceforth; all our relations are at an end; the change of office has also brought a change in my love and affection; I am now your judge, and therefore I cease to be your husband, father, and friend. Look on me therefore in future not otherwise than as a stranger. His meaning was: my present duties have no regard for love or friendship; if you commit a crime, I shall punish you just as I would any other criminal. Christian souls! in the same strain and even more emphatically will Jesus Christ, the most just of all judges, speak to you on the day when He shall appear in His majesty and glory, and seat Himself on His tribunal before heaven and earth: Christian soul! thou knowest the tender affection and love I have always had for thee during thy life on earth, as long as thou didst remain My faithful spouse in the state of sanctifying grace; thou knowest that while thou wert My child I loved thee better than My own life, which I gave up in pain and disgrace for thy sake that I might enrol thee among the number of My children, and keep thee there forever; thou knowest that I have often admitted thee to My Table, and fed thee with My own body and blood, or at least that I was daily prepared to give thee this heavenly food. Thou must also acknowledge that when thou wert actually abandoning, despising, offending Me as thy sworn Enemy, and treating

¹ Leo rapiens et rugiens.—Ps. xxi. 14.

² Jam abhinc me a vobis alienum puto.

Me most unjustly while thou wert in the state of sin, I did not even then cease to heap benefits on thee; that for years and years I have borne with thee most patiently; that I have often gone after thee like a beggar imploring a crust of bread, and knocked at the door of thy heart, pressing as it were with violence on thee My grace and the pardon of thy sins; that as Mediator, Intercessor, and Pledge, I have promised to reconcile thee with My heavenly Father. But now I am neither thy Spouse, nor Father, nor Friend, nor Pledge, nor Advocate; My office is changed; I am nothing now but thy Judge, and all I have to do with thee is after a strict examination of all thy actions to exact full satisfaction for all thy sins, even to the last farthing, and as thou art not able to pay, to condemn thee to eternal flames. Alas, how different that is to what He used to say! "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."¹ Yes, that was true; but it is so no longer; the Man has changed. O meekest Saviour! remember, I beg of Thee, how often Thou hast said: "Go then and learn what *this* meaneth: I will have mercy and not sacrifice. For I am not come to call the just, but sinners."² True, such was the case then; but it is so no longer; now I am come to judge the living and the dead; now I am come to call the just to heaven, and to condemn the wicked to the everlasting flames of hell.

And, O Judge of infinite holiness, I must acknowledge that Thou art perfectly right! Thou canst not do otherwise; Thou shalt be compelled to turn Thy patience and meekness into wrath and indignation, and to deal with the guilty according to the strictness of Thy justice. You yourselves, O sinners, must acknowledge that when the crime in question is clearly proven and the perpetrator of it convicted, and he himself confesses his guilt, and when moreover the crime is clearly one that deserves the gallows, then there is no longer place for grace or mercy; the judge has no power to pardon, but is forced to sentence the criminal according to the rigor of the law, even if it were his own son whom he has to condemn to the extreme penalty. Now on that day, when the great account-book is opened, in which all our thoughts, words, and actions are written down; when moreover the consciences of all men shall be laid bare

Nay, as He is a just Judge, He must change towards the sinner.

¹ Venit enim Filius hominis querere et salvum facere quod perierat.—Luke xix. 10.

² Euntes autem discite quid est: Misericordiam volo, et non sacrificium. Non enim veni vocare justos, sed peccatores.—Matt. ix. 13.

³ Liber scriptus proferretur in quo totum continetur, unde mundus judicetur.

before heaven and earth; when besides, as we all know, the divine law condemns to hell all who are found guilty of mortal sin that they have not blotted out during life by sincere repentance; what else can the Son of man as the Judge of all men, appointed to that office by His heavenly Father,—what else can He do but punish the guilty according to the strictness of the law? All the circumstances of the case are evident, and nothing remains but to pronounce the terrible sentence: “Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels.”¹ But, O God of goodness, if a judge appointed by the sovereign has not the power of showing mercy to the convicted criminal, yet we know that that power is held and is often used by the sovereign himself. Now Thou art the King of kings, and the only law-giver. Canst Thou not then respite a poor mortal in this case, and save him from eternal torments, or at least sentence him to a milder form of punishment? No! “I am the Lord, and I change not.”² I am the Lord, and never retract what I have once uttered: “Heaven and earth shall pass away: but My words shall not pass away,”³ nor be frustrated. And, my dear brethren, suppose that Our Lord could change His law, and as supreme Judge show mercy on the last day; to whom should He show it? To the sinner, who departs this life without repentance? But for what reason? There must be some motive to urge the Judge to be merciful in such a case. And no such motive is at hand; for the sinner who is to be condemned shall then be utterly unworthy of any favor or mercy from his Judge, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

For three reasons the sovereign may pardon a criminal.

There are three motives which can move the judge to pity, or justify the sovereign in dispensing the poor criminal from suffering the extreme penalty of the law. First, when the crime is committed through accident or misfortune, without deliberation and for the first time. In such a case something is accorded to human weakness; for instance, if a man who is otherwise peaceably inclined happens to be overcome by drink, and in a fit of passion plunges his sword into the bosom of his friend. Hardly is the crime committed when he bewails his unfortunate

¹ *Discedite a me, maledicti, in ignem æternum, qui paratus est diabolo, et angelis ejus.—Matt. xxv. 41.*

² *Ego enim Dominus, et non mutor.—Malach. iii. 6.*

³ *Cœlum et terra transibunt; verba autem me non transibunt.—Luke xxi. 33.*

friend with bitter tears, and actually gives himself up to justice, acknowledging that he deserves death. All agree that a homicide of that kind deserves compassion, and should be treated far more leniently than one who is always on the look-out for quarrels, and deliberately attacks a man and kills him. The crime of the first was due to sheer misfortune; that of the second to malice. Again, if the guilty person is of importance in the country, or of a good family, or nearly related to the judge himself, he is generally dealt with more mildly, or even released altogether from punishment. But if he is a stranger, unknown, a bad character, caught amongst the hedges and ditches, and convicted of crime, then there is no mercy for him; he must away to the gallows. Thirdly, the sovereign is often moved to pity and pardon, or at least to mitigate the sentence of one who has the tears of his wife and children, or the favor of some powerful man to intercede for him. Oh, how many would have lost their lives if it were not for such intercessors!

Mark, O sinner, how ill provided you are in this way! If we die in the state of mortal sin, neither you nor I shall have one of these motives to plead for us, even if the Judge were capable of changing; nor shall there be anything whatever to move Him to be favorable or merciful. We shall examine the matter in order according to the rules of right reason.

None of these shall avail the sinner before Christ.

And, in the first place, shall we be able to allege that our past sins and obstinacy in remaining in them was merely the result of weakness, or indeliberation, or accidental misfortune? But how could we say that? Were we not well aware when we committed the guilty act that impurity, vindictiveness, injustice, gross uncharity, voluntary intoxication, or grievous scandal must be a mortal sin? Did we not know that the sovereign God, to whom we owe all respect, obedience, reverence, and love, is grievously dishonored by such actions, and that they offend and insult Him before His very eyes? Did we not firmly believe that the same God has strictly forbidden each and every mortal sin under pain of eternal damnation? And in spite of all this we have not restrained ourselves, but of our own free will, with full deliberation, for some wretched thing, to gratify our senses, to make some trifling profit, to please a mortal creature, we have accomplished the sinful act.

Because he has sinned wilfully and maliciously.

Have we not had examples enough of condemnations to eternal torments, examples that were intended to warn and terrify us,

Because he had examples

enough of
people who
were con-
demned for
having
sinned.

for those and similar sins? Millions of angels, creatures of a far higher order and much more capable of serving God than we are, sinned only by a momentary thought, and at once, without mercy, without having a minute granted them for repentance, like lightning they were hurled by the divine justice into the abyss of hell. That we have believed. Our forefather Adam sinned against the divine command by eating one mouthful of an apple, and he was at once turned out of paradise and condemned to eternal death with all his posterity. We still feel and suffer the hard punishments of this first sin; to atone for it the God of infinite justice and mercy allowed His only Son to be crucified on the gibbet of the cross, and cruelly done to death. That we have believed. Countless human beings have been condemned to hell for their sins, and they are burning there now and will burn forever. That we have believed. And yet it has not had the slightest influence on us; we have sinned without hesitation, shame, or fear. Can such guilt be attributed to mere misfortune? Can it be called deserving of mercy or pity? Does it not rather resemble the conduct of the thief who robs his very judge on the place of execution, while another thief is being put to death for a similar crime?

Because he
wilfully
persisted in
sin without
repentance.

And how could we lay the blame of our sins on human weakness if we remained in them without doing penance? It is true, says St. Gregory, that a man sometimes commits a sin on account of a very alluring occasion, or because he gives way to temptation through the violence of his evil passions and inclinations; but after the sin he enters into himself, repents, and heartily detests the guilty action. Such a case indeed deserves pity, and can well be ascribed to human weakness; for "to sin is human, but to persist in sin diabolical."¹ But not to rise again after the fall, to remain in sin for a long time, to put off repentance and wilfully expose one's self to danger while death is liable to surprise one at any moment, and bring with it eternal damnation; that indeed is devilish, nay, worse than devilish, for the demons have never had a moment granted them in which to repent. And is not this the very state of him who dies in mortal sin? Does not the divine mercy concede him time and opportunity enough to repent of and confess his sins, and free himself from his misery if he wishes? Meanwhile he has not profited of that time, but has remained for weeks, months, and years in sin, until

¹ Peccare humanum est, perseverare diabolicum.

he is at last surprised by death. Could such a man lay any claim to pity, mercy, or grace from the Judge whom he has despised? No! Such a thought would be a presumption that should arouse the indignation of any reasoning man.

Again; I go, for instance, along the street, and see a dog lying there, lamed and crippled, and howling most piteously; oh! I say to myself, that is only a brute beast; he may die there for all I care; and I go along my way in utter indifference, or at most, if the matter interests me in any way, I should in all probability ask some one to kill the dog in order to stop his howling. On the other hand, if I met even the lowliest mendicant in a similar condition, I should certainly try to help him if my heart were not of stone. Why so? Because he is a man who has the same nature, and therefore some relationship with myself. All we human beings are members of the same Head, and therefore we must sympathize with the misfortunes of our fellow-men, as St. Paul says: "If one member suffer anything, all the members suffer with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members of member."¹ We have not the same feelings of sympathy and compassion for a dog or another animal, because they are not united with us by community of nature. Now tell me: is the sinner in any way related to our future Judge, so that He should have some reason for pitying the guilty one who is sentenced to eternal torments? As long as a Christian is in this life he is one of the members of Jesus Christ, from whose mystic body he is, so to speak, never separated, as long as he does not apostatize from the true faith; therefore on account of that relationship Christ is always full of pity for even the greatest and most wicked sinners; He is always running after them to offer them His grace, and He speaks inwardly to their hearts to warn and rescue them from the state of sin and bring them to heaven. But after death, on the day of judgment, he who persists in sin shall no longer be related to Christ, nor concern Him any more than a dead dog now concerns me; for all relationship is broken off, and the sinner is not merely a rotten member, but is actually and completely separated from the body of Christ. Now an amputated foot, as we know, cannot cause pain; it may rot and be thrown out on the dung-hill like any other piece of carrion. "Depart from Me, you cursed," shall Our Lord say to the repro-

Because after death the sinner is no longer related to Christ.

¹ Si quid patitur unum membrum, compatiuntur omnia membra. Vos autem estis corpus Christi, et membra de membro.—I. Cor. xii. 26, 27.

bate; you are condemned and cast off; I know you no more; you are not members of Mine; you will never have part with Me, and therefore I have not and cannot have any pity for you in your eternal misery.

Because he has no one to plead for him.

Finally, where are the patrons, the petitions, the sighs and appeals for mercy? Where are the tears that should flow on the last day to implore pardon for the sinner? Unhappy sinner, look around you and see if there is anyone to put in a word for you with your Judge! Look up! See Mary the Mother of mercy, the Refuge of sinners; she can do anything with her divine Son; perhaps she may help you? Look up and see the great host of saints, friends and children of God, the choirs of angels and ministers at the great Throne; can they do something for you? Alas! a vain hope. They, too, know you no longer! "The sun shall be darkened," says the Gospel of that terrible day: and not only will the Sun of justice, Jesus Christ, be obscured for the sinner, but also "the moon shall not give her light:" Mary, that bright Moon, shall have no light for him; "and the stars shall fall from heaven:" the chosen saints, those brilliant stars in the firmament, shall fall, that is, they shall have neither the power nor the will to help the sinner by even a single word uttered in his favor; "the powers of heaven shall be moved:" that is, the angels shall rise up against the sinner and drive him out of the chosen flock of Christ as a loathsome goat. And is there no one then to implore the mercy of the Judge for him? No; not one.

Because all the just shall cry out for vengeance on him.

But if, on the contrary, many voices shall be raised to embitter the Judge's anger, what shall then become of the sinner's hope? If an earthly judge saw before him the bleeding corpse of a murdered man, which in itself cries loudly enough for vengeance, and heard moreover the lamentations of the widow, the cries of the poor orphans calling out: Justice, O judge! there is the assassin who murdered our dear one and reduced us to this destitute condition, for we have no one now to provide for us; justice therefore on the wretch! let there be no mercy for him! what would you think, my dear brethren? There is no doubt that even if the judge were at first inclined to be merciful, those circumstances would inflame him with anger and turn his compassion into fury. And, O sinner! there shall be similar voices crying out for vengeance on you at the last day. Your own soul shall cry out against your body and say: this is the wretch that

has slain me with its impure desires and love of luxury! And the body will cry out against the soul: this is the wretch that has conceded so much to my sensuality, and not held me in check by its reason, as it should have done; thus it has become the cause of my eternal damnation! And such, too, shall be the exclamations of all those whom you have led into sin by unlawful gestures and signs, by wicked talk, by impure solicitations, and love-letters, by indecency in dress, and bad example: this is the man, O just Judge, who has robbed us of our innocence! He it is who has taught us what we should never have learned! He it is who has led us so far astray that we have offended Thee! Children shall cry out against their father and mother: my parents are the murderers of my soul; they should have brought me up to Thy service, O Judge, but they neglected their duty and taught me nothing but the vanity and sinful customs of the world, or else they allowed me to indulge in them and did not punish me on account of that as they should have done. Such, too, shall be the cries of the weak whom you have oppressed and persecuted, of servants, laborers, and tradesmen whom you have defrauded of their just wages. Your wife shall accuse you of having treated her worse than a servant, and of having spent what belonged to her in drinking and debauchery, so that she had to suffer hunger with her children. All these will cry out in the words of the Apocalypse: "How long, O Lord! (holy and true) dost Thou not judge and revenge our blood?"¹ And this is what the Holy Ghost prophesied long ago by the Wise Man: "Then shall the just stand with great constancy against those that have afflicted them,"² and against all by whom they have been in any way persecuted and oppressed during life.

From this we may conclude what sort of a sentence he has to expect on the last day who dies in the state of sin, and whether he has any reason to hope for grace or mercy from the otherwise meek and gentle Son of man. Oh, truly! neither the Judge, who will then be quite changed from what He now is, shall feel the least pity for the sinner, nor shall the latter have the least title to mercy. Therefore, Christians, let us fear, honor, and always love with our whole hearts the Man who will come to judge the living and the dead. Alas! Jesus, my Saviour and Redeemer, if I should be so unfortunate as to leave the world in the state of mortal

Conclusion
and resolution
to keep
in Our
Lord's
friendship.

¹ Usque quo, Domine (sanctus et verus) non iudicas, et non vindicas sanguinem nostrum?—Apoc. vi. 10.

² Tunc stabunt iusti in magna constantia adversus eos qui se angustiaverunt.—Wis. v. 1.

sin (may God save me from such a fate!), how terrible it will be to appear before Thee and to see Thee so changed and embittered towards me! How could I bear that change? I have never seen Thee as yet. Happy they who have beheld Thee as an Infant in the crib, or as a Victim for our sins on the cross! I have not had that happiness; but I believe without seeing! My faith convinces me that Thou art my only happiness, and alone canst satiate all the desires of my heart; my hopes and desires draw me constantly thither where I can behold my sovereign Good; and when I see Thee for the first time, must it be also for the last time for all eternity? And during the short time that I shall be in Thy presence, must I see Thee only as my Judge and, alas! as a terrible, angry, implacable Judge who will condemn me, and as the first welcome will address to me the words, "Depart from Me;" away, accursed one, into eternal fire? Sinful soul! what are you waiting for after such thoughts as these? Are you not yet resolved to do penance, to amend your life, and to escape such a terrible judgment? Wicked desires, sinful joys of the wanton flesh, money, and temporal goods, point of honor, human respect, vanity of the world, beauty of a mortal creature, will you still so blind me that for your sake I shall commit sin and make an Enemy of my Judge? What could be more foolish or more desperate? No; meek and gentle as Thou art, Jesus, my Saviour, "I am afraid of Thy judgments,"¹ and therefore as far as my past life is concerned, I will cry out to Thee with a contrite heart, and bewail all my sins.² I acknowledge myself to be a poorsinner; I bow my head with shame before Thee. Pardon me, O Jesus, before Thou comest to judge me! And with regard to the uncertain time that remains to me, I shall at once begin to lead a better life, so that when I see Thee as my Judge Thou shalt not be changed towards me, but be the same meek and loving Man as Thou always art. Amen.

Another introduction to the same sermon for the second Sunday of Advent.

Text.

Tu es qui venturus es, an alium expectamus?—Matt. xi. 3.
 "Art Thou He that art to come, or look we for another?"

¹ A iudiciis enim tuis timui.—Ps. cxviii. 120.

² Ingemisco tanquam reus, culpa rubet vultus meus, supplicanti parce Deus.

Introduction.

Dearest Saviour! I too must at once, without further delay, ask Thee with the disciples of Thy precursor St. John, "Art Thou He that art to come" on that day to judge the world, "or look we for another?" Go, was Our Lord's answer to the disciples of St. John, and tell your master what you have seen and heard; from that he will see who I am. Go, he says to me too, and announce to My people what you have seen in the Apostles' Creed: "from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead." Yes, I am He. And if so, why have I on a former occasion so terrified myself and others as well? etc. *Continues as above.*

THIRTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON THE JUDGE AS OUR REDEEMER.

Subject.

In the last judgment the sinner shall be accused and condemned: first, by the fidelity shown him by Christ his Saviour, which he disregarded; secondly, by the love which he despised. —*Preached on the second Sunday after Epiphany.*

Text.

Nondum venit hora mea.—John ii. 4.

"My hour is not yet come."

Introduction.

So that Christ our Saviour had appointed for Himself certain times and hours in which to do certain things. He had determined to show His divinity to the world, and to confirm it during His life on earth by many miracles; but this was not to be done until the proper time came; then He began to change water into wine, to heal the sick in a moment, to cleanse lepers, to free the possessed, to give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, and to raise the dead to life. Whoever asked Him to perform such wonders before the time was answered in the words, "My hour is not yet come." He had determined for the salvation of mankind to give Himself up to the rage of His enemies, to allow them to mock, scourge, crown

Him with thorns, condemn Him to death, and nail Him to the cross; but this was not to happen till the appointed time. Therefore when the wicked Pharisees were seeking in all places to put Him out of the way, as St. John says, "They sought therefore to apprehend Him: and no man laid hands on Him, because His hour was not yet come."¹ But afterwards when the hour came for suffering, He Himself said to His disciple: "Behold the hour is at hand, and the Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of sinners."² My dear brethren, the same Saviour has determined to revenge Himself on His enemies, and to condemn wicked sinners to the eternal flames of hell; but the hour appointed for that is not yet come. Now He bears many insults from them with the utmost patience; He shows Himself to them as their Saviour and Redeemer, their Pledge and Advocate; He is constantly offering them His grace, if at any moment they will only resolve to return to Him. But when His time comes He will appear with great power and majesty to judge the living and the dead. And how He will then be changed! Sinners! ah, do not wait till that hour of the Lord! Wo to you if you do not profit in time of the graces now offered you; for that meek and gentle Saviour will otherwise pronounce the final sentence on you, and condemn you to eternal damnation. Nay, He will condemn you all the more because He is your Saviour and Redeemer, as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

He will condemn you on account of His fidelity to you, which you have neglected: the first part. He will condemn you on account of the love He has shown you, which you have despised: the second part.

O just Judge and loving Saviour! that we may not be condemned by Thee in that last hour, speak now to our hearts, that the wicked may renounce sin, and the just be confirmed in their justice, through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary, and of our holy guardian angels.

The fidelity
and friend-
ship of Our

When a good, well-meaning friend offers to act as arbitrator in a case on which much depends, and after much trouble suc-

¹ Querebant ergo eum apprehendere, et nemo misit in illum manus, quia nondum venerat hora ejus.—John vii. 30.

² Ecce appropinquavit hora, et Filius hominis tradetur in manus peccatorum.—Matt. xxvi. 45.

ceeds in bringing matters to a conclusion, and is insulted and abused by the unsuccessful party for whose sake he has chiefly undertaken the business, and whose case was evidently a lost one from the first, what think you, my dear brethren, would be his feelings under such circumstances? Oh ho! he would think, is that the way in which you treat me? I meant very well towards you; I took a deal of trouble to help you out of the mire into which you were sunk, but you will have to wait a long time before I espouse your cause again; I shall rather turn your accuser and publicly prove that your claim is unjust, and wo to you if I should be appointed your judge! We read in the fourteenth chapter of the Second Book of Kings how Absalom, after having murdered his brother, was forced to fly; Joab, the general of the army, succeeded, partly by the help of others and partly by his own immediate efforts, in reconciling him with his angry father, so that the latter recalled him, under the condition, however, that he was not to see him any more. But when that undutiful, disobedient son again rebelled against his father and set fire to the field of Joab, he had no more determined enemy than that same Joab who was before his warmest patron and advocate. Joab had neither rest nor peace until, even against the express command of David, he pierced the heart of Absalom with his lance. So fierce does anger become in one whose fidelity and friendship are despised.

Lord, scorned by sinners, shall be turned into wrath. Shown by a simile and an example.

My dear brethren, the Mediator and Advocate between God and men, as we have seen already, is according to St. Paul, "One Mediator of God and men, the Man Christ Jesus: who gave Himself a redemption for all."¹ If we sin, we have an Advocate and Intercessor with the angry Father, who, if we only wish, will regain for us our lost cause, and that is the same Jesus Christ. "My little children," writes St. John, "these things I write to you that you may not sin." But he adds for our consolation: "But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just, and He is the propitiation for our sins."² O sinner! how often have you not during your life experienced His faithful and loving desire to help you? I will say nothing of the benefits that are common to you with all

Christ has served the sinner most faithfully during life.

¹ Unus et mediator Dei et hominum, homo Christus Jesus, qui dedit redemptionem semetipsum pro omnibus.—I. Tim. ii. 5, 6.

² Filii mei, hæc scribo vobis, ut non peccatis; sed et si quis peccaverit, advocatum habemus apud Patrem, Jesum Christum justum; et ipse est propitiatio pro peccatis nostris.—I. John ii. 1, 2.

men, and that you derive from His death, by which He reconciled to His Father the whole world that was condemned to eternal death. As often as you deliberately committed a grievous sin you made the almighty God your enemy, and deserved to be tortured in the terrible fire of hell forever with the demons. The sentence was already pronounced against you; your case was utterly lost as far as it depended on you; there was nothing more to be done but to carry out the sentence. And who saved you from that misery? By yourself you would never have dared to appear before the face of the angry God; that is, your natural powers were not able to win His favor and friendship for you. Was not Christ the Saviour, who acted as your mediator and advocate when He lent you, as it were in the holy sacrament of penance, the infinite merits of His passion and death, and offered them up for you to His eternal Father, thus restoring you to the grace and friendship of God? And not once only did He do that for you, but perhaps seven and seventy times. Think of this now, and say with thankful heart: O dearest Friend and most loving Saviour! what do I not owe Thee! If I had not Thee as my Advocate, where should I have been long ago? I must thank Thee that I am not now in hell!

But he has despised Him and persecuted Him to death.

Wo to you, O mortal! if you offend, insult, and reject this Advocate and Intercessor! Yet that is what you have already done, and done in a most outrageous manner, not merely once, but as often as you have fallen again into the sins you confessed, so often have you thrust Christ out of your heart, and said in the words of the citizens in the Gospel: "We will not have this Man to reign over us;"¹ I will not have Christ as my Advocate; I do not want His intercession. Nevertheless with a patience greater than any man could use towards one like himself, that same Saviour has hitherto been your constant Friend, and He will remain so as long as there is a breath in your body, always ready to act as your Mediator and Advocate, and even in the very last moment of your sinful life to reconcile you to His angry Father. But wo to you, and wo to you forever, if you despise to the end this Friend who will come when you know not, at the hour of your death!

Christ as Judge will be revenged

For this most faithful Friend of yours will then become your sworn Enemy to avenge on you His slighted friendship and to

¹ Nolumus hunc regnare super nos.—Luke xix. 14.

act as your accuser. Nay, He will be invested with full power from His Father to be your Judge and to treat you as He wishes. How does a man feel when a suit in which he is interested is left to the decision of a judge whom he has deeply offended, and who, as he knows, is his worst enemy? Ah, he would think, now there is no hope for me! Alas! it is all up with me! although in worldly judgments there is some way of escaping out of a difficulty like that by refusing to have such a one as judge on account of his partiality and hostility, and appealing to another whose decision will be unbiassed. Try that, O sinner! when you come before the divine tribunal, and there see Jesus Christ, whom you have contemned and made your enemy; tell Him that you will not have Him as your Judge; that you appeal to another because you know that He is not favorably inclined to you. But your appeals and protestations will be of little service to you. That same Jesus Christ and no other will be your Judge, and will decide your fate for all eternity. Alas! what will be your feelings then?

for this despised friendship.

Imagine, my dear brethren, the consternation of the brethren of Joseph when they found that he had become viceroy of Egypt, and heard him say those few words: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold."¹ Consider those words. He does not say: I am Joseph your lord and judge, and you are my prisoners: your lives are in my hands. He did not upbraid them with their former cruelty towards him, nor say to them: do you remember how you acted to me when I implored your mercy on bended knees, with streaming eyes, and you put me into a pit, and then sold me like a dumb beast into Egypt? I am now your lord and you cannot escape me, and I am able to take what revenge I please for the injury you have done me. No; that was not necessary to touch their hearts. The few, sweet words, "I am Joseph your brother," were enough to fill them with dismay, although he spoke them with the greatest tenderness and with tears of affection: "He lifted up his voice with weeping: which the Egyptians and all the house of Pharaoh heard."² "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. Be not afraid, and let it not seem to you a hard case that you sold me into these countries: for God sent me before you into Egypt for your preservation." And yet they were thunderstruck with fear: "His

What terror shall then overwhelm the sinner! Shown by an example from Holy Writ.

¹ Ego sum Joseph, frater vester, quem vendidistis.—Gen. xlv. 4.

² Elevavitque vocem cum fletu, quam audierunt Ægyptii, omnisque domus Pharaonis.—Ibid. 2.

brethren could not answer him, being struck with exceeding great fear.”¹ According to Aristotle the proper effect of fear is to deprive a man of his voice, to shorten his breath, and to cause the blood almost to stagnate in his veins. Pererius remarks with reason that the great terror of the brethren came from the consideration of the two phrases, “I am Joseph,” and “whom you sold.” Alas! there he is whom we knew to be such an innocent and amiable child, and whom we nevertheless hated, persecuted, and treated so cruelly! He took our part with our father, and brought us food to the field with his own hands; but we cast him into the cistern and sold him! Now we are poor prisoners in his power and utterly undeserving of mercy. We are in the hands of a patience that we have despised and turned into just anger; of an innocence that we have ill-treated without cause; of a brother and well-meaning friend whom we have outraged in most unseemly fashion, and who is now master of our lives! “I am Joseph.” Ah, do not say those words again, or we shall drop down dead with fear!

Further explained by another example.

Richard, king of England, once lost his way while hunting in a dense forest, and as his attendants could not find him, he was forced to seek shelter in the hut of a charcoal-burner, who received him with the utmost discourtesy, and actually gave him a blow on the cheek. Richard, without giving way to anger in the least, kept quite still. But when he came again to his palace, he put on his royal robes, and adorned with sceptre and crown, seated himself on his throne in great splendor, surrounded by courtiers and the noblest of the land, and protected by soldiers. He then caused his surly host to be summoned before him, and merely said to him the words: “Do you know me now?” Whereupon the charcoal-burner fell down dead on the floor through sheer fright.

The mere voice of the Judge shall terrify them.

What are your thoughts now, O sinful soul? Hear the voice of your Brother, of your King and truest Friend, when He shall cite you before His tribunal, saying to you: “Do you know Me now? I am Jesus whom you insulted.” And these words He shall then pronounce, not with a smiling, friendly countenance, or with tears of tenderness, like Joseph, but He will call them out with a terrible voice so that all the world may hear. “Then shall He speak to them in His anger,” says David, “and trouble

¹ Nolite pavere, neque vobis durum esse videatur quod vendidistis me in his regionibus; pro salute enim vestra misit me Deus ante vos in Ægyptum. Non poterant respondere, fretres, nimio terrore perterriti.—Gen. xlv. 4, 5, 3.

them in His rage.”¹ I am Jesus, He will cry out, who meant so well with you; who so often and truly defended your case; who would so willingly have had you with Himself in heaven, but whom you have rejected and persecuted! I am Jesus, infinite Power, whom you, vile worm of the earth, have despised; infinite Goodness, whom you have abused; Meekness, Patience, and Long-suffering, whom you have so daringly provoked to anger! Here I am now, and you stand before Me. I am Jesus; do you know Me now? But I know you well! I am He for whom you lost all respect in church, to whom you were ashamed to bend your knees because you knew that I was hidden under the humble appearance of bread! I am He whose holy name you have often invoked as a witness of your falsehood, as if I were the outcast of men! I am He whom you have so often sold for a piece of money, a vain breath of popular favor, a brutal pleasure! Do you not know Me yet? I am He who created you for the sole purpose of serving Me, and you have misused Me as your servant and intermediary in the most shameful actions: “Thou hast made Me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied Me with thy iniquities.”² I am Jesus, the Judge of the living and the dead, the Lord and Master of a twofold, long eternity; now I have you in My power, and can take vengeance on you for despising My friendship and fidelity. Oh, what terrible words those are for the sinner! Holy St. John, it is not necessary for thee to describe our future Judge as a fierce lion opening his jaws to swallow up his enemies; the mere words spoken by such a true Friend are more than enough to precipitate into hell through fear one who knows himself guilty! But there is still another point, my dear brethren, which shall add to the sinner’s confusion. And what is that? The unheard-of love shown to men by the Creator, a love which they have scorned, will accuse the sinner, and bring a still severer damnation upon him, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

Never is anger and displeasure greater than when it succeeds to great love: that is, when one is forced to hate him whom he loved before; just as the coals in a smith’s forge are sprinkled

The greater
the love has
been the
greater the

¹ Tunc loquetur ad eos in ira sua, et in furore suo conturbabit eos.—Ps. ii. 5.

² Servire me fecisti in peccatis tuis, præbuisti mihi laborem in iniquitatibus tuis.—Is. xliii. 24.

anger and
hatred that
replace it.

with water to prevent the flames from spreading, and retain the heat better. This comes partly from the fact that a great anger is required to overcome great love, and to effect such a change in the heart that it cherishes no thoughts but those of hatred and revenge against him who was before the object of its sincere affection; and partly because love, when it is scorned and insulted, embitters hatred and anger by the remembrance of the proofs of friendship that were offered to the beloved person, and of the insults that the latter returned for them. Thus no anger is greater than that of the mother who, being ill-treated by a wicked son, goes so far as to persecute to the death him to whom she gave life; all the love that she formerly had for that son now serves only to embitter her hatred of him; the blood that he drew from her, the milk with which she suckled him, the tears she so often shed for him, now remind her of nothing but the cruel ingratitude of which he is guilty, and thus add bitterness to her anger against him.

Shown by a
stencil.

To make my meaning clearer, suppose, my dear brethren, that a nobleman is very fond of the bride whom he has espoused a short time ago; he returns home after being absent for a whole day and finds her in the act of being unfaithful to him. What a blow that is to him! It seems to turn all the blood in his body into poison! His hand moves spontaneously to his sword to draw it and take vengeance on the guilty one, but the thought of the divine law restrains him; he swallows his rage as best he can and runs off to his king, to whom he confides the secret of the shame he has suffered, and from whom he demands punishment on the adulteress. "Yes," says the king, "I see how badly you have been treated; go now and deal with this matter as you think fit; I invest you with full power to examine into the case, to pronounce sentence, and to inflict punishment; you can act on my authority." Now imagine that you are present and see, I will not say the whole trial, but merely the first meeting of the injured husband and the faithless wife. How his eyes seem to dart fire at her! How she is ready to die with shame and confusion! And how terribly these or similar words resound in her ears: I am your husband who loved you, shameless wanton that you are, more than my own life; I am the husband to whom you vowed fidelity and love, but you have shamefully broken your plighted troth. Have I deserved this from you? Have I ever given you cause to treat me so? Am I not good enough for

you? But now I am your judge, and your life is in my hands! But there is no need for going farther; the mere sound of those words should be enough to cause the faithless wife to die of fear.

O divine Lover of souls! Saviour of the world, Jesus Christ, who in Thy unspeakable love hast taken the name of Mother and Spouse, how tenderly Thou hast loved us! And we have not far to go for proofs of Thy love. Thy annihilation in the Incarnation to draw our hearts to Thyself; the poor manger in the crib, in which Thou didst lie as a little Infant; the utter poverty in which Thou didst spend three and thirty years on earth; the fearful torments of Thy passion, in which Thou didst shed the last drop of Thy blood for us; the rods and scourges; the thorns and nails; Thy cruel death on the cross; Thy still open wounds; the precious body and blood Thou hast left us as the food and drink of our souls—these things I need not recall to memory. The tears Thou hast shed for us are in themselves sufficient proof of Thy love, so that I can say what the Jews said when Thou didst raise Lazarus from the dead: “Behold how He loved him;”¹ behold how Jesus loved men! The love you have, O mothers, for your children; that you, O wives, have for your husbands, is nothing compared to the love of Jesus for the souls of men.

The love of Christ for men is unspeakably great.

But, alas! where shall I hide for shame; where run to for fear, if I die without repenting of the sins with which I have so wantonly broken faith with this Bridegroom, and have to appear before Him when He, filled with anger at my infidelity, shall come as my Judge, invested with full power to avenge Himself amply on me? How the words shall resound in my ears, as we read in the Gospel: “Behold the Bridegroom cometh.”² How fearful to hear the voice of Him who loved me saying: adulterous soul, I am Jesus! I am your Bridegroom and Judge, whose honor you have grossly injured! “Under every green tree thou didst prostitute thyself;”³ you have allowed yourself to become a plaything of the demons! Not once, but often have I caught you in the act of being unfaithful to the promise you made Me on oath in baptism. I have often forgiven you, and forgetting the insults received from you, have readmitted you to My love and friendship. But you have rejected Me in spite of all! Adulterous soul! have I deserved that from you? What harm have I ever done you?

And all the greater shall the fear and compassion of the sinner be when he shall be upbraided with this love.

¹ Ecce quomodo amabat eum.—John xi. 36.

² Ecce sponsus venit.—Matt. xxv. 6.

³ Sub omni ligno frondoso, tu prosternebaris meretrix.—Jer. ii. 20.

Have I ever given you the least occasion to desert Me and go over to others? "What is there that I ought to do more to My vineyard that I have not done to it?"¹ What better proofs could I have given you of My love? You loved that person who cast a friendly glance in your direction, and for his sake you hated Me who have given My life for you. You loved that creature with whom you enjoyed a momentary pleasure, and you cast off Me who promised you eternal joys. Day and night you served that great man of the world whose favor you hoped to gain; but one hour spent in My house seemed too long for you, although I wished to place on your head the crown of eternal life in heaven. For the sake of a piece of land or a little money you sold Me who had prepared for you boundless riches and endless delights. To no purpose then has My love for you brought Me down on earth and nailed Me to the cross! To no purpose have I offered you My grace to make you holy and like to Myself! To no purpose have I instituted the holy sacrament of penance to cleanse you from your sins, and prepared the heavenly Food, My own flesh and blood, to unite your heart with Mine! To no purpose have I sent My preachers to urge you to amend your life and to call you to My eternal inheritance. To no purpose have I visited you with trials and crosses that you might enter into yourself, and see what a loving Spouse you had lost. To no purpose have I shown you so many sudden deaths and terrible examples that fear might at last force you to love Me. "What is there that I ought to do more that I have not done?" And you have rejected Me! Adulterous soul! you are now before My tribunal, and I—O cease, O Lord, I beg of Thee! Hell itself is more tolerable than those bitter reproofs from such a loving Saviour! "The confusion of my face hath covered me, for the voice of Him that reproacheth me."² The bare thought of hearing such a reproof fills me with dread!

Explained
by an ex-
ample.

Well known, my dear brethren, and you have doubtless often heard it, is what I now wish to relate to you. A certain rich and noble young man being struck with the dangers and vanities of the world, resolved to leave all and lead a poor and solitary life in the desert. His friends and acquaintances, his companions, and above all, his mother, who was a widow, tried all in their power by prayers and entreaties, by reminding him of for-

¹ Quid est quod debui ultra facere vineæ meæ, et non feci ei?—Is. v. 4.

² Confusio faciei meæ cooperuit me, a voce exprobrantis.—Ps. xliii. 16, 17.

mer pleasures, and by tears and lamentations, to turn him from his purpose; but all in vain: the holy youth remained steadfast, and his only answer was: "I wish to save my soul! Do you understand me? Mother, you brought me into the world, not to serve it, but to gain heaven; that is the only thing that concerns me; it is the only thing on which all depends; without which all other things are useless." (And, my dear brethren, is it not true? For of what use to me is the whole world if I do not save my soul?) "But," replied his mother and friends, "you can save your soul in the world." "True," answered the young man, "but it is a difficult task amidst so many dangers and occasions of sin. I can save my soul, there is no doubt of it; but if God calls me to another state and I do not obey His call, there will be little chance of gaining eternal happiness. Good-bye, O world! I wish to save my soul and place it in security." And so he did. He at once put off his costly robes for a coarse garment, and went into a hermit's cell amongst other solitaries, where he spent many years serving God and practising severe penances. But how weak we poor mortals are in our good resolutions! His mother died meanwhile, and the young man hearing of her death, became home-sick; he began to think of the rich inheritance that was now to be divided amongst so many friends, and which he might have all to himself; the dry, coarse bread reminded him of the well-appointed table at home; the hard couch formed a strong contrast to the soft down-bed in which he used to sleep. Full of these thoughts he prayed, but without devotion; he sang psalms, but without attention or understanding; his eyes were constantly directed to the door of his cell, and he kept thinking of the best way of leaving off the habit and stealing out so as not to attract notice, and returning home. The good God, mindful of his former heroic resolution and the piety in which he had spent his life, would not abandon him. During the night he dreamt that he was summoned before the judgment-seat of God. There he saw a swarm of demons standing round him, his guardian angel leaving him, and his mother crying out to him in scornful tones: "Now, my son, what of the words you were so fond of saying: I wish to save my soul? Eh, is that the way you have acted up to them? Is this the heaven you have gained?" This reproof, although the mere effect of a dream, filled the man with fear and anguish, so that he awoke covered with perspiration, and more dead than alive. His first thoughts

were as follows: "If a dream has terrified me to such an extent, how would it be if I were summoned in reality before the tribunal of God, whom I have served in a very lukewarm fashion for some time past? If I cannot bear the reproaches of my mother, how could I bear the bitter reproofs that shall be addressed to me on the last day in the presence of Christ and His angels? No, O world! stay where thou art. I will remain here, and begin with renewed zeal and increased works of penance to serve my God, so as to work out my salvation." So far this young man.

We should think of this now, and amend our sinful lives.

Oh, my dear brethren, would that we too often thought of the coming judgment! Would that like that young man the thought of it inspired us with the resolution, I will not say of renouncing the world altogether and going into a desert, but of earnestly amending our vicious or imperfect lives! Ah, let us take deeply to heart and often consider this: if I cannot bear a word of reproof from a mortal like myself, how shall I be able hereafter to endure the bitter upbraidings of the slighted love of my future Judge, Jesus Christ? And moreover how many fine promises have I not made to my confessor? how many firm resolutions in secret before God to avoid sin, to shun the dangerous occasions of it, to forget the insults offered me, to give up the bad habit of distraction, cursing, and swearing, and to reform my life thoroughly and serve God more zealously in future? But what shall be said about all this at the last day? Fine promises! beautiful resolutions! See how that man has kept his word! He was just as careless as ever after confession; he remained in the old occasion of sin; he was just as avaricious, unjust, intemperate, unchaste, proud, vindictive, and godless as before. How could I bear to hear such reproofs in the presence of Christ and His angels? Oh, no! I could never endure them! And therefore now at last, this very day I shall get rid of the load of my sins, and serve my God faithfully.

Especially as we do not know when we may be summoned before the judgment-seat.

How is it, my dear brethren, I often ask myself, that we make so little to-do about the last judgment? In my opinion the reason is because we imagine that day to be still far away from us, and therefore we think there is no cause to be afraid of it. But how long do you imagine it will be before that day comes? We need not expect to have to wait for many centuries before the world is reduced to ashes and the last trumpet summons the dead out of their graves to appear before the tribunal

of the Almighty in the valley of Josaphat. The day of death will be for each one the day of his particular judgment, in which he shall appear before the same Judge and hear final sentence pronounced on him. Is death then so very far away from us? Can we foretell the time in which we shall die? May it not be this very day? Ah, how stupid we are and senseless in what concerns our eternal salvation! Why do we not stir ourselves now before it is too late, and make use of the faithful service and intercession that Christ, our well-meaning Friend, Advocate, and Arbitrator with the angry God has promised in our behalf, if we are only firmly resolved to avoid sin and amend our lives? Why do we not begin at once to love that most amiable Lover of our souls?

Sinners! I pity you, if more deaf than the dead, who will rise from their graves at the sound of the last trumpet, you stop your ears to my words, or rather to the words that God speaks to you by my mouth, and if in spite of the consideration of the final catastrophe which shall cause all nature to shudder you still remain in your old sins; if you refuse now to hearken to my words, which are intended only for your good and to induce you to amend your lives, you must hereafter hear another voice—that of your Saviour—who will speak to you of nothing but your eternal reprobation and damnation! Christ Jesus, who art now our faithful Advocate and loving Saviour, and who wilt be hereafter the Judge of the living and the dead, I beg of Thee with the Prophet David in the name of all here present, “Pierce Thou my flesh with Thy fear,”¹ so that I may dread Thy judgments! Pierce my flesh, I say, because it is not enough merely to remember this fear now and then, or to speak of it and then forget it. Penetrate my whole body with this salutary fear! Pierce my eyes with it, that they may never look at impure objects; my tongue, that it may never sin by cursing, uncharitable talk, or unchaste discourse; my ears, that they may never hear detraction; my hands, that they may never be stretched out to take what I have no right to, or to indulge in unlawful actions. Pierce my whole flesh with Thy fear that it may lose its wantonness! And pierce my heart too, that it may never wilfully give admission to sinful thoughts, but rather love Thee with all its strength, and that I may thus one day hear from Thy lips the words: “Come, ye blessed, possess the kingdom prepared for you!” Amen.

Conclusion
and exhortation
to
fear the
judgment.

¹ Confige timore tuo carnes meas.—Ps. cxviii. 120.

Another introduction to the same sermon for the third Sunday of Advent.

Text.

Ego vox clamantis in deserto.—John i. 23.

“I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.”

Introduction.

John was a voice, but the voice of another that was crying in the wilderness. Whose was it? His of whom he said: “Make straight the way of the Lord;” namely, Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Where? In what desert is this voice to be heard? Not here; not while Our Lord is in this world amongst us; for as Isaias prophesied of Him, “He shall not cry, neither shall His voice be heard abroad.”¹ Where then? In the valley of Josaphat, when He shall come to judge the living and the dead. And how terribly that voice shall then resound in the ears of the dead sinner! I am not speaking now, my dear brethren, of that last voice that shall pronounce final sentence on the sinner and send him to hell; there shall be other voices with which our otherwise meek and loving Redeemer shall cry out against you, O sinner! and which shall be a source of greater damnation to you. I will now explain what I mean.

Plan of Discourse.

Our Lord's fidelity that you have despised will cry out against and condemn you: the first part. His love that you have scorned will cry out against and condemn you: the second part.

Just Judge! merciful Saviour! before this terrible voice of Thine is heard, call out to-day by my means to the hearts of all present, that moved by a salutary fear of Thy voice the wicked may refrain from sin and the good be confirmed in justice. Obtain for us this grace from thy Son by thy interceding voice, O Mother of graces, and you, too, holy angels!

¹ Non clamabit, nec audietur vox ejus foris.—Is. xlii. 2.

THIRTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON THE JUDGE AS OUR MODEL.

Subject.

To be judged by Christ, a Man like ourselves, shall be a source of the most terrible pain to the sinner.—*Preached on the first Sunday after Epiphany.*

Text.

Et Jesus proficiebat sapientia, et ætate, et gratia apud Deum et homines.—Luke ii. 52.

“And Jesus advanced in wisdom, and age, and grace, with God and men.”

Introduction.

The Gospel that has been read for you shows clearly that Jesus was true Man, and a Man like to us in all things except sin, for He grew up as we do. “When he was twelve years old” His Mother and foster-father lost him, just as a little child is lost in a large town or in a great crowd of people and cannot find its way home again. He increased in age, understanding, and wisdom, just as all men are wont to become wiser as they advance in years. “He advanced in wisdom and age.” Although in the very moment of His conception He was infinite wisdom and holiness, yet He increased in those; that is, He gave more outward evidences of wisdom and holiness in order to serve as a Pattern for all, that we by following His example may, as we easily can, advance daily in grace and virtue before God. My dear brethren, hitherto we have considered Jesus our future Judge as God and as Man, and in both cases we have had to confess that He will be an exceedingly terrible Judge for the sinner; for as Judge He will be a God without mercy, and as a Man He shall become quite changed and without pity. There is still another circumstance connected with the same Judge which is not less terrible, namely: that He is a Man like ourselves, as I now proceed to show.

Plan of Discourse.

To be judged by Christ, a Man like ourselves, shall be a source of the most terrible pain for the sinner. Such is the whole subject of this meditation.

That we may derive the proper spiritual fruit from this and the preceding sermons, we expect the grace of God, through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

An accused person is best examined by one of his own condition.

To insure the conviction of a criminal, so that he will not have a word to say against it, there is no better means than to appoint one to try him who is either of the same standing and condition, or otherwise has known the accused for a long time, and is well acquainted with his manner of life and the various wiles he employs to carry out his plans. Thus it would be altogether unsuitable for a great king to try a peasant for not paying his rent or taxes. Why? Because the king who lives in a palace surrounded only by noblemen knows nothing of the condition of the peasant, nor how far his liabilities and obligations may extend. No matter how wise and experienced the king may be, nor how simple and ignorant the peasant, the latter might easily befool the king by alleging his extreme poverty, the pressure of hard times, the losses he has suffered, and so forth; nor would the king have any reply to make to all this, but rather, moved by compassion, would be inclined to believe the peasant's lies and let him off scot-free. The proper thing in such a case is to leave the matter in the hands of one of the same condition, who knows by experience how to detect false excuses and to refute them.

Because Christ is a Man like us, the sinner's judgment shall be all the more severe.

Unheard-of, my dear brethren, are the love and goodness of the great God in deigning to take on Himself our lowly nature, and as St. Paul says, to put on the "form of a servant,"¹ with all our weaknesses and miseries, sin alone excepted, even to sorrow and death and to the extent of being tempted by the devil: "Tempted in all things such as we are, without sin."² Therefore since He Himself has borne our miseries, He can have a heartfelt compassion for us. Truly, that is a great consolation for us as long as we are on this earth! But when I consider the matter aright, that very same circumstance makes the last judgment more terrible still to me and to all sinners; that namely, the same Man, like unto us in every respect,

¹ Forman servi.—Philipp. ii. 7.

² Tentatum per omnia pro similitudine, absque peccato.—Heb. iv. 15.

shall come as Judge invested with full power in His majesty and justice to examine into our sins against His commands and laws. For thus we shall be more clearly convicted, put to shame, driven into a corner, and be utterly unable to say a word in reply or excuse.

Why so? Because if our heavenly Father were to examine us only in the divine nature, He would condemn us merely for insulting His sovereign majesty; but Jesus Christ in addition to that will put us to greater shame and convict us more clearly by the life He led amongst us and the example He gave to all men to encourage them to the practice of virtue. If we heard the sentence of condemnation from God alone, on account of having transgressed His commands, we should be indeed convinced that we should have kept the commandments; but since that same sentence shall come from the lips of the incarnate God, it will convince us that we could easily have kept the commandments. Thus there will be nothing for us to plead in excuse, and the grievous injustice of sin will be made much more evident to us. If the Judge were to say to us as He did in olden times to the Hebrews: "I am the Lord thy God," who created thee out of the dust of the earth; how couldst thou, miserable worm, dare to disobey My commands and to live according to thy own will? we might answer perhaps, by way of excuse, O great Lord and God! it is true I should have been most obedient to Thee; I cannot deny that I am guilty and deserve punishment; but remember, since Thou knowest all things, how frail is the handful of clay out of which Thou hast made me! "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak;"¹ the soul Thou hast infused into me was indeed ready to avoid sin and to do good, but my miserable flesh is too frail and has done violence, as it were, to the spirit in order to have its own way. Thus no matter how terrible the judgment may otherwise be, if we were to be tried only by the infinite majesty of God, we might have some way of escaping the penalty due to our disobedience in transgressing a law so hard for our weak nature. But before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, a Man like to ourselves and subject to the law as we are—"God sent His Son made of a woman, made under the law,"² as St. Paul says—before such a Judge what excuse could we put forward? O fear without hope! Anguish with-

Because the sinner to his great shame shall be irrefutably convinced that he could and should have led a better life.

¹ Spiritus quidem promptus est, caro vero infirma.—Mark xiv. 38.

² Misit Deus Filium suum, factum ex muliere, factum sub lege.—Gal. iv. 4.

out alleviation! Terror without excuse! Damnation without gainsaying! The example He gave us in our own nature shall close our lips and clearly prove to us that we could and should have kept the divine commandments and lived according to them.

Christ will confound and convict the sinner by His examples.

Come now, O sinner, and imagine with me that you hear the dread sound of the last trumpet calling you before the tribunal of this Man: Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment! "Give an account of thy stewardship."¹ Where did you get the audacity with which you wantonly trampled My law under foot? Who has given you the courage to persecute and insult even to death Me, your Creator, your Redeemer, your Sovereign Benefactor? Give an account! Answer Me!—Now sigh forth again: Ah, Lord, remember that I am a poor mortal clothed with flesh, and subject to many weaknesses and frailties! Thy law was altogether too hard for me, and therefore Thou shouldst forgive me for not having observed it! What! the Judge will reply, am I a stock or a stone? Am I not a Man like you and clothed with flesh as you are? It is true that as Man I could not sin because I had a full knowledge of the Godhead which was united to My humanity; but were you obliged to sin because you were at liberty to do so? Was My grace, My help, ever wanting to you? Was it not always ready to assist your weakness in temptations? "Put me in remembrance, and let us plead together: tell if thou hast anything to justify thyself."²

The proud man.

Wilt thou still try to excuse thyself, proud man? I, the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, have not disdained to become like to thee; but thou, wretched worm of earth, wert ashamed to resemble Me. I took the form of a servant to teach thee humility: "Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart;"³ but thou hast not been content to remain in the limits of the station allotted thee. I have lived for thirty whole years hidden in the cabin of a poor carpenter, although I might have made a great name for Myself before the world by My preaching and miracles; I fled from the people when they wished to make Me king; but thou wert not satisfied to remain as thou wert; thou didst not spare any effort to extol thyself above others, and to treat with contempt and scorn thy fellow-men. I have worn during My whole life a poor garment; but nothing could content

¹ Redde rationem villicationis tue.—Luke xvi. 2.

² Reduc me in memoriam, et iudicemur simul: narra si quid habes ut iustificeris.—Is. xliii. 26

³ Discite a me, quia mitis sum et humilis corde.—Matt. xi. 29.

thee but a costly dress with which thou didst make a display before the world. I came to serve others; but thou wert filled with anger if anything happened to be wanting to thy comfort. I have not hesitated to cast Myself at the feet of poor fishermen, and to wash them with My own hands; but thou wert so fastidious that thou couldst not bear to go near My sick and suffering servants when they were abandoned by all and in need of thy help, although the Christian law obliged thee to assist them under such circumstances. I was not ashamed to take in My circumcision the likeness of a sinner; but thou wert ashamed to confess thy sins candidly in the tribunal of penance in order to regain My grace. I have prostrated Myself on the ground in prayer to My heavenly Father; but thou, even in church, in My very presence, didst refuse to bend both knees, although thou couldst bow and scrape easily enough before a mortal. Where is thy excuse? Hast thou anything to allege in thy favor? "Tell if thou hast anything to justify thyself."

"Put Me in remembrance and let us plead together," O unjust man! Were My commandments too difficult for thee because thou wert a weak mortal? Then look at Me, thy Judge. I am a Man like to thee. I, to whom heaven and earth belong, have become poor in order to show thee the way to heaven, as I have told thee by My Apostle: "Being rich He became poor for your sakes."¹ I was so poor that I could not point out a foot of land as belonging to Me during My whole life; I was poorer than the birds in their nests, the foxes in their holes; I had not even a stone whereon to lay My head, nor a corner in a barn in which to be born; naked I lay in the crib, and naked I hung on the cross; but thou wert not content with what I so generously bestowed on thee. Thy greed for gold was insatiable, and to gratify it thou hast had recourse to dishonest means, and hast robbed thy neighbor. Thou hast lived in luxury, and when I came before thee in the persons of My poor brothers and sisters, thou hast not given Me a farthing. Thou hast gratified thy gluttony, indulged in immoderate drinking and gambling, conformed to the vain customs of the world, and given away money enough to the object of thy sinful passions. Thou hast not borne temporal crosses and secret poverty with patience for My sake and to win heaven. What excuse hast thou? Thy weakness? As if I did not know thee, nor ever experienced in Myself what a man can

The unjust man.

¹ Propter vos egenus factus est, eum esset dives.—II. Cor. viii. 9.

The un-
chaste man.

do and bear! "Tell if thou hast anything to justify thyself."

"Put Me in remembrance and let us plead together." Come, impure man! wanton, dissolute woman! whose god was thy corruptible body, whose thoughts and imaginations were filled with foul pictures, with a thousand sinful desires, with unlawful looks and touches, and other shameful things that may not be named, and who wert occupied in such filth day and night; who could not bear a forty days' fast according to the law of My Church, or an hour's cold in My house, or a slight mortification of the senses, a word of contradiction, or a slight, trifling cross; look at Me and see what a man can suffer! See the cross, the nails, the thorns; they condemn thy fastidiousness. See this mouth which so often bore hunger and thirst, and spent forty days without food or drink; it condemns thy luxurious living. See My body gashed with the scourge, and the still open wounds that cry out against thy unchastity. I did not wish to enter into My glory except by the rude way of the thorns and the cross; and thou hast tried to enter heaven by a pleasant road strewn with roses! Where is thy excuse? "Tell if thou hast anything to justify thyself."

The vindic-
tive man.

"Put Me in remembrance and let us plead together." Vindictive man! what hast thou to say for thyself? I have told thee and caused My preachers frequently to remind thee that thou shouldst love thy enemies. Thou didst think it impossible for thee to do that, and didst persuade thyself that thy honor required thee to take revenge, and that in any case there was no use in trying to conceal thy hatred, much less to think of a reconciliation. But how couldst thou err so far? How is it that I, a Man like thee, and the Lord of the world, whose honor is of far more importance than thine, could take the form of a helpless child and fly from a mortal Herod whom I might have destroyed with a breath? I could suffer the cruelties and insults that My enemies inflicted on Me, and repay them by miraculous healings and other benefits. I have allowed Myself to be mocked as a fool by the court and army of Herod, and have not said a word in My own defense. Like a lamb led to the slaughter I have not uttered a word of complaint against those who nailed Me to a cross, and even prayed for them to My heavenly Father. Why hast thou not done the same? Art thou not infinitely smaller than I, and must not eternal shame and disgrace be thy portion on account of thy sins? "Tell if thou hast anything to justify thyself."

“Put Me in remembrance and let us plead together.” Tepid, slothful Christian! thou hast disregarded many beautiful examples that might have helped thee to do good and save thy soul, and neglected them through sheer sloth; thou hast wasted many hours, weeks, and years, in which thou mightest have gained heaven at any moment; thou hast missed many Masses and sermons in which I could have brought thee to the knowledge of thy vices, to amend thy life to greater zeal in My service, and that thou hast done simply to indulge in sloth and love of sleep; thou hast consumed thy precious time in eating, drinking, and gaming; thou hast performed thy daily tasks without a good intention, without offering them up to Me. Couldst thou not have been more diligent and zealous? Hast thou not often heard that “the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away”?¹ Look at Me, a Man like thyself, and see how I have labored for heaven, as if I stood in the greatest danger of losing it, although it belonged to Me by right and I could have had it without the least trouble on My part. I have been as diligent in working for thy salvation as if I could not be happy without thee; for thy sake I have gone many a long journey, and have often fatigued Myself running after thee; all the thoughts, words, and actions of My whole life were offered to the eternal Father for thee and thy salvation. But thou hast been unable to do any work, to take any trouble except for the world and perishable things! O wicked man! “Tell if thou hast anything to justify thyself.” What excuse canst thou offer? If thou hast any, let Me hear it; but “put Me in remembrance and let us plead together!” Think of what I, a Man like thyself, have done, and that will be enough to reduce thee to silence.

The slothful
in the ser-
vice of God.

Cry out again, O Malachy, the words: “Who shall be able to think of the day of His coming, and who shall stand to see Him?”² I will not ask who shall be able to hear such a convincing Judge. Sedecias, the king of Israel who was taken prisoner by Nabuchodonosor, gives us a slight idea of the sad spectacle the sinner shall present when he appears before his insulted Judge to be put to shame. You may read all about it, my dear brethren, in the twenty-fifth chapter of the Fourth Book of Kings. The city of Jerusalem was besieged and taken by the Assyrians; all the people

The mere
sight of the
Judge shall
be intoler-
able to the
sinner.
Shown by
an exampl^e
from Scrip-
ture.

¹ Regnum caelorum vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud.—Matt. xi. 12.

² Quis poterit cogitare diem adventus ejus, et quis stabit ad videndum eum?—Malach. iii. 2.

took to flight, and Sedecias was captured, bound in chains, and brought to Babylon: "The army of the Chaldees pursued after the king and overtook him, . . . and bound him with chains, and brought him to Babylon."¹ There the unhappy king had to see his children slaughtered before the throne of Nabuchodonosor; his eyes were plucked out, and there was nothing more left him on earth to see or care for. Thus deprived of sight, childless, helpless, without consolation or hope, his most bitter torment and greatest shame was to know that he had to lie there a prisoner and slave to a king like himself, who was now his conqueror and sworn enemy. "So they took the king and brought him to the king of Babylon, and he gave judgment upon him,"² and mocked at his misfortunes. That was worse to him than his imprisonment, his blindness, nay, even than death itself. Truly unhappy, Sedecias! But still more unhappy are you, O sinner, if you have to stand with open eyes before a Man like yourself, and hear Him convict you as your implacable Judge!

Even during His life on earth Christ often terrified men.

For the same Man, when He was taken prisoner in the garden, patient as He was then, by merely uttering the words "I am He,"³ so terrified the shameless rabble and fierce soldiers that they fell to the ground in fear: "They went backward and fell to the ground."⁴ The same Man, when He showed a few rays of His beauty and glory to His disciples on Mount Thabor, although they knew Him well and He was friendly disposed to them, filled them with dismay: "The disciples fell upon their face and were very much afraid."⁵ The same Man, when He engaged in works of mercy and was healing the sick, frightened with one question the woman we read of in the Gospel of St. Mark: "A woman who was under an issue of blood twelve years," says the Evangelist, "when she had heard of Jesus, came in the crowd behind Him and touched His garment" with the firm hope that she would be freed from her infirmity; meanwhile "Jesus turning to the multitude, said: Who hath touched My garments?" Whereupon the poor woman fell to the ground in terror: "But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing

¹ Persecutus est exercitus Chaldæorum regem, comprehenditque eum, vinxitque eum catenis, et adduxit in Babylonem.—IV. Kings xxv. 5, 7.

² Apprehensum ergo regem duxerunt ad regem Babylonis, qui locutus est cum eo iudicium.—Ibid. 6.

³ Ego sum.—John xviii. 5.

⁴ Abierunt retrorsum, et ceciderunt in terram.—Ibid. 6.

⁵ Ceciderunt in faciem suam, et timuerunt valde.—Matt. xvii. 6.

what was done in her, came and fell down before Him.”¹

If, I say, the mere voice of the then loving Saviour, when He was actually distributing His benefits, could inspire such fear, how will it be on that day when the same Man shall come in all His majesty and glory, surrounded by a thousand times a hundred thousand angels, having laid aside all His mercy and compassion, and resembling a ravening lion in His wrath and anger? How will it be when He shall have the sinner bound before His throne, and shall speak to him in a terrible voice, upbraiding him with having neglected the example of his Saviour’s most holy life? Oh, “who shall stand to see Him?” Will you be able to do it, wicked Christian? But what am I saying? Will you, O holy and innocent Job? Oh, no! he answers; I shall not be able to bear the sight of my Judge, nor to look at His face! “Nor shall the sight of man behold me: Thy eyes are upon me, and I shall be no more.”² Let the heavens thunder and send forth their lightnings on that day in the most awful manner; let the sun be darkened and turn day into night; let the moon lose her light and become blood-red; let the stars in confusion fall from the heavens, the sea roar and pass its bounds, and all the living things on earth grow mad with terror: all that will not frighten me so much as one look of that Man. Of what Man? Of Christ Jesus! Oh that I may not have to face Him! But what are you saying? Are you afraid of that countenance that makes the joy of the angels and elect in heaven? that countenance that surpasses the sun in beauty? that countenance that so many patriarchs, prophets, and kings have longed to behold, and have not seen? Yes; that is what I fear. “Nor shall the sight of man behold me:” hell would be more tolerable to me than the sight of that Man. “Who will grant me this, that Thou mayest protect me in hell, and hide me till Thy wrath pass?”³ Thus, according to St. Basil, holy Job speaks in the person of the sinner before the sacred humanity of Our Lord in the tribunal of judgment. “Who will grant me this, that Thou mayest protect me in hell?” Eternal Father! protect me; hide me! What, accursed sinner! why should I protect thee? where should I hide

But on that day He will be more terrible to the sinner than hell itself.

¹ Mulier, quæ erat in profluvio sanguinis annis duodecim; cum audisset de Jesu, venit in turba retro, et tetigit vestimentum ejus. Jesus conversus ad turbam, aiebat: Quis tetigit vestimenta mea? Mulier vero timens et tremens, sciens quod factum esset in se, venit et proccidit ante eum.—Mark v. 25, 27, 30, 33.

² Nec aspiciet me visus hominis; oculi tui in me, et non subsistam.—Job vii. 8.

³ Quis mihi hoc tribuat, ut in inferno protegas me, et abscondas me, donec pertranseat furor tuus?—Ibid. xiv. 13.

thee? Ah, in hell! Let me go there! In hell? But that is the place of all imaginable pains and torments. No matter! let me go there! Cover me with flames! Bury me in them so deeply that I cannot come out! It will be more endurable for me there than the sight of this Man who is my Judge. "Nor shall the sight of man behold me!" Let me not look at the incarnate God! I cannot bear the sight of Him, nor that He should see me. Mountains, fall upon me in pity! Hills, bury me in your mercy! "Then shall they begin to say to the mountains: fall upon us; and to the hills: cover us."¹ Yes, miserable wretch, call out as loud as you will; bore into the bowels of the earth if you can; tear the eyes out of your head: you must stand before Me and see the Man who will put you to shame: "Then they shall see the Son of man;"² and then too, O Lord, shall sinners wither away with fear before Thee. "They shall perish at the rebuke of Thy countenance."³

Exhortation
and comfort
for the
good.

My dear Christians, there you have our future Judge as God, our future Judge as Man; our Judge who, in whatever way you consider Him, is all-seeing, and therefore nothing can be hidden from Him; almighty, and no one can escape Him; infinitely just, without mercy, without pity, without respect for persons, who will pronounce final sentence on each one according to his deserts. This Judge, terrible in all respects, I have chosen as the subject of your meditation and mine too, that we may persevere in the way of virtue, have a greater horror of sin, and be more zealous in the performance of good works. It is indeed on the last day of the world that the sentence will be made known which decides the eternal happiness or misery of each individual; but now during this life is the time in which the trial is going on; all that we now do, think, or say, we shall then see written in the great account-book; what we now sow we shall then reap. "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels: and then will He render to every man according to his works."⁴ Ah, above all things let us do what we can to ensure a favorable termination to our suit. If we have sinned and sinned often, and grievously even, let us not despair

¹ Tunc incipient dicere montibus: Cadite super nos; et collibus: Operite nos.—Luke xxiii. 30.

² Tunc videbunt Filium hominis.—Ibid. xxi. 27.

³ Ab increpatione vultus tui peribunt.—Ps. lxxix. 17.

⁴ Filius enim hominis venturus est in gloria Patris sui cum angelis suis; et tunc reddet unicuique secundum opera ejus.—Matt. xvi. 27.

on that account. As long as we are in this life we have time to regain what we have lost, and to wipe out our sins so that they will not be brought up against us in the judgment. Now, O incarnate God, Thy thoughts are full of peace towards me, and Thou art not minded to do me the least harm! Thine eyes are now opened to look on me with favor; Thine arms are stretched out to embrace me; Thy sacred head is bowed down; Thy whole body suspended on the cross, and all for my salvation and eternal happiness! Without danger I may hide myself in Thy wounds, and even if I have often dealt Thee a death-blow by my sins, provided I now sincerely repent and implore Thy mercy, Thy sacred Heart pierced with the lance shall be my sure Refuge, in which Thou wilt receive me again into favor! But if through my own fault I allow the time of grace to pass by, alas! then it is all up with me forever! Thy Godhead, Thy humanity, Thy love and fidelity towards me, Thy life and example, Thy very looks shall overwhelm me with shame and condemn me! And that this may not be the case let my life be always conformed to Thine in future, and this resolution, which I now renew, shall be the fruit of this and the other meditations I have made on the last judgment and Thy second coming.

Sinners! I have said nothing yet of the terrible sound of the final trumpet which shall summon the dead out of their graves; nothing of the examination that shall take place in the judgment; nothing of the accusers and witnesses; nothing of the public manifestation of consciences and the intolerable shame of sinners before the whole world; nothing of the final sentence that shall call the just to the kingdom of heaven and condemn the wicked to the fire of hell. What I have hitherto treated of concerns only the Person of our future Judge, and this in itself is terrible enough, so that the bare remembrance of that Judge should fill even the most pious with fear and anguish. But there is yet another point which to my mind is still more terrible and worthy of admiration. What is that? Hear first what Father Ambrose Catanenus of the Society of Jesus writes of a celebrated preacher in Spain. The latter was once representing to his audience, in his usual eloquent style, the terrors of the last judgment; he portrayed its severity, its strictness, and all the other circumstances of it in such lively colors that every one was stricken with fear. "See there," he cried out, "in the midst of that altar, in a heavy, black cloud, from which come forth fear-

Conclusion
and exhortation
to
sinners.

ful thunders and lightnings, that awful and strict divine Judge, formerly a God of love and mercy, but now a God of wrath and anger and vengeance; a God armed with the thunderbolt! See whole legions of spirits soaring through the air, all ready to take vengeance on the sinner! See those sinners formerly so desirous of honors now put to shame before the whole world; how they stamp with their feet in their fury! How they struggle with the chains that bind them!" These and similar things the zealous preacher described to his audience in a voice of thunder. They were all as still as possible; all overwhelmed with fear; all hearts were moved to contrition, and at last the whole congregation broke out into tears. When the preacher saw the people so well disposed, he stretched forth his hand and ordered them to refrain from weeping, and to listen to the remainder of the sermon. "I have," he continued, "a more terrible thing to tell you than all that I have described hitherto: a thing that alone ought to be bewailed with bitter tears." The people waited eagerly to hear what was to come. "The most terrible thing of all," burst forth the preacher with flaming eyes and awful voice, "the greatest misery of all is that you who are now filled with a well-grounded fear, and who are shedding tears of true contrition, after the lapse of one quarter of an hour will forget everything you have heard here to-day; all your present feelings, devotion, and zeal shall vanish; you will go back to your former sins, and to much worse ones; you will fall still deeper into the mire, heap sin on sin, and at last die in sin and be sent to hell on the last day. This is indeed the worst of all evils: to hear those terrible eternal truths, to take them to heart and acknowledge them, to weep bitterly, and mourn with a contrite heart at the recollection of them, and yet not to change for the better, or to give up old bad habits. What can be more deserving of wonder than this? It is like the marble of which the altar is made; it weeps when the warm noon-day wind blows through the church, and becomes so damp that one might think it quite softened; but it is marble all the same, and harder than before." So spoke the preacher, and left his audience filled with shame at his stinging reproof. Ah, my dear brethren, it is this very thing that seems so terrible to me too, that namely, after all that we have heard about our divine Judge and meditated about Him, to conceive a greater horror of sin, nevertheless most people still persist in their old vicious ways: the unchaste return to their filthy pleasures, the

blasphemers to their cursing, the uncharitable to their detraction, the drunkards to their intemperance, while the unjust refuse to make restitution, and the vindictive to lay aside their hatred. Thus the sermons they hear about the divine justice only serve to make them more hardened in vice, and less excusable before the tribunal of the Almighty. This, I repeat, is what appears to me far more terrible than all that you have hitherto heard about Christ our future Judge; and that also is what I am most in dread of. O God of goodness, effect the contrary by Thy powerful grace in our hearts, of which Thou art Lord and Master; grant that this fear of mine may be unfounded, and that instead of that fearful curse, which I dare no more utter through terror, we may all hear Thy loving voice inviting us, "Come, ye blessed," enter into the joy of your Lord. Amen.

*Another Introduction to the same sermon for the fourth
Sunday of Advent.*

Text.

Videbit omnis caro salutare Dei.—Luke iii. 6.

"And all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Introduction.

So all flesh shall see the Saviour. And shall mine and yours, and also the flesh of dead sinners and the wicked? Yes; "all flesh shall see the salvation of God;" all flesh without any exception. But where? In the crib of Bethlehem, where in a week's time we shall celebrate the festival of His Nativity? In the house at Nazareth in which He dwelt? In the temple of Jerusalem, in which He preached? On Calvary, where He was crucified? No; for we were not alive in those days; that happiness fell to the lot of other men. Perhaps in the kingdom of heaven? Alas, we shall not all enter there! Where then? In the place where all flesh shall be assembled at the last day after the general resurrection, before the judgment-seat of God. There "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." Oh! we shall see Him then! "Who shall stand to see Him?"¹ cries out the Prophet Malachy, filled with awe and fear; to see that Judge who is a God, and a God without mercy; that Judge who is a Man, and a Man filled with wrath against the sinner; that Judge who is a Saviour, but whose

¹ *Quis stabit ad videndum eum?*—Malach. iii. 2.

fidelity and love shall cry out against the sinner. This is what we have hitherto been considering in this Advent season. There is still one point not less terrible than the others, namely, that we shall see as Judge Him who is a Man like ourselves. O terrible sight for the sinner! *Plan of Discourse as above.*

ON THE SINNER AT THE LAST DAY OF JUDGMENT.

THIRTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON THE SUMMONING OF THE DEAD TO JUDGMENT.

Subject.

All men without exception shall be summoned before the judgment-seat of God. Oh, what a wonderful change shall then take place in many minds!—*Preached on the third Sunday after Epiphany.*

Text.

Dico autem vobis, quod multi ab Oriente et Occidente venient.—
Matt. viii. 11.

“And I say to you that many shall come from the east and the west.”

Introduction.

They will come from the east and the west, but what a vast difference there shall be between them! Of some the Gospel says that they “shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,” while others, amongst whom there will be many for whom the kingdom of heaven was prepared, “shall be cast into the exterior darkness.” When shall this coming, this crisis take place? On the last day, when Jesus Christ shall summon all mankind from the four quarters of the globe before His tribunal, to judge every one according to his works. My dear brethren, we have already considered the Judge as God, as Man, as our Saviour, and as our Model. But in a judgment there are many persons besides the judge: there is the accused, who is cited before the tribunal; there is the chief

question on which he is to be tried; there are the assessors who examine the case; there are the accusers and witnesses; and finally, there is the sentence pronounced by the judge which either absolves or condemns the accused. All these circumstances are a source of consolation for the just, but a terror for the wicked. The summoning of the accused before the tribunal is the subject of this day's meditation, which shall consist in the answer to this one question;

Plan of Discourse.

Who are those who shall be summoned? All men, without exception. Oh, what a wonderful change shall then take place in the minds of many! This shall serve us a salutary meditation by way of consolation for the just and of warning for the wicked.

Touch the hearts of both by Thy grace, O future Judge and still merciful Saviour! We ask this of Thee through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

Faith tells us that all men shall be summoned to judgment.

To prove that we and all mankind shall be summoned before the tribunal of the Almighty nothing more is necessary than the words of Our Lord Himself, the divine Judge: "When the Son of man shall come in His majesty," He says in the Gospel of St. Matthew, "and all the angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the seat of His majesty: and all nations shall be gathered together before Him."¹ All without exception, from every country in the world—great and small, rich and poor, men and women, all who have ever lived on earth shall meet there. In the four quarters of the globe shall be heard the awful sound of that trumpet which re-echoed in the ears of St. Jerome day and night: Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment! Arise, ye princes and kings, who ruled the world! away with you to the tribunal of your Supreme Lord! Arise, ye heroes and warriors, whose arms filled the world with dread! away with you to the muster which is to be held in the presence of your General-in-chief! Arise, ye judges and superiors, who have so often tried others and pronounced sentence on them! it is now your turn to hear the final decision of your Supreme Judge! Arise, ye merchants and men of business, who have travelled over land and sea to make money! your account-books have now to be examined by your

¹ Cum autem venerit Filius hominis in majestate sua, et omnes angeli cum eo, tunc sedebit super sedem majestatis suae, et congregabuntur ante eum omnes gentes.—Matt. xxv. 31, 32.

greatest Creditor. Arise, ye laborers and servants, who earned your bread by the sweat of your brow! come before the great Head of the family! Arise, ye married people, ye young men and maidens; behold the Bridegroom cometh, and is waiting for you! Arise, ye rich, ye poor, noble, and lowly! But away with such names, they have no longer any meaning, for then we shall be all alike. Arise, ye dead; that is the only common title we shall all have. Come, hasten to judgment!

Now I wish, my dear brethren, to place before your mental vision a spectacle of terror and surprising change. Quick, ye angels! Heavenly messengers, blow the trumpets! Sun, be darkened! Moon, hide thy light! Stars, fall down from heaven! Skies, send down the fiery rain! Everything on earth must be burnt up and reduced to ashes! Now, angels, sound the call: Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment! Behold, says St. Paul, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet,"¹ the graves shall all be opened, the mouldering bones shall come together, each soul shall enter into its body, "the dead shall rise again incorruptible."² The dead shall come forth living. What an awful spectacle! In earthly judgments the accused is warned some time beforehand, and a certain day is fixed for the hearing of his case, so that he may be able to prepare for it. But here all is to happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, without any forewarning; when the summons comes the accused must appear. In earthly tribunals the accused is allowed to bring his advocate with him, to speak for him and plead his cause as best he may; here each one shall have to appear alone and speak for himself, and answer the questions put to him. Kings and emperors! bring not your crowns and your purple with you to this place, and let no ministers or satellites accompany you! Here one man is as good as another, as far as respect for persons is concerned. The peasant is as good as his prince, the beggar as good as the rich man, the ignorant clown as respectable as the learned philosopher, until the Judge sends His angels to make the proper separation between them all. "He shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats: and He shall set the sheep," that is the just, "on His right hand, but the goats," that is the wicked, "on His left."³

This summons shall be surprising.

¹ In momento, in ictu oculi, in novissima tuba.—I. Cor. xv. 52.

² Mortui resurgent incorrupti.—Ibid.

³ Separabit eos ab invicem, sicut pastor segregat oves ab hœdis; et statuet oves quidem a dextris suis, hœdis autem a sinistris.—Matt. xxv. 32, 33.

It will be
comforting
and joyful
for the just.

There, my dear brethren, we have the infallible truth taught to us by our faith about the calling of all mankind to the last judgment. Now let us make a few reflections on this truth. First, what a great change shall take place in many minds when the dead shall arise out of their graves and hear for the first time the trumpet that summons them to the tribunal! Just souls! what a joyful sound that will be for you! To you alone does Our Lord say the words that we read in the Gospel of St. Luke: "When these things begin to come to pass, look up and lift up your heads: because your redemption is at hand."¹ What joy for the student at the end of the scholastic year to hear his name called out in public, that he may ascend the stage to receive a gilded volume. And although during the performance he may have represented the person of a poor, tattered beggar, he considers his honor greater than if he had represented a king, without receiving any mark of honorable distinction: for in the latter case he would try to hide away and weep for very shame. Arise, ye dead! These words, pious Christians, shall bring nothing but joy to you; they will be the loving invitation of the Spouse to His bride: "Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come,"² "for winter is now past, the rain is over and gone."³ Come, and thou shalt be crowned! Arise, ye poor in spirit! Come to eternal riches! Arise, ye mourners who have bewailed your sins with tears and contrition; who have suffered many tribulations with contented hearts for My sake; come! you shall be comforted; the rude winter is past; the rough toil is over; there is an end to all suffering; come, and enter into eternal joys! Arise, ye merciful; now shall ye obtain mercy without end or limit! Arise, ye meek, ye peacemakers; come and possess the kingdom of the beloved children of God! Arise, ye chaste of heart; come and behold your God forever! Arise, ye humble; come now and be exalted, and sit on a throne of everlasting glory! O my God! should I not during this short and uncertain time of my life love Thee above all things with my whole heart, and serve Thee with all possible zeal, that I may one day be awakened by such a joyful invitation? But otherwise, alas! what a terrible sound shall that of the last trumpet be for me and all sinners!

¹ His autem fieri incipientibus, respicite, et levate capita vestra, quoniam appropinquat redemptio vestra.—Luke xxi. 28.

² Surge, propera, amica mea, columba mea, formosa mea, et veni.—Cant. ii. 10.

³ Jam enim hiems transit; imber abiit et recessit.—Ibid. 11.

Arise, ye dead! Arise, wicked sinners! Arise, you proud and ambitious man, you unjust, avaricious man, you impure adulterer, you drunkard, you vindictive man, you blasphemer, you curser, you vain, sensual man! Arise, slothful, wicked servant, and come to judgment! Imagine, my dear brethren, the feelings of a criminal who on awakening in the morning sees to his great surprise the executioner awaiting him with the rope in his hand ready to lead him to the gallows. Some have suddenly become grey with terror when they heard the bell toll as the signal for their execution. Imagine—and it is not near so terrible as the first case—the state of mind of the child who, having committed a great fault, sees its father standing by its bedside in the morning with the rod in his hand, and calling out to him in an angry voice: get up! Ah, there is something else in question besides merely getting up! The child turns and twists in the bed and rolls itself up in the clothes, crying so as to be heard over the whole house, although it has not as yet felt a single blow. Why so? Because in addition to having to get up it knows that the rod is in store for it. But all this is mere child's play compared to the anguish that shall fill the sinner when he awakens from the sleep of death to be summoned to judgment.

But terrible
for the
wicked.
Shown by
similes.

William of Lyons writes of a Grecian king who was always sad and melancholy because he kept thinking of his sins and of the last judgment. His brother often remonstrated with him on this, and the king determined to bring him to his senses. One night he ordered the trumpets to be blown at the door of his brother's house as a sign that the master of it was sentenced to death. The brother next morning, thinking that things had come to an evil pass with him, went with his wife and children all clad in mourning to the king's palace, and there threw himself down on the ground, weeping with terror. What is the meaning of this? asked the king. Have I not reason to be sad, replied his brother, since I have heard the terrible trumpet that announces my death, although I know not what I have done to deserve such a fate? Oh, replied the king, if that trumpet has disturbed you so much, although you do not know what you have done to deserve death, how can you reasonably ask me to lay aside all fear and anxiety, since my thoughts are always occupied with that terrible trumpet-sound that shall call me to the tribunal of the Almighty, there to have sentence passed on me; and moreover I know very well that I have often sinned and deserved eternal

Explained
by an ex-
ample.

death? Go; my only object was to teach you what just reason I have for my fears.

Sinners
should
think of this
now.

Wicked Christian! wo to you if, more deaf than the mouldering bones which at the sound of the trumpet shall rise at once out of their graves, you close your ears to my voice, or rather to the voice of God who speaks to you by my mouth! Wo to you if the meditation on that dreadful day in which all nature shall be disturbed and men shall wither away with fear does not inspire you with a salutary fear, and with the resolution of at last amending your sinful life! But if you now refuse to listen to me who am only saying what is for your eternal salvation, you will one day against your will have to hear that terrible voice whose only utterance for you will be the sentence of your eternal damnation. Therefore I advise you in the words of St. Paul: "Rise thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead;"¹ arise and put on the mourning garments of true contrition for your sins, so that when the trumpet calls out: Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment! you may arise with joy and exultation to eternal life.

The just and
the wicked
shall resume
their former
bodies, but
in very dif-
ferent cir-
cumstances.

Again, what a change shall take place in the minds of many, of the just on one side and of the wicked on the other, when the souls of both shall rejoin their bodies, which in the case of the former shall be glorified, angelically beautiful, and brighter than the sun; but in the case of the latter, deformed, hideous, and emitting a foul odor. With what joy will not the souls of the just welcome their bodies and lead them into everlasting happiness! Come, the just soul shall say; come, my dear companion, and share in my glory which thou hast helped me to gain! Give me the hand with which thou hast labored every day for the honor of God; with which thou hast given such generous alms to the poor; which thou hast never misused for injustice or impurity! Give me the eyes that thou didst so carefully guard against dangerous looks! Give me the mouth that thou hast opened so candidly in the tribunal of penance to confess thy sins, a confession that has saved us from the fire of hell! Give me that flesh that thou hast so often mortified for God's sake and to gain heaven! Come now, and let us enter together into the joys of heaven, where we shall never be separated from each other again! And on the other hand, with what horror, with what curses and blasphemies, the soul of the reprobate shall re-

¹ Surge, qui dormis, et exurge a mortuis.—Ephes. v. 14.

join its foul carrion and drag it down to eternal flames! Accursed body! the soul shall say; how can I remain united to this putrid mass for all eternity? Art thou that sink of corruption that I have so much loved and petted? for whose pleasure I have lost the glory of heaven that I was created for? For thy sake, that thou mightest enjoy thyself and live in luxury, I am lost forever! Accursed soul! the body shall exclaim; thou shouldst with reason have held me better in check, and refused me what was bad and injurious for me! Oh, rather let me lie in the grave consumed with worms than accompany thee to hell!

Pious Christians! to console yourselves in your daily trials and crosses and to encourage you to lead mortified lives, think often of this: the less comfort your body now has in the shape of sensual, earthly, and transitory pleasures; the more it is plagued with labor, hunger, thirst, sickness, and pain; the more it is chastised by voluntary mortifications, the more glorious and beautiful will it be at the last day, when it shall be again united to your soul. Vain worldlings! do you also frequently think of this to inspire yourselves with a salutary fear; no one can go to heaven by leading a luxurious, idle, sensual, comfortable life; the way on which Jesus Christ has walked is a narrow, rude way, beset with thorns and crosses, and it must be travelled by all who wish to follow Him to life; no one shall be reckoned in the number of the elect, no one shall be acknowledged as His child by the eternal Father, who is not like to the image of His crucified Son. What will then become of you, to whom the very name of the cross is a hideous goblin? you who never deny your mouth, eyes, ears, and other senses any pleasure they ask for? you who always pet yourselves and treat yourselves so tenderly? you who adorn your bodies contrary to the law of God, the teaching of the Gospel, and the rules of Christian humility, as the vain usages of the world demand, and to the scandal of others? You will receive those bodies again, but in what condition? How monstrous, deformed, and horrible they shall be? To dwell in them in that state, even if you had nothing else to suffer, would be a hell in itself.

Thirdly, what a change there will be in the minds of many when all mankind shall behold themselves huddled together without any respect for persons: kings and princes with lowly peasants, high-born ladies with vulgar kitchen-maids—all assembled before the judgment-seat of God, as St. John says in the Apoca-

From this both may learn a salutary lesson.

Then the great ones of earth shall be humbled and put to shame.

lypse: "I saw the dead, great and small, standing in the presence of the throne"!¹ O my dear brethren, what will then become of the point of honor and of precedence in rank? what of nobility and high lineage? what of high stations and positions? what of titles and honorable distinctions? Will there be perhaps a dispute as to who shall come first out of the grave, as to who shall precede and who shall yield to others? Will any respect be shown to one who comes forth from a grand mausoleum more than to one who arises out of a lowly church-yard? Shall we hear people say: I am a king, a prince, a count, a noble, a gentleman, a servant, a peasant, a beggar? I am a person of distinction; I am one of the lower orders—things that now excite such foolish comment in the world? Oh, truly there will be an end of all that; for then all shall be equal; one shall be as high as the other, and the only rank shall be that of holiness and justice. And how aggrieved the great man must then feel when he sees not only that he is paid no mark of respect by his former servant, but that the latter, or the beggar, or the shepherd, whom he formerly hardly deigned to cast an eye on, is now placed above him, and he is forced to give way, nay, that he must now actually lie at the feet of those whom he formerly persecuted, oppressed, and treated like dogs. Then shall the prophecy of Isaias be fulfilled: "The children of them that afflicted Thee shall come bowing down to Thee, and all that slandered Thee shall worship the steps of Thy feet."² See there the rich glutton at the feet of the poor, ragged Lazarus, to whom during life he did not even deign to give the crumbs that fell from his table; Herod at the feet of St. John the Baptist, whom he decapitated; the emperor Nero prostrate before the poor fishermen, Peter and Paul, whom he had bound in chains; the emperor Diocletian bowing down before St. Sebastian, whom he had caused to be pierced with arrows; Rictius Varus at the feet of the citizens of Treves, in whose blood he had washed his hands; a judge prostrate before the poor widow or desolate orphan whose rights he had not upheld because they were of lowly condition. Oh, what a change that will be, and what confusion it shall cause in many minds! Could anything more humiliating be imagined for a proud, haughty man?

And they

You must not think, my dear brethren, that on that day peo-

¹ Vidi mortuos, magnos et pusillos, stantes in conspectu throni.—Apoc. xx. 12.

² Venient ad te curvi filii eorum qui humiliaverunt te, et adorabunt vestigia pedum tuorum omnes qui detrahebant tibi.—Is. lx. 14.

ple will pay no heed to rank and privilege, and that the proud, after suffering the humiliations that shall then be common to all sinners, will not feel the confusion to which they shall be subjected. No! On the contrary, the wicked, as they left this world with their bad passions and inclinations in full vigor, shall rise again from the dead with the same passions; the proud man shall have his pride and ambition as formerly; the impatient man shall still feel all the rancor of his ill-humor; the passionate man shall be still subject to his feelings of rage; and hence what despair shall possess them when they see themselves so humiliated, despised, mocked at, and rejected by those over whom they were so much exalted during life! Piso, a noble Roman, was led before the judge, clad in a shabby robe, to be tried for some offence of which he was accused; seeing the people staring at him, some in scorn, others with pity, he felt so keenly the humiliation of being thus degraded before the common herd that he drew a dagger which he had concealed under his cloak, and in a fit of passion stabbed himself to the heart.

will feel that keenly, because they shall be as proud as ever. Shown by an example.

The consideration of this truth, my dear brethren, should now help us to practise true Christian humility. If one is inclined to think too much of the rank that exalts him above others, he should say to himself: on that day there will be no question of rank, and who knows whether I shall not have to take my place even amongst the lowest? Remember this, you rich people, when a poor mendicant comes to your doors and calls through the keyhole for a piece of bread, and do not keep him waiting for hours, nor turn him off with harsh words; say to yourselves: one day I shall have to stand with that beggar in the valley of Josaphat, and who knows whether I shall not have to lie prostrate at his feet? Remember this, you ladies and gentlemen who are sometimes so harsh with your servants and treat them like slaves, storming at and cursing them if they happen to commit the least fault, and refusing them the necessary care and nourishment if ill-health renders them unable to attend to their duties. Say to yourselves: on that day my servant shall stand in the same rank with me, and then shall be seen which of us is to be the master, which the servant; which is to be the lady, and which the humble handmaid. Then perhaps I shall have to address in humble words those who now wait on me, and who are so badly treated by me!

The thought of this should help the rich and great to practise humility.

The same thought should bring consolation to you, pious And the

poor and
despised
servants of
God to be
consoled,
because they
shall be ex-
alted here-
after.
Shown by
similes.

Christians, who are content with the will of God, although you are poor, desolate, despised, humiliated! Your trials shall last only for a time, and a very short time; and on the last day everything shall be changed, just as it is in a mirror. Look at yourselves for once in the glass; not for the sake of gratifying your vanity, in which useless occupation much precious time is often lost, but for the sake of learning a salutary lesson for the good of your souls. You will see your person represented therein as you stand, but with this difference: that your right hand shall be on the left side in the mirror, and your left hand on the right side; then think to yourselves: here in this life I am on the left hand, rejected, looked on as not worth anything, nay, hardly looked at at all, while others and even the wicked are held in high esteem. Thy will be done, O God! I can wait till Thy great day comes, when Thou shalt exhibit our lives to the whole world as in a glass; then we shall find our places changed. "They are lifted up for a little while," says the Prophet Job of the wicked who are raised above others in this life: but only for a little while; "and they shall not stand, and shall be brought down, and as the tops of the ears of corn they shall be broken."¹ Consider the ears of corn in a field; what do you see? Nothing but a long stem of straw whose top is covered with something like hair. Nothing more? No. And where is the corn? The wheat for the sake of which alone the land has been tilled, cannot be seen as yet; it is hidden and covered up. But wait till the time comes for threshing, and what happens? The straw that lifted itself up so proudly before is bruised by the flail and trodden under foot, but the corn falls out and can be plainly seen; it is then most carefully gathered up, cleansed, winnowed, and put into the barn, while the straw is thrown into the stable under the cattle. So it is with us mortals during this life. Poor, pious souls! you are now in your humility concealed, hidden from the eyes of the world. The proud sinners are lifted up and honored like the straw in the field; but be not disturbed at this; console yourselves till the harvest time comes, till that day on which the straw shall be threshed out and the wheat separated from the chaff, as Our Lord says; then "as the tops of the ears of corn they shall be broken," then shall they be humbled, and like the straw lie under your feet; but you, like the corn, shall be

¹ Elevati sunt ad modicum, et non subsistent; et humiliabuntur, et sicut summitates spicarum conterentur.—Job xxiv. 24.

gathered into the storehouse of the Eternal Father, who will then say to His reapers, that is, to His angels: "The wheat gather ye into My barn."¹

Finally, what a great change shall take place in the minds of many when the separation shall be made according to the words: "The angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked from among the just!"² Wicked man! the angels shall say, what are you doing here amongst the sheep of Christ? Away with you! This is no place for you! You belong to the reprobate goats. Alas, how bitter and full of confusion shall then be the separation of one friend from another, of one acquaintance from another, of one fellow-countryman from another, of one neighbor from another, of one member of a household from another! One shall be on the right hand, the other on the left. "Then two shall be in the field," says Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Matthew, two who have worked together their lives long; "one shall be taken, and one shall be left."³ Two are living in the same house; "one shall be taken and one shall be left:" one shall be on the right, the other on the left hand. Two are in the same occupation; one of them shall be on the right, the other on the left hand. Two in the same family; one of them shall be on the right, the other on the left; the wife, for instance, on the right, the husband on the left; the father amongst the sheep, the son amongst the goats; the daughter amongst the angels, the mother amongst the devils; the sister amongst the elect, the brother amongst the reprobate; the scholar amongst the pious, the teacher amongst the wicked; a layman amongst the saints, a priest amongst the accursed; the penitent amongst the blessed, the confessor amongst the damned; the hearers in heaven, the preacher in hell, or quite the reverse. Alas, I think, be this as it may, the separation will be a sorrowful one for the unlucky part, the change terrible!

My dear brethren, ah, where shall we be? on what side shall we stand? Shall we all be at the right hand? May God grant it! And if so, how we shall rejoice with and congratulate each other! Shall some of us be at the left hand? God save each and every one of us from such a fate! If any were so unfortunate, how pitifully they would look at their former companions from whose society they are now excluded! For my part, I am

Most terrible for the wicked shall be their separation from the just.

Conclusion and resolution to serve God here most zealously, that we may be amongst the elect on the last day.

¹ Triticum autem congregat in horreum meum.—Matt. xiii. 30.

² Exibunt angeli, et separabunt malos de medio justorum.—Ibid. 49.

³ Duo erunt in agro; unus assumetur, et unus relinquitur.—Ibid. xxiv. 40.

frightened when I think of my past life, and not without reason do I fear that many lay-people and simple lowly ones shall be placed far above me on that day. Nay, perhaps many great sinners who have been converted by my sermons and changed into zealous penitents shall stand quite close to the divine Judge; but where shall I be? O my God! I hope in Thy infinite mercy that Thou wilt not put me among the reprobate on Thy left hand! I have detested and will as long as I live detest all my sins. I have repented and do now repent and will repent as long as I live that I have ever offended Thee. I love Thee now with my whole heart, and am ready to do, to omit, to suffer whatever thou wishest me to do, to omit, to suffer. But I am not sure that I shall continue to love Thee to the end of my life. This much I know for certain: that if, as I hope and trust from Thy divine mercy, I shall find myself among the elect on the right hand, I shall see very many men who are now apparently far beneath me and far less esteemed than I am, to whom I shall have to yield in glory. This thought shall as long as I live make me look on others with the utmost respect, and never despise any one, no matter how lowly, or poor, or ignorant, or sinful he may be; and I will say to myself: perhaps that man shall have a higher place than I at the judgment. This thought shall prevent me from giving way to anger, from seeking to be revenged on those who offend me, and from doing evil to any one; for perhaps the object of my anger may be much higher than I shall be at the last day. This thought shall encourage me to bear contempt, abuse, sickness, pains, and tribulations with the greatest contentment, in the firm hope that my present state shall be completely changed. Say now to yourselves, dear Christians: now is the time to choose and prepare the place in which we shall wish to be on that day. We are all horrified at the idea of being on the left hand, and we all wish to be on the right. Then let us rise up from this meditation, which we shall often make, especially in the time of temptation and danger of being led into sin—let us rise with the firm determination to serve zealously with our whole hearts, for the uncertain time that still remains to us, our God, who is worthy of all our love; to be obedient sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd and follow it, and never on any account to commit a wilful sin, for that alone is able to place us amongst the accursed goats on that day! Such is our unanimous resolution, is it not? And with God's

On the Examination of the Sinner in Judgment. 431

help we will keep it, so that when the trumpet calls us to the last judgment we shall be all together, to our great joy and mutual happiness, at the right hand of the Judge, and not one of us on the left. Amen.

Another introduction to the same sermon for the first Sunday of Advent.

Text.

Arescentibus hominibus præ timore.—Luke xxi. 26.

“Men withering away for fear.”

Introduction.

That I can well believe, for they will have good reason for fear! “Then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud with great power and majesty.” Who will not be awe-stricken at the sight of such majesty? Then they shall see coming a Judge who is a God of infinite wisdom and power; who shall not fear, whose conscience accuses him? A Judge who is at the same time a Man like to us; who shall not fear, who has not lived as becomes a man? A Judge who is our Saviour; who shall not fear, who has repaid such love with ingratitude? A Judge who is our Pattern and Model; who shall not fear, who has not followed His example? True it is, sinful men shall “wither away for fear.” My dear brethren, this was the subject which we considered last year during the holy season of Advent, when I spoke only of the Person of the Judge. But in a judgment there are several persons, etc. *Continues as above.*

THIRTY-FIFTH SERMON.

ON THE EXAMINATION OF THE SINNER IN JUDGMENT.

Subject.

1. Each of us shall be examined in the judgment; oh, what answer shall many be able to make? 2. The question and answer shall be given in the presence of all mankind; oh, how shall the sinner be able to bear the shame and confusion of that?—*Preached on the fourth Sunday after Epiphany.*

Text.

Porro homines mirati sunt, dicentes: Qualis est hic?—Matt. viii. 27.

“But the men wondered, saying: What manner of man is this?”

Introduction.

The same question shall one day be put to us: What manner of man is this? Where does he belong to? To heaven or to hell? Wo to us, my dear brethren, if the answer we give is not a favorable one for our salvation! The examination of man in the judgment is the subject of to-day's meditation, which shall consist of two points.

Plan of Discourse.

Each one of us shall be examined in the judgment; oh, what answer shall many be able to make? The first point. The question and answer shall be given before the whole world; oh, how shall the sinner be able to bear the confusion and shame of that? The second point. Sinners, repent of and confess your sins! Just Christians, be always on your guard against sin!

Such shall be the conclusion, and the end and aim of the whole meditation; help us thereto, Mother of mercy, and you, holy guardian angels!

The answer is difficult when the question regards many intricate and forgotten matters.

Difficult is the answer when the question deals with intricate matters, many in number, different in their nature, extending over a considerable time, and easily forgotten. A rich merchant who traffics in all kinds of goods by sea and land, who keeps a number of men employed, partly at home from morning till night in receiving and sending off his wares, and partly in other towns in buying and selling, if he were asked to give an account of his business for one year, and to state what, where, how much, at what price, on what day and hour, with what profit or loss he has sold; what, how much, where, from whom he has bought; how much money he has put by every day; how much he has expended; how much he has to pay; how much is owing to him: what answer could he make? Oh, he would exclaim, do not ask me such a question! How could I remember all those things? If I look over my books, comparing one with another, and count all my

money, a task that would require many months, then perhaps I might be able to say in a general way whether I am richer or poorer; but it is utterly impossible to enter minutely into such matters.

My dear brethren, in what shall the question consist that we shall each have to answer when we appear before the tribunal of divine justice? Will it merely regard what has been done for the space of a year in our households? No, indeed! To put the matter in a few words, we shall be asked about everything that we have done, said, thought, and omitted during our whole lives, in all places and circumstances, counting from the first dawn of reason to the last moment in which the soul left the body. "The books were opened," says the Apocalypse, "and the dead were judged by those things which were written in the books, according to their works;"¹ all the secrets of men's hearts and consciences shall then be displayed in a most vivid light. "Give an account of thy stewardship,"² shall be said to each one, as was said to the steward in the Gospel. Come here, O mortal! give an account of all that has occurred in thy household during the time of thy life. Account for the thoughts that were in thy mind! Thought is free, we generally say; no worldly jurisdiction has any control over it, not even the Church herself, unless one reveals his thoughts to her. Thou alone, O Judge of the living and the dead, hast reserved this right to Thyself! "The Lord is the weigher of spirits."³ In Thy scales are weighed not only the works but the most secret, hidden, and unknown spirits, the thoughts I had from my early childhood until the present moment, and which I cannot remember myself because their number is almost infinite. All are written down most exactly in Thy great account-book, and one day Thou wilt read them out for me, and call upon me to answer for them. "Inquisition shall be made into the thoughts of the ungodly."⁴ O my God! what filth shall then come forth from the hearts of many who now show no mark of it on their foreheads! All the envious, hateful, angry, vindictive, suspicious, rash-judging thoughts you entertained against your neighbor; all the vain, self-conceited, ambitious thoughts with which you flattered yourself: your beauty,

In the judgment we shall be questioned about all we have thought during our lives.

¹ Libri aperti sunt, et judicati sunt mortui ex his quæ scripta erant in libris, secundum opera ipsorum. Quidquid latet, apparebit.—Apoc. xx. 12.

² Redde rationem villicationis tuæ.—Luke xvi. 2.

³ Spiritum ponderator est Dominus.—Prov. xvi. 2.

⁴ In cogitationibus impii interrogatio erit.—Wis. i. 9.

or your skill; all the unclean thoughts, desires, and longings that you kept in your mind about unmarried or married persons, about relatives or persons consecrated to God, in some of which you have secretly taken pleasure, while in others you have wished to commit the sinful act; all the complacency you have had in former sins, or in future lustful gratifications that you imagined in occasions and temptations that were likely to befall you; all the desires you had that others should have an unlawful passion for you; all the impure emotions you experienced in wilfully looking at another person; in assisting at an immodest play; in looking at an unchaste picture, etc.: all these things you will have to answer for in order, and confess when, how often, and how long you were guilty of them.

and said.

“Give an account:” answer for all the words that you have heard and said during your life; how many imprecations and curses; how many words of abuse and invective, of sarcasm and contention you have spoken against others; how often you have injured Christian charity and your neighbor’s reputation by talking, fault-finding, tale-bearing, and detraction; how often you have disturbed the peace between friend and relations, brothers and sisters, husband and wife, by carrying stories backward and forward; how often you have indulged in or wilfully listened to impure conversation, or sullied your own purity and that of others by indecent allusions, double-meaning expressions and similes, and unchaste songs and writings; how often you have taught others to sin, and instructed the innocent in things they should never have learned; how often you have taken false and unnecessary oaths, or made false promises; how often you have dishonored the Almighty God and His saints by unbecoming words or blasphemy; how often you have told injurious, deliberate, or jocose lies; how often you have boasted of yourself or of your sins in the company of others; nay, how often you have spoken idly and to no purpose. Alas! exclaims St. Bernard, considering this point; alas! what account shall we be able to give for our idle words,¹ and what shall we be able to say about the sinful words we have uttered? Yet Our Lord tells us in the Gospel of St. Matthew: “But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt

¹ Heu nobis! quænam ratio reddi poterit de otio!

be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”¹

“Give an account;” answer for all the actions of your whole And done. life; what evil have you committed alone, with others, in secret, publicly, in youth, in manhood and age, up to the last moment of your life? What evil have you done at home, in that room, in that garden, on that walk, in that street, in that hidden corner? What injustice, impurity, intemperance have you been guilty of against yourself, against your neighbor, against God and His commandments, with eyes, ears, mouth, hands, feet? Ah, how will you be able to account for all these things? But one day you will have to do it. Give an account of all the sins you have caused others to commit or given occasion to by advice, command, approval, toleration, flattery, allurements, deceit, bad example, indecency in behavior, manner, dress, conversation. How many are there now who think of these things when they prepare for confession? Since my last confession, they say, I have done this or that, and nothing more; but not a word of the harm they have done the souls of others. On that day, however, all this shall be made the subject of a most strict interrogation. Many a one shall look on himself as quite free from all foul sins, and he shall be so in reality; and nevertheless in that strict judgment he shall find himself examined and found guilty of the most abominable actions. But how can that be? O my God! the accused will say, during my whole life I have never done such things! Yes, shall be the reply to him; you have not done them yourself, but you gave others occasion and opportunity to do them. How then? By your vanity and foppery; by your insatiable eagerness to find out and follow new fashions in dress, scandalous though they were, in order to please the eyes of strangers. You have often made an assignation dressed in that manner even in church, there to erect one church against another, one altar against another. The head of the family shall be found, as far as his own conduct is concerned, upright and just before God and the world in all his dealings, in buying and selling, careful in speech, diligent in hearing Mass, edifying, modest, and recollected in church; and yet he will be convicted of many blasphemies, false oaths, excessive drinking, and other similar crimes. But how? Why? I have never even known the names of those vices! Answer: those vices were well

¹ Dico autem vobis, quoniam omne verbum otiosum, quod locuti fuerint homines, reddent rationem de eo in die iudicii. Ex verbis enim tuis justificaberis, et ex verbis tuis condemnaberis.—Matt. xii. 36, 37.

known and freely committed by your servants, domestics, and even by your children, because you did not take due care of them, nor look after them day and night, as you should have done, nor kept a watchful eye on your children's training, seeing whether any wrong-doing was going on in the house; because you did not inflict punishment for faults committed, and tolerated everything; therefore in all those things you are guilty. A high official or minister of a great man may be most just and upright in his own conduct; a judge may be most anxious to keep the strict balance of justice, and not to allow himself to be biassed by gold, or promises, or hopes, or fears, and yet he may find himself convicted of many grievous sins and faults by his strict Judge. These will make themselves known to him, and cry out to him, as St. Bernard says, in a terrible voice: "We are thy works; we shall follow thee to the tribunal of the Almighty."¹ Ah, my God, how can these things be put down to me! When, where, and how have I become guilty of them? Answer: your servants, the domestics under your care and authority have forced bribes and presents from those whom they presented to you in audience; the cases entrusted to you were put off till the contending parties were impoverished and tired out, and obliged to put a stop to all law proceedings, so that he who had right on his side was compelled to suffer the loss of his case; you are to be blamed for all this, and it will all be put down to you because you have not been more careful, and have neglected the duties and obligations of your state; for you might easily have prevented all these evils. Give an account of what you have done wrong through culpable ignorance. Here and there you had a reasonable doubt as to the lawfulness of what you were about to do, but self-love, human respect, and other motives made you deaf to the doubt, so that you proceeded to act without taking any advice. You seldom heard instructions on the Christian doctrine, or attended sermons in which you might have been taught many duties of your state of life that you have not fulfilled through culpable ignorance. In all states there are certain sins that one either does not know or does not wish to know; one is apt to adopt erroneous maxims and to look on certain customs as lawful, or at all events as not sinful, and to conform to them because they are in vogue and are practised without scruple by the greater number of men of the world, although they are quite

¹ *Opera tua sumus; sequemur te ad Dei tribunal.*

opposed to the maxims of the Gospel and the doctrine and example of Christ. Oh! how many ignorances of that kind shall we not find in the great account-book, and how deeply they shall be scored therein!

Give an account; answer for all that you have omitted during your life, that you could and should have done. It is not enough ^{And omitted.} to abstain from what God has forbidden; one is also obliged to do what He has commanded, and will be questioned about the one as well as about the other. For instance, the Judge will not condemn you for having robbed your neighbor and stolen his property, but He will condemn you for not having helped the poor according to your means: "I was hungry and you gave Me not to eat: I was thirsty and you gave Me not to drink." He will not condemn you for having taken away your neighbor's reputation, but He will condemn you for having encouraged uncharitable remarks by your silence or your approval, and for not having stopped them when you might have done so. He will not condemn you for having given scandal to your domestics in many things, but He will condemn you for having tolerated faults in them, and for not having punished them for those faults. There are many parents whom He will not condemn for having brought up their children to vanity and luxury, and given them bad example in that respect, but He will condemn many because they have not brought up their children to virtue, and kept them from evil; for not having procured religious instruction for them in due time; for not having watched over them carefully; for having allowed them to run about the streets in all sorts of company, as is unfortunately the case with some, who thus grow up like heathens and gypsies. There are many superiors whom He will not condemn for having oppressed their subjects by unjust burdens, but He will condemn many for not having, as they were in duty bound to do, examined into the vices and bad habits of their subjects, or when they have known of such vices, for having tolerated and not at once prohibited and abolished them.

Give an account; answer for all the years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, moments that you have lived on earth. ^{And how we have employed our time, and other natural and su-} Every year has three hundred and sixty-five days; every day twenty-four hours; count the minutes if you can. Now you have

¹ Esurivi, et non dedistis mihi manducare: sitiivi, et non dedistis mihi potum.—Matt. xxv.

pernatural
gifts.

lived for twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy years; how have you employed all the minutes? For your eternal salvation, for which alone they were given to you? or for your eternal damnation? How much time have you spent uselessly in play, amusements, and other triflings? Give an account and answer; in what manner, to what purpose have you during all that time employed the natural goods bestowed on you by God: your health and bodily stature, your understanding and memory, and other gifts, and how much have you gained with them? How have you used the goods of fortune? To what purpose have you employed your money and wealth, your high position and authority? How have you used the gifts of grace? What profit have you derived from the use of the sacraments, from the good inspirations, the clear knowledge you had of divine things, the many opportunities of doing good that were given to you in preference to others, the many sermons you heard or might have heard if your slothfulness had not prevented you, the many examples of pious Christians who walked before you on the path of virtue?

Even our
good works
shall be
judged.

Give an account; answer even for all the good works you have done in the course of your life. Of what kind were they? "When I shall take a time," says the Lord, "I will judge justices."¹ Now bring forward your good works, your prayers, fasting, almsgiving, hearing of Mass, confessions, Communions, mortifications, works of mercy and charity, the daily duties of your state of life. Perhaps you have a great heap of them; but answer and say whether they were always performed in a proper manner, with due devotion and zeal as becomes a Christian? Oh, how many of them you will find to have proceeded from a bad source: from hypocrisy, vainglory, and self-complacency! How many were performed without the good intention, without being directed to God, out of human respect, through a natural taste, or self-love, or for convenience sake, and by chance? How many were without all zeal and devotion, attention, and reverence: tepid, cold, distracted, performed negligently? If all these faulty good works that deserve punishment rather than reward are separated from the remainder of your justices, alas! how many shall then remain? Then indeed you would seem to me like the unhappy Urias, who imagined that a great favor had been granted him when he received a letter from his king; but the poor man did

¹ Cum accepero tempus, ego justitias iudicabo.—Ps. lxxiv. 3.

not know that the letter contained the sentence of death for him. O judgments of God! how terrible you are; for we shall have to answer not only for our sins, but also for our good works and virtuous actions! I sometimes flatter myself now that I am heaping up merits; I imagine that I am carrying about with me letters of credit for eternity when I count up my good works; but perhaps for all I know there may be amongst them letters like that of Urias, which will increase my responsibility, as the good works are not performed for the proper end. O Lord! if Thou art so strict in judging justices, what shall become of me, a poor sinner?

Now I know how well-grounded is the fear of Thy servant Job, and I must acknowledge with him: "Indeed I know it is so, and that man cannot be justified compared with God. If he will contend with Him, he cannot answer Him one for a thousand."¹ The holy Abbot Elias, a great ascetic, and much given to the practice of mortification, considering the strict judgment that awaited him at the end of his life, cried out filled with dread: "Three things I fear: the exit of the soul from the body, that terrible, momentary spring from time to eternity; the severity of the judgment, the strict examination of my whole life; and finally, the Judge's sentence that shall be pronounced according to the requirements of justice, without any regard for mercy, and it shall be irrevocable for all eternity."² Ah, my God! holy men have experienced that fear in spite of the austerity of their lives; and we are so little concerned that we live in utter carelessness, and waste our years in vanity, dissoluteness, and luxury! Rosweid relates in his Lives of the Ancient Fathers that a celebrated hermit who kept the thought of the strict account he would have to render in the judgment always before his mind, once hearing a young ecclesiastic laugh while engaged in some innocent recreation, opened his eyes wide in amazement, and reproved the young man in these few but pithy words: We shall have to give an account of ourselves to the God of heaven and earth, and yet you laugh!³ I mention this anecdote, not meaning that we should always spend our time in sadness, in scruples of conscience, and give way to pusillanimity. No; my only object is that we should not altogether forget this eternal

Hence the answer will be most difficult, and we have reason to fear judgment.

¹ Vere scio quod ita sit, et quod non justificetur homo compositus Deo. Si voluerit contendere cum eo, non poterit ei respondere unum pro mille.—Job ix. 2, 3.

² Tria timeo: egressionem animæ e corpore; severitatem examinis; sententiam Judicis.

³ Coram coeli et terræ Domino rationem reddituri sumus; et tu rides!

truth, but sometimes recall it to our minds; it is quite certain that we shall have to give an account of our whole lives to the Lord of heaven and earth, and yet you dare to amuse and enjoy yourself with the vain children of the world! And you, my tongue, dare to utter injurious words against this great Lord! And you, my mind, do not hesitate to pollute yourself with foul thoughts, and to take a wilful pleasure in sinful desires! Ah, think of this and weigh it well: we must render an account one day to the Lord of heaven and earth! O my God, what shall I do? "What shall I do?" exclaimed the steward in the Gospel, when his lord called him to account. "To dig I am not able, to beg I am ashamed;" I will make friends for myself, "that when I shall be removed from the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses."¹ Ah, that resolution shall come too late for me on the day of judgment, for then there shall be no time left to amend my faults. Therefore I will do it now since I still have time! I will blot out my wicked works by true repentance, and this very day I will begin to multiply my good works by serving God zealously, so that when the Judge shall ask me concerning the former I may be able to say to Him: I have already atoned to Thee and paid Thee for them; and that with regard to the latter I may say with truth: I have done them as well as I knew how, and now I expect my reward. My dear brethren, if the mere question put to the accused on the day of judgment shall be so difficult to answer even for the just, how will the sinner be able to bear the shame and confusion that shall fall to his lot? For how and where shall this examination take place? Before the whole world. Oh, what a disgrace! as we shall see in the

Second Part.

The sinner shall hear his crimes called out before the whole world.

Now, my dear brethren, I bring you in thought into an amphitheatre infinitely greater and vaster than any that the Romans and heathens ever saw here in Treves. Imagine that you see above in the clouds Jesus Christ, the Judge of the living and the dead, seated on a throne of awful majesty, surrounded by countless armies of angels, as the Prophet foretold: "Thousands of thousands ministered to Him, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before Him."² Beside Him stands

¹ Quid faciam? Fodere non valeo, mendicare erubescio. Ut, cum amotus fuero a villicatione, recipiant me in domos suas.—Luke xvi. 3, 4.

² Millia millium ministrabant ei, et decies millies centenamillia assistebant ei.—Dan. vii. 10.

Mary the Queen of angels; all the apostles, patriarchs, prophets, and martyrs are seated around in choirs as assessors; below are legions of devils, who as executioners of divine justice await the sentence of the Judge, panting like blood-hounds meanwhile with eagerness. On the right hand are the just in their brightness and glory; on the left the wicked all in confusion, like goats driven together in a disorderly flock. In the midst of these on the public stage is brought forward the sinner to hear and answer for all his wicked actions. What do you think will be his feelings on the occasion? There have been ambassadors and orators admitted to an audience of the Roman emperor seated in pomp on his throne, and the sight of his majesty struck them dumb, so that they were unable to utter a word, although they did not appear as suppliants, much less as criminals. How then will it be with the poor sinner, who in the presence of all in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, must hear the record of his crimes read out?

In their presence, says the Lord by the Prophet Nahum, "I will discover thy shame, and will show thy nakedness to the nations, and thy shame to kingdoms. And I will cast abominations upon thee, and will disgrace thee, and will make an example of thee."¹ Shall then, O Lord, all that I have thought, spoken, and done be made manifest there? Yes; I will discover it all. Even what I have done in the dark night, in hidden corners, and tried to keep from the knowledge of everyone? I will discover it; all shall be made manifest. Even those sins that filled me with shame when I was committing them alone? Even those that I should die with shame to be barely suspected of? Even those that I would not reveal to my dearest friend to escape death? Shall all those be made manifest? Yes! I will discover them all to the whole world; they shall be seen written on your forehead with all their circumstances; the place, the time, the number, the intention you had when committing them. "Thou didst it secretly," said the Lord to David by His prophet, of the adultery he had committed, and the same shall be said to all sinners; thou hast secretly caused Urias to be murdered, and taken Bethsabee to wife that no one might suspect thy guilt; "but I will do this thing in the sight of all Israel,

And his most secret sins even shall be revealed.

¹ Revelabo pudenda tua, et ostendam gentibus nuditatem tuam, et regnis ignominiam tuam. Et projiciam super te abominationes, et contumelias te afficiam, et ponam te in exemplum.—Nahum iii. 5, 6.

and in the sight of the sun" thy shame shall be made known to the whole world.¹

How the
sinner shall
be put to
shame.
Shown by
examples
and similes.

Alas! where shall I then fly to hide my shame? If anyone in the world was ever put to great shame, it was surely the case with the ambassadors of David, who were ill-treated by the Ammonite king Hanon, as we read in the tenth chapter of the Second Book of Kings. He caused their heads to be shorn as if they were slaves, their beards and their garments to be half cut away as if they were fools, and in this shameful guise he had them brought into his court to be made the laughing-stock of his courtiers and ministers; he then had them led through the streets through a great crowd of people who were staring at them. "The men were sadly put to confusion,"² says the Scripture of them. To my mind they must have been so ashamed that they hardly knew where to turn their eyes, and they would certainly have preferred to have their heads cut off by the executioner than to be thus treated. Honorable maidens of this city! if one of you, born of a noble family, and whose fair fame has hitherto been unsullied, were convicted of having given birth to an illegitimate child, and publicly pilloried, or according to the custom of the Church, had to stand this morning at the door of the parish church, clad in white, with a candle in her hand, so that all the people should see her, what would you think of that? Would you not rather die than suffer such ignominy? I knew a young woman, writes Father Paul Segneri, who through foolish passion sinned against holy purity, and no sooner did she notice that she could not conceal the fruits of her sin than filled with fear of the shame that threatened her, she ran at once to her lover and begged of him on her knees to help her to make away with herself, as she could not bear the shame of having her crime made known; the man agreed, gave her poison, and sent her soul to hell. Unhappy soul! you chose rather to suffer the eternal torments of hell than to have your sin known in only one town! But what is that, Christians, compared to the confusion of the sinner at the last day? Do you, O ye heavens, understand the exceeding greatness of it? For that very girl and every impenitent sinner, shorn and ragged like the ambassadors of David, shall stand in the pillory surrounded by demons, and that, too, not in the sight of one town, but before all men,

¹ Tu fecisti abscondite, ego autem faciam verbum istud in conspectu omnis Israel et in conspectu solis.—II. Kings xii. 12.

² Erant viri confusi turpiter valde.—Ibid. x. 5.

angels, and devils, and all their most secret crimes shall be made public.

O terrible day of confusion and despair! Think, although it is a small matter compared to the other instances we have considered, of the feelings of one who has to tell a shameful sin in confession. The confessional then seems to him nothing but a rack to torture him; his blood stagnates; his heart beats violently; his color changes; he stammers and can hardly get out the words. I have—, the tongue falters, and he is covered with a cold perspiration. But why does he get into such a state? What is he afraid of? Ah, I need not ask; he has a single sin to disclose to his father confessor, and that is quite enough to fill him with shame and anguish. O my God! if the disclosure of a sin in the privacy of the confessional can cause such shame, how will it be when all sins shall be made known, to the whole world? If it frightens one to tell his sins to a priest who is dumb; to a priest who often does not know him nor has ever seen him; to a priest who listens to him with all charity and friendliness; speaks to him gently, and rejoices that a lost sheep has returned to the fold of Christ; to a priest who will give him absolution from his sins: how will it be if those sins have to be made known to the whole world, before heaven and earth, not that they may be pardoned, but that the sinner may be sentenced to eternal damnation?

Confirmed
by experience.

Let us continue this reasoning a little longer, my dear brethren. Suppose that an angel, to whom all our thoughts are known, stood here in my place in this pulpit. (Let each one now think of the sin of which he is most ashamed.) The angel begins to call out the name of every one in a clear voice; that man has done so-and-so at such a time; that woman has lived in such a manner; that gentleman whom you see there has committed adultery in that house with that person; that wife has been unfaithful; that young woman has impure desires and has sullied her chastity; that servant has robbed his master; that maid her mistress; that priest is leading a dissolute life; and so on, calling out all the sins each one is guilty of: what would many a one do in such a case? How they would hide under the benches in shame and try to conceal themselves! How quickly would they who know themselves to be guilty try to get away, and run out of the church lest it should come to their turn to have their names called out! O dear angel! cease; be still! otherwise I should

Further explanation of the magnitude of this shame.

be among the first to run off. But, my dear brethren, where are we then? Is not this only one town in the wide world, and only one church in that town? There are indeed many of us here together, but what is that compared to the population of the whole city of Treves? What is it compared to the population of the whole world at this present moment? What is it compared to the vast hosts of angels, devils, and men who ever lived, are living, and shall live on earth till the last day? O my God! I think, if I cannot bear to have my shame disclosed before a handful of people who cannot condemn me on account of my sins, how shall I bear it on the last day before heaven and earth? How shall all sinners bear to have their vices made known to all their friends, relations, acquaintances, and to strangers as well? The husband shall then know the vices of his wife; the wife those of her husband; parents shall find out the hidden crimes of their children, and children those of their parents; I and all men shall know what you have done wrong; you and all men shall know the abominations of which I have been guilty. See, they will say; who would have thought it of that person who seemed to be so good and pious? How different he seems now to what we imagined him to be! Now we know what those people are! Ah, it was the fear of this shame that suggested to holy Job that terrible wish: "Who will grant me this, that Thou mayest protect me in hell, and hide me till Thy wrath pass,"¹ so that no human eye may see me? It is the dread of this shame that will force the wicked to cry out to the lifeless stones to cover them: "Then shall they begin to say to the mountains: fall upon us! and to the hills: cover us!"² Ye demons, hurry us off at once to hell that we may escape such intolerable shame!

Conclusion and exhortation to confess one's sins candidly in the tribunal of penance, and to avoid sin in future.

Oh, how foolish we are to seek so diligently to hide our wickedness, and to sin so recklessly when we have the opportunity of doing so, in the dark, or in a room where no one can see us! For everything shall be made known in the minutest detail to the whole world by the all-knowing God Himself. Go on, then, you wicked deceiver! continue to hide your abominations through shame as long as you may, to conceal sins in confession, and to palliate and excuse them! What good will that be to you? Will you be able to do that on the last day, when the great account-book shall be opened? Ah, I beg of you for God's sake

¹ Quis mihi hoc tribuat, ut in inferno protegas me, et abscondas me, donec pertranseat furor tuus?—Job xiv. 13.

² Tunc incipient dicere montibus: cadite super nos, et collibus: operite nos.

have more common sense; think of what you are doing! Open your mouth and disclose your sins candidly in a much more merciful tribunal: in the holy sacrament of penance, and repent of your wickedness! Hear what St. John Chrysostom says: Your sins are written in the great account-book; your tears are like the sponge, and with them you can wash all the black record away, so that the book will be found clear and stainless.¹ O desirable penance, says St. Bernard, and good the judgment that will withdraw and hide me from the strict justice of God!² according to the words of St. Paul: "But if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."³ But we, my dear brethren,—and this is the chief part of this meditation,—shall henceforth have a still greater horror of all sin, and shall fear nothing more than to offend God deliberately, lest that intolerable shame should fall to our lot on the last day; and now we shall practise the works of Christian humility, justice, and mercy, that we may then be exalted to eternal honor and glory. Amen.

Another introduction to the same sermon for the second Sunday of Advent.

Text.

Ait illi: Tu es qui venturus es?—Matt. xi. 3.

"He said to Him: Art Thou He that art to come?"

Introduction.

What answer does Christ make to this question? Nothing more than to say: "Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen;" from My works he shall soon know who I am. My dear brethren, the same question shall one day be put to us by the elect, when the angel shall sound the trumpet to call the dead from their graves before the tribunal of the Almighty. Art thou he that art to come with us on the right hand, or is thy place on the left among the demons? Art thou to rejoice with us forever in heaven, or to burn with the reprobate in hell? Alas for us if our works do not give us a favorable answer, etc. *Continues as above.*

¹ Spongiæ ad instar sunt lachrymæ tuæ; lachrymas funde, et purus ille liber invenietur.

² Bonum iudicium, quod me illo districto iudicio subducit et abscondit!

³ Quod si nosmetipsos dijudicemus, non utique iudicemur.—I. Cor. xi. 31.

THIRTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE ACCUSATION OF THE CRIMINAL IN THE JUDGMENT.

Subject.

The criminal shall be accused in the judgment of God.—
Preached on the fifth Sunday after Epiphany.

Text.

Colligite primum zizania, et alligate ea in fasciculos ad comburendum.—Matt. xiii. 30.

“Gather up first the cockle, and bind it into bundles to burn.”

Introduction.

According to Barradius, Cornelius à Lapide, and other commentators, the cockle signifies the wicked and those who love the world; the wheat the just and pious servants of God. The reaper is in every case death. The place in which the cockle is to be burnt is hell. The barn where the wheat is to be gathered is heaven. The time in which the cockle is to be publicly tied in bundles to be burnt, and the wheat gathered into heaven, is the last day of the general judgment. If we look at the fields in the spring-time we see weeds of different colors—white, red, yellow, blue, coming forth like the most beautiful flowers and adorning the whole field. A child that has not yet seen much outside the house of its parents might easily imagine them to be real flowers, and think that they have been planted purposely, while it would look on the green stalk of the corn just showing above the ground as useless grass. But when the harvest-time comes the apparent flowers are seen to be but useless weeds, and what seemed to be grass is known now as the fruitful stalk that bears the nourishing food and is carefully stored away. So it is in the world, my dear brethren. If we consider on one side the life of the wicked man and the worldling, we find in it much pomp and splendor in dress, food, drink, sleep, gaming, amusements, pleasure-seeking, and luxury—things that worldly-minded people desire at least, if they cannot have them in reality. And if on the other side we consider the lives of the good and pious, we see in

them nothing but humility, modesty, temperance, watching, fasting, prayer, mortification, carrying the cross, etc. Oh, what a desirable, joyful life is the former, and how sad and melancholy the latter! So should we say if we judged by mere outward appearances. But wait a while; let the day of judgment come, and what will become of worldlings then? Away with the useless weeds that have brought forth no fruit of good works! Away with them to eternal fire! "Gather up first the cockle, and bind it into bundles to burn." But what shall become of the good wheat? "The wheat gather ye into My barn," because it has brought forth good fruit. Oh, what a terrible difference! Before considering it, my dear brethren, we shall continue the meditation of the matter we have commenced. On last Sunday we have seen how the criminal is examined in the judgment, and forced to answer to his great shame and confusion. But even if he were to keep silent, and it were possible for him not to acknowledge his sins; if he might say: I have not done the evil things I am asked about, what would that help him? For he shall find accusers enough and more than enough to carry on the case against him, and to convict him beyond the shadow of a doubt: as I now proceed to show.

Plan of Discourse.

The criminal accused in the judgment. Such is the whole subject of this meditation. Its object is to inspire the just with a constant, salutary fear of sin, and the wicked with a wholesome dread, so that they may accuse themselves in time in the tribunal of penance, and amend their lives; that thus they may be able to defend themselves against all accusers on the last day.

Give us all Thy grace to this end, O Lord; we ask it of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy angels.

The case is lost for the criminal against whom there is a great crowd of witnesses who can prove him guilty of many crimes worthy of death, and that all the more when his accusers are moved by hatred against him, and when under the influence of a just indignation they demand that justice should be done on the guilty one. Still less is the latter's chance of escape when the witnesses against him are nearly all men of probity, who are high in favor with the judge. In such a case I, for my part, would not give a farthing for the man's life. For if only one man appeared against me in judgment he would have enough

When many credible witnesses testify against one accused of a great crime, the latter has a poor chance of escape.

to do in order to convict me, as I should then hold to the old saying: if you are guilty, deny it. He should prove everything most clearly, and in the minutest detail. Even if my accusers were many, but were either good friends of mine, whose favor I am sure of and who are compelled to give evidence against me; or otherwise if they are men to whom it matters little that the ends of justice should be served, who are indifferent as to whether their accusation is believed or not; or if they are people of evil repute, who deserve little credence and are moreover hateful to the judge: then indeed I should not be very uneasy as to the result of the trial, or at all events I should have good grounds to hope for a favorable termination. But otherwise I might look on my case as utterly hopeless. For he who accuses me through hatred will not keep back the least thing that he can bring forward to my discredit. He who is moved to appear against me through zeal and love of justice will not desist until the judge pronounces sentence and has it carried into execution. If there are many to give the same evidence against me, their united testimony saves them from all suspicion of falsehood. And finally, if the witnesses enjoy the friendship and favor of the judge, their testimony against me must carry more weight and ensure my condemnation. In a word, I should not have the slightest chance. Is not that your opinion too, my dear brethren?

On that day
the devils
shall accuse
the sinner
of breaking
the promises
made in
baptism.

Now, O sinner! think of this, and tremble at the thought: countless, almost infinite in number are the witnesses who shall appear against you in the valley of Josaphat to accuse you openly and convict you unanimously of guilt. First there shall be swarms of demons from hell, moved by the bitterest hatred towards you. St. John in the Apocalypse calls the devil "the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night."¹ Even he who now tries to inspire you with a presumptuous hope in the divine mercy will then beg of God to forget all His mercy. Even he, says St. Basil, who now paints sin to you as of little account and a mere trifle, will then bring forward all your sins in all their deformity. Even he who now tries to drive you to sin by his suggestions will then bring forward those very suggestions for your damnation, and accuse you of having listened to them. "Even he," such are the words of St.

¹ Accusator fratrum nostrorum, qui accusabat illos ante conspectum Dei nostri die ac nocte.—Apoc. xii. 10.

Basil, "who is now our co-operator in sin shall be hereafter our accuser."¹ What shall he say? How shall he give testimony against us? Hear what St. Augustine says: "The devil will recite before the tribunal of Christ the words of our profession, and the oath by which we bound ourselves in baptism."² Come here, wicked Christian! he will say; at your first entry into the holy Church of God you were kept waiting a little at the door, and were asked whither you wished to go and what you desired. You answered by your godfather and godmother that you wished to be baptized and enrolled amongst the soldiers and followers of Christ. Then you were asked whether you renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil, and you answered: I renounce them; I give them up forever.

Now tell me how you have kept this promise during your life! Show me some sign that you have acted up to the holy profession you made that you were a soldier and follower of Christ? You, who the whole time of your life observed the customs of the vain world, looked on its maxims as the laws to guide you, conformed to its usages in all your external behavior, brought up your children to live according to its fashions, and ruled your household by its prudence! What was good and holy in itself was unbecoming in your eyes if it ran counter to the custom of the world. What was in itself vicious and unlawful was honorable, lawful, and good in your eyes if it was only in conformity with the customs of the world. How often have you not been ashamed to show devotion and due respect and reverence to God in public, simply because such was not the custom of the world! How often have you not followed the example of others even against your conscience because the world would have it so, in spite of the warning of St. Paul and the oft-repeated, emphatic exhortation of Christ! "Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him."³ "Be not conformed to this world."⁴ Is that the way to renounce the world? If you had vowed in holy baptism to observe perpetual fidelity and obedience to the world and its luxury, could you have fulfilled that vow better and more exactly than by your past conduct?

And show that he did not keep those promises.

¹ *Idem et in peccato cooperator, et accusator noster est.*

² *Diabolus ante Christi tribunal recitabit verba professionis nostræ.*

³ *Nolite diligere mundum, neque ea quæ in mundo sunt. Si quis diligit mundum, non est caritas Patris in eo.—I. John ii. 15.*

⁴ *Nolite conformari huic seculo.—Rom. xii. 2.*

But lived
according
to the flesh.

You promised also to renounce the flesh and all its concupiscences. And how have you kept that promise? Say when did you fulfil your obligation in that respect? In your childhood, when you first commenced to know what the sin of impurity is? In your youth, when you knew enough of it by experience? The sinful thoughts, desires, wishes, conversations, letters, allurements, words, and actions that resemble those of a dumb beast rather than of a reasoning being—all these things show how you have observed your act of renunciation. Finally, you have renounced me; I renounce Satan and his works, you said. But you have done me little harm. If you had signed a document promising to follow me in all things, I could not have expected more from you than what you have done to please me. You have at once consented to my temptations, nay, sometimes done more evil than I hoped for from you. I have advised you to curse and swear, but you have gone beyond that and blasphemed God. I have told you to hate your enemy and wish ill to him, and you have really done him harm. I told you to get drunk, and you committed impurity besides. I suggested unchaste thoughts to you that you might take pleasure in them, and you have actually committed the sinful action. I would have been content with your own soul, but by your allurements, seductions, scandal, and bad example you have brought hundreds of souls into my hands. You have done my will in all things as if you were my servant or slave. Have I perhaps treated you so well and been so kind to you while you were serving me that you had reason to renounce God and adhere to me so faithfully? Oh, how I have embittered for you the short and mean pleasures that you owe to me! I have sent you a worm to gnaw your heart and torture your conscience; the money you procured by my help cost you a world of trouble and anxiety. And have you not often suffered humiliation and scorn in order to satisfy your thirst for honors and the esteem of men? How much disquiet, melancholy, and pain of heart did you not have to endure day and night through your senseless love for that person? Your intemperance in drink you had to pay me for by violent headaches, sickness and injured health, and the shortening of your life. How much discomfort, mortification, and laughter from men of sense you had to put up with in order to gratify your vanity in dress! How often have you not in obedience to me exposed yourself to wind and weather, rain and snow, in the

dark night, risking at the same time your good name and reputation in order to gratify your sensual desires! You have felt how bitter a thing it is to abandon your God, and yet you have constantly despised Him to cleave to me. You were always ready to serve me and to do my will, but the least difficulty in pleasing your God was enough to frighten you away from Him.

“Now therefore, most just Judge,” he will exclaim, as St. Augustine says, “judge this man!”¹ I have not become man for this man, as Thou hast done. I have not endured hunger and thirst, and buffets and scourges, and nails and the cross for him, as Thou hast done. I have not shed my blood for him, given my life for him, as Thou hast. I have not promised him heaven, which I could not do, but I have kept him in the way of sin and wearied him in it. I have often betrayed and deceived him; so that he himself knew well that I sought nothing but his ruin and eternal damnation; nevertheless he has served me like a slave, and shamefully despised and rejected Thee, his Lord and God, to whom he had sworn eternal fidelity. He has treated Thee as if Thou wert a God of wood; as if Thou hadst no eyes to see his wickedness, no power to punish it. “Now therefore pronounce sentence, and let him be mine through his own fault, who refused to become Thine by grace.”²

Wherefore they will demand justice on him from the Judge.

He is Thine by the title of creation, I acknowledge that; he is Thine too by the title of preservation, but he belongs to me by donation or gift, for while still in life he withdrew himself from Thy rule and gave himself to me altogether; nor canst Thou say anything against this! Just God! remember how Thou didst act towards me and my companions. We unhappy spirits committed only one momentary sin of thought against Thee and Thou didst at once sentence us to hell without mercy, without giving us time for repentance; Thou didst hurl us like lightning into the abyss in which we have been now for many thousand years, and where we shall burn forever without hope of release. Holy and just is Thy judgment! Yes, we have deserved our fate. But if this punishment of ours is just, consider now what sort of a hell this man has deserved to whom Thou hast shown such unheard-of love, whom Thou hast waited for so patiently for many years, whose repentance Thou wert ready to receive at any hour or moment, and who nevertheless has so often

And show that he belongs to them by right.

¹ Nunc ergo æquissime, Judex, judica!

² Nunc ergo judica, meum esse per culpam, qui tuus noluit esse per gratiam.

and daringly offended Thee to the very end of his life; not merely in thought, but in word and deed as well! Is it not right, then, that he should share in my fate? ¹ Ah, Christians! what defence shall many of us be able to make against such an accuser? "The devil will repeat before the tribunal of Christ the words of our profession." You lay people he will accuse with the words of the profession you made to live according to the maxims of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; you secular priests with the words of your profession to live according to the obligations of the priesthood and to lead lives of angelical purity; me and all religious, with the words of our profession to observe our vows and the rules of our order. Wo to you! wo to me! if the evil spirit is able to prove that we are Christians, religious, or priests only in name, or if we have not during our lives blotted out by sincere repentance the sins we have committed against our profession! Alas! I must again repeat, if such is the case we are lost indeed, and there is no hope for us.

He will be
accused also
by those
men whom
he injured
in temporal
things.

Yet these accusations shall proceed only from a bitter hatred. There shall be others, wicked Christian, inspired by just indignation and by a love of justice, that shall be brought against you on that day. For complaints shall be made by all those, whether they are amongst the elect or the reprobate, who have been unjustly treated or injured by you during life, whom you have harmed in their honor, health, or temporal goods, according to the words of the Holy Ghost in the Book of Wisdom: "Then shall the just stand with great constancy against those that have afflicted them and taken away their labors."² When King Saul returned from the battle in which he had spared the king of Amalec and the best of his flocks, contrary to the express command of God, he tried to boast to the Prophet Samuel of the manner in which he had performed his allotted task and done the will of God; but as he was speaking, the sheep and lambs began to bleat. What! exclaimed the Prophet, have you indeed done as you were commanded? "What meaneth then this bleating of the flocks which soundeth in my ears, and the lowing of the herds which I hear?"³ Unjust, unmerciful, vindictive, passionate, treacherous man! will you perhaps try to pass as a man

¹ Nonne ergo justum est, ut in eandem mecum sortem descendat?

² Tunc stabunt justi in magna constantia adversus eos qui se angustia verunt, et qui abstulerunt labores eorum.—Wis. v. 1.

³ Et quæ est hæc vox gregum, quæ resonat in auribus meis, et armentorum, quam ego audio?—I. Kings xv. 14.

of honor on that day, such as you now pretend to be before the world? What! the Judge will exclaim, "what meaneth then this bleating of the flocks which soundeth in my ears?" what mean those lamentations of the poor, of widows, orphans, laborers, servants, innocent people? Justice, O God! they cry out; here is the wretch who wronged us and cheated us out of our property! He it is who in the time of extreme necessity lent us money and corn, and demanded an exorbitant interest from us! He it is who in that suit, in which we should not have failed to obtain our rights, forced us to accept a compromise by which we were defrauded wholly or in part of what belonged to us! This is the miser who wronged us by not paying the wages due to us for our hard work, or by delaying to pay us, or by unjustly lessening the salary agreed on, so that we had to suffer the pangs of hunger! This is the merciless husband who treated me, his wife, as if I were a servant-maid or a dog, so that I was almost reduced to despair and spent my life in continual sorrow and affliction! This is that inhuman father who brought us, his children, to the extremity of poverty by his constant gambling and drinking, and by the idle, worthless life he led! This is the unprincipled wretch who by all sorts of tricks, lies, and bribes, deprived us of our employment and of our good name, that he might do a service to others! This is the avaricious man at whose door we have so often knocked in vain to ask for a piece of bread! O just Judge, pronounce sentence! Nor shall there be individuals only to bring forward such charges; whole cities, provinces, and countries shall cry out for vengeance; this, O Lord, is he who by his brutish vices put the rod in Thy hands to chastise us, and forced Thee to afflict us with unfruitful seasons, contagious maladies, wars, and famines! Most just Judge, pronounce sentence!

And if the Judge shall hear the complaints of those whom you have injured only in their worldly substance, in transitory things, how much more loudly will not resound in His ears the cries for vengeance of those whom you have injured in their immortal souls, in eternal goods? What bitter complaints shall then be made against you by those to whom you have given occasion of sin by impure solicitations, love-letters, unchaste songs, and conversations? by the children whom you have taught to swear and curse, and to indulge in vanity? by the servants whom you have kept in your house for unlawful purposes? by the innocent

And still
more by
those whom
he led into
evil.

maidens whom you brought to ruin by your flatteries and allurements? by the young boys and students whom you taught what they should never have learned? My God! what wickedness! Most just Judge, pronounce sentence! This is the reason why we have so often offended Thee! That man was the stumbling-block in our way! He was the cause of our remaining in that odious vice from youth till old age! He is the cause of our eternal damnation! O traitors! murderers of souls! what will you do on that day when such accusations are levelled at you? Ah, your cause is lost; there is no hope for you unless you now do penance, and make good the injury you have done the honor of God and the souls of others.

All the
saints shall
accuse him.

Hitherto hatred and a just desire of revenge have been the accusers in the judgment. Zeal for the divine honor will also cry out against the wicked. That is, all the friends and saints of God, whom we now honor as our patrons and protectors in heaven, will give testimony against them; all the holy apostles and disciples of Christ will complain of the sloth of the sinner in matters of faith, of his irreverence in the house of God, of his many superstitious practices and dealings with the devil, of the unlawful customs he followed that were contrary to the teaching of the Christian religion. All the holy martyrs will complain of the sinner's love of ease and sensuality, of his shirking the slight labor required to gain an eternal crown, of his refusing to bear a short-lived suffering, a light cross. All the holy penitents and confessors of Christ will accuse the pride and impenitence of the sinner because he refused to humble himself to tell his sins to the priest holding the place of God in the tribunal of penance. All the holy virgins will accuse the impurity of the sinner who would not do violence to his inordinate inclinations for the sake of the everlasting joys of heaven.

And the
holy guardi-
an angels.

All the holy guardian angels (alas! shall we find accusers even in you to help to our eternal damnation?)—yes, even they will accuse their own charges, and demand their reprobation from the Judge. “Every one of the angels,” says Origen, “shall be present in the judgment to bring forward those who were the objects of his care,”¹ and he shall then make his accusation, stating the number of years he endeavored by his inspirations and warnings to encourage to good the soul entrusted to him,

¹ Unus quisque angelorum in iudicio aderit, producens illos quibus præfuit.—Orig. Hom. 66. in Num.

and keep it away from evil. You must not imagine, my dear brethren, that only one angel shall appear against us in the judgment if we do not lead good lives; for there are many of them to guard us: "He hath given His angels charge over thee," says the prophet David, "to keep thee in all thy ways."¹ How many guardian angels have we then? The general teaching of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church is as follows: Each one, they say, has a special angel to guard his soul and body; but there is also another to look after the whole world; another to take care of all Christendom; every kingdom, country, town, and community has its special guardian angel; every church, every house, every family has also its special angel to guard it. All these angels have been sent by God to look after me and take care of me, and they shall all appear as my accusers in the judgment if I leave this world in the state of mortal sin.

O ye guardian angels of many churches and cities, what testimony will you give when that man, that woman, that youth, that maiden, appears before the tribunal! Behold, O just Judge, so shall the accusation be worded, these are the people whom I have seen in the church entrusted to me, assisting at public devotions on certain days; their only object was to see and be seen, and they came dressed for a dancing-room rather than for a church; at their entrance I wished that the greater number of those present were at home, lest their eyes and hearts should be scandalized, and so they might find their ruin in Thy house where they came to seek their salvation! These are they who when they entered Thy church drove me out of it lest I should be a witness to its profanation; talking, laughing, and paying empty compliments was their chief occupation, whereby they disturbed the devotion of others. They were ashamed to bend both knees and to fold their hands before Thee, O great God, who wert there present. These are they for whose salutary warning and amendment I have often suggested matter and words to preachers; but for a quarter of a year they never came to a sermon, or if they did happen to come they tried to forget what they heard, so that it made no impression on them. Justice, O Judge, on these people for their carelessness and irreverence in Thy temple entrusted to our charge!

See! the angels of certain cities and communities will exclaim, these are they who being in a high position, by their scandalous

Epecially
the angels
of the
churches.

And also
the angels

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

of cities and countries.

lives made certain vices actually respectable, and took away from them the shame that should attach to them. These are they who could have prevented and punished evil, but did not do so. Angels of houses and dwellings! what a great register of complaints you will have regarding what happened here and there between man and wife, parents and children, masters and servants, incomers and outgoers, day and night, while you had to look on all the time to your great sorrow! "We would have cured Babylon," the angels shall say of the souls entrusted to them, "but she is not healed;"¹ we wished to save that soul, O God, and bring it to Thee, but all our labor was in vain: not through our fault, but because it would not come with us. Now we demand justice for the labor and care that we have employed to no purpose. Thus the words of Jeremiah in the Lamentations shall be verified for the sinner on that day: "All her friends are become her enemies."²

Even the Mother of God, and all pious Christians shall accuse him.

Refuge of sinners! Help of the desolate! Mary, Mother of mercy! thy very name fills my heart with sweet joy and consolation! Surely I shall have nothing to fear from thee at all events? But, alas for a lost cause! If I die in the state of sin even thou shalt be among the number of my accusers. Sentence him, she will say, O just Son! Through me he could easily have been saved; through my hands went all the graces and blessings Thou didst so generously bestow on him, but he rejected them. And a similar complaint will be made against me by all good Christians who have lived in the same town and house with me: We gave that man good example of the Christian virtues; we have shown him the narrow way that leads to heaven; he did not follow us, but went on the broad road that leads to hell. Such too shall be the testimony of the priests from the confessional: We have warned that man not to sin any more, but he kept on adding sin to sin; we begged him as gently as possible to leave that house, that person, to avoid the occasion of sin, saying to him that otherwise all his confessions would be of no avail, and that we dared not give him absolution, but he paid no attention to us; he promised indeed to do as we said, but his promises came to naught; he went from one confessor to another, and as the latter did not know the state of his conscience, nay, as he deliberately concealed it from him, he succeeded in

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

² Omnes amici ejus facti sunt ei inimici?—Lam. i. 2.

obtaining absolution under a false promise of amendment. **The preachers will give testimony:** We sought nothing but that man's good and desired nothing but his salvation; we warned him often, zealously, and earnestly; we condemned his vices and wickedness according to our duty, and instructed him in all the ways of virtue; we have done all we could, with Thy help, O God! to deter him from sin, and to encourage him to enter on the path of virtue; many others were moved and induced to repent by what we said; many have derived much profit from it and begun to lead good lives, but with this man all our preaching was of no avail. If his conscience was touched now and then, he put the truth he had heard out of his mind as soon as possible, nay, actually turned it into ridicule; he heard with unwillingness what did not suit his taste; he went off with a bitter feeling at heart, and came no more. Most just Judge, pronounce the sentence!

Alas! whither shall I go? What shall become of the sinner in the midst of so many, and such powerful, hostile, and embittered accusers, many of whom shall be high in favor with the Judge?¹ What shall I then say in that miserable position, outvoted on all sides; what shall I say in excuse? Ah, there will be no escape for me! Wherever I turn I shall find my case a lost one, my situation desperate, my sentence eternal damnation! But it is not come to that yet! Like the unjust steward I know what I shall do. I will sigh forth with the sorrowing Job: "Shall not the fewness of my days be ended shortly? Suffer me, therefore, that I may lament my sorrow a little before I go and return no more."² Just Judge, grant me still a little time that I may go and repent of my sins, accuse myself of them, and seriously amend my life before that great and terrible day comes; so that when the accusers shall stand forth against me and call out for vengeance on me because of my sins, I may be able fearlessly and truthfully to answer: it is true, ye demons, ye saints and angels, ye just and ye reprobate, ye apostles and disciples of Christ! it is true that you have reason to accuse me; but it is true also that I have repented, that I have accused myself, that I have atoned for all, that I have amended my life and died a happy death. Thus all your accusations are repelled; my cause is justified and won; my eternal inheritance is with the just, who

Conclusion and resolution to accuse one's self now in confession.

¹ Quid sum miser tunc dicturus?

² Numquid non paucitas dierum meorum finietur brevi? dimitte ergo me, ut plangam paululum dolorem meum, antequam vadam, et non revertar.—Job x. 20, 21.

will joyfully await the Judge's sentence on me. My dear brethren, if we are in need of doing so, let us observe this and do penance, and then we shall attain to the desired consummation. Yes, O my Lord and my God, such is now my firm resolution; now let men think and say of me and against me what they will, I shall pay little heed to them; but I do fear to meet those accusers at Thy tribunal, and to escape them I will this very day begin to amend my life. I renounce thee, Satan, and thee, corrupt world, and thee, too, wanton flesh! I belong to my God, and to Him alone and completely; Him too will I serve with all my strength according to the terms of my holy profession, and that constantly till the end of my life. Amen.

Another introduction to the same sermon for the third Sunday of Advent.

Text.

Tu quis es?—John i. 19.

“Who art thou?”

Introduction.

An unusual and ticklish question: “Who art thou?” One that is often difficult to answer, especially when it concerns what a man is at heart. Yet, my dear brethren, that is the difficult question that all men shall be asked on the last day at the tribunal of God's justice, and that even the worst sinners shall have to answer. Who art thou? What are you, not merely in outward state or condition, but in the secrecy and privacy of your conscience? And that question shall have to be answered in presence of the whole world before heaven and earth, to the great confusion of sinners, as we have seen in the last meditation. But even if the wicked man could then keep silence and conceal what he is, or if he could take refuge in falsehood, or say in the words of St. John in to-day's Gospel: “I am not;” I am not so bad as you pretend, what would that help him? For he will have accusers enough and more than enough to convict him and show beyond the shadow of a doubt what he is: as I now proceed to prove. *Continues as above.*

THIRTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

ON THE CONVICTION OF THE CRIMINAL IN THE JUDGMENT.

Subject.

The sinner in the judgment shall be convicted: 1. That he lived a bad life; therefore he shall not be able to deny that. 2. That he might have lived a better one; therefore he shall not be able to offer any excuse.—*Preached on the sixth Sunday after Epiphany.*

Text.

Eructabo abscondita a constitutione mundi.—Matt. xiii. 35.
“I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world.”

Introduction.

So shall it be; there is nothing so hidden in the hearts and consciences of men from the beginning of the world that Our Lord shall not bring to light and speak out openly on that day when He shall come to judge the living and the dead. And not only shall the Judge do that; there shall also be many accusers to demand justice on the sinner, as we have seen from the Scriptures and the holy Fathers in our last meditation. What will you do then, O sinner? Will you be able to deny your wickedness, or to excuse it against so many witnesses? Will you perhaps appeal to others? But where the accusers are so numerous no appeal can help. But do you still wish for other witnesses? Then if so, you will find enough of them to convict you as clearly as the noon-day sun of the crimes you shall be charged with: as I now intend to show.

Plan of Discourse.

The criminal convicted by witnesses in the judgment. Such is the whole subject. He will be convicted of having led a bad life, and therefore no denial will help him: the first part. He will be convicted of having been able to lead a better life, and therefore no excuse will help him: the second part. The object is the same as that of the last meditation.

Help us thereto, O Virgin Mother, and you, O holy guardian angels.

As Peter was convicted by the servants of being a disciple of Christ ;

I cannot represent to myself better the sinner convicted of having led a vicious and criminal life than by considering the case of the apostle Peter in the court of the high-priest warming himself with the servants at the fire. How he must have been embarrassed! A servant-maid who attended the door was the first to attack him: "Thou also wast with Jesus the Galilean. But he denied before them all, saying: I know not what thou sayest."¹ A little later the servants came to him and said: "Art not thou also one of His disciples?" But Peter kept fast to his denial: "He denied it and said: I am not:" I know not the man, nor what you are speaking of. At last one came to him saying: "Did not I see thee in the garden with Him?"² There Peter was caught, and as it so happened the cock crew and he escaped.

So shall the sinner be convicted on that day

Sinner! there you have a picture of what shall one day happen to you; but with this difference, that you will not, like Peter, be able to seek safety in flight. You will then be publicly accused of all your crimes, not merely before a few servants, but in the presence of all in heaven, on earth, and under the earth; and your accusers shall surround you in countless numbers, as we have seen in our last meditation. Are you not the man, they will say, the wretch who did, said, or thought this or that contrary to the law of the great God? Try now if you can to deny the charge; say: I am not; I know not what you are speaking of; I am innocent; and see if your efforts at deceit will be as successful then as they oftentimes are now when you hide your wickedness from the knowledge of men.

Of the sins he committed with others.

Those countless witnesses will cry out against you: "Did not I see thee?" Was I not present while you were actually committing the sin? Such shall be the evidence of all your companions and co-operators in sin, and they shall testify to the crimes you committed with others. Did not I see thee? Were we not together in that house, that room, that garden, that deserted street, that hidden corner, on that day, that night when we did that wicked act together? Did not I see thee, proud man? Can I not prove that you wished to be more thought of

¹ Et tu cum Jesu Galilæo eras. At ille negavit coram omnibus, dicens: Nescio quid dicis.—Matt. xxvi. 69, 70.

² Numquid et tu ex discipulis ejus es? Negavit ille, et dixit: Non sum. Nonne ego te vidi in horto cum illo?—John xviii. 25, 26.

than all others of your condition? Have you not come to me to get my help, and bribed me to procure that appointment for you, for which you had neither capacity nor merit, and to which you wished to be raised through sheer ambition? Did not I see thee, avaricious man, unjust man? Have we not worked together, and studied all sorts of tricks by which we might deceive others and get possession of what we had no right to? Have you not given stolen goods to me to sell them for you? Do you recognize your own handwriting? Here are the usurious contracts we made; the papers referring to that lawsuit against that poor person, which we protracted unnecessarily for such a long time, being bribed to do so by the opposite party, until all hope of obtaining justice vanished, and the case was abandoned? Did not I see thee, O impure man? Was I not witness of the abominations you committed? I am the person whom you sought to lead astray by your flatteries and caresses; here are the letters you sent me; here the presents you made me. I am the one with whom you committed adultery, whom you robbed of my maidenly honor, whom you kept for so many years in unlawful intimacy, and with whom you committed so many sins. Did not I see thee, O drunkard? How often have we not spent the whole night drinking in your house, in mine, in that other place, and robbed ourselves of reason by our excesses? How often have we not gloried in making others drink more than they could bear? How often have we not made ourselves incapable of performing properly the duties of our state? How often have we not neglected our households and ill-treated our wives and children, consuming what should have gone to their support? Did not I see thee, O vindictive man? Did we not agree to insult publicly with gross abuse this or that person, whom you did not like? Have you not in my presence often abused and threatened him? How often have you not cursed him and wished him all kinds of evil?

According to St. John Chrysostom, the lifeless creatures that the sinner abused to offend God shall testify against him; they will accuse him of those sins that he committed in solitude by outward action. "On that day," says the holy Doctor, "the heavens and the earth, the sun and the moon, the day and night, and the whole world shall stand against us to convict us of our sins."¹

Of the sins
he committed
secretly
in action.

¹ In illa die cœlum et terra, sol et luna, dies et noctes, et totus mundus stabunt adversum nos in testimonium peccatorum nostrorum.

Did not I see thee? the sun will say; have you not used my light to carry out your wicked purpose. Did you not often, like the bats and owls, shun my light, and wait for the darkness in order to steal into that house of ill-fame to satisfy your brutal lusts? Did not I see thee? the moon will say. Have I not been obliged to give you my light in order to show you the way to the place where you went for the purpose of indulging your passions? Did not I see thee? the earth will say. How long have I not been wearied with bearing your accursed wickedness, while you were sullyng me with abominable crimes? Did not I see thee? the other elements will say: the fire that allowed itself to be damped and extinguished that it might not oppose any obstacle to the heat of your passions; the water that bore you even while you were committing thefts and acts of injustice; the air that you poisoned with your oaths and curses. Did not I see thee? the gold and silver in your coffers will say. Have you not shut me up, while poor people were famishing with hunger? "Your gold and silver is cankered," says the apostle St. James, "and the rust of them shall be for a testimony against you." Did not I see thee? your clothes will say, which were eaten by the moths, or shut up in your wardrobe when you might have covered your poor brothers or sisters with them. The corn you heaped up in your granaries will give testimony that you preferred to allow it to rot away in the time of scarcity, in unfruitful seasons, rather than sell it to poor citizens and peasants at a low price. Even the stones in the walls shall cry out against you, says the Prophet Habacuc: "The stone shall cry out of the wall; and the timber that is between the joints of the building shall answer."² Did not I see thee? shall exclaim the stones and walls of the churches. Have we not often seen you come here with a bad intention? The stones of the streets, of that drinking-house, of that place of ill-fame, of the building in which you dwelt, the walls of your room, the doors that you bolted, the windows that you shut, the curtains that you drew around your bed; all these shall cry out: did not I see thee? Have we not been witnesses of your actions?

Hence David and St. Jerome feared their couch and cell.

I shudder with fear when I hear a St. Jerome in the wilderness giving expression to the terror that possessed him in these

¹ Aurum et argentum vestrum æruginavit, et ærugo eorum in testimonium vobis erit.—James v. 3.

² Lapis de pariete clamabit, et lignum, quod inter juncturas ædificiorum est, respondebit.—Habac. ii. 11.

words: "As often as I thought of the day of judgment I feared even my very cell, as a witness of my thoughts."¹ It seemed as if the stones and rocks were crying out to me: this and that thought you have had in your imagination! Alas! such a holy hermit, living among the wild beasts, was afraid to look at his poor cell, which could give testimony only of the austere life he led, which saw how he fasted daily, tore his flesh with scourges, and beat his breast with a stone; and he feared his cell as a future witness of thoughts that were suggested to him only in the form of temptations and altogether against his will! Alas, wicked Christians! how then should we not tremble when we see the houses, rooms, gardens which have served for nothing else but sin, intemperance, vanity, impurity, uncharity! What will those things be able to say to us? "I have labored in my groaning; every night I will wash my bed: I will water my couch with my tears,"² such are the sighs that I hear from the penitent David. But, O David, what distresses thee so much? or why shouldst thou make thy bed the scene of so much grief? Ah, he would answer, it was a witness of my adultery, and will one day cry out against me on that account; therefore it must also be a witness of the tears of repentance I shed every night! My tables, if you were ever forced to behold intemperance on my part during the time that I had forgotten my God, now you will be able to point to the ashes that I mixed with my bread, and to the tears that I mingled with my drink: "I did eat ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping."³ Ah, unlucky houses, rooms, and beds, if you will be able to point to our sins, but not to our repentance, what shall become of us? Thus all creatures shall appear as witnesses against us on that great day to give testimony of our crimes. "The whole world shall stand against us to accuse us of our sins."

But why should I fear such witnesses? There is not the least need of them; my case is lost already without them if I leave this world in the state of mortal sin. I myself shall be my own accuser; I shall convict myself of my sins and vices, not only of those that I have committed with others, not only of those that I have committed in act and secretly, but also of those that no

The sinner's own conscience shall convict him of the sins he committed in thought.

¹ Ipsam quoque cellulam, quasi cogitationum mearum consciam, pertimescebam.

² Laboravi in gemitu meo; lavabo per singulos noctes lectum meum; lacrymis meis stratum meum rigabo.—Ps. vi. 7.

³ Quia cinerem tanquam panem manducabam, et potum meum cum fletu miscebam.—Ibid. et. 10.

man, no creature whatever could possibly know anything of except myself, namely, of the inward sinful thoughts of my heart. My own conscience shall be a witness against me: "Their conscience bearing witness to them," says St. Paul, "and their thoughts between themselves accusing, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men."¹ This is the book of which the Catholic Church sings in the Mass of the dead. The book shall be produced in which all is written from which the world shall be judged.² "The book spoken of," says St. Augustine, "is a certain divine force and intelligence which shall cause every one to recall to mind and remember with a wonderful quickness all his works, whether they are good or evil."³ This is that truthful and infallible book that shall be opened before the eyes of all men, and cry out in a loud voice: "Did not I see thee?" Did I not behold everything you have thought, said, or done, and see when, how, and where you did it? Have I not always experienced a pang of anguish whenever you acted contrary to the will of God and His commandments? From this conscience, says St. Bernard, all your sins shall spring forward like dogs let loose from the leash, and they shall seize you by the throat and cry out upon you as their author.⁴ Terrible it is to read what the Sacred Scriptures say of Sennacherib; after his whole army had been destroyed by the angel, he returned in shame and confusion, "and his sons that came out of his bowels slew him with the sword."⁵ Wicked Christian! what sort of children have you brought into the world during your life? Do you not know them? Come without first having done penance into the valley of Josaphat, when the angel's trumpet shall call you thither, and then you shall see how they will rage and storm against you. The children of your head, your proud thoughts in which you extolled yourself and lowered others; the children of your heart, those wicked thoughts and unlawful desires, that hatred and vindictiveness; the children of your eyes, those unchaste looks; the children of your tongue, that hateful, abomin-

¹ Testimonium reddente illis conscientia ipsorum, et inter se invicem, cogitationibus accusantibus, in die, cum judicabit Deus occulta hominum.—Rom. ii. 15, 16.

² Liber scriptus proferetur, in quo totum continetur, unde mundus judicetur.

³ Liber, qui apertus dicitur, quædam vis est et intelligentia divina, qua fiet ut cuique opera sua, vel bona, vel mala, cuncta in memoriam revocentur, et mentis intuitu mira celeritate cernantur.

⁴ Tunc quasi loquentia simul ejus opera respondebunt, et dicent: tu nos fecisti, opera tua sumus.

⁵ Filii, qui egressi fuerant de utero ejus, interfecerunt eum gladio.—II. Paral. xxxii. 21.

able conversation; the children of your hands, those acts of injustice, those impure touches,—these shall all cry out against you: you have committed us! we are your works! Unhappy sinner! what excuse shall you make? Wherever you turn you are betrayed by other men, by all creatures, by yourself. There is no use in denial; you are fully convicted of having led a godless life. Nor is there any chance of making an available excuse, for it shall also be clearly proved that you might have lived much better and holier, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

In nothing is our understanding quicker and more apt than in palliating and excusing our own faults and sins; it is most easy for us to find some way of either lessening or cloaking our own wickedness. Sometimes we put the blame on the Almighty, saying that it is He who gave us such strong inclinations for evil; sometimes we accuse our own weakness and frailty; sometimes others with whom we have to deal in the duties of our state, and in whose company we find daily occasions of sin; sometimes we blame our own ignorance or want of deliberation, and say: I knew no better; I did not think this or that was forbidden under pain of mortal sin. With these and similar excuses we try to persuade ourselves while here on earth that our sins are not so very grievous, and that God does not look on them as very wicked.

But bring those lame excuses with you on the judgment-day and see how they will serve to defend and protect you. Say to God: O Lord, I am the work of Thy hands; as Thou has made me, so I am; the violent inclination and proclivity to anger that I experience every day; the impatience, avarice, impurity, and sensuality that I am subject to; the aversion I have to the cross, and to everything that is hard and bitter; the law of sin that always fights in my members against Thy holy law—these things I have not given myself; I have received them from nature. What else then couldst Thou have expected from a poor, weak mortal, such as Thou has created me, but faults and sins? What! will you make the Almighty the Author and Cause of your wickedness? Bring witnesses here! Your own conscience will convict you of a lie. Is it true that you came forth from the hands of your Creator with those violent passions? Were you always so wicked and inclined to evil? even before good fortune or the esteem of men turned your head? even before that

During life we are apt to excuse our sins in various ways.

On that day the sinner shall not be able to lay the blame on his corrupt nature

senseless love hardened your heart? even before you learned to know the world properly? Were you like that forty, thirty, twenty years ago, and even in your first youth, in your early innocence? Can you not remember that you were then more inclined for devotion and the fear of the Lord, and that you were afraid of the very name of mortal sin? Why have you not been able to continue in those good dispositions, and to restrain and mortify, while still weak and almost dormant, the evil inclinations that afterwards showed themselves?

For he was
not always
wicked.
Shown by
an example.

A noble gentleman, as Father Cataneus relates, who had reached a ripe old age, found amongst his papers some debates and poems that he had written while a student in the lower classes. Curiosity urged him in his old age to see what his mind was able to bring forth in its youthful vigor. He found on a sheet of paper a rule of life that he had written out in his youth, and had kept exactly while a student; namely, confession and Communion every fortnight; sodality sermon every Sunday and holy-day; the examen of conscience on bended knees every night before retiring to rest; the daily recital of the rosary and office of the Blessed Virgin; thrice-repeated mortification of the eyes and tongue daily, and fasting every Saturday in honor of the Mother of God; the tenth part of the pocket money sent by his parents to be given to the poor. The gentleman read and re-read the paper with astonishment; he knew his own handwriting, and recollected too that he had observed that rule for many years. Then, filled with shame and confusion, he began to sigh and to say to himself: ah, beautiful life! where art thou now? How thou hast changed with time! How different my life is now from what I led then! Confession and Communion every fortnight! Alas for the confession and Communion of the present! Once a year at Easter is enough for me now, and then I go more through human respect or some vain motive than with the earnest intention of amending my life. A sermon every Sunday and holy-day! Poor sermons! I hardly hear one in the year! The examen of conscience every night! I never think of such a thing now; my soul is like a wilderness of sin; I hardly bend my knee to God in His church when I go to hear holy Mass! Daily prayer and frequent mortification! Poor prayer! poor mortification! poor fasting! I give my mouth, my eyes, my ears, and other senses all the gratification they demand. Almsgiving! All my money is spent on sin, and I am not now able to give the

poor what belongs to them of right. Oh, what a life I led then! And, alas! what sort of a life am I now leading? Will not this very sheet of paper written by my own hand rise up against me on the judgment-day and demand my eternal damnation? If there were no devil to accuse me, no witnesses to appear against me, no Judge to condemn me, I must be myself my own devil, witness, and judge, for my conscience will show me this paper, and clearly convince me that I might have led a holy life all this time, since I was able to do it for so long. Such were the sighs of this man, accompanied with bitter tears of repentance. Well for him that he thought of himself in time, and amended his life!

My dear brethren, let each one look into his own conscience. for it will be a book full of matter on the last day. There is hardly one of us who cannot remember having served God for some time or other during his life; no one who has not had some experience of the sweet repose of a good conscience; no one who has not tasted the consolation and joy of being free from all guilt and loving God above all things. Perhaps many a one when comparing his present with his past life will, like that gentleman, be compelled to sigh forth with shame: ah, beautiful life! where art thou? How modest and retiring I was then; how vain and haughty I am now! How pious and devout I was then; how tepid and slothful in the divine service now! How chaste and pure then; how dissolute and unclean now! What shall I say when my conscience gives testimony of me before the tribunal of God? Shall I allege in excuse that my evil inclinations and corrupt nature did not allow me to live in better fashion? Ah, the innocence of my early years shall convict me of a lie, and prove beyond doubt that I might have lived better if I had only chosen to do so.

Shall I appeal to the weakness and frailty that in the midst of so many dangers and opportunities of evil did not suffer me to offer resistance to temptation? Oh, a countless multitude of witnesses shall be there to put me and all sinners to shame in that case! It seems to me that I hear all the chosen saints of God crying out with one voice in the words of the Prophet Job: "My strength is not the strength of stones, nor is my flesh of brass."¹ What! Do you think we are made of granite, or of brass, or iron, like the statues you see of us? Our bones and rel-

Thus the good life he formerly led shall prove that he might have lived better.

Nor shall he be able to blame his weakness.

¹ Nec fortitudo lapidum fortitudo mea, nec caro mea ænea est.—Job vi. 12.

ics that you honor on the altars show clearly enough that we were not angels, but men, weak and frail like you, who had flesh and bodies like you. And that there were not wanting to us temptations and occasions of sin is evident from the number of great sinners who fell shamefully, but are now in our number because they repented sincerely, kept from sin ever after, and became great saints. Look at the countless multitudes of every age and sex; the young boys, tender virgins, weak widows, who in spite of the severest temptations and of many crosses and trials remained chaste, patient, resigned to the divine will, and lived in a pious and holy manner. Could you not have done the same? If you know your own weakness and frailty, why did you rush so wantonly into the dangerous occasions of sin? Why did you not guard your senses more carefully? Why did you not constantly and in all places humbly beg of God to protect you as we did? No; away with your lame excuses! You could and should have led a better life!

Nor his
state of life
or occupa-
tion.

And what answer shall I then make? Shall I throw the blame of my sins on my state of life, on my daily occupations, as most worldly people do, according to St. John Chrysostom? To excuse their sins and slothful lives some appeal to an unhappy marriage, others to the number of children and household cares they have to attend to, others to the difficulties and dangers of their occupations, others to the labor they have to undergo, others to the exigencies of their employment, to the duties of their high office, to their riches, to their poverty, to the customs of the world which they have to conform to, as they must live like those around them. Christians! what is the meaning of all that? Is it then true that you have not been able to lead good lives nor to work out your salvation? But listen again to the countless multitude of witnesses who cry out against you from amongst the number of those who are on the right hand of the Judge—married and single, superiors and inferiors, courtiers, warriors, rich, poor, people of every condition and sex and station in life, as St. John says in the Apocalypse: “I saw a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues: standing before the throne.”¹ All these will say to you: we have lived under the same conditions, in the same domestic circumstances, in the same office and employ-

¹ *Vidi turbam magnam, quam dinumerare nemo poterat, ex omnibus gentibus, et tribubus, et populis, et linguis: stantes ante thronum.—Apoc. vii. 9.*

ment, amidst the same worldly fashions and customs, yet we became holy, and are now eternally happy. Could not you have done as we did? We have lived in the world, in daily intercourse with worldly people, but we shunned the vain customs and laws of the world; why have you always adored them and taken them as the guide of your actions, although the Christian law was placed before your eyes as well as before ours, and the warning of the Apostle was for your good as well as for ours: "Be not conformed to this world."¹ We have attended to the duties of our state, and have performed them with a good intention for God's sake, and been careful not to offend God for any man's sake; that according to our ideas was to live in a holy, Christian, and pious manner; why could you not have done the same?

Ah, what is to be done then? Shall I say: I knew no better at the time; I did not reflect on what I was doing? But that might avail a heathen, a Turk, a Jew, a wild barbarian brought up in savagery, who never heard a word of the Christian Gospel, of the commandments of God, of the holy sacraments. But you and I, O Catholic Christian, who are born and bred in the full light and with every opportunity of doing good, how could we put forward such an excuse? But what am I saying? Even many heathens, who followed the mere light of reason and lived better than many a Christian, shall testify against us.

There will appear against us from amongst the Roman nobility the heathen youth Spurlina, who seeing that his great beauty was an occasion of unchaste desires to many, deliberately took a knife and cut and slashed his face so that it was completely disfigured. What will you answer, asks St. Ambrose, who relates this incident: what will you answer, vain Christian who, not content with the natural comeliness given you by God, seek to increase it by all imaginable luxury in dress, and thus equipped show yourself in public? There will appear against us the heathen matron Lucretia, who not being able to defend herself from the violence of a king, took a dagger and stabbed herself to the heart, preferring death to the shame of having lost her purity. What will you answer, unchaste Christian, who allow so many liberties to be taken with you, and seek out opportunities of exposing your virginal or conjugal chastity to danger? There will appear against us the heathen philosopher Anaxagoras, with many others like him, who in order to be more at liberty to at-

Nor his want of knowledge or reflection.

Even heathens shall convict him in this respect.

¹ Nolite conformari huic sæculo.—Rom. xii. 2.

tend to his studies and to cultivate the moral virtues, freely renounced all his property. What answer will you make, avaricious Christian, you who spare no effort to amass money, while you neglect your soul? you who refuse to restore the ill-gotten goods you have in your possession, and thus lose your chance of heaven? There will appear against us the hero Phocion, renowned among the Greeks, who being betrayed to death by envious people, was asked before he drank the poison what last command he had to leave his son; he answered: he must forget all the injuries done his father, and return his enemies good for evil. What answer will you make, vindictive Christian, who cannot bear the least insult, and who often repay good with evil? There will appear against us the heathen warrior Manlius Torquatus, who put his only son to death for having disobeyed his orders regarding a battle, although he was victorious. What answer will you make, Christian parents, who allow your sons and daughters to grow up in all freedom from restraint, in vanity and wantonness? That is what Our Lord prophesied: "The men of Ninive shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it."¹ O sinners! what answer will you make if you do not repent of your manifold sins? There is no hope for you; none at all! No denial or excuse will be of any avail. You are convicted of having lived bad lives; you are convicted of having been able to live better. And you still go on adding sin to sin, increasing every day the number of witnesses to your eternal damnation? Ah, how I bewail your present blindness and your future everlasting misfortune!

Exhortation and resolution often to think of the last judgment, in order to live well.

My dear brethren, you will say perhaps that the subject of our past meditations was chosen only with a view to frighten and terrify you. And you are perfectly right. Would to God that all who need to be frightened were filled with terror by it! I should congratulate myself and thank God from my heart, but in the way which St. Paul speaks of: "I am glad: not because you were made sorrowful, but because you were made sorrowful unto penance."² I do not rejoice at the grief caused you by my Epistle, but because that grief has urged you to do penance. Even so should I rejoice if some of you were terrified and dismayed by the meditation on the last judgment; not by a

¹ Viri Ninivitæ surgent in iudicio cum generatione ista, et condemnabunt eam.—Matt. xii. 41.

² Gaudeo, non quia contristati estis, sed quia contristati estis ad penitentiam.—II. Cor. vii. 9.

mere passing fear, but by a fear unto penance; a fear that would make you regret your past sins and never again offend God. It is an undoubted truth of our faith that we shall all appear before the tribunal of God, there to give an account of our actions; what will it help us to thrust that truth out of our minds? Shall we have less reason to fear or to expect judgment? We must and should often think of such truths in order to keep straight in the midst of so many dangers and occasions of sin. Therefore it is that we so often fall into sin; therefore it is that we sometimes lead a vain life quite opposed to the law of the Gospel, and keep our minds fixed on transitory things while we seldom think of salutary truths. Not without cause does the Holy Ghost warn us by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "Remember thy last end," O man! and think of it often, "and thou shalt never sin."¹ Let each one recall this to mind when he feels an inclination to sin; let him say to himself: would I do this if I heard the last trumpet calling out: arise, ye dead, and come to judgment? Should I wish to have this revealed to heaven and earth? Let each one think: the life I now lead and the manner of it, is it in accordance with my Christian profession, and with the sworn promise I made to God in Baptism to renounce the vain world and its idle, silly customs, the flesh and its lusts, the devil and all his works? that there may be no one to accuse him at the last day. Otherwise, if your answer to this question is not favorable, then abandon the life you are leading and embrace another. Say to yourself: on this life, and I know not how long it will last, depends my future judgment, the position I shall hold in it, whether I shall be on the right side with the angels, or on the left with the devils; therefore I will spend this short, uncertain time in the service of my God alone, so that the meditation of the last judgment, instead of terrifying me, shall inspire me with a consoling hope, and when the great day comes I may enter with the sheep of Christ into eternal joys! Such shall be the resolution of us all. Amen.

Another introduction to the same sermon for the fourth Sunday of Advent.

Text.

Vox clamantis in deserto.—Luke iii. 4.

"A voice of one crying in the wilderness."

¹ Memorare novissima tua, et in æternum non peccabis.—Ecclesi. vii. 40.

Introduction.

The valley of Josaphat, in which we shall all be assembled before the judgment-seat of God, may well be called a terrible wilderness. The voices crying out therein shall be manifold, and they shall exclaim against the sinner and accuse him, as we have seen in the last sermon, etc. *Continues as above.*

How the saints in heaven shall be our judges: see the following sixth part.

THIRTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

ON THE LAST SENTENCE OF THE JUDGE ON THE CRIMINAL.

Subject.

Terrible shall be the sentence of the Judge, if we consider only these few words: "Depart from Me, you cursed."—*Preached on Septuagesima Sunday.*

Text.

Multi enim sunt vocati, pauci vero electi.—Matt. xx. 16.
"For many are called, but few chosen."

Introduction.

Fearful words to come from Infallible Truth, "Few chosen"! So that on the last day the smaller number shall be called to the kingdom of heaven? Yes. And the greater number condemned by the Judge to hell? Yes. Ah, if we blind mortals only thought of that while there is still time, that we might be inspired with a salutary fear, and so live that we may be found among the few elect! My dear brethren, we have hitherto considered the miserable state of the guilty sinner before the judgment-seat, and how he shall be summoned to judgment, questioned therein, accused, and convicted. There is still another and that a most terrible point to be considered, namely, how that summoned, questioned, accused, and convicted sinner shall be condemned by the sentence pronounced on him. This sentence shall form the matter of this and the following meditation. "Then shall He say to them also that shall be on His left hand," so we read in the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew, "Depart from Me,

you cursed, into everlasting fire.”¹ Ah, those words are enough to dry up the marrow of one’s bones! Depart from Me, you cursed! Where to? Into everlasting fire!

Plan of Discourse.

The first part of this sentence shall form the whole subject of to-day’s meditation; namely, the words, Depart from Me, you cursed. Just souls, who have the good will to serve your God, be not afraid! Let any feeling of dread that may arise in your minds only spur you on to continue in the pious lives you have been leading! Wicked Christians, who are still in the state of sin, fear and tremble, but with a salutary fear that shall bring you back again to the right path. This twofold effect is the end of our meditation.

Future Judge! God of all hearts! inspire us all with that salutary fear, through the intercession of the Mother of mercy and of our holy guardian angels.

First, let us consider the circumstances of the place in which the sentence is to be pronounced; and that is the valley of Josaphat, where shall be assembled all angels, men, and devils. When an angry father is about to inflict just punishment on a disobedient son, in order to give it more effect he calls into the room his other children as well, and gives them presents, while he permits the guilty one to go empty-handed. He means thereby to say to the latter: see, if you had conducted yourself properly, you should have got something too; but now come here, and I will give you what you deserve. Children, remain where you are. Then he takes the rod and proceeds to execution. This punishment is far more grievous to the son than if it had been inflicted in secret; partly on account of the envy he feels at seeing his brothers presented with gifts and enjoying themselves; partly on account of the shame and disgrace of being chastised before them. Far worse and more intolerable would the punishment be if the others mocked at him mercilessly and laughed at his tears and cries. My dear brethren, this is a childish simile of the great final judgment which shall be fulfilled on the sinner on the last day. It is mere childishness compared to the anger of the Judge who will then inflict the punishment. Fatherly mildness and affection, with which the chastisement is inflicted on

The circumstances of the place shall make the sentence terrible.

¹ Tunc dicet et his, qui a sinistris erunt: Discedite a me, maledicti, in ignem æternum. —Matt. xxv. 41.

the son for his good, there is no place for thee here! Vengeance and implacable anger shall pronounce the sentence. It is mere childishness too, compared to the bitter envy, confusion, shame, and despair with which the wicked shall hear the sentence of their condemnation, and see it actually carried into execution.

For it shall
be pro-
nounced in
presence of
all the elect.

The holy Evangelist St. Matthew describes the terrible scene in order in his twenty-fifth chapter. When the whole universe, heaven and earth, and all that is in heaven, earth, and hell shall be gathered together, "then shall the king say to them that shall be on His right hand: Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."¹ Mark how He begins by bestowing the eternal reward with which His chosen children shall rejoice. Meanwhile the wicked shall have to stand there, gnashing their teeth with rage and envy, seeing the happiness of the others which might have been theirs too had they not excluded themselves from it by the perversity of their wills. "These seeing it," says the Wise Man of them, "shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the suddenness of their unexpected salvation, saying within themselves, repenting, and groaning for anguish of spirit: These are they whom we had sometime in derision; and for a parable of reproach." O fools and simpletons that we were! "Behold, how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints,"² with whom they will rejoice forever! Mark too, how the elect, after they have been invited to go into eternal happiness, shall not enter into it immediately, but shall wait till the sentence on the wicked shall be carried out. For although the just shall be the first to hear their sentence, they shall be the last on whom it will be fulfilled, as St. Matthew expressly says: "And these shall go into everlasting punishment: but the just into life everlasting."³ Again a source of fearful shame for the reprobate. Who could describe the fierce anger and intolerable shame and anguish of heart that the proud Aman suffered when he was forced to see Mardochai honored by the king, while he himself had to walk on foot, lead-

¹ Tunc dicet rex his, qui a dextris ejus erunt: Venite, benedicti Patris mei, possidetis paratum vobis regnum a constitutione mundi.—Matt. xxv. 34.

² Videntes turbabuntur timore horribili; et mirabuntur in subitaneitate insperatae salutis; dicentes intra se, poenitentiam agentes, et prae angustia spiritus gementes: Hi sunt quos habuimus aliquando in derisum, et in similitudinem improperii. Ecce quomodo computati sunt inter filios Dei, et inter sanctos sors illorum est.—Wis. v. 2, 3, 5.

³ Et ibunt hi in supplicium æternum, justi autem in vitam æternam.—Matt. xxv. 46.

ing the king's horse on which Mardochai was seated in great pomp? Who could describe the rage and fury of the same Aman, when after suffering so much shame he was brought to be hanged in the sight of the triumphant Mardochai on the very gallows he had prepared for him? But what is it all compared to the shame, confusion, and despair of the damned, when they shall be forced to look on the last day at the chosen servants of God seated in glory, and to tremble and shudder at the feet of those whom they scarcely deigned to cast a glance on during life, while they themselves shall be dragged by the demons to hell?

In those circumstances then the divine Judge shall open His mouth, and with a loud voice call out the sentence; He will no longer be meek and gentle as a lamb, but rather like a ravening lion, so that the whole earth shall tremble at the sound of His voice, as the Prophet David says: "At the voice of Thy thunder they shall fear."¹ And what shall that sentence be? "Depart from Me, you cursed." Let us consider the full import of these terrible words. "Depart from Me:" to understand this, it is enough to know what it is to be separated from God forever. But alas! who can tell us what that is? A saint who actually sees God and knows Him clearly should come down from heaven to enlighten us on the point, and even then we should fail to grasp it fully. We may get a slight idea of it from the state of mind of Absalom, that disobedient, obstinate, undutiful son, who was banished by his father, but recalled and restored to favor through the intercession of Joab, under the condition, however, that he should never dare to present himself before his father, nor even to look at him: "But the king said: Let him return into his house, and let him not see my face."² This condition seemed too hard and intolerable to the son. He saw how the courtiers, ministers, and attendants, how citizens and strangers, and even the poor and oppressed were freely admitted to the king's presence, while he himself dared not venture too near even to his father's chamber. No longer able to bear this reproach, he entreated Joab, saying: "I beseech thee therefore, that I may see the face of the king;" if that may not be, I have no longer any wish to live, and you may tell him that he can have me put to death: "If he be mindful of my iniquity, let

Terrible on account of the separation from God.

¹ A voce tonitru tui formidabunt.—Ps. ciii. 7.

² Dixit autem rex: Revertatur in domum suam, et faciem meam non videat.—II. Kings xiv. 24.

him kill me.”¹ We may get an idea of it from Syllanus, the son of Manlius Torquatus, of whom Valerius Maximus writes that his father pronounced this sentence on him on account of a crime he had committed: “I declare my son unworthy to be in my house, and I command him to go far away at once out of my sight.”² The son was so afflicted at this that the next night he laid violent hands on himself, and hanged himself. We may get some idea of it from those soldiers of Alexander who, on account of a tumult they had made in camp, had to hear these words from their king: “Away with you at once out of the sight of Alexander.”³ This sentence smote them like a thunderbolt, so that they laid aside their arms and tried to hide themselves for fear in caverns. We may get some idea of it from Turannius, the minister of Cæsar, who, as Seneca writes, being deposed from his office, threw himself on his bed and ordered his family to mourn him as dead. Now if these men were so oppressed with sorrow at a sentence that banished them from the sight of an earthly father, general, and emperor, that they preferred death to banishment, what must it be to be separated and excluded forever from the house of God, from the inheritance of God, from the sight of God, from that God who said to Moses: “I will show thee all good;”⁴ from that God in whose possession we shall find everything that is desirable, everything that can rejoice and make us happy, and who is moreover in Himself the only true, supreme, most beautiful, and infinite Good, to be separated from whom is nothing less than to be separated from all that is good?

We do not now understand this, but shall in the next life.

O poor, blind mortals that we are, who so little understand this while here on earth! Our mind is now bewildered and darkened by all sorts of evil inclinations; our appetites are excited by worldly goods and the outward beauty that we behold with the senses; we have never seen God except by the faith darkly; hence what wonder is it that we long so little for the possession of Him, that we feel so little regret at losing Him! What wonder is it that we are so little affected by the threat of being deprived of Him, that we are so callous and undisturbed at the thought of the judgment that awaits us! But, unhappy sinner, how will it

¹ Obsecro ergo ut videam faciem regis; quod si memor est iniquitatis meæ, interficiat me.—II. Kings xiv. 32.

² Filium meum domo mea indignum iudico, protinusque a conspectu meo abire iudec.—Val. Max. l. 5, c. viii.

³ Abite hinc ex Alexandri conspectu.—Majol. t. 3.

⁴ Ego ostendam omne bonum tibi.—Exod. xxxiii. 19.

be with you when you learn clearly in eternity what God is, and at the same time must hear that you are banished from His sight forever? To be deprived of a good with whose value one is not acquainted is tolerable enough, but to be banished, and that forever, from a Good that one has before his eyes, and knows to be his only happiness, oh, what a bitter parting that is! Painful it is to be deprived even of the smallest thing to which we have a claim, and which belongs to us. The orphan does not feel any pang at not being allowed to deal with his own property as he wills, for he knows that while he is in a state of pupilage that right does not belong to him. But suppose he has reached the age appointed by law which frees him from the guardianship of others, would he not become angry and indignant if any one tried to interfere with his right to deal with his own property as he wills, or if an attempt was made to deprive him of it unjustly? The soul while enclosed in the body is like the young ward, for as long as it is in that state it has no right nor title to see God in heaven; but when it is freed from the trammels of the body and the bonds of life are loosed, oh, what pain, anger, and rage that soul will experience when it sees itself not only hindered from possessing the eternal Good, but also banished, driven away, rejected in such a manner that for all eternity it will never be possible for it to approach that sovereign Good! Unhappy sinner! I say again, how will it be with you when on that day the glory of the children of God, the joys of heaven will be shown to you, and you at the same time will have to hear what God said to Moses after having shown him the promised land from afar: "Thou shalt not pass over to it;"¹ that is not for you; it might have been yours had you wished, but now you can never get there? How will it be with you when you see your God, but at the same time hear from Him the words, "Thou shalt have no part with Me"?² How that terrible sentence will thunder in your ears: "Depart from Me"!

What! you will say, from Thee, my God? From Thee, my only End? From Thee, the Author of my being, and my Repose? From Thee, my Father? From Thee, my Brother? From Thee, my Saviour? From Thee, my sovereign Good? Yes; from Me! Away with you! Depart from Me! Alas! must I go away from Thee? Was I not created to possess Thee forever; and must I

Painful
shall this
separation
be to the
condemned
sinner.

¹ Non transibis ad illem.—Deut. xxxiv. 4.

² Non habebis partem mecum.—John xlii. 8.

now consider myself as incapable of enjoying the supreme Good? If I had not such a clear knowledge of Thee, and knew not Thy worth, I should not feel so much pain at being deprived of Thee; and if the separation lasted only for a time I could and should easily find some consolation. But now Thou art my God, and Thou hast been offered to me as my portion and inheritance; and yet I have to go from Thee! Now Thou art my God, whose worth I see only too clearly; and I have to be separated from Thee! Now Thou art my God, my sovereign and only Good, and I have lost Thee forever! And is there no hope of my ever seeing Thee again? No; not the slightest hope. Depart from Me, along with the whole rabble of accursed ones! "Because I called, and you refused."¹ I wished to have you with Me in heaven, but you did not wish to come. I became Man for you, shed My blood, gave up My life for your salvation, but you have made no use of My goodness. For years and years I have had patience with you while you were in the state of sin; I have offered you the benefit of My merits, of My Passion in the holy sacrament of penance, "and you refused." You did not wish to acknowledge or love Me as your God; you have offered incense to other deities; you have adored the world and its vanities; I had to yield in your choice to a transitory gain, a filthy pleasure, a breath of honor, a mere mortal! My cross was a scandal to you; My poverty and humility too mean for you; My life and the laws of My Gospel only provoked your laughter; heaven was in your estimation not worth striving for. Away with you, then! what keeps you here? Let those enjoy My glory in heaven who have striven as they ought to gain it. Depart from Me! out of My sight, My kingdom, My inheritance, the society of My beloved children! Never for all eternity shall you have any part with them!

Es shall be
cursed by
God.

Depart from Me, you cursed! Another thunderbolt, my dear brethren. You are accursed by Me, who purchased a blessing for you; accursed by the blood I shed for you, which cried out for mercy and pardon; accursed by My death, which was offered to gain eternal life for you; accursed by My heavenly Father, who had prepared a kingdom for you; accursed by the Holy Ghost, who wished to sanctify you; accursed by My Mother, through whom so many sinners have found salvation; accursed by My angels, who were appointed to guard you; accursed by all My saints, who went before you with their good example; ac-

¹ Quia vocavi, et renuistis.- Prov. i. 24.

cursed by all creatures, who cry out for vengeance on you; accursed in your souls, which were subjected to the flesh; in your bodies, which you petted so much and adorned so extravagantly to the scandal of others; accursed in your mind, your will, and all your outward senses; accursed in yourselves, accursed in your companions! You have loved the curse; it shall be with you forever! Depart from Me, you cursed! Away, ye demons, with those who belong to you; I know them no more!

Ye heavens! is there no mercy then? Is there no one to show the least pity for those so miserably banished and condemned souls? No; not one! Angels, saints, the Mother of God; even parents, children, friends, relations among the elect, will all with biting laughter and exultant triumph cry out with one voice: Depart, you cursed! Away! To hell with you! So shall the father among the elect cry out to his reprobate child: Away with you, accursed son! So will children cry out with scorn and contempt to their parents: Away with you, accursed father and mother! So will the husband cry out to his wife; the wife to her husband; one friend and acquaintance to another: Depart, you cursed! Away with you to the depths of hell!

By all the elect.

Thus abandoned by all, rejected, and banished, what will the unhappy ones have to do? asks St. Ephrem. What else but with despairing cries to take leave forever of all the just, of God, of heaven and earth? Farewell, all ye just souls, we cannot have any part with you! Farewell, angels and heavenly spirits, you have left us! Farewell, ye apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins; we shall not see you any more for all eternity. Farewell, beautiful heaven, paradise of pleasure! thou wert created for us, and we in order to possess thee; and now we have lost thee forever! Farewell to thee also, Mary, the Mother of God! Alas, we are shut out from the eyes of thy motherly love for all eternity! Beautiful sunlight, farewell; thou wilt never shine more for us; our dwelling is in everlasting darkness! Good-bye, earth, we are not worthy of thee; swallow us down into thy deepest abyss! Farewell, O God, and with Thee all that is good! Our dwelling must be among the demons in hell! We were created by Thee, O God, called by Thee, enlightened by Thee, supported by Thee, often fed with Thy own flesh and blood, preserved by Thee to the very end of our lives for no other purpose but to bless Thee in the eternal joys of heaven with Thy chosen children; but henceforth Thou shalt be the object of our fierce hatred, of our eternal curs-

How terrible to bid adieu to th whole world, and be hurled into hell!

ing and imprecations! Amidst these despairing cries the valley of Josaphat will at length be cleft asunder, and swallow up the unhappy wretches like so many rabid dogs, and their memory will not remain any more.

We should now fear this sentence with a wholesome fear, that we may avoid sin.

Christians, what are our thoughts now? Does not our hair stand on end with terror? O my dear brother, writes St. Augustine to a certain person, O dearest brethren, I say now: "is our flesh of iron that it does not tremble?"¹ Are our hearts marble that they do not become soft? Is our spirit sunk in such a deep sleep that it refuses to awaken even at the terrible voice of the angry Judge: Depart from Me, you cursed? Ah, fear; fear by all means, but fear no one except that just Judge who alone has the power of passing such a terrible sentence on us! Fear, but fear nothing except sin, for it alone can bring down that sentence on us! Fear, but not with an empty fear, that remains only in the imagination, and leaves the mind anxious and dispirited. Fear with an effectual fear that strides on to action, repressing our evil inclinations, withdrawing our hearts from the world and its vanities, confining us always within the bounds of the divine and Gospel laws! If we know that we are free from sin, or even if we have committed all the sins in the world, but our conscience gives us testimony that we have repented of them sincerely, confessed them candidly, and amended our lives, and if moreover we have the earnest will never again to offend God deliberately, and always to do His holy will as well as we know how: then we can and shall always rejoice in the Lord that we have not to fear that terrible sentence; a sentence that the divine goodness and mercy often suggests to us, now while there is still time, as a subject of meditation to inspire us with a wholesome child-like fear, that we may resolve to be true to Him always, and with this resolution to enjoy even in this life a foretaste of the happiness to which we shall be called with His chosen children by the divine Judge on that day.

Yet in spite of that fear, most people shall be lost. Why so?

Meanwhile, my dear brethren, of all the reprobates who are now in hell, how many think you are there who during life heard in sermons, or read in spiritual books, and that too with fear and trembling, of the last judgment and the terrible sentence on the wicked? How many of those here present (ah, I sincerely hope that may not be the case!) who are now filled with fear

¹ Numquid ferreæ sunt carnes nostræ, ut non contremiscant?

at the thought of that terrible sentence, and who will nevertheless on the last day be among the unhappy wretches on the left hand of the Judge, so that they will hear that sentence thundered forth against themselves? Why is this? It comes from the fact (and the same may be said of other truths too) that after they have been for some time disturbed in mind by what they have heard, after having considered in a cursory manner what a reasonable man should do to avoid such an irreparable calamity, they forget those good thoughts in a short time, drive them out of their minds, and go on in their usual vicious, tepid, idle, vain, and therefore as far as their salvation is concerned, most dangerous way of life. This is chiefly the case with those who, that they may not become melancholy, as they term it, deliberately avoid all reflection on such salutary and terrible truths, and lest they should be forced to face them, wilfully absent themselves from sermons. Ah, my dear Christians, I augur something better for you!

But you, O sinners, who are not yet earnestly resolved to re-
nounce your vicious ways and to return to God by sincere repentance, fear! tremble! Bewail and lament your folly, the hardness and blindness of your hearts! Is it then your determination for such a wretched thing, for a momentary carnal pleasure, for some trifling gain, for the sake of being revenged on your enemy, to satisfy your vanity, or for the love of a mortal creature—is it your determination to hear one day the terrible words: Depart from Me, you cursed? Ah, souls, I beg of you by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, which still cries out to heaven for mercy; by the tears that the ever-blessed Virgin Mary, the Refuge of sinners, the Mother of mercy, has shed for you, enter into yourselves, and return to your God, most worthy of love, who now sincerely desires not your damnation, but your eternal happiness! I assure you that even I, willing as I am to help you to get to heaven, even I on that dreadful day shall have to appear against you before the divine tribunal, and in the presence of my Judge and yours to cry out before all creatures: I have warned you in the words with which God inspired me at the time, telling me to speak to your hearts in His name, and you have paid no attention; you have heard and understood the truth explained to you, but you became no better. If you will not be influenced by what I say to you now, then hear the words that God your future Judge says to you by the Prophet Jeremias: “I am weary of entreat-

Folly of the sinner who cannot be moved to repent by the thought of that sentence.

ing thee.”¹ I have worked hard for your salvation: “Thou hast forsaken Me, saith the Lord; thou art gone backward and I will stretch out My hand against thee, and I will destroy thee.”² I have begged of you to repent and abstain from sin, but My entreaties were in vain; now I shall lift up My hand against you, and pronounce on you the sentence of eternal damnation.

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion of
amend-
ment.

Ah, merciful God, refrain! I cannot and will not bear to hear that terrible sentence! I confess before heaven and earth that I have richly deserved reprobation by my sinful life; but hoping and trusting in Thy endless mercy, which still speaks for me, I sigh forth with a contrite heart in the words of Thy penitent servant Augustine: “O Lord, although I have done that for which Thou canst condemn me, Thou hast not lost that by which Thou art wont to save.”³ Only grant me time and grace for true repentance; I will bewail all my past sins with sincere contrition, and candidly confess them to the priest. I now execrate and detest them above every other evil, because they have offended and insulted Thee, O God, most worthy of love! From this moment my firm resolution is (and I take the angels and elect as witnesses thereof) always to live according to Thy law and the maxims of Thy holy Gospel; Thee alone shall I love in future with my whole heart, and then I shall be able to say with more right and confidence: “When Thou shalt come to judge, do not condemn me!”⁴ Then I shall comfort myself with the hope of a better sentence, and expect to hear with Thy elect to my great joy and exultation the blessed invitation: “Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;” enter into the joy of your Lord. Amen.

Another introduction to the same sermon for the first Sunday of Advent.

Text.

Arescentibus hominibus præ timore.—Luke xxi. 26.

“Men withering away for fear.”

¹ Laboravi rogans.—Jer. xv. 6.

² Tu reliquisti me, dicit Dominus, retrorsum abisti: et extendam manum meam super te, et interficiam te.—Ibid.

³ Domine, etsi ego admisi unde damnare potes; tu non amisisti, unde salvare soles.

⁴ Dum veneris iudicare, noli me condemnare!

• Introduction.

Terrible shall be the day of general judgment. The expectation, nay, the bare thought of it should fill men with dread if their consciences are not in a good state. "Then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud with great power and majesty." A terrible day in all its circumstances! Terrible when we consider the Person of the Judge, who shall be the all-knowing and just God, a Man like to us, our Redeemer, the Pattern of our lives! Terrible when we consider the poor sinner who shall be summoned to this judgment, accused, examined, and convicted therein; as we have seen already in eight sermons. There is still one point, and that a most terrible one, namely, how the sinner, summoned, examined, accused, and convicted, shall have the sentence of condemnation pronounced on him, etc. *Continues as above.*

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.







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