

MEDITATIONS ON THE LORD'S PRAYER

by A. Bonnet

Bonnet's devotional meditations on each petition of the Lord's Prayer, exploring the depth of meaning in Christ's model prayer and drawing practical applications for the believer's communion with God.

9 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 01 - Meditation 1
2. 02 - Meditation 2
3. 03 - Meditation 3
4. 04 - Meditation 4
5. 05 - Meditation 5
6. 06 - Meditation 6
7. 07 - Meditation 7
8. 08 - Meditation 8
9. 09 - Meditation 9

01 - Meditation 1

MEDITATION I.

“OUR FATHER, WHICH ART IN HEAVEN.”

Matthew 6:9.

How different must prayer have been in Eden from what it is now on earth! Happy in intimate communion with his God, deriving life from its source, and breathing into the bosom of his heavenly Father the feelings of his heart, man “prayed without ceasing;” to him to live was to pray, and to pray was to live. But, alas! how far otherwise has it been, since sin separated between man and his God, and rendered the Creator a stranger to his creature! Since that time, some have lived altogether without prayer; they have neither known God nor desired to pray to him; others have repeated a set of phrases to accomplish what they felt to be a slavish and burdensome task; and if there have been some who have learned to pray in the school of Jesus Christ, ah! how forcibly do their prayers, yea even their most fervent prayers, admonish us of our fall and of our deep degradation! Hear those chosen servants of the Lord? those men after God’s own heart. With one, prayer is the sighing- of a soul bowed down under the pressure of innumerable evils: “Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Who can stand before thee?” With another, it is a cry of anguish and of fear: “Lord, save us, we perish!” With a third, it is the humiliating confession of a conscience tormented with remorse: “O Lord, great and terrible God, we have sinned, we have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled!” Happy, still happy, for the sinner, when he can send up from his heart this lamentation to the throne of God! Happy, when reduced to this melancholy avowal of his ignorance: “We know not what to pray for as we ought,” he is taught to add: “But the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered!” For, my beloved brethren, you know that there are times (and they are the most painful moments of our existence,) when you cannot pray; there are times when it appears to you as if you had forgotten the way to the throne of grace; when there is, as it were, a weight upon your heart, which makes you a slave to visible things, and prevents you from rising on the wings of faith, above the miseries of this present world; when consumed by a burning dryness within, you have not even the sad consolation of weeping over your deplorable condition; when you would give every thing you possess for a tear to shed upon the bosom of your Saviour, or a sigh to breathe forth towards your God; and yet that tear, that sigh, is denied you.

It was thus, doubtless, that one of the disciples of Jesus felt on a certain occasion, when seeing his divine Master pour out his soul, in powerful prayer before his heavenly Father, and being desirous to partake of the same precious privilege, moved with a holy emulation, he said, “Lord, teach us also to pray!” Then the Saviour, the compassionate Mediator between God and man, ever ready to meet the wants of his redeemed, put into the heart and upon the lips of his disciples, that divine prayer, the first words of which we have just read; and for more than eighteen hundred years, has this prayer been the consolation of all those who have enjoyed the blessed privilege of being able to call God by the name of “Father!” But do we understand this deep, this

comprehensive prayer? Do we know how, and are we able to offer it up to God in the spirit that dictated it, so that it is to us a source of comfort and of refreshment in those trying hours of which we have spoken? Or because we have learned it by heart from our childhood, because a pious mother taught us to lisp it from our cradle, because we are in the habit of using it every day in our private devotions, because we begin and end with it, our religious exercises in the house of God, have we come to see in it nothing but words without meaning, and to repeat it without obtaining any of the inestimable blessings which our Lord thus permits us to ask in terms of his own dictating? My brethren, it is this painful doubt, it is the fear lest we should repeat this prayer in your hearing from Sabbath to Sabbath, without your entering into its spirit, and joining in it with your hearts, that has impressed me with the conviction that it might be useful to us all to make it the subject of our meditation in a series of discourses, upon which we entreat you to unite with us in asking a blessing from on high.

We are far, very far indeed, from thinking that we can exhaust a subject so comprehensive. But if we can only draw a few drops of living water from this majestic stream of prayer, for the refreshment of some, and to convince others that they are not in a state to use it, and inspire them with a desire to become so, we shall bless God even for this, and our labor shall not be in vain. For the present, let us fix our thoughts on the words which I have read "Our Father, which art in heaven." Who can thus address God? What meaning do these words convey to the heart of the Christian? Such are the two questions which we shall endeavor to answer.

O merciful Saviour! we also would entreat thee, saying, "Teach us to pray!" Without prayer our souls are dead; breathe into them this breath of life! and when thou hast taught us to pray, hear and answer us! Amen.

Father! such is the endearing name under which Jesus directs us to address God. But who can do so with sincerity and uprightness of heart? Who can repeat this encouraging name of Father, and experience at the same time, with a thrill of joy, all the feelings which it supposes to exist in the heart of him who pronounces it? But what need of this question? Some one perhaps will say, to whom it may appear to circumscribe so magnificent a subject; is not God the Father of all men? is not every child of Adam, that bears within his breast a human heart, member of the great family of man, placed under the paternal safeguard of that God who "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth?" Is it not to God we owe our existence? Are we not all his creatures, the work of his hands? Is it not in him "we live, and move, and have our being?" "Doth he not make his sun to rise on the evil and on the good?" and the rain "to descend upon the just and the unjust?" Why then should not all say to him with confidence "Our Father! Our Father, which art in heaven!"

Why, my brethren!... Ask man himself; ask, perhaps, your own hearts, but not God.

Ah! doubtless he who created the heavens to declare his glory, the earth to produce its fruits, the bird to sing his praises, and the blade of grass to fulfil, after its manner, the end for which it was created, made man also to be his child and to call him Father; he gave him an understanding to know him, a heart to love him, and a mouth to praise him by telling of his paternal benefits! But if God be their Father, then ought men to be his children, and to cherish towards him the feelings which a father has a right to expect from those who owe to him their existence and all things. And when we cast a glance at the world, we ought to see all the members of that great family, bearing

upon their front and in their hearts, the pure and holy image of their heavenly Father, finding their most exalted happiness in knowing, loving, and being near him, in communion with him, in thinking of him, in imitating him in all their actions, in rendering him a willing, cheerful, and loving obedience; we ought to see them referring every thing to him and to his glory, making him the centre of their affections, of all their pursuits, and of their whole life; we ought to see these children of one and the same Father loving one another with sincerity and tenderness, and manifesting towards their brethren the same kindness, justice, and love, which their heavenly Father continually displays towards them. But is this the spectacle which the family of mankind presents? Look around you, and look at a distance from you; is it with the actions of such children of an Almighty Father that the pages of history are filled? Is it such children of an Almighty Father that cover our earth from pole to pole, that crowd our cities and our villages, that dwell upon our mountains and in our valleys? Alas! my brethren, in drawing the picture of which the human family ought to be the reality, we seem to write a sad and bitter irony!

Ah! “doubtless God is a Father, even in this universal sense; the Father of all; doubtless he spreads out over all his paternal hands which create, preserve, protect, and bless, scattering upon each a thousand, thousand benefits. But his children what, children! Can beings claim that title, who have denied their Father, and, like the prodigal son, have gone as far as they could from their paternal home, who love that separation from him, live thus distant without remorse, shut their ears to the calls by which their merciful Father would bring them back to himself, and, after having cast off the yoke of his paternal authority, and broken the bonds of their obligations as children, despise the Word of their Father, violate his laws, and seem to take pleasure in offending him? Can beings pretend to this title, who take occasion, from the very benefits of their Father, to indulge in a daring ingratitude; beings who have polluted and effaced the image of his divinity which he impressed upon their souls; who endeavor to forget him, that they may escape from the thought of his righteous indignation; or who are even ashamed of him, yea, ashamed of him and of his name, when he is presented face to face to their recollection and to their conscience? Say, can such beings, who bear in their hearts a secret enmity against God, or at least entertain for him no more than a cold respect, an insulting indifference which freezes the life in their souls, while they are all fire for the world, its earthly goods, its impure joys; can such beings pretend to the title of children of God 1 can they lift up to heaven those hearts, full of covetousness; those looks, full of pride, and say, “ Our Father! Our Father, which art in heaven 1” No, my brethren, no! It would be an insult to the Divine Majesty; it would be a mockery of God! it would be to suppose that the holy and merciful God should be satisfied with feelings and with a conduct in his children, which you, fathers and mothers, whom I am addressing, would be indignant at finding in the children to whom you have given life, and whom you have brought up. And shall not God feel that which you would feel, in virtue of the rights which nature gives you over your children? Hear his Word. “ A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master: if I be a Father, where is mine honor? and if I be a Master, where is my fear?” He demands, then, this honor, he requires this fear, before he confers on us the privileges of children, and the right of calling him Father. And here observe that mankind, though in general they do not like to be told these humiliating truths, have, by their conduct, avowed this truth, without, perhaps, in so many words admitting it. Indeed, so strong is the conviction in man that he does not stand in such a relative position towards his Creator, as to be able to look upon himself as his child, and regard God as his Father, that all human religions have seen in the Deity an offended Being, whom it was necessary to appease by every imaginable

sacrifice: and neither their priests nor their worshippers have ever addressed to God, in the sense of the words of our Lord, this name of Father, which supposes, in the heart and in the life, something quite different from what they have felt. Further; this remarkable testimony, extorted from man by his own conscience, is confirmed in the most striking manner by the Word of God. Can any thing be more surprising, and at the same time more instructive, than to hear that same Jesus, who taught his disciples to say to God " Our Father, which art in heaven!" addressing to those who were not and would not become his disciples, these startling words, " Ye are of your father the devil, and the works of your father ye will do." And when these men say to him, "We have one Father, even God," he answers them, " If God were your Father, ye would love me." The Apostle Paul also inculcates the same doctrine, when in one and the same Epistle, reminding the Christians to whom he was writing of their past life, he says to them, " We were children of wrath, even as others;" and in another place addresses to them these words of eternal consolation, " He hath made us accepted in the Beloved, to the praise of the glory of his grace." The sum, my brethren, of what the Bible teaches us on this subject is, that in the truest and most important sense, of the words, we are not children of God by nature, but we become so by grace; man is not born a child of God, but may become one.

Yes, he may become one; and, my beloved brethren, we all are likewise called to become children of God; we all are called to partake of the happy and glorious privilege of addressing God as " Our Father, which art in heaven! " It was for this that Jesus Christ came upon earth; it was for this he wrought out a new creation by his redeeming work. He alone could teach us thus to pray, because he alone has acquired for us, if we belong to him, the privilege of calling God our Father. Here, again, let us come back to the declarations of the word of him who cannot lie; and that none of us may deceive ourselves, let us learn what must take place within us ere we become children of God, " He came unto his own," St. John tells us speaking of the object of Christ's coming, " and his own received him not; but as many as received him," received him as a Saviour with the grace and pardon, the new love and new life which he bestows, " to them gave he power to become the sons of God, which were born" (mark attentively these words) " not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh. nor of the will of man, but of God." That is to say, as we have just observed, it is not by a natural birth of flesh and blood that we have " power to become children of God," but by being " born of God," of his Spirit; by being begotten of him, as really as a child is begotten of his father to be his son. Again the Bible declares, " we are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the word of God," " and this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto us." And elsewhere: "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his; but as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!" May you be enabled, my brethren, to enter into the meaning of these words, for they contain the whole secret of the divine life. This birth by the Spirit of God, produces an entire change in the inmost affections, thoughts, desires, and volitions of the inner man. The man that is born of God is literally a child of God; he bears his features; the divine image, in which our nature was originally created, is restored to him, and with it all the feelings which should characterize a son love, gratitude, respect, and devotedness; there is a new life, a new creation; a new relation is established between the soul and God; and henceforward the words " Our Father," express a fact as real, as they are inexhaustible in consolation. My brethren! is not this also an idea, or rather a reality, which would never have " entered into the heart of man?" What! shall the creature of a day, a worm of the dust,

be permitted to give the name of Father to him who fills heaven and earth with his immensity and with his power? What! shall man, sinful, guilty, and condemned, but accepted through grace, be permitted to give the title of Father to the Holy One and the Just, and to consider himself as his child? Here is a miracle of mercy and of love such as our Divine Saviour alone could achieve; it is the triumph of his work; the result of his infinite sacrifice; it was this that made his heart leap with joy, seeing that it was the fruit of his sufferings: for scarcely had he risen triumphant from the tomb, when, contemplating a lost and sinful world transformed by him into a willing and obedient people; beholding, by anticipation, a family of children of God rising up upon a rebellious and accursed earth; he says to a weeping woman 'whom he wished to comfort; " Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God! "It was under this endearing name of Father that Jesus generally chose to address God in the most solemn moments of his terrestrial life. Does he speak of the filial obedience which he had vowed to him from his earliest childhood, " Wist ye not," he says, " that I must be about my Father's business?" Does he wish to express the ineffable love which his Father had for him: " The Father loveth the Son, and hath committed all things into his hands." Is he desirous, in the dark hours of Gethsemane, to call down assistance from on high, and to testify his entire resignation to the divine will: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt! " Would he give from the cross the most striking evidence of his charity, by praying for the authors of his sufferings " Father, forgive them!" Does his dying voice rise once more from this vale of tears, just at the moment when he is about to pass through the valley of the shadow of death, and enter into his glory? " Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" This name, then, which he loved, this name which spoke so powerfully to his own heart, he permits us also to pronounce; he shares this privilege with us; he desires to sustain the character of our eldest brother; he would have us belong to the same family; he calls God " his Father, and our Father; his God, and our God!"

Here, my brethren! you, who have been taught by Jesus to know God, here you see the spirit in which you, like him, are permitted to pray, to pray at all times, to pray under all circumstances. You are no longer the poor fearful creature, exiled to a distance from God, that approaches, with trembling, an unknown and dreaded being, surrounded with terrors, and enshrined in an inaccessible immensity. No; Jesus himself puts into your mouth, when you fall upon your knees before your God, the name of Father, that most endearing name in nature, a name which summons up to the mind the tenderest affections, a name which we never pronounce without the deepest feelings of veneration and love! Is there in the heart a single feeling of filial fear, of filial love, of child-like and unreserved confidence, which this name is not calculated to awaken? He, then, who thus prays, a child, weak, indeed, but loving, who approaches the best of parents to ask of him, with confidence, every thing that he has need of. in the assurance that nothing which he asks shall be denied him, if it contribute to his real happiness. The Bible insists much upon this comparison of an earthly father and our Father in heaven; and it challenges the tenderest affection of a parent's heart to surpass in any respect the love and care of our heavenly Father. " What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" Does a suffering or an erring child meet with assistance or compassion from his father? "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." The Bible does not stop even here; the

experience of the Christian contains still richer treasures of consolation. If there be found a father so unnatural as to abandon his own child, or if death, striking a beloved father, leave his child an unprotected orphan, the arms of a heavenly Father are stretched out to receive him, to surround him with love and with paternal care: "When my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up!" And this assurance, which David had found so blessed a reality when he pronounced these words, is the same to every soul whose confidence is in the Lord. Yes, I have seen the young child returning sad and dejected, after accompanying its father to the tomb, and have heard it ask, in the agony of grief Who will now be my guide and my support in this life of misery upon which I am about to enter, alone, and poor, weak, and without hope? And then I have seen the hand of a faithful servant of God pointing upwards, while with accents of sympathy and tenderness he said "My child! remember that thou hast still a Father in heaven;" and these words, these few words, found the way to that young heart, and never after departed from it; and these few words gave a direction to his whole future life by shedding over it a new light.

And, my brethren, it is to remind us also of this power of consolation and of succor which resides in God, that Jesus teaches us to say, in our prayers, "Our Father, which art in heaven!" Which art in heaven! but is not God present everywhere? Is he not on earth as well as in heaven? Doubtless; but Jesus, by these words, seeks to raise our hearts, our thoughts, our hopes, above this earth, above our miseries, above every thing that changes, passes, and dies; above life and death! He desires to remind us, that were all our earthly supports to crumble into dust beneath us, were the earth itself to be shaken to its foundations, were we to remain solitary and alone in the midst of an immensity reduced to chaos, God, our Father, who is in heaven above all, would still be there to receive, to succor, and to save us. He wishes to remind us, that, we have for a Father Him who reigns from all eternity in heaven, who by his Word created all things, and hence, that every one of his works ought to proclaim to us his presence, his care, and his love. The poorest and the meanest creature, then, who has become a child of God, can say, with the fullest confidence, He who made the heavens and the earth, He who peopled immensity with glittering worlds, who maketh summer and winter to succeed one another, he is also my Father! He who enriched the earth with its beauties, who gave the flower its bloom and its fragrance, and the bird of the air its note of joy, is also my Father! The God who governs the world which he created, is also my Father! What, then, shall I fear? Poverty, the wants of life? my Father is he who gives the sun its brightness, the earth its riches, the bird of the air its food. Shall I fear sickness or suffering? my Father is he who, from the height of heaven, where he reigns, holds, in his almighty hand, all the moments of my existence, "who maketh sore and bindeth up; who woundeth, and his hands make whole!" Shall I fear the death 'of those who are dear to me? if I have loved them in the Lord, they go, like my Saviour, "to their Father and to my Father, to their God and to my God." Shall I fear the hour of darkness, when I myself shall be called to descend into the grave? my Saviour has taught me to pray, "Our Father, which art in heaven" that I might learn, while on earth, to see in that blessed place my Father who loves me, my family, and my real home. He wished, that every time these words escaped my lips, I might remember that I was an exile, and that my hopes, my wishes, and my happiness, ought not to cleave to this perishing dust, but rise, with this prayer, even unto God!

Thus, my brethren, you see, that to him who can really say from his heart, "Our Father, which art in heaven," every thing changes its aspect in life, in death, and in eternity, upon which there now no

longer rests to him the shadow of a doubt. But his relations with men are also changed, elevated, ennobled, and immortalized. Observe, that Jesus does not teach us, isolating ourselves, each in his own selfish individuality, to say my Father, but our Father, which art in heaven! And in pronouncing these words, we remember with joy that we do not pray alone. Whosoever is born of God upon earth is a member of that family of the redeemed of Christ, with which we are all united; a new bond of imperishable relationship links together the children of God, from the most obscure Christian whose whole religious knowledge consists in being able to pronounce, with affection, the name of his heavenly Father, even to the spirits of the just which already surround the throne of God. O, believing soul! wert thou even alone and desolate upon earth, forgotten of men and of the world, yet art thou a member of a great and glorious family. Wherever there exists a human being in whose heart burns a spark of love for the Almighty Father, there thou hast a beloved brother, who can never separate thee from his interest and affection.

Thou art not alone in thy conflicts; thou art not pursuing thine earthly pilgrimage alone; thou dost not pray alone, for in every corner of this globe, where a soul prays, it addresses itself to thy Father and to its Father, to thy God and to its God; wherever the Lord's Prayer is repeated, thou art comprised in this word of boundless charity: "OUR Father, which art in heaven!"

Let us then remember, my brethren, that we can never really address this prayer to God without coining out of our miserable egotism.

You know, that the language of individualism, the little singular pronoun which so continually betrays our narrow self-love; my. rights, my interests, my property, my family, my enjoyments; the language of egotism is banished from the vocabulary of the Christian as Christ Jesus has formed it. After him, when we pray, we say, our Father, and we ask no favor which we do not wish to see extended to all those whom these words embrace. Here must be realized that famous device which the men of the world sometimes adopt, but to which, alas! they ever give the direct lie, "One for all, and all for one!" Here the interests of our brethren must be ours, their joys our joys, their trials our trials: "If one member of the body suffer, all suffer with it."

O, my brethren, did this love fill the hearts of all the disciples of Jesus when praying did they know how to avail themselves of the precious privilege of praying for one another, of uniting to ask of God their mutual happiness, and the conversion and salvation of the world, the Church of God would soon change its appearance! Where, then, would be the divisions, the animosities, the wretched strivings of a miserable self-love? Where would be that cold and disdainful charity which belies itself in assuming the name? Soon would all other feelings give place to love, and love would unite all hearts, so that they would be able to say, with feelings of delight, and in sublime unison, "Our Father, which art in heaven."

And, my brethren, since the Saviour introduces us by such words and such ideas into the sanctuary of prayer, what may we not expect to find there! what riches of grace, of consolation, and of love! What can such a Father refuse to his children? But permit me to conclude this discourse by a question which I would entreat you to examine in your consciences before God. Can you really and sincerely address to the Almighty these words, "Our Father, which art in heaven?" "Do these words, on your lips, speak the truth? Do they express your feelings, your soul, your heart? Is God really your Father? Do you entertain for him. the love, the submission, the confidence which he expects from his children? Happy, a thousand times happy are you, if the

witness of his Spirit in your hearts responds affirmatively to these questions! For then there is nothing in life or in death which can inspire you with a fear that is without an antidote, an anguish that has no remedy.

Nothing can really hurt you; you are happy!

Give thanks unto the Father, who hath loved you, and brought you to the knowledge of Himself; love him in return; serve him all the days of your life! But if it be otherwise, if you have never said to God, in the spirit of adoption, " Our Father;" if your conscience forces you to acknowledge that these words, upon your lips, would be a lie from whom, then, do you expect your happiness and your peace? If God be not your Father, what then is he to you? What will he be to you when in a few days you appear before his throne 1 If God be not your Father, from whom do you expect help in danger, consolation in affliction, life and salvation in death and in judgment? Put not away from you this great question, treat it not lightly, seek not to distract your mind that you may shun it; but solemnly charge it upon your conscience to resolve it. But I wish not to conclude with severe words; those of my text are so encouraging.

God does not come to you here as a judge or as an avenger. No, he comes to meet you, calling himself your Father! Oh! if hitherto the threatenings of his Word, and the chastisements of his justice, have been powerless to shake your souls, to awaken your consciences, to lead you to God, through that fear, which is due to him, let your hearts at least be touched by the words upon which we have been meditating; let them be attracted and subjugated by them forever!

We conjure you this day not by the terrors of the law, we conjure you by 'the mercies of God, to hear the Saviour, who himself would lead you to the foot of the throne of grace, put into your hearts and upon your lips the endearing name of Father, and teach you to stammer, were it for the first time in your lives, " Our Father, which art in heaven." Do you refuse to follow him? Do you refuse to have God for your Father? Whatever part you choose, the responsibility rests upon your own heads!

02 - Meditation 2

MEDITATION II.

“HALLOWED BE THY NAME.”

Matthew 6:9.

WE are told that one of the most justly distinguished individuals of modern times, one of those who have contributed the most largely to extend the boundaries of human knowledge, I mean the great Sir Isaac Newton, never heard the name of God pronounced in his presence without respectfully raising his hat from his hoary and venerable head. Was it that this great master spirit, having penetrated farther than any other man into the boundless immensity of the works of God, having discovered and taught to the world the laws which govern the universe, knew of God only what is sublime and terrible in his being? and was this action, by which he testified his profound veneration, solely the fear of the creature before the Creator, or the trembling of a slave before his master? No, my brethren, for Newton was a Christian. The same man who had carried his observations and his calculations to the loftiest heights of the heavens and found God in his works, endeavored also to sound the depths of the Bible, and to find him in his Word. There he learned to know as a father, Him whom science had revealed to him as the infinite God. He had been taught then to say, “ Our Father, which art in heaven;” and the deep veneration which he manifested, on hearing the name of God, only shows us that he could add, with Jesus Christ, “ Hallowed be thy name.” May we, my brethren, this day learn the same lesson. Oh! if we have felt an indescribable joy in hearing Jesus put into our mouths, whenever we approach the throne of grace, the name of Father, may we this day learn of him never to abuse that precious privilege by imposing upon ourselves by fatal delusions! It was with a consummate knowledge of our hearts, of our corruption, and of our wants, that the Lord, in the model of prayer which he has given us, after authorizing us to say, “ Our Father,” directed us immediately to add, “ Hallowed be thy name.”

Let us hear with attention, and as it were in the presence of Him whose name is holy, and who fills this place with his majesty, First, a few remarks on the “ Name of God,” and then a few observations on “ the hallowing of that Name,” shall severally occupy our thoughts on the present occasion. In the formation of languages, names, we apprehend, must have been intended not merely to hold the place of arbitrary and conventional sounds, but to designate some one or more properties of the objects to which they were applied. Thus, when God, as we read in the book of Genesis, caused all the animals which he had created for the furnishing of man’s abode to come to Adam, “ to see what name he would call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof;” no doubt man, endowed as he was with such noble faculties, did not proceed in an arbitrary manner to this nomenclature, but, on the contrary, affixed to each living creature, a name which contained a definition more or less clear and complete of its several properties. Among the Hebrews, at least, it was a constant practice to give a significant denomination to children, for example, and even to inanimate objects, and places distinguished for some remarkable event. And this is no more than what happens among men in the present day,

when they are required to create a name for some object newly invented or discovered in the arts or sciences. The name, in such cases, indicates or describes the thing.

Taking a step further, we often find that in our minds we associate with a name an entire order of ideas, a whole world of thoughts and systems, which sometimes have changed the aspect of an age. Thus he who cites the name of Newton, recalls to the mind all that is most transcendent in the domain of physical science; he who pronounces the name of Luther, carries us back in thought to the stupendous religious, moral, and intellectual revolution of the sixteenth century; he who mentions Voltaire (if you do not shrink from such an association), summons up to his recollection the whole of that superficial, scoffing, and impious philosophy, which undermined the foundations of the eighteenth century. And observe, that not only does a name recall ideas to our mind, but it may sometimes make a powerful impression upon our heart. There are names inscribed upon the page of history, which we can scarcely utter without a shuddering of horror; there are others which we cannot pronounce without a feeling of emotion.

Further, a name may be the representative, the compendium of an immense power. Let the absolute sovereign of a mighty empire but inscribe his name, his signature upon an insignificant piece' of paper; let him put this name into the hands of the obscurest subject in his dominions, and immediately this individual, hitherto without influence, can, by producing the name of which he is the depository, issue his commands, with a certainty of being obeyed to the remotest extremity of the kingdom, wherever he shall send the expression of his will. The reason is, that the name which has been intrusted to him, is the representative of the whole power, and of all the prerogatives of sovereign majesty.

Woe to the man who shall despise that name!

Let us apply these remarks to our subject. Does it follow that, because in human affairs, words so well express ideas, names paint and represent things, it must be the same with regard to God also, that infinite Being, who is incomprehensible in all his perfections, and who fills all things with his immensity? Must not human languages fail in their endeavors to define him? And might not the same prophet who, addressing the worshippers of idol gods, defies all the art of man to represent the infinite essence, exclaiming, " Whereunto will ye liken the Almighty, and unto what will ye compare Him?" might he not also put forth this challenge to all the languages of men, and say, " How will ye call the Almighty, and what name will ye give him?" To this question we shall in vain seek an answer among mankind; or, at least, if they have ever invented names for the Deity, they have been names which only represented impure divinities, made after the image and similitude of men. God was unknown, and the name cannot exist when the thing does not exist. It was necessary, then, that the name of God should come down from heaven, with the revelation of his perfections, as far as our languages could designate them, and our feeble understandings comprehend them. This is what God has condescended to do. He has revealed himself in his Word; he has taken a name; he has taught us to lisp it. Yea, as human words would not have been sufficient, and could not have furnished a name capable of representing God to us, the eternal Word (the real name of God) " was made flesh" in Jesus Christ; because " no man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whom the Son shall reveal him" that Son came to reveal to us the Father, to tell us his name, that is, his perfections, in a human language adapted to our weakness.

Since that time, my brethren, the name of God is known to us; since that time it has assumed a deep and important meaning; it expresses to us, like the human names of human things, the nature and perfections of the Being to whom it is applied. The eternity of God, his immensity, his power, his wisdom, his holiness, his justice, his mercy, his love, all have been clothed with an expression which is comprehensible to us, and which speaks alternately to our understanding, our conscience, and our heart.

Let God pronounce his glorious name, and we know who speaks to us. Does Moses, when commanded to go into Egypt to deliver the people of Israel, express a wish to be invested with a power, in virtue of which he shall command even the kings of the earth? "Go," saith the Almighty, "go and tell them, / AM hath sent me!" Does God wish to give his people an idea of the mercy and love with which he will deliver and redeem them from every kind of bondage? "For my Name's sake, for my Name's sake," saith he, "will I do it!!!" Would Christ lay on his disciples a command to bestow on all that should believe through their word, all the blessings and privileges which flow from the perfections of our God? "Baptize them," he says, "in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Would the apostles set forth to the enemies of the Saviour his power and love, displayed in the healing of a man that had been a cripple from his mother's womb? His Name, they say, through faith in his Name, hath made this man strong, whom ye both see and know! Indeed, such was, on this occasion, the whole secret of their power.

"In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." Would the same men give us to know, and make us love that Name in which God has included all the mercy and love of heaven that Name which represents the whole mystery of our redemption? "Father!" say they to us, or "is there any other Name under heaven, given amongst men, whereby we must be saved?"

We might multiply these quotations without end; the Bible is full of the Name of God, or rather, as we have just seen, his Name is the sum, an epitome of all the revelations of the Divine perfections. But what is it for us to "hallow the name of God?" And what do we ask of God, when we say, in the words of Jesus Christ, "Hallowed be thy name!"

Here, doubtless, it is unnecessary to observe, that we do not ask of God to render his Name holy. That Name, an expression of his glorious perfections, is holiness itself. In the Bible, which, as we have seen, is a revelation of the Name of God, the word holy is an epithet which most, frequently accompanies the great name of the Almighty. And in heaven, we hear the angels of God, who cover their faces before him, crying one to another, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" Yes, God is holy, all his perfections are holy, his name is holy! But we are defiled, and what we ask of God in this prayer is, to sanctify his name in our understandings and in our hearts, by enabling us to know, and to confess as holy, his great Name, and then in our whole life, by giving us feelings and a conduct in every thing conformable to the holiness of that Name. Let us enlarge upon these two ideas. To hallow or sanctify any object, in the language of the Bible, is to acknowledge and declare it to be holy or sacred, and in virtue of this principle, to set it apart to separate it from everything common or denied. Thus the vessels of Divine service, in the temple at Jerusalem, were sanctified; that is to say, it was expressly forbidden, as a criminal profanation, to use them for any ordinary purpose. It was said of the Sabbath-day, "Keep the Sabbath day, to sanctify it;" that is, separate it from the other days of the week, for holy purposes. The people were required to sanctify themselves on solemn festivals;

that is, they were to renounce all the occupations and habits of every-day life.

Well, then, my brethren, the Name of our God, that Name which God in his great mercy hath revealed to us, that Name which includes in it all his perfections, that Name, to be sanctified by us, must, first of all, be acknowledged and declared to be holy. We must then set it apart and separate it, with reverential fear and love, from all profane or light discourse; from all that religious phraseology, which proceeds only from the lips, and not from the heart; from all vain and unholy thoughts; and from all presumptuous and unbelieving speculations. The pious Jews had such a feeling of this duty, such a high idea of the holiness of God's Name, that they never pronounced the sacred- name of Jehovah, for fear of profaning it.* As for us, * In the Hebrew Bibles, this name is always written "with the vowels of the word Adona'i: Lord, and the Jews pronounced this word instead of the majestic name of Jehovah, which expresses Being, absolute and independent existence.

Hence all the versions in modern languages, except the we are no longer, it is true, under this law of terror, but under the law of grace; so that we can address God " in Spirit and in truth."

Christ has not only permitted us to name our God, but he has taught us to call him " Our Father;" and in this word, he includes all the condescension, all the tenderness, and all the love, which a child can find in his father. We have already seen, in a preceding discourse, that there is not a sinner under heaven that may not, find in this Name an abundance of compassion and grace, exceeding a thousand times all his defilements; and upon which, if indeed he have become a child of God, he may throw himself with the unreserved confidence and composure of a saved sinner. But does it follow that this Name, thus revealed, is no longer holy? Does it follow that, because God is love, he is no longer holiness? Does it follow that, because we have the privilege of calling him "our Father," we are no longer required to recognise him as a God thrice holy in all his perfections? One would say so, I must confess, to judge from the tendency of the French, which has The Eternal (AEternal), have rendered this word by Lord. In this they have followed the Greek of the Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate. age in which we live. For where, in point of fact, is the Name of God acknowledged as holy? where is it hallowed with all the perfection which it expresses? Where is it received as he has revealed it to us, and pronounced with profound feelings of veneration and love? Listen to the conversations of men, cast a glance at the innumerable publications, which are considered as an expression of the feelings and sentiments of society, study the predominant character of all kinds of literature, and what will you see in them? Where in the whole universe of ideas, thought, sentiments, and systems, will you find the sanctuary reserved for the abode of God's holy Name? And, not to speak here of those schools of Infidelity, in which the name of God and all his perfections, which we ought to adore upon our knees, are filtered, evaporated, dried up one by one in the barren alembic of proud and blinded reason, in which the worm of the earth demands of his God an account of the Name which he has appropriated to himself, and denies the character which he has revealed, and the authority of him who has brought it down to us from heaven; without speaking here of, those productions of the human mind, in which the Name of God and of his Christ is shamelessly dragged through the mire of a polluted imagination; without speaking of these things, consider attentively, O ye who desire to know as holy, and to sanctify, the Name of God! I say, consider attentively the tendency which the present age would impress even upon piety itself; examine with care what is called in our day religious literature; open the books of devotion which abound, especially in Germany works

composed to meet the taste of a generation which finds it more convenient to deny the sacredness of God's name, that it may be released from the necessity of hallowing it. There you will see, that the knowledge and adoration of the holy Name of God has given place to that of a divinity stripped of all holiness and of all justice a God, the creation of man a God who has no horror of sin, a God who punishes not the sinner, who holds the guilty innocent, who regardeth not iniquity; there you will see, that man, to be consistent, after having made of God a father like Eli, too weak to punish his children, rejects * with disdain the great means of salvation and pardon which the Gospel points out to us in the cross of the Saviour and in his work of expiation; there the deep, serious, and holy principles, which rest upon the knowledge of the God of the Gospel principles of life and sanctification, which detach man from himself, from sin, and from the world have given place to a vapid sentimentalism, a vague form of religion, without energy, power, or life, which soothingly lulls the soul in its favorite delusions, and teaches it to regard its sins merely as infirmities inseparable from human nature, which God is too good to notice. Unbelieving and effeminate generation, unmanly age, which, because it has no longer the will nor the strength "of mind to become Christians, secularizes Christianity; because it no longer wishes to rise to the God of the Bible, brings down God to itself, or rather creates a new divinity, and cries, " This be thy God, O Israel, to go before thee!" And now, let that man of God, who, even in the court of a profligate and avaricious prince, " reasoned of temperance, righteousness, and judgment to come," let him come forward and tell the men of our generation, that " the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;" that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" let the Son of the carpenter come and tell our age, that " except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God;" that the broad road leadeth to destruction, " and many there be that walk therein; that beyond the tomb, there may be " weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth;" and without any doubt these men, could they speak thus without being recognised by their Galilean tongue, would be rejected and ranked among those gloomy fanatics of former times, who are no longer deemed worthy to be named in our enlightened age, and to whom is denied even the privilege of common sense!

Thus, take away from the Bible the knowledge of God's holy Name, as he has revealed it to us, and his fear disappears with the truth; you open the flood-gates to a torrent of the most pernicious errors; and the name of God is unhallowed and blasphemed! O my God! " let thy Name be hallowed!"

But, you will say, is this hallowing of God's name of which you speak, incompatible with the feeling of his love? Does it banish from the Bible and from revelation the tender mercy of a God " who hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he should turn from his wickedness and live?" The love of God, my brethren! his tender mercy! Have we not just called him by a name which supplies an answer to this objection? Ah! would that we had never occasion to bring into this pulpit any other subject! Would that it were given to us never to come up into this place but with a heart full of that love! "Would that we could find in that love accents so full of warmth, that they might touch, penetrate, and captivate your souls! But this love, which we are so far from denying, this love, which we rejoice to set forth under every form and every aspect, in addressing sinners who stand so much in need of it, how has God manifested it to us? Is it in denying the holiness of his name, and annihilating the rights of his justice, or of some other of his Divine perfections which his name reveals? On the contrary! Never did God in a more striking manner hallow his Name than in

the very means by which he manifested his love. "Herein," saith St. John, "is manifested the love of God to us, in that he sent his Son into the world to be a propitiation for our sins i" Yes, my brethren, on Golgotha, on the cross, on which the Saviour died as an atonement for sin, the name of God and his perfections, his holiness and his justice which condemn sin, his love and his mercy which save the sinner, have been, honored and hallowed more than anywhere else; there we see that God hateth sin and yet hath pity on those that have committed it; there is written in indelible characters, " Holiness unto the Lord!" There we read, " Woe to the man that taketh occasion from the goodness of God to sin against him!" and at the same time, " Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" In a word, there is proclaimed, for the instruction of ages, in louder accents than in any other of his works, the words of my text: " Hallowed be thy Name!"

Thus according to the Gospel, God has hallowed the whole and every part of his Name. His love is holy, his mercy is holy, as well as all his other perfections. This, my brethren, is sufficient to prove, that even the pardon which he grants, must be a sanctifying pardon; and this leads us to speak of a second manner in which the Name of God must be hallowed in us, I mean, by our conduct, by our thoughts, our words, our works, and our whole life.

Alas! my brethren, is it not true, that under this second point of view, the Name of God is no better hallowed in the world, than with regard to the knowledge of that sacred Name? In vain does the Bible cry to those who call on the Name of God, who pretend to invoke him as their heavenly Father, and who bear the Name of Christ, calling themselves Christians: " If ye call upon the Father, who without respect of persons, judged! every man according to his works, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." In vain does God say to them, "Be ye holy, for I am holy!?" In vain does he say again, " Sanctify the Lord your God in your hearts!" this Name, notwithstanding, is associated, by the great mass of those who call upon it, and upon whom it has been invoked from their baptism, with such conduct and such works, that were it not holy in itself, and inaccessible to the hand of man. which denies every thing that it touches, it would have been polluted by man; and the world, which knows not God, instead of seeing his holiness in the holiness of those who invoke it, instead of being led by beholding these good works, to "glorify the Father which is in heaven," is led on the contrary, to blaspheme a name which is defiled and profaned by the very persons who ought, by their whole life, to hallow it. God said to the Jews, the unfaithful depositaries of the precious knowledge of his name; " Through you, my name is blasphemed among the Gentiles!" O my beloved brethren! where is the remedy for so great an evil? in the very prayer upon which we are meditating. Christ did not put it into our hearts and upon our lips to be a vain form or a mere deception; God is willing and ready to hear it. Let us pray, pray with sincerity, and from the bottom of our hearts, " Hallowed be thy Name!" hallowed, acknowledged, adored by those who as yet know it not, but worship the works of their own hands and the creatures of their own imaginations. In every region of the world where the glorious sun sheds his light, let the holy Name of God be proclaimed; let it be embraced with fear, with joy, and with delight! Let it be hallowed by those who disregard, pervert, or desecrate it! Let it be hallowed by those who blaspheme it by mixing it up with the pollutions of their life, instead of setting it apart by the holiness of their conduct, and by their renunciation of the world and of sin! Let it be hallowed in our hearts, in our thoughts, in our actions, and in our whole life!

Oh let there not be in our hearts, either thoughts, or affections, or desires, which we may not sincerely associate with the holy Name which we invoke! Let there not be upon our lips, words of which we would have reason to be ashamed, if they were to meet there the holy Name of God! Let there not be in our lives, actions, or works, anything which we could not undertake in the Name of our God! If our hearts be not sufficiently upright before God to ask of him such a sanctification of his Name by us and in us, with a sincere desire to be heard, whatever sacrifices it may cost us, whatever self denial it may require of us, then let us cease to regard ourselves as his children, let us cease to address to him this prayer! for whosoever saith to God,- “ Our Father, which art in heaven,” must also be able to add, “ Hallowed be thy Name!” And you, especially, Christian brethren, whom God has called to the knowledge of himself, you to whom he has given repentance unto life.” you whom he has graciously led to seek salvation simply and entirely in Jesus, the Saviour of sinners, remember that you, above all, are called upon thus to pray, and thus to hallow the Name of your God. Ah! may you never forget, that it is from you God expects the sanctification of his Name in the midst of the present generation; that it is into your hands he has committed the standard of truth and of holiness, to hold it up before the eyes of all; that you, according to the word of Jesus, ought to be “ the light of the world, the salt of the earth, a city set upon a hill, which cannot be hid.” And if you lower this sacred standard into the dust before the errors and prejudices of the age, who will lift it up 1 If you defile it with the pollutions of the world, who will hallow it? If you put this light “ under the bushel,” who will make it shine forth in the midst of darkness? “If the salt have lost its savor wherewith shall it be seasoned?” Instead of counteracting and preventing corruption, it is only fit to be “cast out and trodden under foot of men.” If you be “ conformed to this world,” if you hallow not the Name of God, who will hallow it? Your privileges are great, but great also is your responsibility. “ Unto whom much is given, from them shall much be required.”

If, my brethren, this work of sanctification appear to us impossible; if it appear as much above our weakness as heaven is above the earth. Let us remember I must repeat it, let us remember, for our encouragement, that the words upon which we are meditating are a prayer, a prayer taught us by Him who is to answer it. And that we maybe enabled to offer it up humbly and sincerely, let us frame our whole Christianity and our whole piety after the knowledge of God’s Name, as revealed to us in the Bible.

Let us banish from us that cowardly fear, yea, that dread of knowing God as he is in all his perfections! And if that knowledge produce in us an involuntary feeling of fear, very natural to a sinner before God, Oh! let us go to Calvary, that our souls may be steeped and invigorated in that depth of love and holiness, in that ocean of grace, more vast still than justice, and which, “ where sin abounded doth yet much more abound.”

Church of God! you whom God permits to call him by the Name of Father, were you a thousand times more weak, more miserable, than you are; had you a thousand times more temptations to overcome, conflicts to sustain, and fatigues to endure, if ye be sincere, if it be in the name of Jesus that you pray, fight, and suffer, be confident, for he hath declared it, “His strength shall be perfect in your weakness.” Church of the Lord! put on the strength of thy God, and hear and hold fast the immutable promise of him who hath commanded thee to say to him, i: Hallowed be thy Name /” “ Thus saith the Lord God, I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for my holy Name’s sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. I will sanctify my great Name

which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments to do them.”

O God of truth! fulfil thy promises! fulfil them with respect to this Church, and to us all, in us all, and throughout the world; let thy great name “ be hallowed.” Amen.

03 - Meditation 3

MEDITATION III.

“THY KINGDOM COME.”

Matthew 6:10.

“THY kingdom come!” Have you not often, my brethren, pronounced these words, or heard them pronounced, without their conveying to your minds a distinct idea, or awakening a feeling in your hearts, and consequently, without their being realized as a prayer? The majority of persons see in this expression the kingdom or reign, of God, nothing in common with our present life; and if they attach to it any idea at all, it is entirely comprised in a future existence. In other terms, the kingdom of God, in the view of many persons, is heaven, and most frequently a heaven quite different from that of which the Bible speaks, a heaven created by their own imaginations, a heaven whose joys and glories are of man’s invention, joys and glories in which all, without distinction, whatever may have been the nature of their faith and hopes, whatever their sentiments and their life, will participate after death! Oh! how many immortal souls have been rocked to sleep even to the tomb, in these fatal illusions, which left them devoted to the world, its interests, its joys, and its sins, while, notwithstanding, they cherished the deceitful hope of this false heaven which they had created for themselves! My brethren! the petition which we are about to meditate upon this day, is calculated, when rightly understood, to dispel these dangerous errors, and to substitute the truth in their place. Christ, by directing us to pray for the coming of his kingdom, would teach us that this kingdom has a present existence upon earth before it arrives at its perfection and final triumph in heaven; that consequently, we must make a part of it in this life if we would be members of it in eternity; in a word, that the kingdom of God must be a reality to us, a present reality, and not merely the object of vague and deceitful hopes for the future. To demonstrate to you this truth, we shall call upon you to view the kingdom of God under two aspects; “We shall consider, from the Bible, . Its history, and its nature.

It will then be easy for us to answer the question What is it to pray from the heart, “ Thy kingdom come?” The great reformer of Germany, in the most popular of his works, his catechism, establishes a distinction between the kingdom of God’s power, and the kingdom of his grace. God reigns by his power over all creation. “ The Lord reigneth,” the Bible saith, “ his throne is established of old.” No creature in the wide extent of the universe, can escape from under his dominion.

He feigneth over the worlds which fill immensity, marks out for them their courses, and they obey him; he reigneth over the blade of grass which vegetates in the depths of the valley and maintains its life; he reigneth over the holy intelligences which surround his throne and chant his praise; he reigneth over the devils in the abyss of darkness which subsist only by him. In this sense the kingdom of God is eternal, perfect, and universal; no created being can invade or injure it. It is not, then, with regard to this kingdom that we have to ask of God: “ Thy kingdom come!” But is it so

with what Luther calls the kingdom of grace, and what might with equal propriety be designated the kingdom of love ’? Does God, who is love as well as power, reign in this perfection over all beings capable of loving, as he reigns by his absolute power over creation in general? No, my brethren! There is, in the immense empire of the Omnipotent, a province which has lifted up the standard of rebellion against him, and has said, “ We will not have this man to reign over us,” and has surrendered itself to the rule of another sovereign, who labors to foment in it hostility against the government of God. This province is the earth which we inhabit; and the rebels are ourselves! The Bible has recorded the history of this fearful catastrophe, the triumph of evil and of the kingdom of darkness, the tyrannical usurpation of sin which madly braves the power and the laws of the Sovereign of the universe. So firm is the footing which this hostile power has obtained upon earth, that neither the threats nor the judgments of the Most High have been sufficient to bring back under his dominion those who had renounced it. In vain did God, seeing that “ every imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart was only evil continually,” say in his wrath, “My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh;” in vain did he bring upon the whole earth the most frightful destruction. Since the deluge, as well as before it, rebellion, pride, and sin, have filled the heart of man, and seduced him to forgetfulness of God and to a degrading idolatry.

What, then, will the most holy God do? Will he suffer pollution, rebellion, and moral anarchy in his creation? or will he expunge from his creation an impious world? No: God, who is love, who wishes to reign by love and not by terror; God, who seeks to be loved, and says not, like the tyrants of this earth, “I care not whether I be loved, provided I be feared;” God declares that he will come himself to establish in this fallen world his kingdom of grace and of love. With this view he forms a peculiar people, and makes them the depository of this glorious promise; Abraham is their father; he receives from heaven this assurance, “ In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed;” this promise constitutes the life and hope of the chosen people, and exerts an influence over all their destinies; God continually brings them back from all their captivities to the country where it is to be accomplished; he repeats it to them from time to time by his prophets, who predict the future deliverance; he gives them religious institutions, all intended to shadow it forth, and raise their expectations of it; he finds in his own bosom, in his well-beloved Son, the Deliverer, the eternal Sovereign of his new kingdom. “I have set my King,” he says, “ upon my holy hill of Zion. Thou art my Son, this clay have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.”

“ But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” At length the times of the kingdom of grace are fulfilled the whole East is in mysterious expectation of a Deliverer; pious men among the people of God are “ waiting for the consolation of Israel;” the precursor of the spiritual King appears in the deserts of Judea; “Repent ye,” he cries, “for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” The King of Glory himself appears preaching the glad tidings of the kingdom of God, and saying, “ The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.” These are his first words. But how different is this kingdom from what his guilty and rebellious subjects had reason to expect! This King comes not “ to speak to them in his wrath, and to vex them in his sore displeasure; he comes not to bruise them with a rod of iron, and to dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” No; he comes as the Prince of Peace, to establish a kingdom of grace and of love; he comes poor and

humble, stripped of all the marks of his infinite greatness: “ he goes about doing good:” “ he bath not where to lay his head;” he teaches the laws of his new kingdom; he instructs, consoles, and heals; he brings to rebels the assurance of pardon; his royal entry into the holy city is thus touchingly described, “ Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.”

Further, instead of punishing the guilty with death, as the holy law of God required, he dies for the guilty. Yes, as in order to re-establish his kingdom and open it to us, it was necessary not only to instruct men, but still more, to save them; not only to teach them the will of God, but to reconcile them to God; not only to urge them to renounce their rebellion and their sins, but to redeem them from their sins and. from the just condemnation which they deserved, he dies! The expiatory victim promised in Eden, confirmed to the Patriarchs, prefigured by sacrifices, and foretold by the prophets, he dies! and it is even upon the cross that he founds his kingdom! It is from thence he throws over the abyss which the fall had opened up between us and God a solid bridge of communication! He dies;... but soon, bursting the bonds of death, triumphant over the grave, the devil, and hell, he ascends to the right hand of God his Father! he goes to enjoy the fruit of his work; he goes to prepare, by his power and merciful intercessions, the complete triumph of that kingdom of which he is the supreme head as well as the Saviour. But how is his work carried on upon earth? And what connexion is there between that Being who died an ignominious death upon the cross, and the conversion of the world! My brethren! the whole world shall be compelled to recognize the divine power of this glorious King, by the weakness of the means which he employs. The kings of the earth, to establish their dominion, carry into the heart of the countries which they have vanquished, fire and sword; they ravage their provinces, and establish their authority amid ruins and blood. But our King chooses for his ministers twelve fishermen of Galilee, he confers upon them the spirit of power, and sends them forth to make the conquest of the world. At their voice, the altars of idol gods, worshipped for ages, crumble into dust; their word, their simple word, reduces to ruins the temples of idolatry, roots out of the heart of man the most inveterate prejudices, the dearest errors, and the most powerful passions; the whole civilized world bows its head before a cross, and adores as its Saviour and its King him who died upon it.

Into this kingdom, souls rescued from the bondage of sin. from the tyranny of Satan, and from the fear of death, have come for more than eighteen centuries, to find a refuge, a peace, and a happiness hitherto unknown to the world. It is this kingdom, and the word of this kingdom, that we preach to you; it is this kingdom that is assuming, in the present day, a new ascendancy among the Churches/ of Europe; and it is to proclaim this kingdom, that the Protestant Churches, awaking out of their sleep of death, and not wishing to keep it to themselves, are sending forth their missionaries to the remotest limits of the earth; it is the presence of this kingdom of peace that is now making distant islands, where it has been for the first time announced, rejoice; and it is the word of this kingdom which in our day consoles, instructs, and gladdens the inhabitant of the icy regions of the north and of the burning zones of the south. And if, from these realities of the past and the present, we cast into the future a believing glance at the promises of God, which are also a reality, we shall see this kingdom, after having triumphed over every obstacle, “ filling the earth as the waters cover the sea.” Resting upon this word, which shall not deceive us, any more than it deceived Abraham, the prophets, and the apostles, we believe with the fullest assurance of faith, that “unto Christ every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that he is Lord to the glory

of God the Father.” Then shall the sovereign King come and take unto him the great power of his kingdom, all the members of which shall share in his glory and his triumphs; then “ they shall come from the east and from the west, and from the north and the south, who shall sit down with him in the kingdom of his Father; then, when all the enemies of Christ have been made his footstool, his redeemed of every nation, tongue, and tribe, delivered from all their tribulations, victorious after their conflicts, surrounding for evermore him who loved them, and redeemed them with his own blood, shall chant an eternal hymn of thanksgiving and praise! Then shall evil in every form be vanquished and destroyed: Satan, with his iron sceptre and his crafty devices; sin, with its deadly venom and its agonizing remorse; hatred, with its secret torments; calumny, with its incendiary torches; enmities, with their troubles; war, with its ravages; the sufferings of the body, of the soul, and of the heart; sickness, agony, death yes, death itself, “ the last enemy, shall be destroyed!” Then shall re-echo through the whole conclave of the heavens that voice which St. John heard with transports of joy in the Island of Patmos: “ Now is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ; for the accuser of the brethren is cast down which accuseth them before our God day and night!” Then shall the kingdom of God and of his Christ have reached its final destiny, and the Church shall no longer, from amid its bondage and its corruptions, cry, “ Thy kingdom come!” but it shall shout with triumph and with love, “ God, God alone all in all!” Such, my brethren, are the principal features in the history of God’s kingdom. But do all men form a part of it? To answer this question we shall consider for a few moments the nature of this kingdom.

If nothing more was here meant than that which we have called the kingdom of God’s power, then, doubtless, all would be included in it, without exception. There is not a man upon the face of the earth, that can withdraw himself from under that dominion, however he may desire it. In this sense, the greatest enemy of Christ and of his kingdom has reason to say to God, as the Psalmist did in another sense, “ Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me!” In this manner God reigns over the wicked; he holds them in by the rein of his sovereign will. And, my brethren, but for this kingdom, but for this dam opposed to the devastating torrent of evil, what would have become of our earth? But is it such an empire over us that the Almighty Creator desires? Is it over a race of slaves that he wishes to reign slaves who bear their chains with reluctance, and only because they are unable to shake them off? No, no, my brethren; God is a Spirit, and it is over spirits, over the will, and not merely over the body and matter, that he wishes to rule; God is love, and it is in the heart that he wishes to have his throne; God is holiness, and it is over the conscience that he wishes to establish his dominion.

Now, I would ask you, does God thus reign over all men? Does he reign over that man who, full of himself, has made self the centre of his existence, and refers everything to it? Does he reign over him who, having deified his own self-interest, has become his own god, the god to which he offers incense which he serves and adores, the god which is the motive of all his actions, and the end of his whole being, the god which excludes from his heart even the very thought of the true God? Does he reign over him who, enslaved to his carnal passions, forces even his mind and his reason to bow the neck to their ignominious yoke? Does God reign over that man who, enslaved to the good things of this earth, employs all his powers and his whole existence to amass a little gold?

Does God reign over that man who, a slave to the world' its fashions, and its joys, passes his whole life in a vortex which scarcety leaves him a moment to think of his soul and of his God? No, certainly not! God reigns neither over the thoughts, nor the heart, nor the affections, nor the will of such men. Though they may have prayed all their life with their lips, " Thy kingdom come!" that kingdom has never come to them. They have other gods which have dominion over them; they belong to another kingdom the kingdom of darkness and of Satan. These severe expressions are not ours, my brethren; they are St. Paul's, who characterizes such men in saying that they " walk according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the Spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience." What then, what is this prayer addressed to God, in the mouths of such men? " Thy kingdom come!" What? say to God, " Thy kingdom come /" when you are determined not to let him reign either over your hearts, or your wills, or your consciences!

" Thy kingdom come /" and you withdraw yourselves, with all your powers, and by every means, from under his empire, that you may be ruled by other gods! " Thy kingdom come /" But the king whom you invoke has come, he has come a thousand times to knock at the door of your hearts, to demand admission there, to endeavor to set up there his throne, and you have rejected him. Ah! cease then, until you become sincere, cease to offer to God a prayer which you would tremble to see fulfilled. What, I ask you, would you think of a subject that should express to his prince wishes for the extension of his kingdom, for the glory of his arms, and for the establishment of his throne, and then forthwith should go out and fight as a traitor in the ranks of the enemies of his king? I leave it to yourselves to characterize such conduct. But here, I anticipate an objection which it is necessary to answer before we proceed any further. There are many who, from an erroneous habit of regarding the kingdom of God merely as the state of the soul in heaven, while perhaps they acknowledge that God is far from reigning over them now, do nevertheless hope, I know not on what grounds, to belong to his kingdom after death; I repeat, I know not on what grounds. For what change will take place in them then? Will God change them? Will the nature of his kingdom change them? Will the tastes and inclinations of their hearts be changed a as it were by enchantment?

Supposing, as we have already done, that a principal element of happiness in the kingdom of God in another world shall be the contemplations of those grand and magnificent scenes of which the Bible speaks; the sight of that Jerusalem which is above, shining with magnificence and glory, which St. John describes in the book of Revelations; what would such a heaven be to the unhappy being who was destitute of the organs of sight? Supposing, again, that the essence of this eternal abode shall consist in the rapturous strains of a divine harmony, of which also the Bible speaks; what would these enjoyments be to a being whom a fatal deafness rendered a stranger to all the charms of music?

Then, my brethren, we know that in heaven God will reign by his presence, which is to his children " the fullness of joy;" by his love, which shall fill their whole hearts with inexpressible delight; he will reign over their will, which shall be blended into an eternal harmony with his will; over their purified consciences, which shall find their happiness in the holiness of God; over their minds, whose supreme felicity it shall be to penetrate deeper into the knowledge of his mercy and of his glorious perfections; in a word, over their whole being, which shall then have found eternal rest in the bosom of God. And this is the kingdom into which you, to whom I am now addressing myself, desire to enter? You think you will then be capable of enjoying the presence of that God, the very

thought of whom is now a burden to you! his love, against which you have hitherto shut your hearts, that you might love the very opposite of it! You think that God will reign over your will, which is now habitually opposed to him! over your conscience, which the holiness of God now inspires with nothing but terror! over your mind, the faculties of which you have employed in the pursuit of objects in which God had no part! Again, I ask you, by what enchantment do you expect to be thus transformed?

Ah, my brethren! it is in vain to hope it. If you remain as you are, heaven itself would be to you as the magnificent spectacle of the abode of God to the blind man, or all the charms of celestial melody to the deaf. The kingdom of God in heaven is of the same nature as the kingdom of God on earth, save that it is perfect.

If, then, his kingdom come not to you on earth, be sure that it will never come to you in heaven.

If this truth, which ought to appear self-evident to your reason, fix your attention, render, you serious, and force you to think of the salvation of your souls more than you have hitherto done; if it extort from you the cry of Saul of Tarsus, when arrested by a Divine power on his way to Damascus, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" hear the word of the Saviour, of Him who, being the Sovereign of that kingdom, and knowing perfectly its nature, has a right to prescribe its laws; he tells you what is the fundamental law, the charter of that kingdom, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."- And in another place, "Verily, I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." And what is this change, and how is it effected? This change is effected, when by the power of Divine grace, we dethrone self, to enthrone God in our hearts; when we renounce our own wisdom, to receive a wisdom from above our own merits, to cling to the merits of Christ our own strength, to live by the strength of his Spirit, yea, our own life, as our Lord teaches us, to receive a new life. This change takes place when the kingdom of God, which "consists not in word, but in power," comes into us to dethrone and banish by that power, all the false gods which we had made for ourselves, and which we had served like slaves. This change takes place when our rebellious will bows to the will of God, and obeys it; when our hearts and our affections are influenced and sanctified by the love of God; when our conscience, purged from dead works, seeks in God that "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord;" when our thoughts and our imagination, delivered from those earthly pursuits and impure images which enslave them, are brought under the sanctifying influence of the omnipresence of God, who filleth all things; when our whole life, receiving a completely new direction, is governed by that great principle which includes our supreme destination, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Then has the kingdom of God come to us; then God has his throne in the centre of our life, and then we are, for time and eternity, in his kingdom. To attain, in our present state, this end of our being, is our duty as well as our happiness.

What can be more happy than the soul which is possessed and constrained by the love of Christ? Who is there more worthy than he to rule over our hearts, those hearts to which he has so many claims? Who is more worthy of our supreme affection? Who has ever loved us as Christ has loved us? His love is life, it is a foretaste of heaven! Yes, even in this world, in our exile, amid our conflicts and our trials, we may experience something of the joys and associations which shall be perfected in heaven; our life, even now, in this present time, has a destination, to which everything

around us directs us. However solitary we may be, however forsaken by the world, we have, notwithstanding, a country whose shores already rise up to our view. Hear St. Paul, from the depths of the dungeon: "Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself." And his expectation was not disappointed; he was delivered from his chains, from his persecutions, from his labors, from that "body of death under which he groaned, to be put in full possession of that heavenly kingdom which he so faithfully preached. Let his hope be our hope, let his Saviour be our Saviour, his life our life; and his deliverance and his joys shall soon be ours also! My brethren, if there be among you those who are serious and sincere, who begin to see with fear and trembling, that hitherto God has not reigned over their hearts; that they have served other gods; that the petition upon which we are meditating has been to them mere words, or an insult to God; if there be among you some in whom God has begun to reign by his grace, but who are terrified at still beholding the many corruptions, sinful inclinations, and evil passions which dispute with the Lord the empire over their lives, we would say to such, "Fear not; be not dismayed!" Has not Jesus Christ our Saviour, our King, to whom has been given "all power in heaven and earth," has not He pledged "himself, yea, pledged himself, to vouchsafe to us a complete deliverance, an entire victory over the enemies of our salvation, since he commands us to pray, "Thy kingdom come!" If he were not willing to establish this kingdom in you by his own power, then would he have deceived you, O ye of little faith! But far from us be this blasphemy! Were you so bowed down under the burden of your infirmities, so oppressed by the feeling of your utter weakness, so galled on every side by the chains which you still drag after you, that you could do no more than send up to him this cry of your soul, "Thy kingdom come!" this cry he would hear and answer, since he himself has put it into your heart and upon your lips. Remember a similar cry, which rose once from the depth of a conscience tormented with remorse, which escaped from a bosom agonizing amid the most excruciating tortures, which rose from a gibbet, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom!" And remember the answer of the Saviour to that dying malefactor, "This day thou shalt be with me in paradise!"

Only let us be sincere in pronouncing this petition; let us be sincere, and let us not dare to ask God with our lips to come and assume in our hearts the place of idols which we still secretly cherish! Let us fear to say to God, "Thy kingdom come!" so long as we feel a secret apprehension lest our prayer should be heard so long as we are willing to concede to the world, sin, and our own egotism, the dominion over us.

Let us not seek to combine the service of two masters; it is impossible. God will never consent to share a throne with idols; to pretend to it would be to insult him! It would be to run the risk of raising up insuperable barriers to his work in us! It would be to wish to perpetuate in our souls trouble and anguish; on the one hand, conscience would claim us for the kingdom of God; on the other, the world, through our passions, and the fear of man, would claim us for the bondage of this earth and our life would be but a continual struggle. Let your own experience bear witness to this truth.

O that you might taste the happiness and peace of that soul which has broken all its chains, and to which the grace of God has given strength and courage to devote itself entirely, for ever, and without restriction, to its heavenly Father!

Then, penetrated with love to the Saviour, to his cause, and his glory, we could no longer restrict to ourselves the petition which we are considering, or selfishly enjoy the riches of his kingdom. Oh no! every time we approached the throne of grace to say, "Thy kingdom come," we would remember, with profound compassion, the multitudes who reject that kingdom and surrender themselves up to the slavery of the world and sin. Yes, this petition would become in us an aspiration of tender charity, for those among us who are living without God, for the multitudes who are rushing, with a headlong recklessness upon "the broad road which leadeth to destruction." Yea, this prayer, breathed forth from a Christian's heart, includes the whole world in the comprehensive spirit of a charity like that of the Saviour, who died for all, and desires that his kingdom should be preached to all and come to all. Would we be Christians, animated with the spirit of our Master, if we could repeat this petition without experiencing- a feeling of grief and compassion for six hundred millions of heathen for whom Christ died, whom he intended to be partakers of his peace, and of his kingdom as well as ourselves, and who yet remain in ignorance of their high destiny, though to us has been committed the charge of making it known to them? immortal beings who still sit in the darkness of a degrading idolatry; beings who drink in like water the deadly poison of sin, and still groan under the slavery of corruption? Again, I ask, would we be Christians if we had not a thought, a prayer, an aspiration to offer to God for these immortal souls, when we say to him, "Thy kingdom come?" No, no, my brethren! This would be asking of God that for which we have no desire, that which inspires us with no interest, that for which we are unwilling to make the least sacrifice; it would be an act of solemn mockery!

Here experience speaks louder than the nature of things. It cannot be denied that the commencement of the present century has been marked (thanks be to God) by a powerful religious revival. The Protestant Churches, as we have already said, have, to a considerable extent, awoken out of the sleep of death into which they had sunk under the sceptical influence of the eighteenth century. And what was the first symptom of life which they exhibited? My brethren, these Churches, as soon as they became acquainted once more with the kingdom of the Saviour, as soon as they had learned to pray with faith and with love,; 'Thy kingdom come," that they might not, by their conduct, give the lie to their prayers, rose up as one man, in England, in America, in France, in Switzerland, in Holland, and in Germany, to send the Word of eternal life, its consolations, and its blessings, to those who were without them. And such an abundant blessing did God pour out upon these efforts, that never since the time of the apostles has the Gospel had such free course in the world, never has God so visibly answered the cry of his Church, "Thy kingdom come!" But, my brethren, while this extensive movement, which in so many places has changed the aspect of the world, has been taking place; while the heathen have been outstripping us in the ways of the kingdom of heaven, what part have we taken in this work, as a Church and as individuals? Ah! if we have felt but a cold and passive indifference for such noble labors, such generous sacrifices, and for a cause so holy as that of our blessed Saviour himself; if we have not even condescended to take (hem into consideration,! ask you. in the presence of God, how shall we dare to appear before him, and solemnly to say to him in our public worship, as well as in the secret of our hearts, "Thy kingdom come!" It is coming, the Lord might answer us.; my kingdom is coming, and ye despise it!

It is coming, it is come, it is around you, it presses you on every side, it is snatching souls from ruin before your very eyes and in the world at large, and yet you do not deign to regard it!

Hypocrites! cease to ask of me with your lips what you desire not in your hearts!

Let us return to ourselves, dear hearers, and let us conclude with a solemn admonition, which we would address affectionately and at the same time with intense anxiety to those among you who may perhaps still be paralyzed by indifference, led captive by sin, and deadened by unbelief. The eternal kingdom of God and of his Christ is coming; it is coming with power! Already the dawn of that day is appearing, when you shall see with your own eyes the accomplish' ment of that word of the Lord: "God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." You also then shall bow the knee before him; and if it be not with the adoration which his infinite love inspires, alas! it shall be with the terror with which the prospect of eternal judgment shall fill you. Do you know, then, what you are doing when you present yourselves in this house of God with his people, and solemnly say, " Thy kingdom come /" This petition means, as far as you are concerned (I say it with trembling), hasten the day of eternal justice, the day of my ruin and perdition. Carry away with you this thought, it ought, to be enough to convert and save your souls, it ought (o be sufficiently powerful to teach you, from this day, to pray in the true sense of the words, " Thy kingdom come!:> Lord! let thy kingdom come to those souls! let it come to us all! Amen.

04 - Meditation 4

MEDITATION IV.

“THY WILL BE DONE IN EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.”

Matthew 6:10. HAD the prayer upon which we are meditating been composed by one of the sages of this world, assuredly we should not have found in it the petition which we have just read. In a certain sense he would have regarded it as absurd.

What! (would he have thought) ask God that his will may be done! Shall a feeble creature, a worm of the earth, ask of Him who summoned all things into existence out of nothing by a mere act of his sovereign will, to which it is impossible to oppose the smallest obstacle; shall he ask of that Being that his will may be done! It is as if we were to ask time to wing its flight, the sun to fulfil its course, or the night to succeed the day. And if we told that man that he did not understand this petition, that the question is not respecting God but ourselves, that we do not ask God to accomplish his will, which shall eternally be accomplished, because it is his will; that we ask him to give us the desire and strength to do that will; even then would not the man have framed this petition; he would have found in his heart another objection against it. Enamored of his own will, of his own proud independence, of the desire to walk according to the inclinations of his own heart; fearing, above all things, whatsoever might interfere with, contradict, or break down his own will, he would have said, in addressing God (supposing that such a man could ever address God), not “ Thy will be done /” but much rather, My will be done!

It was just for this reason that it was necessary for Jesus to teach us to offer such a petition to God. And the place which it occupies in this model of prayer which he dictates to his disciples is admirably chosen. It is the last of the three petitions which regard the work of God generally, for the deliverance of fallen man. The commencement, and, as it were, the foundation-stone of this edifice, erected for the salvation of the world, is the knowledge and the hallowing of God’s Name, as the expression of his sublime and holy perfections: “ Hallowed be thy Name!” The form under which God has clothed the knowledge of his Name, the means by which he leads men to hallow and to love it, to receive it into their hearts, and submit to its ruling influence, is that admirable institution prepared in the people of Israel, established in its power by the work of the Redeemer, propagated to our times and to the end of the world by his servants, the kingdom of God: “ Thy kingdom come!” The final end of the work of God, the destruction of that culpable dissonance which sin has introduced into the world by alienating the will of the creature from that of the Creator, the consummation of this ultimate end of every moral being, God all in all, is the subject of the third petition, “ Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven!” Such then, is the principle, the means, and the end of all that is, or ever has been most sublime and most worthy of our prayers: the deliverance and salvation of fallen humanity.

We shall devote a few moments to the explanation of this petition, and we shall consider the will of God under the two points of view in which it is manifested to us.

God manifests his will by his Word; he commands, we must obey.

God manifests his will by the dispensations of his providence. He acts; it is for us to submit. In a word, the will of God, by us and in us, is the subject of this petition, and the subject of our meditation.

There cannot be two masters in the universe. The Supreme Intelligence that created all things for his own glory, will have all things to obey Him. The inanimate creation itself gives us the example of this; all the worlds that fill immensity obey that Almighty Word which created them, fulfilling with a rigid exactness the course which it has assigned them. But let us pass over the inanimate creation, which can render but a passive obedience to the Creator, and let us raise our thoughts (for our text invites us to do so) to those intelligent and moral beings, in whose voluntary obedience God takes pleasure, to the heavenly hosts, those millions of angels, upon whom the Almighty has lavished with such rich abundance, life, and happiness holy and pure natures, worthy of being held up as models to other thinking and responsible creatures beings happy in their very obedience, the thought of whom ought to fill us with consolation and encouragement, when, in the midst of a world, in which the sovereign will of God is so often trampled under foot, we send up to him this aspiration of our souls, “ Thy will be done on earth, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN!” beings so prompt in their obedience, that they are represented to us as having wings, to fly wherever the Divine voice summons them; beings so full of veneration for the Sovereign Majesty, that they cast at the foot of God’s throne the crowns of glory which adorn their brows; beings so happy in the unchangeable accordance of their wills with the will of God, that they receive a new accession to their felicity every time a straying and rebellious creature is brought back to that same harmony: “ There is joy.” our Lord tells us, “ in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth;” beings, the thought of whom filled the Psalmist with a holy enthusiasm, long before Jesus had held them up as models for our imitation: “ Bless the Lord, ye his angels that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his Word.” And think you, my brethren, that man, to whom these pure intelligences are presented for his imitation, was created for any other end than that of uniting his will to that sublime unison of all created wills with the Supreme will? No; his destination was to mingle his voice and his whole life in that unanimous concert of the creatures to the glory of the Creator. Ah! had he remained faithful to the end of his being, never had the Son of God come upon this earth to “endure the contradiction of sinners against himself,” to die, that he might reconcile our rebellious will with the Divine will, to teach a fallen creature the prayer which we are considering; never would we have been compelled to struggle painfully against our rebellious will, and, in the midst of the conflict, to send up that cry, “ Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven /” But, alas! you know from the Bible, from the whole history of mankind, and by a melancholy daily experience, that sin has broken the unison of our will with the will of God. Man foolishly aspired to be God, aspired to withdraw himself from under that Eternal will which governs all things, and to become a law unto himself, his own rule, his own idol. Awful revolt, fatal independence! Look what the world has become under such a domination. Contemplate all the generations of men which have succeeded one another upon the earth, each contributing its quota of iniquity and crime to the universal anarchy of sin, and sweeping away, like a torrent, all the barriers which legislators, philosophers, and moralists had set up to oppose them; impotent means to restrain a rebellious will, which bears away every obstacle, like swollen waters escaped from the channel which God had dug out for them! The harmony once broken, it was not

only against God that the depraved will of man opposed order and crime, but that will without order, without restraint, without unison with a superior will, brought forth hatred, jealousy, oppression, enmity, and wars which converted into a field of blood the abode of man, where peace and happiness ought to have reigned. But this is not all; harmony being once broken, man brought into his own heart, as well as against God and his fellow-men, strife and disorder. Yes, where is the man, without God, who enjoys peace who feels not in himself discord, conflict, and bitterness? insomuch that even when he wishes sincerely to escape from the anarchy of his passions, and to return into the eternal and Divine order, he has to endure the struggles which St. Paul so well describes in the seventh chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, and which extort from him that exclamation of anguish, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" O, my brethren, you who have any acquaintance with your own hearts, confirm here the testimony expressed by a man of God in these energetic words: "A grating discord runs through the whole concert of life, and none but a madman can take it for harmony."

Ah how necessary, then, is the petition which Jesus Christ gives us to meditate on. This petition must be offered by us to God, and answered in our experience, or we shall be eternally miserable! Moral disorder is a crime which God will visit with all the severity of his justice. The being separated from God, at war with God, who is the only source of life and happiness, is like a branch severed from its parent stock, "which withers, and men take it, and cast it into the fire, and it is burned." I repeat it, and may you lay it to heart, immortal sinners! In this alternative there is no medium the will of God by us and in us, or misery! unison with God's will, or woe! But as it is requisite, in order to conform to a will, that we must know it what is the will of God with regard to us? Has he condescended to manifest it to us? and, in this case, where has he expressed it? You know it, my brethren; it is in his "Word, which is an expression of his will with regard to us, so necessary, that to reveal it to us he "spared not his own Son."

Jesus Christ came to communicate to us the Word of God, and to give us, in his whole life, a living commentary on that Word, even that Jesus, whose "meat and whose drink it was to do the will of his heavenly Father;" who from the manger to the cross, where he "learned obedience" through suffering, had but one thought, one desire, one object the will of the Father! With such a model before our eyes, and with his Word in our hands, which of us can remain in ignorance of the will of God? But if I am mistaken, or if any of us remain in ignorance of that will, it is evident that it is a wilful ignorance, and consequently, a culpable ignorance, which will afford such a one no excuse in the great day of retribution. Judge your own selves, if, possessing the Word of God, the manifestation of his will, which, in his great mercy he has been pleased to give us, you neglect it; if you read it not, if you study it not, "line after line, precept after precept" with what sincerity, with what uprightness, with what desire to be heard, can you present yourselves before God, and say to him, "Thy will be done!" What! solemnly to ask God to enable us to do his will, and yet take no trouble to become acquainted with it, but neglect and despise it! I leave it to yourselves to find a name for such conduct, or rather hear the name which Jesus Christ himself applies to it, in these severe words, addressed to characters of a similar stamp: "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me!" But it is not enough to read and study the Word of God. in order to know the Lord and his will, or to come into the house of God, where that Word is preached; we must believe and do it I say, believe and do it, for before God, these two things are

but one and the same act of submission and obedience; submission of our will and understanding; obedience of our heart and of our life. Yes, my brethren, we believe in obeying: “ If any man will do my will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak it of myself:” and we also obey in believing; for we remember the word of our Master, “ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father, which is in heaven.”

Thus, to let the Word of God decide upon our convictions and upon our life, to reduce our will to a subserviency to God’s will, to bow the head with adoration to every declaration of the will of God in his Word, instead of continually putting forward, as objections, our erroneous persuasions, our prejudices, and our opinions, which, without the light of God, are but darkness, to give to our conduct, our desires, our projects, our undertakings, and our whole life, a direction in all things conformed to the revealed will of God; such is the blessing which we ask in the petition under our consideration, the first duty which it imposes on us, the first step which we must take in order to escape from the moral anarchy of our wills, and return into that eternal and divine harmony, without which, we repeat, we can have nothing but misery.

You will think, perhaps, my brethren, that it is a hard bondage which God imposes on us, and which we call down upon ourselves when we pray, “ Thy will be done!” Far from it. To be the servant of God is the highest liberty; it is the sweet and voluntary bondage of love. No man can submit to it without receiving from Him “ a new heart and a right spirit,” the source of all liberty and of all strength to do the will of God. Without this liberty there is no liberty, and in vain do the worldly-minded deify and follow after, under this beautiful name, a chimera which can never be realized. Be assured that neither in the moral nor the social world, can there be liberty where there is anarchy and disorder. You will not do the will of God. that you may be free to do what will? Your own?

Impossible! the most powerful wills, those wills of iron, which seem at first sight to give an impulse to everything around them, and sometimes even to an entire age, sooner or later are shivered against the decrees of the will which ruled the world, and which “will not give its glory to another.” O, worm of the dust! thou that wouldest accomplish thine own will, tremble!

Behold, the first event that arrives will lay its foot of brass upon thy rebellious will, and crush it with thine existence! But further, we have already said there is no longer harmony in man; his will, which he would set up as sovereign of his life, is a deposed sovereign; it is but a slave in bondage to the passions. You, then, who reject the will of God, and refuse to do it, behold the will to which you are subject the abject will of flesh and blood, the will of the least of your impure desires, or of the weakest and most contemptible lust that rises up within your breasts; the will of your earthly inclinations, of your vile appetites, the will of avarice, ambition, pride, anger, and jealousy. And when each of your passions has enslaved you in its turn, you will then do the will of the world, of its errors, and its prejudices; the will of the despotic opinion of men, the will of sin, the will of Satan! “ Know ye not,” saith the Bible, “ that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?” And is this the liberty which ye seek in shaking off the will of God?

Ah, from such liberty may the all-powerful and merciful God preserve us!

No, my brethren, no, it is not a hard bondage for which the Christian prays, when he says to his heavenly Father, "Thy will be done!" To be made free from sin, and to become the servants of righteousness, is our primitive destination, is the end of our existence, and the liberty of an immortal spirit. The will of God does not crush, extinguish, or annihilate the will of man, which is a gift of the Creator's hand; on the contrary, it emancipates it from the slavery of sin, and from the bondage of the world; it imparts to it a new direction towards happiness, elevates it, sanctifies it, places it again in eternal harmony with God, and thus delivers it from the conflicts, agonies, and miseries of a being in arms against the Divine order, which can never be disturbed with impunity.

Then the Christian, in pronouncing our petition, asks of God what perhaps you still fear as a bondage. Yes; his will thus sanctified, desires, above all things, what God desires; and if he sometimes feels within himself the corrupt will of the old man rising up in opposition against some painful duty, it is with love and with a sincere desire to be heard, it is as demanding liberty and deliverance that he cries to his God, - Thy will be done /" Then he feels that "love is the fulfilling of the law:" that the Lord's yoke is easy, and his burden light. 5 " And since there is so much pleasure in conforming to the will of one we love, of one between whom and us there exists a sweet harmony of thought and feeling, what happiness does the child of God experience, even in the performance of duties which cost him much self-denial and sacrifice, when he hears his Saviour telling him with affection, "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father, the same is my brother, my sister, and my mother!" Thus, not only do those sacrifices and acts of self-denial, with which our life is replete, offered to God, lose their bitterness and become acts of filial love, but the least and most insignificant duties of ordinary life, of domestic life, and of the obscurest condition, performed for the Lord's sake, assume a high importance in our eyes; they are sacred, they have a powerful and sweet motive in the conscience and the heart, instead of being objects of dislike and annoyance. It was by such a motive that St. Paul sought to elevate to the noblest and the holiest feelings of Christianity, those that move in the humblest ranks of human society; it was on this principle that he could say to poor slaves, "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ, not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will, doing service, as to the Lord and not to men." But if, in our present life, we ought thus to do the will of God by an active obedience, we ought to ask him, with no less fervor, to enable us to do that will by an obedient submission.

God, indeed, does not manifest his will merely by his Word, but also by ways beyond the reach of our will, and which our resistance can in no wise change: these are what we usually call the dispensations of Providence.

Here especially is manifested, in the most conspicuous manner, the immense difference which exists between the man whose will is brought back to a unison with that of his God, and him who neither knows nor loves that will.

What will the man who has not learned in the school of Jesus Christ the petition on which we are meditating, what will he do in the presence of that sovereign will? Doubtless, if we could live on earth in a state of continual repose; if all our desires, all our wishes, and all our affections were satisfied and filled up, like the canvass of a vessel, which a favorable breeze wafts to the port, and which encounters neither the roughness of the storm nor the dangers of the quicksands; if what

the world calls happiness, and pursues as such, fell to our lot without any mixture of bitterness, and without disappointments, then we might, for a time at least, live in that delusive independence of the will of God, of which I have spoken in the commencement of my discourse. We might persuade ourselves that submission to his will is of little importance; that we can do without being in harmony with him; that we have little need to say to him.

“ Thy will be done /” Such at least is the foolish error of multitudes who are falsely called the fortunate of the earth, who place their happiness, and the sum of their hopes, in the fleeting years which they pass in this world. But where is the man whose life flows on as we have just supposed? Where is he? I seek for him everywhere, I find him nowhere. I find everywhere passions which consume themselves, after they have consumed their object, which dispute the heart of man, rule it with a rod of iron, and torment it; I see everywhere disappointed hopes, unsatisfied desires, the will wounded by the concussion of events; moral and physical sufferings, sickness, death, tears, and sorrows. And, my brethren, if there be among us any who think they can oppose the example of their life to this sad picture, who have not yet drunk this cup, or have not found it bitter, we would say to them, Wait, your hour will come, and will not tarry!

What, then, is it that you expect to make of such a life, O you who have never learned of Jesus Christ, to say from the heart to God, “ Thy will be done?” and who, on the contrary, see in the various events by which that will is expressed to you, so many enemies of your peace, enemies always at hand, enemies which you encounter at every step? Say if there could be any peace, any happiness between two beings called to live together in the closest and most intimate relations, who found in one another nothing but the most perfect opposition of opinions, feelings, tastes, desires, and characters, nothing but violent passions, which afforded a continual source of mutual vexations and annoyance? And in a life such as sin has made ours, what peace, what happiness can there be to the tempest-tossed soul which is driven continually against the inflexible course of events which it has no power to control? What will it do under the repeated strokes inflicted by the burning mortifications of pride, cruel heart-breakings, and contradictions of the will? Say what you can make of such a life? What can you make of it? Alas! what so many others have made of it, who, without communion of the soul with God, without inward peace, without harmony with their fellow-men, live in a perpetual and overwhelming struggle with life, and the incidents of every day. The struggle lasts while any remains of natural strength, delusions, false hopes, and insensibility, yield a support to their constancy; but there comes a time when these factitious means of life are exhausted; and then it is that the world without God gives utterance to murmurs and complaints against Providence, heathenish lamentations, Pagan expressions, such as cruel destiny, frightful lot, and adverse fortune! Then are left to the hapless soul nothing but distraction and despair; then are formed those desperate projects by which men seek, at any price, to put an end to the conflict; then, in these hours of darkness, rises up like a spectre, which yet they eagerly embrace, the thought of those self-murders, which from time to time horrify society, and teach it that there was there a soul that had never learned to say to God, “ Thy will be done!” or at least it is then that they seek to take refuge in a stoical insensibility which they lay hold of with a strength of mind borrowed for the moment, that they may not appear cast clown; and it is then that men are reduced to these poor and miserable consolations which we so often hear repeated: “We cannot alter it; it is the course of nature; we must submit!”

O sweet and precious harmony of the mind and heart with the will of a kind and gracious Father! hope of the Christian! living faith of the Gospel! love of God! Spirit which supports us in all our weaknesses! come produce in such souls this aspiration of resignation, of child-like confidence, “Thy will be done!” Blessed be thou, O compassionate Saviour, because thou hast had pity on our misery! Blessed be thou, because thou hast taught us to pray, by assuring us that “all things,” yea. ” all things work together for good to them that love God!”

Brethren, be assured that when we view life by the light of the Gospel, when with the assistance of Him who hath led us to Gethsemane and Calvary, we study and hear it reveal to us its gloomy depths; when the cross has become to us the key of all its mysteries; when our broken heart has been healed and renewed by grace: when love has subdued our rebellious will, when it has surrendered, at discretion, to the mercy of a sovereign and compassionate God; when the new-born child has lisped the endearing name of Father; when it has learned to say, “Our Father, which art in heaven! thy will be done T’ then everything here below changes its aspect; prosperity and adversity, joys and sufferings, life and death are explained; this is the highest philosophy; it is a soft light that penetrate? into the bosom of darkness. No doubt, trial.-- are still trials; sufferings are still sufferings; it cannot be otherwise in this world; it is not good that it should be otherwise. But if the will, bent and subdued, unites itself to the will of God in eternal harmony; if the heart embraces that will, and lovingly adores it then can the soul taste peace even in the midst of sorrow. There is then no longer the obstinate struggle, the wearying conflict, the will broken down without submission, the heart lacerated without a balm and without a remedy. But further; we are in this world exclusively for the purpose of attaining an end. And what end? precisely that which the petition we are considering brings before us, the union of our sanctified will with God’s will; a union which constitutes our supreme happiness. Now if we know from the Word of God, if the Christian knows by experience, that there is nothing more calculated to carry him on quickly and surely towards that end than the very sufferings to which God subjects him; if he knows that these alone will bend his rebellious will and make it renounce its idols, die to itself, and to every creature, that it may live to God alone; if he knows that they will promote his sanctification, that they are the crucible in which the Divine Artificer purifies his soul, and renders it capable of enjoying heaven, the abode of holiness and love; then he will never be induced to consider suffering as the result of a blind chance, or as the strokes of a terrible justice that would plunge him in hopeless despair. Oh no! he feels the hand of a tender Father, who is carrying on the education of his child, and who. for this purpose, employs a rigorous discipline, painful to his paternal heart, but employs it because he sees, in his wisdom, that this is the best means for attaining the end which his tender mercy has in view, the salvation of an immortal soul for which Jesus died, and which he desires to save at any cost!

God himself has condescended to teach us, in his Word, the secret of his love; “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten/” Hear this, my brethren, “As many as I love.” Hence the child of God can love his Father’s will, whatever it be, as a certain mark of his love.

Oh! had we in our hearts a living; conviction of this, with what cheerfulness would we offer to God the petition upon which we are meditating! What an inexhaustible source of consolation would it open to us even in the midst of our severest trials! A man thus prepared by the grace of God, seized with a malady which may prove mortal, is laid upon a bed of languishing; but behold, instead of the rebellion of his will, which would only pour venom into his wounds, and bitterness

into his heart; instead of trouble and anguish, moral pain, worse than that which he suffers in his body, he is enabled to cast himself into the arms of his heavenly Father, whether for life or for death, saying, with faith and love, "Thy will be done!" Ah! think ye not that his trial is thus already softened, even before he knows the full extent of it? The child of God has the happiness of hearing those who are dear to him repeat around him, with tears, no doubt, but yet with submission, (the same prayer. And thus, along with affliction and mourning-, there enters into the dwelling of such a one a peace which the world never tastes, even in the midst of its joys? A mother weeps over the cradle of her infant which has suspended between life and death; but she has been enabled to make to God in her heart the sacrifice which he demands; she has been enabled to sanctify that sacrifice by this prayer, "Thy will be done!" Think ye not that she feels at that moment the flowing of a balm beneath the wound which soothes its smarting pain? O ray brother! you whom a long and trying infirmity cuts off from all the enjoyments of this world, if each successive morning, as you open your eyes to the light, you are enabled to look up to God while you take up your heavy cross for another day, to say to him, without casting an anxious glance into the future, "Thy will be done!" 1 do you not think that your cross will be lightened, and will bring with it rich blessings 1 What evils will such an unreserved confidence in the will of God leave without a remedy? what sacrifices will it not make easy? what acts of self-denial will it leave without a compensation! Is your fortune taken away from you, are your dearest hopes in this world frustrated, are you robbed of the most cherished objects of your affections, is your reputation wounded by calumny, your conduct blackened by malevolence? in all these things, the Christian will never rest in men as the agents, never in second causes.

You know the hand that inflicts these strokes, and if you can imitate your Saviour in Gethsemane, and, like him, renounce your will, and say with him, "O my Father! not my will, but thine be done!" then ah 1 your afflictions shall be sanctified, and each new day of suffering, each new act of self-denial, by making you die to yourselves, will unite you more closely to God, and will increase and multiply in your hearts true peace and true happiness.

But, that the will of God may have in us its full accomplishment, let us endeavor to discern in the trial the special end of the trial. God has assured us in his Word that he doth not "afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men," that chastisement is "his strange work," and his love alone ought to be a guarantee of this to us.

Hence we ought to suppose, that in general (I will not say that it is so in every case,) God seeks to accomplish a particular design of mercy with regard to each of his children whom he afflicts. The duty, then, of such is not only to see in the trial the will of God, as we have already intimated, but to seek in it a special end, which it is designed to attain. He will not satisfy himself with merely saying to God, with a child-like confidence, "Thy will be done!" but he will add, "Lord, since thou smitest me with the rod, what wilt thou have me to do? Since thou easiest me into the crucible, from what defilement dost thou intend to purify me? What new lesson wouldst thou teach me in this severe school of adversity? What secret or known sin dost thou desire me to abandon? What evil habit must I sacrifice? What idol have I to cast away! Wherein must I renounce my will?

Wherein must I crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts?" And oh! if we have then the happiness to see the will of God, that we may do it; if our heart, humbled by affliction, weaned from visible things, more easily makes to God the sacrifice which he demands not only will the trial be

explained, but our soul, conscious that it has cast off one of its chains of bondage, and taken a step towards "the glorious liberty of the children of God," will bless the Lord even for the painful means by which he has brought the accomplishment of this end. Then shall we be able to repeat with understanding the words of the Psalmist, "It was good for me to be afflicted;" then shall we be enabled to attach a meaning to these words, so strange and incomprehensible to the natural man, "Count it all joy when ye shall fall into divers temptations;" then, in fine, having once more found by experience that the will of God is 'good, and acceptable, and perfect.'" we shall be able to say to him, with a more lively faith, and a more entire confidence than ever, "Thy will be done!" My brethren, if we find ourselves far, very far from such an end, let us not be discouraged. We cannot too often repeat it, let us remember that the Words upon which we are meditating are a prayer, a prayer which we may offer up to the Author "of all grace, and of every good and perfect gift," to Him who seeks only "to open his hand, and to pour out upon us the riches of his mercy;" to Him who, "as a father pitieth his children," hath mercy upon them that fear him. to Him who came down from heaven to earth to teach us to pray, and to restore us to communion with "his God and our God, with his Father, and our Father!" But take heed, my brethren! Who among us can apply to themselves these encouragements? Is it those who have never sincerely addressed this prayer to God? No, certainly! To such we would rather say, Beware how you pronounce with your lips, words in which your hearts have no part yea, words which condemn you, and which would impress upon your worship a character of hypocrisy! What! can you say to God, "Thy will be done /" while you love not that will, while you have no desire to know it, while you brave it, and while you are determined not to submit to it your own will, your heart, and your life? How can you say to God, "Thy will be done /" at the close of a day which has been filled with violations of that will, or at the commencement of a day in which you are fully decided to have no other guide or master than your own will? In fine, how can you offer up this petition so long as the manifestations of the will of God in providence find you unsubmissive; so long as they give birth to impatience, bitterness, and irritation in your heart; so long as they bring murmurings and complainings upon your lips; so long as you have other gods, whose will you wish to do; so long as you are yourself your own divinity 1 Ah! beware that this petition upon your lips be not a lie; for you already know, or you shall know it hereafter, that "God is not mocked!"

But, whether you do the will of God or not, whether you address this prayer to God, or whether you neglect it because it does not suit you, God's will shall be accomplished. Nothing shall oppose it; it shall be accomplished upon earth; it shall be accomplished in the day of judgment; it shall be accomplished in eternity; it shall be accomplished in you and in spite of you. Oh! hasten, then, cordially to embrace his will, before you run foul of it; for to this inflexible will may be applied those alarming words of our Lord, "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." We say in this petition, "Thy will be done in earth, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN!" That will, then, is done in heaven; it reigns there alone, and you hope, do you not, to be admitted into that place? but how are you preparing for it? What would you do in heaven, if you brought there a rebellious will, exercised until the moment you entered there in opposing the sovereign will of God? I ask you, what would you do there?

Oh! may you yet this day say from your heart, Thy will be done!"

05 - Meditation 5

MEDITATION V.

“GIVE us THIS DAY OUR, DAILY BREAD.”

Matthew 6:11.

WHAT a new world of real knowledge has Jesus Christ opened to our view! How vain do the wisest theories of men, concerning the world, God, and ourselves appear, in comparison of the facts so grand, so lofty, consoling, and suited to our wants, which the Saviour has brought to light by his Gospel! Compare the words which we have just read, this simple petition, which supposes such intimate and confiding relations between the creature and the Creator, with any of the systems which ever issued from the laboratory of human wisdom! Did the wisest of men ever dream of regarding God in any other light than that of a Being great and powerful indeed, but yet as little occupied with the wants and concerns of men, as with those of a stone which falls, and rolls whithersoever it is thrown 1 Ask these sages about the mystery of the world, the place which you occupy in it, or the relation you bear towards Him to whom you owe your life, and one will tell you that this world, existing from eternity, or owing its formation to mere chance, to a fortuitous combination, is handed over, with all the creatures that inhabit it, to a blind destiny. Another will tell you that the world, indeed, must have had for its author a powerful and intelligent being, but that he only drew it out of nothing, and summoned it into existence, to deliver it over immediately to the operation of eternal, inflexible, and immutable laws, in which he neither will nor can make any alteration. So that the world, with all the beings which it contains, is but a vast machine, in which man, like the other creatures, is a wheel performing its evolutions by compulsion, whether he be happy or miserable, whether he be triumphant in this universal march, or be crushed and trodden under foot. A third, perhaps, will admit the idea of a vague and passive Providence; in his view God indeed reigns, but he reigns in an eternal immutability, inaccessible to the prayers and cries of his creatures; according to him, it would be unworthy the greatness of God to suppose that he took an interest in the fate, the wants, and the miseries of each individual, however insignificant and obscure. Alas! how many men, even among those who bear the name of Christians, thus worship a God of their own creation, an idol which neither delivers nor consoles, nor has anything in common with the God of the Bible! thou true and living God “ our Father, which art in heaven!” who canst embrace all in thy paternal care, seeing that thou art infinite. who embracest all, because thou art love, in whose eyes an insect is as much accounted of as a world, because before Thee nothing is great, nothing is little, reveal thyself to our souls, inspire our hearts with the confidence of children!

Yes, let us leave these comfortless theories of ignorance or unbelief; let us take refuge in the consoling assurance, founded on the infallible Word of God, that, like a Father, he takes an interest in the meanest of his creatures, and knows their minutest wants, and that we may say with the Psalmist, “The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing!” Let us hasten to the school of

Christ Jesus, and when he has enabled us to say to our God, " Our Father, which art in heaven." he will teach us to add, " Give us this day our daily bread /"

Such is the filial relation, full of unreserved confidence, which Jesus establishes between his disciple and his heavenly Father. Such are the words which we would consider this day, imploring the gracious assistance of that Spirit of adoption which alone can pray in us. and teach us to pray from the heart. But is it in place to treat of such a subject in this pulpit? Is it in an assembly where the signs of a rich abundance meet our eyes on every side, that we ought to meditate upon and explain a petition in which we ask of God merely our daily bread 1 Is there no contradiction in this? Can our words on such a topic find an echo and a sympathy in the hearts of persons who possess, in more than abundance, not only their necessary bread, but the most refined enjoyments of the good things of this world? Ah! is it not rather into the hovel of the poor man, that we ought to bring our meditations this day, to endeavor to banish from beneath his humble roof the tormenting disquietudes of life, and wipe from his cheek the tears of want. Our mission, perhaps, might be more agreeable, more easy, and more useful there. But if it be not so among you also, it is because you have never yet understood the Lord's Prayer, nor entered into the spirit of this petition. It is not the poor man^alone that Jesus invites to offer it to God, but all his disciples, of every rank and condition. Let a man possess all the riches and all the glory of Solomon, yet, woe unto him! if he learn not his dependence upon God in pronouncing these simple words, "GIVE, GIVE iis our daily bread /" It is God that gives; acknowledge in him the giver of all you possess, and bless and adore him! Such is the salutary lesson which Jesus would inculcate upon us in the first word of this petition. Have you thought of this, my brethren 1 or is it still necessary to prove to you that it is indeed God who gives?

Prove it! All! our demonstration were an easy one. We need only say to you, Go forth without the walls of this city, take a few steps amid the works of God, open your eyes upon the ravishing beauties of nature which burst upon your view, sparkling with freshness and -youth; hear the language in which they address you. - Who clothed the fields with that verdure and that fecundity which promises once more to man his daily bread? who thus, in each successive spring, renews the miracle 1 And where would be the bread of the richest of mankind, could we not say with St. Paul, of that God from whom they are bound to ask it, that he never " leaveth himself without witness, in that he doeth us good, and giveth us rain from heaven, filling our hearts with food and gladness?" Your gold and silver, which, perhaps, make you forget the giver of your daily bread, could they nourish you, if God did not pour forth every year from his rich treasures, the gifts of his bountiful goodness? No; the rich man would then perish in the midst of his gold, as well as the poor man in his abode of misery. What, then, can exempt the rich man from the necessity of saying to God with the same spirit of dependence as the poor man, " Give us this day our daily bread?" The rich man, did I say? But who made him rich? Will he answer, with ingratitude towards God, that it was his industry, his labor, or his skill in the management of his affairs? But are not these things themselves gifts of the Divine goodness? Your whole existence is a gift; the breath which animates you is a gift, a free gift, which is renewed every moment; if God were to withhold it from you for an instant, you would return, while I am speaking to you, unto the dust from whence you were taken. The strength necessary to make the slightest movement is a gift; every hour you spend in the labors of your calling is a gift. Let us go still further back: to whom do you owe it that you were born in the midst of opulence and prosperity? Why did you not derive your origin from

parents plunged in indigence, in physical and moral misery, who would have left you as your heritage, ignorance, vice, and degradation 1 Why have you been from your infancy objects of the tenderest care? Why have you enjoyed that education, which qualifies you for the situation in life which you occupy, or which, perhaps, has enabled you to arrive at it? Or why have you not been deprived of your possessions and your property, like so many others? To all these questions there is but one answer; God, God is the giver, and this is what Jesus Christ wishes above all things to impress upon you in the petition which we Are now considering. O ye, who have never from your hearts pronounced this prayer, ye who live in ingratitude towards God. have you never thought that instead -of listening here at your ease to a meditation, you might, and, but for the goodness of God, you certainly would have had reason, like many others, to cry, from the depths of poverty and wretchedness, " Give us this day our daily bread," yea, a miserable bread, bedewed with sweat and tears? Have you never reflected, when some forlorn object, with famished countenance, covered with rags, and with eyes suffused with tears of shame and suffering-, has stretched out his hand to you for relief, has the reflection never occurred to you, "I might have been in that man's place, and must inevitably have been so, but for the bountiful goodness of my God?" And then have you not raised up your eyes to heaven with a feeling of gratitude, while you called to mind the petition of Jesus Christ, " Give us this day our daily bread?"

O, ye rich men of the world! in what a different light would your earthly possessions appear to you, if you remembered that they were the gift of God! Did we receive, as coming from the hand of our heavenly Father, each benefit, each portion of the good things which contribute to our happiness here below, each enjoyment, each one of our repasts, each morsel of daily bread that nourishes us, how could we be guilty of the odious sin of ingratitude? Could the man who, on awaking in the morning, would lift up his heart to his heavenly Father, and say, " Give us this day our daily bread!" could that man sit down to a table laden with the gifts of God, and not lift up that heart again to his God to bless him, and to give him thanks? Did we remember that it is God that gives, did we receive every thing from his hand, would it be in our power to make the deplorable use which we too often do of our Creator's benefits? Can you conceive of a man, who in the morning had offered this prayer to God from the bottom of his heart, afterwards, in the course of the same day, going forth and employing the gifts of God in satisfying his carnal passions, nourishing his pride, vanity, and ambition, (making a god of his belly.) exalting himself above others, shaming the poor man by the ostentatious display of his luxury and grandeur, and, in fine, offending and braving Him from whom he has received everything?

Rich men of the world, you are, perhaps, not sensible how much more enjoyment you would derive from your earthly riches, if } 7 ou received them thus from the hand of God. and in the spirit of the prayer which we are now considering. You know, however, how precious and dear to our hearts is the possession of the smallest object, when received from one whom we love and revere, and whom it recalls to our remembrance. But think what all the riches, and all the enjoyments of this life would be to you, if you received them, from the hand of a Father, as a mark of his paternal kindness! These riches, which are so often a source of care and anxiety to you these riches, which, perhaps, have cost you many a sleepless night these riches, which the rust corrupted! these riches, which so often harden and materialize the heart, and render it incapable of the noblest and purest enjoyments these riches, the least of these riches, a present from God, the gift of his paternal kindness, would then be as a remembrance of a Father, as a proof of his love, and

be a source of holy joy to your heart. And as the Giver is holy, the remembrance of him would sanctify all the abundance and well-being which he bestows upon you. Thus the goods of this life, which man has so often found the fatal secret of converting into a real curse, would become a real blessing! And you who enjoy not the same blessings, you, whom the Lord has not seen fit to intrust with the dangerous gift of fortune,) 7 ou poor of this world, do you also remember that it is God that gives? He who to this hour hath given you your daily bread, as he doth to the birds of the air, which Jesus holds up to you as patterns of confidence, will give it to you even to the end. And let your poverty, yea, even your indigence, far from discouraging- you, or making you doubt the goodness of God, teach you on the contrary, morning after morning, to come and cast yourselves at his feet with renewed confidence, and to sa}, t: Give us this day our daily bread!"

It is true that earthly cares, and the solitudes of this life may sometimes impose upon the soul a burden which will oppress it, prevent it from rising to God, shut out from it feelings of trust, dry up the sources of prayer, and extort from it that cry of painful anxiety, " What shall we eat, what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" It is true that a father or mother, whose weeping children importune them for a morsel of that daily bread which they scarcely have it in their power to afford them, must feel a pang of grief, of which others can know nothing: but even under such circumstances, would Jesus teach them to say to God, "Give us this day our daily bread," in vain? Would this prayer, put into their mouths by him, be a deception? Far be from us this blasphemy! Ah! while that mother was offering up this prayer to God, with tears not unmixed with anxiety, God he who gives, who holds in his hands all hearts and all events, would already be preparing in secret the daily bread with which he was about to furnish her. And now, if he sends not his prophet to multiply the widow's handful of meal and cruse of oil if he increases not before our eyes, by his creating hands, the few loaves which are to feed the thousands of a famishing multitude, shall other means be wanting to Him who saith, " The silver is mine, and the gold is mine?" No, no, so long as the promises of God, who cannot lie, remain written in his Word, so long as I hear " the Prince of Life" saying, " Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you;" " I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," I will believe it impossible, absolutely impossible, for a child of God. who says to his heavenly Father, for himself and for his own, "Give us this day our daily bread," to be disappointed in his expectation. And shall not He, who by the word of his power sustains the universe, be able to support any one of his children that crieth unto him? Shall he not be able to bless the labors of his hands, to crown his industry with prosperity, or to incline a heart to charity? Yea, He who hath saved you from eternal misery, can he not, will he not, deliver you from your temporal distresses? " He who spared not his Son," exclaims St. Paul, "how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" What has he more precious to refuse us? He who hath given us eternal life, the "inheritance incorruptible, un-defiled, and that fadeth not away," shall he not also give to his child the daily bread which is to sustain, for a few days longer, his mortal existence? ye poor of this world, be Christians! learn prayer in the school of Christ, and you shall be able to say with the Psalmist at all times, " The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." The Saviour next teaches us to pray for our bread. And thus, in a prayer entirely private, and in the only petition which has reference to our temporal wants, it was proper that we should find a word, which would speak to our consciences, a word, which every time we pronounced it before God, would lead us to search into the depths of our hearts, and to examine our conduct; a word, which, amid the sumptuous banquets of the rich, and the homely reprose of the poor, would raise this question of such high moral import, Is the bread which I eat

really my bread? Is this bread unmixed with the leaven of iniquity? No doubt it is God that gives us our bread; but he gives it to his children by means in every thing conformable to his eternal justice, and his immutable holiness.

Nothing acquired in any other way, even to the least morsel of it, is the bread of God, the bread of prayers, our bread.

O ye great and rich ones of this world! what would ye feel, if the mysterious and terrible hand which surprised the king of Babyloia in the midst of his banquet, and wrote his condemnation on the wall of his palace, were to come forth from your gilded ceilings, during your feasts, and trace, in succession, before the eyes of your guests, the means by which such a profusion of riches was heaped upon your sumptuous tables?... Ah! would we not then see many, whose loins would be loosed with terror, and their knees smite one against another, because that they had fulfilled against themselves that prophetic imprecation: "Let their table become a snare before them; and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap." In this sense observe, as well as in another, a man may "eat and drink his own condemnation." "Consider, then, your ways;" and if you are so happy as to be able to write uprightness and equity upon your treasures, ask yourselves also if you make of those goods, which the Lord bestows upon you, the use for which they are committed to your trust. And, in fact, to this examination you are called, because, in using this prayer, you associate yourselves with the poor man whom we have endeavored to console, and you say with him, in the words of Jesus Christ, not give me, but give us, not my bread, but our bread. And thus does the Saviour condemn, with one word, that narrow and heartless selfishness, which shuts us up in our own personal interests, allows us to think only of ourselves, and renders us callous and insensible to the interests and enjoyments, the privations and sufferings of our brethren. That selfishness which has never come out of itself, which has never learned to love, or to sacrifice itself to another, never learned even to pray, has nothing in common with the Lord's Prayer; that prayer is not intended for it. The Christian, on the contrary, says, "Give us," and in this generous and charitable us, he includes all who are exposed to the suffering of privations and misery; in this US) he associates with his own joys and sorrows, the joys and sorrows of his brethren.

And, indeed, if there is ever a moment when our hearts ought to open to sympathy and love for others, is it not when we approach that God who is love, and whom we address as our Father 1 If there is ever a moment when "our conversation ought to be without covetousness," is it not when we address ourselves to that God who scatters, with profusion and with love, upon all the worlds which he has created, abundance, life, and happiness? Yes, if we come as Christians to the throne of grace, it must be in leading, as it were, by the hand, all those who have a claim upon our interest, our charity, or our prayers; that is, it must be. to say. "Give us," and never "Give me!" And if this be the case, if you ought to include your brethren, the poorest of your brethren, in your prayers, is it not evident, that since God has heard you, and since he has loaded you with temporal blessings, he means by you to hear the prayer of the poor man? You associated him with you in your prayer, and can it be possible that you did. not wish to associate him with you in the gift of God accorded in answer to that common prayer? What! you would say us in praying, me in enjoying! Then you would falsify your own prayer, you would frustrate the end for which Jesus Christ taught it to you; you would make void the design of God towards the poor; you would be unfaithful stewards of the goods committed to your trust, prevaricators Take heed, then, that you

pronounce not the words of this petition; take heed that you say not to God, Give 2is: it were an insult to God, to whom you would speak falsely to his very face; it were a cruel irony towards the poor, whom you include in your prayer, but shut out from your charity!

I know, my beloved brethren, (and why should we not here acknowledge it with thankfulness to God?) I know that in general, you are disposed to sympathize in the necessities of those who suffer. But in the situation in which God has placed you, and with the gifts which he has committed into your hands, does your conscience bear witness that you do, in this respect, all that he expects from you, and above all, that you do it in the spirit in which he requires it? Is there one among us that ever arrives at the point of duty which this simple petition under our consideration prescribes to us? I do not merely ask, Do you give enough of your goods? but do you give enough of your hearts? Is it a Christian interest, full of love, that leads us to the poor? Do you confine your charity to their temporal wants, to their earthly life,- to their bodies? or do you also extend it to the essential part of their immortal being, to their real happiness, to their hearts too often wounded and bleeding, to their minds too often degraded by misery? And if these suffering 1 beings do not present themselves before you, do you seek them out that you may do them good, and that a permanent good? Ah! if our privileges are great, our obligations are great also. God does not measure our works according to man's measure; it is not merely the material thing, the mental that he takes account of; he looks to the heart that gives it.

What had that poor widow done, whose praise the Lord Jesus had caused to be inscribed in the pages of his Word, that her praise might live there to the end of time, and meet her again in eternity? She had given a mite; but it was "all that she had, even all her living." Doubtless it was because she had learned to pray in the temple, that she was also taught to give when she came out of it, and the Saviour, who knows the heart, declares that she gave more than the rich Pharisees, notwithstanding the sums which they had cast into the treasury.

Oh! let us learn, in the spirit of real prayer, what ought to be the spirit of real charity! The spirit of real prayer! the spirit of real charity! Jesus teaches us it once more in the short and simple petition upon which we are meditating. Hear these words, the last to which we would draw your attention this day. What is it that extinguishes the spirit of prayer and of charity 1 Is it not the insatiable love of possessing- which so easily occupies our carnal hearts? But how does Jesus Christ here deal with this tendency of our corrupt nature? He who knows wherein our happiness consists, and wishes to make us happy, leads us into the presence of our heavenly Father, permits us to address to him a petition touching our terrestrial life, and directs us to say, Give us,... what? our daily bread) that is to say, our necessary bread.*

* Though we allow the word daily to stand here, because it has been consecrated by a usage which it is difficult to alter. yet it may be well to remark, that it does not faithfully render the sense of the original. The expression which our Lord employs, is formed from a word (jivf,) which signifies the substance or essence of a thing, so that Jerome translating it literally, rendered it pattern super substantivum. Hence we demand in it the bread ESSENTIAL to life, extending the meaning of the word to all that is necessary to our subsistence. The idea expressed by daily is not lost by this interpretation, as it is still preserved in the expression this day, instead of which St. Luke uses day by day, which with, daily would be an unmeaning repetition: "Give daily our daily bread." As to the general meaning of the petition, "we cannot adopt And for how long a time are we to ask this

provision of the goodness of God? This day. And first, to prevent all misconception, and every objection that might be raised against this doctrine, we would observe that the Gospel, far from condemning, commands the labor, order, and economy, by means of which a man arrives at an honest and praiseworthy independence for himself and his family. Let us observe further that the Gospel, which never tends to, or sanctify the opinion of those who understand by it spiritual bread, the bread of life. Besides that this petition would then evidently be included in the three former, would there not be something incomplete in this model of prayer, if it contained no reference to our earthly life? Is it not a great happiness to the poor man, who often knows not in the morning from whence he shall derive nourishment for his family is it not an immense consolation, a salutary preservative against the anxieties by which he might be tormented, to find in the prayer taught by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, even an express permission to ask of his heavenly Father wherewithal to meet his pressing wants? We do not, however, mean by this, absolutely to exclude the spiritual sense; we may, to use the beautiful illustration of Augustine, draw from the source of Scripture a first draught, then a second, and then a third. Let us realize the idea that God is the source of all life, physical and spiritual; that he communicates it to whom he will, and as he will; that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," and the two ideas in our text will be reduced into one: the subversion of social order, but, on the contrary, condemns it, has thereby consecrated a diversity of conditions in society, and consequently, that diversity cannot be disapproved of in our text, though the rich as well as the poor must ask of God only their necessary bread.

But, notwithstanding this just concession, how immeasurably removed is the disposition of the natural man from the spirit of prayer which the Saviour teaches us! Say, my brethren, if you sincerely expressed your desires before God, is it your necessary bread that is, what is required to meet the wants of life, that you would ask for? Necessary! ah. each one finds means to interpret this word according to his own views, and to extend the signification of it, if possible, to the most brilliant opulence. And as the wants of life increase in proportion as we create them to satisfy them; as afterwards, the ambition of the influence which fortune bestows comes in. with all its insatiable pretensions, there are not, and there cannot be any longer, any limits to the desires of the man who has once entered upon such a career. Arid if that man were sincerely to examine his thoughts, if it were still possible for him to embody these thoughts in prayer, he could never, never, say,

"Give us this day our daily bread," but rather, Give us treasures, give us the consideration, the honors, the influence which men lavish upon fortune! And such a man, after having demanded opulence instead of bread, would not say, "this day" as our Lord directs us, in order that we may wait upon God from day to day with confidence, and with an acknowledgment of our absolute dependence upon Him, but would say, "for ever!" for ever, that we may be able to live without God, and to banish from our minds every thought of him. Jesus himself has given us the type of this utterly carnal and earthly disposition, in that rich man who, when he had heaped together vast treasures, cried, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry;" forgetting the answer of the Lord, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee!" forgetting that, after all, "we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we shall carry nothing out." But further: as such a man could not and would not offer up for himself the prayer of Jesus; as his desires, instead of confining themselves to his necessary bread, would embrace the

treasures of opulence; and instead of embracing this day, would embrace his whole life; do you think that they would stop upon the verge of the tomb? No, my brethren; accomplished for himself, he would refer them to his children, to the future glory of his house; he would refer them to a time which shall never belong to him, to a time when he shall already have appeared before the tribunal of God, to give an account of a life sacrificed to an impure idol.

Expect not that I shall here demonstrate to you the folly of such a life, or attempt to describe to you the happiness that is to be found in the spirit of this prayer, or that I shall prove to you that "godliness with contentment is great gain" the greatest of gains. I shall not do it; for those among you who know and possess the true riches, who have placed their treasure in heaven, in "the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away," have no need of new demonstrations: a precious experience bears witness to them that they have chosen "the good part;" and, as for others, they would not understand it; they would see in our words nothing but vain declamation. I shall content myself with drawing from what I have just been saying, one single observation, to which I beg your most serious attention. You acknowledge, then, you to whom I address these reflections, you acknowledge that hitherto you have been strangers to the spirit of this prayer, which has issued from the mouth of Jesus; you acknowledge that that prayer, if you uttered it, would be disallowed by your wishes and by your lives! you acknowledge that you cannot present it; you then place your happiness in something else than that in which Jesus has placed it; you are then in direct contradiction with the Saviour!

Bring home 'with you this conclusion; meditate upon it, and may it produce in you a new life, and fruits which shall never perish!

O Lord our God! detach us more and more from this world, which, with all its lusts, passeth away! And if thou art pleased to support our earthly life a short time longer, by means of that bread which we ask of thee, and which thou givest us in thy goodness, O enable us to consecrate those short moments to thy glory! They are lost, O Lord, miserably lost, if they belong not to thee. Preserve us from so great a misery. Enable us, by the power of thy Divine Spirit, to live henceforward, not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life! Amen!

06 - Meditation 6

MEDITATION VI.

“FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS.”

Matthew 6:12.

AMONG the innumerable proofs of the deep degradation into which man has fallen by sin, and in which he continues to live, there are few at once more striking and more painful than the inconsistency which characterizes his conduct in every case where his eternal interests are concerned. This inconsistency is the more surprising, since he is very far from manifesting it when the interests, the hopes, or the fears which relate to this life are in question. Do you want a proof of this? If I were to come, like the messenger who brought to the patriarch Job the tidings of his misfortunes, and to tell you that the failure of a considerable house had involved you in the loss of all your property, and that you had nothing left but debts to an immense amount, for which you would speedily be exposed to a legal prosecution; or were I to inform you, that you carried in your constitution the germ of a mortal disease that would soon bring you down to the grave; or that you lay under the weight of an accusation which, according to the laws of your country, might entail upon you the most frightful consequences, you would immediately be filled with the deepest concern and anxiety, or, perhaps, surrender yourselves to utter despair. And this would only be acting consistently, consistently with nature and with the wants of your being. If, again, you were told that you had yet within your power the means of retrieving your affairs, expelling from your constitution this mortal malady, clearing yourself of the accusation which lay upon you, or of obtaining a full and free pardon, you would immediately lay hold of this means with joyful eagerness, and make use of it, though it might cost you much pain, and labor, fatigue, and many sacrifices. And this, also, would be acting consistently, consistently with nature, and with the requirements of your being. But if I come to the very same persons, who, in those cases, would have acted thus consistently, holding in my hand a book which they profess to acknowledge as of Divine authority; if I prove to them out of this very book, that they have contracted, not with man, but with God, a debt of enormous amount, for which they shall be called to an account; that they are attacked in the most important part of their being with a mortal disease; that they are lying under the weight of an accusation which will entail upon them an infinite punishment, a boundless and never ending misery, and that too not before the bar of human justice, but of Divine justice, whose decrees are inevitable and eternal, we see those very same persons remaining perfectly tranquil and secure in the consciousness of that debt, without the least uneasiness under the pressure of that disease, and maintaining the coolest indifference with regard to that accusation! Is not this an inconsistency which has in it something the appearance of madness? Would not you yourselves say, that the man who acted thus in the cases which I have supposed, had lost his senses? Yes, you would say so, and your decision would be in accordance with the Word of God, which tells such persons, that, “Professing themselves wise they have become fools; their understanding darkened. being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in

them, because of the blindness of their heart." Mark these words

"because of the blindness of their heart;" it is in the blindness or hardness of the heart rather than in the darkness and ignorance of the understanding, that the cause of this inconsistency or folly consists. This is for man positively to deny his responsibility before God; it is to deny the Divine justice; -it is to be practically an Atheist!

Assuredly it is not to such men that the petition, which we have to consider this day, is suited: "Forgive us our debts/" or "Forgive us our trespasses!" This prayer in their mouths would be a fresh inconsistency, and perhaps a fresh act of hypocrisy. But you, serious souls, in whom conscience, in accordance with the Word of God, asserts its sacred rights; you who feel the weight of a fearful responsibility, humble, contrite sinners; to you Jesus has taught it, and it is you whom we would call to hear it! Oh! come listen to these words; I know that you have need of them; to you they will be a balm for your bleeding wounds, a heavenly dew upon a thirsty ground, life in the midst of death!

What is it that we ask our heavenly Father to forgive us? Wherein does this forgiveness consist? What are the marks whereby we shall know that we are partakers of it? Such are the three questions which we propose briefly to answer.

What do we ask our heavenly Father to forgive us in this petition? Learn from the man who, perhaps, having lived the greater part of his life in that stupid indifference of which we have just spoken, has felt a conscience, whose voice he too long neglected, awaking within him. He, too, had been guilty of that fatal inconsistency, that inconceivable folly which we have indicated; he had lost sight of his responsibility, the law of his God, and the judgment of eternity; referring everything to this present life, he had confined his hopes and fears within the narrow space which separates us from the tomb, foolishly expecting to find happiness therein: if but the desires of his heart might be fulfilled and his passions satisfied, he gave himself little trouble to ascertain whether his principles and his actions were in harmony with or in opposition to the supreme will of God, to whom he was to give an account of his life hereafter. But God, that God who "willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather his conversion and life," has arrested him in the way which was leading him to ruin; he has awakened him; either by some one of those heavy strokes of adversity and of death, which are sufficient to tear at once from the eyes of blinded man every veil of delusion, and to lay naked and undisguised before his awakened soul all the realities of life and of death; or by one of those attacks of sickness, which from time to time put a sudden termination to the visions of a deceitful world, and summon the soul before the tribunal of God to undergo a foreboded judgment; or by those disappointments and sufferings which so often strew the path of life, or by a direct appeal from the Word and Spirit, of God, fastening upon the soul a powerful and alarming conviction of the awful contrast between the man's life and the demands of the moral law, which will be satisfied with nothing short of holiness. As soon as the conscience, by one or more of these causes, is awakened from its sleep of death, it asserts all its neglected rights; it utters within a painful and heart-rending cry; it erects a tribunal from which it exercises a tremendous judgment, before which it summons, as witnesses, all the recollections of the past life, recollections which, contrasted with God's holiness, assume the form of abominable pollutions, guilty violations of the eternal will. His iniquities are thus set in order before him, and bring terror into his inmost soul. O how serious does his life then become! What an insupportable burden is his responsibility! How his

actions change their nature in his eyes! Those things which before he called innocent and amiable follies, become what the Psalmist calls with grief “ the sins of his youth;: ’ what appeared to him in the past, venial faults, assume the character of crimes against the holy Majesty of God. Oh! how many guilty actions, how many idle words, how many impure thoughts, condemnable feelings of the heart, since the time the man began to think, to feel, to distinguish between right and wrong to the moment of this awakening, now unite to form a dark and foreboding cloud which covers the whole life, and ascends up to God to provoke his justice! Immortal, accountable being, thou mayest count the hairs upon thy head, the sands upon the sea-shore, or the stars in the heavens! yet canst thou never, never count thine offences. And yet all, all are written in the book of eternal justice, and form, that enormous unpayable debt of which our text speaks.

Dreaded conscience! holy and divine law! hast thou any other bitter recollections to call up to trouble my soul? Yes. answers the law! Yes, answers conscience! From thine infancy I commanded thee, saith the law, to “ honor thy father and thy mother;” and I accuse thee, saith conscience, of not having rendered their life happy by love, gratitude, and docility; I accuse thee of having made them shed bitter tears by thine ingratitude, obstinacy, and the incorrigible defects of thy character. I commanded thee, saith the law, to shun all impurity and all unrighteousness, to avoid all falsehood and all covetousness. And I accuse thee, saith conscience, recalling at the same time past recollections; I accuse thee before God of this action, and that secret unholy thought; I accuse thee of this indelicacy, and that act of injustice in thine affairs; I accuse thee of these rash judgments, and those slanderous words which thou rememberest to have pronounced: I accuse thee of those innumerable unhallowed desires which fall under the jurisdiction of the law. I commanded thee, saith the law, “ to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength;” and I accuse thee, saith conscience, with having lived without love to God, and without gratitude for his mercies; I accuse thee of having loved thyself more than God, of having loved a thousand objects more than God, and thus of having as many gods before him as thou hast bad passions; of having been all warmth, all fervor towards thine idols, but cold and indifferent, and full of secret enmity towards thy God. I commanded thee, saith the law, “ to love thy neighbor as thyself;” and I accuse thee, saith conscience, of having made thy brother feel, on a thousand occasions, not thy love, nor thy charity, but thy selfishness, thy severity, and thy pride. I accuse thee on all the points of the law, on all the pages of the Word of God, on all the days of thy life; I accuse thee, and this accusation is written in letters of fire before God; it is engraven in the rock; you can never efface a single line of it. This is thy debt, from which thou canst never retrench a single farthing. And what is the issue of the judgment which is thus carried on before the tribunal -of the awakened conscience? What is the sentence pronounced by the law and ratified by the conscience? That sentence, which has been recorded beforehand by the finger of God, that man might not have it in his power to sin without knowing the consequences: “ Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them!” “The wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness!” “ Tribulation and anguish against every soul that doeth evil!” And Jesus Christ, the Sovereign Judge, setting the seal of his Divine authority to this sentence, pronounces, with those lips which cannot lie, the dreadful words, “ everlasting punishment; the worm that never dieth; outer darkness, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth!

O how dreadful is the inward travail which works in the awakened conscience as in a furnace, when these truths are brought home to it as overwhelming realities! What days of anguish! what nights of sleepless restlessness! what hours of mental agony! It is in this, it is in this the soul finds its Gethsemane and its Calvary! Christians! pray for such souls!

Worldlings and unbelievers! profane not with a smile of derision such holy sufferings! for woe to the man who experiences nothing of them in this life! God may indeed deal leniently with you; he may lead you by less painful paths; he may give you to feel your misery and the greatness of your debt by degrees, and in proportion as he himself diminishes the amount of it; because he sees that an entire, an instantaneous view of the evil within you would be too much for your weakness, and would drive you to despair. But I repeat it woe to the man who never undergoes that inward judgment which we have described, until he appears before the tribunal of his Judge! Woe to the man who never becomes sensible of his debt, until God spreads it out before his eyes at the last day, and who never condemns himself until he is condemned by the Judge of quick and dead! But is it so, my brethren? Must we then desire for you this terrible awakening of conscience, this judgment of the soul, these agonies, these conflicts, and this anguish of mind? Yes, my beloved brethren; yes, we desire them, for it is out of this judgment that righteousness arises; it is out of this death that life springs up; it is from this condemnation that salvation issues; it is from the depths of this abyss that the soul, for the first time, cries, with understanding, "Forgive, forgive us our debts!" Would to God that this word, this single word, might escape from your agonizing consciences, your suffering souls! we would then be without anxiety for any of you; you would be saved. My brethren! does this idea appear strange to you? Would you fear to rest the salvation of your immortal souls upon the efficacy of a prayer so simple, and so soon uttered? Weary, heavy laden souls! do you hesitate in painful doubt? When conscience cries, when the law condemns, are you tempted to say that you know not if you shall find pardon with the Lord?

O how happy we are to be able, now, with the Word of God in our hands, to come forward to meet this distressing doubt, and having spoken to you of sin, to speak to you of pardon! Ah! indeed, you would have reason still to fear, still to doubt, if it were a man, yea, if it were an angel of God that encouraged you to say, "Forgive us our trespasses!" but it is Jesus Christ himself, "the true God and eternal life," who came "from the bosom of the Father," to reveal to us his purposes and his sovereign will. He knows, then, he knows perfectly if there be pardon for sinners with God. And what more solemn declaration of pardon could he have given us, than to command us to say to God, with entire confidence, "Forgive us our trespasses." But further, He who thus encourages us to pray, is our Judge, who shall decide upon our life, and upon our eternity. And to pronounce a sentence of condemnation upon a single soul which he himself has directed to ask for pardon, and which shall have done so, would be to deny himself and to deceive us. But no: we may present ourselves before the tribunal of God with the prayer which we are considering-, and offer it up to our Judge as an undeniable title, since it is his own word, and we may say to him, "Lord, I am a sinner; I have pronounced condemnation upon myself; I deserve eternal death; but here is thy word which cannot lie; thou hast taught me to say to my God, 'Forgive!' I confide in thee!" Which of you will doubt the salvation of such a sinner? But the doubting soul may still object "Since the law of God condemns me, how can I be justified?" Can God deny himself? Can he, in contradiction to his own direct declaration, "hold the sinner guiltless?" And when his law, his inviolable law, curses, can he bless? Here, my brethren, we would have nothing, absolutely nothing, to say in

reply, were we not authorized to tell you, that he who directs us to pray", " Forgive us," is our Saviour, our Redeemer, as well as our God and our Judge. Oh! yes; it is from the cross, where he died in our stead, that Jesus Christ invites us to cry with confidence for pardon and grace. It was there he paid the whole of our debt, the least farthing of which we never could have paid ourselves: it was there he shed " the blood of the New Testament for the remission of sins;" it was there he paid the ransom of his people; there he washed away their iniquity, and obtained an eternal right of property in them as the fruit of his sufferings, and " the travail of his soul!" " Who then shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect 1 It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth 1 It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us!" Yes. he intercedes, he carries on his mediatorial work, he will not leave it imperfect. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous." He presents our imperfect prayers to God, purified by passing through his divine lips. Whenever a sinner upon earth cries from the midst of his misery and the anguish of his soul, " Forgive me my trespasses/" the Saviour, who taught him that prayer, repeats with compassion, " Father, forgive him his trespasses."

Yea, he himself, as God, as Judge, as Saviour, has the eternal right to pardon sin. It was he who said to the penitent in the Gospel, "Thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace!" It was he who declared that the publican "went down to his house justified," after having prayed with humility and penitence, " God be merciful unto me a sinner." It was he that opened Paradise to the imploring malefactor upon the cross. But that which crowns the delightful assurance with which the penitent sinner can ask of God the pardon which shall give him happiness, peace, and life, is that this pardon, being the work of Christ, is complete and perfect. Not only does Jesus repair for the pardoned sinner all the disasters of sin, but he restores to him all the privileges of which he would never have been deprived if he had never sinned. The pardon published in the Gospel is not merely negative, it is positive; it not only releases the soul that thus prays from the punishment of sin, and from all its dreadful consequences, but it also includes the gifts of grace, peace, and the love of God. We can conceive that the pardon of God might only have been negative, that it might only have brought us exemption from the penalty of sin, and from the condemnation which it deserves, and that we might afterwards have been left to ourselves to secure our own happiness, like the criminal, who only receives a pardon and nothing more. We can conceive that Jesus might only have paid the mighty debt of our I sins, and then left us in poverty. And even this would have been a great mercy, calculated to fill us with deep and eternal gratitude. But he does more, infinitely more. He is not satisfied with merely averting from our guilty heads the just condemnation of the law against sin, but he has procured for us, in its stead, all the benefits and blessings of the divine mercy. He was not content with merely closing beneath our feet the gulf of eternal misery which sin had opened up, but he has unveiled to the eye of the repentant sinner the beautiful and cheering prospect of the pure enjoyments and of the eternal felicity of those beings which never sinned.

Yes, mourning sinner, in whose conscience the judgment of God is passing, pray, pray at the foot of the Saviour's cross, " Forgive us our trespasses!" and thou shalt feel the bitter and deadly fruits of sin which poison thy life, giving place to the fruits of pardon and righteousness, anguish to peace, the indignation and wrath of God to the love of a tender Father, and to that Spirit of adoption whereby thou shalt say to him, "Abba! Father!" Behold, penitent sinner, whom Jesus has

taught to pray! Thy prayer ascending up to heaven, dissipates the "outer darkness" which hitherto covered thy conscience with a veil of night; the soft light of "the Sun of Righteousness with healing in his wings," ariseth upon thee! Harken! the "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth," of which the groanings of thy heart were but a sad prelude, die away, and are succeeded by that new song of deliverance, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, be glory and dominion for ever and ever!" Here is the chorus of the heavenly host superseding the cry of despair!

It is heaven taking the place of hell! It is eternal life instead of eternal misery!

This, this is what those pardoned sinners knew and felt in their heart, who exclaimed, even in this world, and from amid their conflicts and trials, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!" "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity!" "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

"There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." "Who shall separate us from the love of God." But if sin still return to trouble this peace of forgiveness; if the view of your unfaithfulness and of your corruptions disquiet your soul; if, in your temptations and conflicts, you fall perhaps often; if, as you advance in the Christian life, you make, alas! painful discoveries in the depths of your heart; if your love to Him who hath forgiven you, languish in a heart still cleaving to the dust then, pardoned souls, return again and again to the fountain which God hath opened on Calvary for the cleansing away of sin and of uncleanness; return to repentance, and remember that Jesus Christ hath taught you as long as you live to pray. "Forgive us our trespasses!" Yes, as we must say every day for the support of our bodies, "Give us this day our daily bread," let this petition, "Forgive us our trespasses," also, be the nourishment of our souls. And remember that this prayer is likewise a promise, a promise of pardon, ever new, from Him who taught us to use it. Let us treasure it up in our hearts during the whole course of our pilgrimage on earth, that every morning and every evening it may renew and maintain peace in our hearts, that it may be our succor and our safeguard to the bed of death to soothe its anguish, to the agonies of dissolution to dispel their terrors, and even to the throne of our Judge, where it will open unto us a free entrance into the eternal kingdom.

Oh! I rejoice to repeat it, that to the sincere and penitent soul, the soul that sends up to God the prayer upon which we are meditating", the pardon which is here promised, is entire and complete; a pardon without reserve, and which embraces our whole life, our death, and our eternity. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool." "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins." In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found!"

We could have wished, my brethren, before concluding, to have pointed out to you some marks whereby you might be able to determine for yourselves, individually, whether you had obtained that inestimable pardon which, in accordance with our petition, we have been considering. This inquiry is, indeed, of the highest importance. Am I pardoned, or am I not? is the most solemn question that an immortal being can put to himself, a question which involves eternal condemnation or eternal salvation, curse or blessing, death or life. All the powers of the universe, all the sophistry of unbelief, all the delusions of the world cannot extricate us from this fearful

alternative. Well, then, if, to assist you in determining this question now, which, perhaps, with regard to many of us, shall soon be decided at the bar of our Judge, we were to choose the marks by which you might know how it stood with you in this respect, we would ask you, first. Are you acquainted with true repentance? Has the feeling of your sins, of your transgressions of God's law, made you feel something like what we have described in the first part of our discourse? For you must see yourselves, that to ask pardon of God for sins which you acknowledge not, which you feel not, which give you no uneasiness, and which you deplore not, is a mockery, an act of hypocrisy. If such were your case, we should conclude that you had never really used the petition which we are considering, and that you are not pardoned.

We would then demand, Do you believe in that Saviour who teaches you to ask the pardon of your sins, having first obtained it for you by his death? Do you believe in that pardon? For you perceive yourselves, that to ask of God a favor, in the existence of which you do not believe, would again be a mockery, an act of hypocrisy. And we should have reason to conclude, if such were your state, that you had never yet prayed, and that you are still unpardoned.

And, lastly, we would demand, Do you feel some gratitude, some love for that divine Saviour who hath pardoned you? Do you hate sin in every form? Do you tremble at the thought of offending, in any possible way, the God to whom you apply for pardon? Do you feel that every voluntary sin which you may commit, becomes a source of torment to your heart, which is bound to love God and to find its happiness in keeping his commandments? For you understand yourselves, that to say to God, "Forgive us our trespasses," and yet to take pleasure in sin, would be an act of hypocrisy, the most infallible mark to the man who is guilty of it, that he is still without pardon. Ah! woe to the man who, when he asks of God the pardon of his sins, thinks that he also asks the privilege of continuing in sin! Woe to the man who says, "Let us continue in sin that grace may abound!" Oh! the first thing that is required here is sincerity and uprightness, without which there can be neither prayer nor pardon!

But, my brethren, however suited these marks of pardon may be to enlighten, us as to the great question at issue, we will not stop at the consideration of them, because our Lord himself has selected and pointed out another, in reference to which we entreat you to examine yourselves. This mark is contained in the last words of our petition, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," that is those that have offended us. To forgive those that have offended us; "to love our enemies; to bless them that curse us; to pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us," is, you know, a point of Christian morality directly opposed to the disposition of the unconverted man; this is, I would say, a duty purely impossible to any sinner who has not received the pardon of his God. But it is also a necessary fruit of pardon, a fruit which always grows on the tree of the grace of God. It must be found in the hearts of those who are the recipients of that grace. Ah! I would ask, is it possible for a man who is oppressed with the burden of his offences against God, a man who has "a broken and contrite heart." a man from whom the acute feeling of his iniquities has wrung this cry of humiliation and anguish, "Forgive us our trespasses!" is it possible for such a man to cherish in his heart resentment, hatred, animosity for those miserable offences which he may have experienced from his fellow-sinners? Can the soul that knows the immense price at which -it has been redeemed; that knows a Saviour's love and the example which he has given us for our imitation: that sees him leaving the abodes of blessedness, that he might come to "seek" it and to "save" it from its misery, taking upon him its sins and its infirmities, submitting to be "led as

a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep is dumb before her shearers, opening not his mouth;" even him, who "when he was reviled, reviled not again" who prayed upon the cross, "Father, forgive them:" can the soul that places its hope in such a Saviour, and receives from him a pardon purchased at such a price, refuse to pardon others with cheerfulness and with love? The pardon of God produces love, and love always pardons, not "seven times, but seventy times seven!" To love, to love is a primary object with the pardoned soul. Hatred would hence be its punishment; love is its happiness, and forgiveness, long-suffering, and charity become necessary to its repose, and its peace.

Thus that which is "impossible with men is possible with God;" thus the "Saviour's yoke is easy, and his burden light." If we love not 3 if we forgive not, it is because we know not the Saviour, we feel not our misery, we enjoy not the pardon of God, we have never prayed, "Forgive us our trespasses!" For the disciple of Jesus these motives are sufficient, we shall add nothing to them. But if there be any one in this assembly who does not feel in his heart the necessity of exercising this Christian duty, who can cherish in his bosom in any degree, or against, any person, a feeling of resentment, of ill-will, or of hatred, or a desire of revenge, and who, notwithstanding this, imagines that he can approach God and say to him, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," to such a man I would say, "Every time you repeat this petition in public or in private, you call down from God a curse upon your head!"

Let not this judgment surprise you. You have received an injury; some one has spoken evil of you; has blackened your character; has maligned you, or wronged you in some way or other. Yielding to the inclination of your own heart, you repel this injurious language by injurious language, this evil speaking by evil speaking. Then you go and say to God, "Forgive as I forgive!" Is not this to say, Crush me with the weight of thine indignation and of thy wrath which my sins have provoked. Withhold from me thy mercy and thy love! Or; perhaps, you render not evil for evil, injury for injury, but you keep in the bottom of your heart a feeling of resentment for an injury received; or, perhaps, you say, This person has offended me, but I seek no revenge, I will do him no harm, I will have nothing to do with him, I will never see him more. And you go to God and say, "Forgive me as I forgive!" Is not this to say, "Never pardon me! Leave me to my misery; and to all the frightful consequences of my transgressions! Let not heaven open to receive me! Deprive me forever of the joys of communion with thee and of thy presence!" Is not this to demand of God the most frightful condemnation!

Alas! I dare not follow this awful contrast into the depths of the heart; I fear we should all be condemned by it; I fear it too often happens that we use this prayer, when our hearts are not enlarged to love all men as God loves them. I fear that we have all reason to ask pardon of God for the manner in which we have asked his forgiveness.

Yes, Lord, pardon even our prayers, even our acts of devotion! Forgive us more fully than we forgive others! Communicate to our hearts something of that infinite love wherewith thou hast loved us. Teach us to love and to forgive.

Oh! once more we ask thee forgive forgive!

Amen.

07 - Meditation 7

MEDITATION VII.

“LEAD us NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL.”

Matthew 6:13.

“BEHOLD, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.” It was with these words that our Lord exhorted a man whose body he had cured of the palsy, and whose soul he had healed of the more deadly malady of sin, when afterwards he met him in the temple at Jerusalem. And on another occasion, when the Jews brought to him a woman taken in adultery, and he had compelled those designing hypocrites to go away, being convicted in their own consciences, he addressed the unhappy criminal, saying unto her, “Where are these thine accusers 1 hath no man condemned thee?” “ No man, Lord!” answered the woman, ashamed and confounded. And Jesus, who came “ not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved,” then said, “ Neither do I condemn thee;” but immediately he added, “Go, and sin no more.” Now as the Word of God is always perfectly consistent, and never contradicts itself, we here find the Saviour, after permitting us to say in our prayers, “ Forgive us our debts,” directing us immediately to add, ‘-Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’ The reason is, as we have already said in our preceding meditation, that the pardon which God bestows, must necessarily be a sanctifying pardon. He who asks for and obtains the pardon of his sins, desires also to obtain deliverance from his sins; he demands of God the strength to renounce them for ever, and to live to the glory of him who redeemed him at so great a price.

Bat how many obstacles be has to surmount! how many difficulties to overcome! how many enemies to combat! how many sacrifices and sufferings to submit to! how many crosses to bear with patience before he reaches the destination towards which his heavenly calling in Christ Jesus has directed his footsteps! Placed in a world which sin has overrun on every side; exposed to the corrupting influence of the spirit of darkness; carrying about in himself a heart prone to sin; finding “ a law in his members which wars against the law of his mind;” sinful man, even after he has asked for and obtained pardon, walks continually upon the edge of a precipice Who will uphold him there in security? God, my brethren, God alone who has saved him from ruin can still protect him; God alone can finally secure to him a complete and everlasting 1 triumph over the enemies of his eternal repose! This Divine protection, the work of grace, and this delightful prospect, are just the object of the petition which we have to meditate upon this day, “ Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

Temptation, the means of escaping it, the deliverance promised to us, in other words, the enemy, the conflict, the victory, are the subjects which shall successively claim our attention.

Lord! one of the most dangerous temptations to which we can be exposed, is that of hearing thy word with lightness and indifference. Oh! expose us not to this temptation; for then, we feel, we should have no strength to fight against the rest, and we should inevitably fall before them. Lord!

be our strength! be our deliverance! Amen.

Some persons have found a difficulty in the words of our text, "Lead us not into temptation." Has not God, it has been asked, declared in his word, that he "tempteth not any man; that no man when he is tempted should say, I am tempted of God." This expression, then, it has been added, must have a meaning different from its ordinary signification; and hence some translators, or rather commentators, have rendered it, Let us not fall into, abandon us not to, temptation. My brethren, it is always an evil method of explaining the Bible not to allow it to speak for itself, but to make it say something different from what -its language naturally expresses. This method, to which, unhappily, men too often have had recourse, has only multiplied difficulties, and engendered dangerous abuses and pernicious errors.

Thus, as we find it here literally in the original, expose us not to temptation, lead us not into temptation, why should we weaken or change the sense of this word by an unfaithful paraphrase? Is it to avoid the objection which I have noticed? But since it is true that not a hair of our head can fall to the ground without the permission of the sovereign authority of God; since the most insignificant event of our life is foreseen by his divine prescience, and directed by his good pleasure, why should we not ask God to put away from us occasions of falling, and not to place us in circumstances which would infallibly expose us, whether internally or externally, to powerful and dangerous temptations? Why should we not ask God to turn away our footsteps from paths where there lie perilous precipices? In a word, why should we not say to him in our prayers, as Jesus Christ directs us, "Lead us not into temptation?" It is an inestimable favor which he permits us to ask our heavenly Father; it is the object of the supplication of the Psalmist, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity." In the other sense, on the contrary, we voluntarily deprive ourselves of the privilege of asking this grace of God; we intreat him not to remove from us the temptation, the danger, but to save us when the temptation has already assailed us, and the danger is imminent; not to preserve us in time from falling into the snares of sin which so easily envelop us, but to draw us out of them when we are already entangled in them on all sides. Ah! which of us can so far count upon his own strength, or rather is so far insensible of his danger, that he has not reason earnestly to desire to be spared this terrible trial? Or which of us can count, with sufficient certainty, upon a continual miracle of grace ever interposing, just at the critical moment, to save him from a fall, when he is already tottering on the verge of the precipice? We do not mean that in such a case the believer has no longer any resource, and that the petition in our text no longer affords him either strength or hope; God forbid! Nothing is further from our thoughts. This petition may and ought then to be the cry of his soul, and it shall not ascend in vain to that God who saves and delivers. Hence we do not exclude from this petition the restricted sense upon which we have offered these remarks; all that we wished to establish, was, that it expresses but a part of the assistance which we are authorized to demand of God with reference to temptations; and that in this place, as in every other, we ought to receive the terms of Scripture as they have been given us by the Spirit of truth. In order to enter with some precision into our subject, it will be necessary to determine the limits of it by a second observation. There are men who, properly speaking, are strangers to temptation, and who, consequently, never feel the need of offering up the prayer which we are considering. Think not, however, that I have here in view persons who are so far emancipated from sin, so far raised above its assaults, so righteous and holy, that they have no longer any thing to fear, or any reason to cry unto God from the midst of danger, "Lead us not into

temptation.” No, we believe not in the existence of such men upon this earth. Those whom we have in view stand just on the opposite confines of the moral world at the other extremity of the scale of accountable beings.

They are men who are so unhappy as not yet to know the criminality of sin in the eyes of God, and the terrible nature of its consequences.

These persons, I repeat, are strangers to temptation. Temptation, in fact, supposes the existence of two forces opposed to one another; the one drawing us towards an object, because it is pleasing to some inclination of our nature; the other drawing us away from that object, because it is marked with the Divine reprobation, and as such we fear it. There is, therefore, attraction on the one side, and resistance on the other. Now, in the persons whom we have pointed out, the first of these forces alone is found; the second has no existence; for, far from fearing sin, as provoking the wrath of God, and bringing in its train the most terrible evils, they, on the contrary, love it and take pleasure in it, because it is agreeable to their corrupt and imregenerate nature; they seek in it an element which they imagine will appease their burning thirst; instead of drawing from the fountain of living Avaters, “ they drink in iniquity like water,” according to the forcible expression of Holy Writ.

What temptation can there be to a man of such a character? Does it require perseverance on the part of Satan, the tempter, to induce him to separate himself from God? He already lives at an immeasurable distance from, and in habitual forgetfulness of his Creator. Does he need to aim at persuading him to cast off his allegiance to God, as he did our first parents in Eden? The man has never bowed his heart nor his will to that allegiance; he obeys only his own passions or the prince of darkness.

Satan finds his work already done; why should he seek to bring under his bondage a being that already serves him. or to bind and reduce a victim which already belongs to him? What temptations can such a man feel from the world?

He is “ of the world,” as St. John says; he has the spirit of the world, the principles of the world, the conduct of the world; he does with pleasure the evil which the world has invented and propagated; the world is satisfied with him; it has nothing to reproach him with or io offer him.

What temptations can such a man find in his own heart? He lives, and wishes to live, after the flesh and its desires. To satisfy his passions, his lusts, his ambition, his avarice, his pride, and his vanity; to “ walk after the imagination of his own heart and the desire of his eyes,” is that which he seeks, his good pleasure. But if you say that the career of sin is very long from the man that is honored and respected by polite society, down to one who is notoriously unjust, impure, or profligate, or to the criminal against whom the strong arm of human justice is lifted up; and that, consequently, there may always be temptation for a sinner to descend from one degree to another: I admit it; but if he gives some resistance, and even a vigorous resistance, which enables him to carry off the victory, it is because, at a certain point, sin brings immediately with it its own punishment; it wounds him in his enjoyments, his honor, his property, and his liberty, or even in his life. Now the most thorough egotist, the most devoted disciple of the utilitarian school, will stop at the moment when sin, even upon earth, immediately brings evil along with it. But have God and his sovereign will any part in this calculation? Think you that the man who habitually lives in sin, so

Jong as he finds a carnal profit in it, will stop at any point whatsoever, from a regard to God?

And, then, is it to God that such a man will say, "Lead me not into temptation?" If he said it to any one, it ought to be to his own egotism, which is in danger of suffering, or to human justice, which threatens to punish him! But who are they for whom there exists temptation? And whence does it come that they are exposed to it? The order in which the petition under our consideration stands, with reference to the preceding, might, if necessary, afford us some assistance in answering this question. He alone, who with an awakened and sensible conscience, and by the light of God's holy law, has learned to know sin; he alone to whom sin has become an intolerable burden, and who, humbled and broken-hearted, has cried at the foot of the Saviour's cross, "Forgive us our debts!" knows, or can know, what is temptation. And if that prayer has been heard on his behalf, if hope has risen upon his soul, like a soft light dissipating his darkness, if he has heard those life-giving words of the Saviour, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee!" if he has felt the peace of God, now reconciled to him, taking possession of his heart, O then, be assured, that at the very thought of encountering sin again in his path, he will cry, with the terror of the helpless infant, that casts itself into its father's arms at the approach of danger, "Lead me not into temptation!" Ah! the reason is, that now he knows that the peace which he enjoys, and which is better than life, would be taken away from him by sin: that now he fears above all things to offend that God who so loved him, and to grieve the Spirit of grace which hath sanctified him; in a word, to escape from sin, which for so long a time kept him in a state of bondage, is to him, as a Christian, "to be. or not to be." And henceforth, what a warfare, to use the language of the Bible, what, continual assaults of temptations the most diversified, powerful, and subtle, has the redeemed of Christ to undergo, before he reaches the end of his career! The prince of darkness, pursuing the work which he began in Eden, ambitious to recover a victim rescued from his grasp by the grace of God, will contrive to bring to the conflict temptation and sin in every form, and in every way. I am aware that in our day it is scarcely fashionable to speak of the devil, and of the temptations with which, he assaults us; unbelief calling his very existence in question, sees in the idea of the devil nothing more than a bugbear to frighten weak-minded persons; a pious fraud, invented in by-gone days, to make an impression upon the ignorant multitude. On the other hand the artistic religion of our day represents Satan as a poetic figure, a literary personage whom imagination makes use of for its own purposes, but who has no real connexion with sin, or with the ruin of immortal souls, who commit it. The Word of God, which we are much more disposed to hear and to believe on such a subject, holds a far different language: "Be sober, be vigilant, for your enemy the devil as a roaring lion goeth about, seeking whom he may devour." Here is the secret of those hours of doubt which torment even the converted soul, of those periods of unbelief which dry up the sources of life, which take away from the Word of God its efficacious power, render barren the fruitful truths of the Gospel, like a tree whose roots an enemy has cut. Hence, also, that distrust which keeps us from prayer; that cleaving of our hearts and affections to the things of earth, as if heaven were no more our country, as if it no longer contained anything worthy of our love, as if we had for our portion only earth and corruption, "Hath God said?" demands Satan in our heart, in order to undermine faith, which is our life, and to insinuate doubt, which is death; then, when the soul is disarmed, and the heart weakened, a temptation presents itself, the allurements of sin solicits the passion, conscience awakens, admonishes, and with stern eye points to the law, to duty; but the seducer hastens; "It is a thing" of no consequence, says he; no one will know of it. God will not regard it: "ye shall not surely die!" Then woe to him who has not cried to his God, "Lead us not into

temptation!"

Temptation! the world presents it to you under every form, at every step, and every moment.

You breathe it in the atmosphere, which sin has impregnated with its poison. It was called false shame when you saw the smile of derision curl the lip, or heard ironical remarks made upon your religious principles; it is called vanity when these same men, from amongst whom you were banished, wanting to draw you again in their society, and into their evil courses, flatter, praise, and solicit you. It imperceptibly insinuates itself into your heart, and into your very principles, when, after having manifested indignation against certain actions, or a certain manner of living, you by degrees become habituated to them, so as to be indifferent to them, and perhaps even to conform to them. It follows you to the very threshold of your door; it enters with you into the intimacy of your family and of your friends, where, less watchful, because you think you are in less danger there, you pronounce, in the effusions of confidence, words which, weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, would be called slander, flattery, imprudent levity, or the betrayal of a secret confided to your heart. Temptation accompanies you in all the details of your calling; if you meet with difficulties or disappointments in it, it inspires you with distrust, discouragement, and murmurs against those to whom you attribute the blame of it; if you meet with success, your heart may be puffed up with vanity. and may give you a self-satisfaction and a security which pave the way for the most disastrous falls. Are you in prosperity? temptation is found in those carnal enjoyments which you know not how to give up, that you may be able to do more good. Are you exposed to privations or to sufferings? there is temptation in that look of secret covetousness which you cast upon those in happier and more elevated situations, or in those earthly cares which hinder you from waiting upon the Lord with faith, confidence, and submission.

Temptation! look not even so far to be on your guard against it. You carry it in your heart, which, corrupt by nature, produces it under a thousand forms, and "deceitful above all things," hides it from you under a thousand veils, and a thousand illusions. Observe that impure thought which the flesh brings forth, and the imagination cherishes; it rises unperceived, like a cloud in the horizon; call the breath of God's Spirit to dispel it immediately, it is temptation! Search into the bottom of that thought which troubles your heart, in thinking of some brother who has showed a want of respect towards you, despised, or wrongly judged you; throw over it the mantle of Christ's charity. it is temptation! There was formerly some defect in your character which made you suffer much; with the assistance of God's grace, you have vigorously!" and victoriously combated it; you imagine you are free from it; but an occasion, calculated to bring it into action, again suddenly presents itself; watch, pray it is a temptation!

You love, with a noble, pure, and legitimate affection, some being, in intercourse with whom you find happiness; this affection by degrees becomes exclusive; it occupies too large a place in your heart, your thoughts, and your time, to allow you to give to others what you owe them; God, and the hallowing thought of him, no longer stand in the first rank; your affection having become selfish, can no longer be satisfied, O you should long ago have seen that this was temptation!

O how grave and serious is this subject! What will be the consequence if a remedy be not applied immediately, and in an efficacious manner? The consequence? Let the Bible answer: "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth... sin! and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth DEATH."

Death! eternal death! the ruin of the soul!

O, my beloved brethren, when we hear this sanction of the holy law, when we see the dangers which on every side surround us, the temptations which present themselves to us under every form, the devil, the world, and our own heart; when we see the occasions of falling which meet us every day, in society, in our families, in our calling, in our station, in our interior and exterior life, which of us will be so careless, carnal, or impious, as not to receive with eager attention, with fear and trembling”, that admonition of the Saviour, addressed to us by the mouth of one of his servants, “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day. and having clone all, to stand.” The armour of Gfod” the apostle tells us. and not of man. After having showed you the danger, it would be bat a poor resource, my brethren, if we were to direct you to your own means, and tovour own strength, to overcome our spiritual enemies, and to “ withstand in the evil day/’ It would be to lead you into error, to deceive you, and to prepare you for an inevitable defeat. Where is the Christian that has not oftentimes acquired, by a dear-bought experience, the knowledge of his own weakness? Where is the Christian that, left to himself, will presume to say, in presence of the least of the temptations which we have enumerated, I will resist it, and remain firm. It was thus Peter spake, promising to die rather than be unfaithful, and an hour after... he denied his Master! Ah! let us remember, that the most formidable powers of our nature, our passions, our evil heart, are most frequently leagued with temptation, instead of resisting it, and leave the fortress without defence at the mercy of the enemy! It is, then, on the Almighty and merciful God that we must depend; his faithfulness must be our buckler; to him we must lift up our eyes at the approach of danger, to him we must cry in the hour of distress. Sometimes the thought of God’s presence alone, his name passing upon our lips, will be sufficient to show us sin in all its deformity, and to destroy its attraction. And has not the Lord, in a thousand passages of his Word, promised succor and deliverance to every one that calls upon him in the time of trouble 1 And have not his children, at all times, and in all places, experienced the faithfulness of his promises? “Our fathers trusted in thee; they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered.” “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” And, finally, what are the words upon which we are meditating but a cry of the soul in danger? Ah! how well did he know our wants and our weaknesses, who taught us to call God to our assistance in our temptations, and who thereby opened unto us an inexhaustible source of omnipotent succor and excellent virtues! With what full assurance may we send up to the throne of grace a prayer which Jesus Christ himself has dictated to us! Is he not thus pledged, in the most solemn manner, not to “ lead us into temptation, but to deliver us from evil?

“Watch and pray.” said the Saviour to his beloved disciples, when he sought to guard them against a dangerous fall; “ watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.” Thus, my brethren, to prayer we must add watchfulness. And let us not deceive ourselves as to the nature of this Christian virtue, as a preservative against temptation. It does not consist in a pusillanimous anxiety, which, in a world like that in which we live, would deprive us of all liberty of action, all courage, and all joy. To be watchful, we must first of all know ourselves, study with a scrupulous exactness the weak sides of our character, the sins to which we are the most prone, in order to apply a remedy to them with all the promptitude and all the powerful efficacy of the means with which the Gospel supplies us. Without this knowledge of our own heart, there can be no spiritual development, and temptation

will always find a wide door by which it may enter. disarm, and overcome us. Next, to be watchful, we must; by means of the Word of God, which “discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart,” make continual progress in the discernment of spirits. To distinguish error from truth, and evil from good, whether in doctrine or in practice, is half the victory over temptation. For observe, that sin never presents itself to us under its real name or its real form; it is always disguised, it always wears a mask which sets it off. and a beautiful name with which the world is skilful in clothing it.

He therefore, who, to use the remarkable expression of an apostle, “seeth not afar off,” he whose eye is not penetrating, and his discernment exercised by the Word of God, that man will infallibly be deceived. In the last place, to be watchful, we must shun temptation as far as possible. O, let us not trifle with sin! Let us not hold parley with the enemy, relying on our own strength or skillfulness. The angel that watched over Eve in Eden, might have wept over her fall, the moment she inclined an ear to the insinuations of the devil and stopped to answer him. How many sins does hell exult in, how many souls are ruined, because they have wished to calculate with God, to speculate on the line which they ought to trace, and on the distance which they ought to put between His will and sin! To look at the imprudent curiosity of young Christians, or the systematic temerity of ill-advised Christians, who seek at the same time to keep fair with the world and their principles, and to reconcile, if it were possible, Christ and Belial; to look, I say, at such persons, one would say that they took a secret pleasure in treading upon the very limits of the ground on which God had set his curse.

Let us beware of such dangerous folly. Let us enter into an entire and unrestricted communion with our God. He alone is our fortress and our strong tower; if His Spirit dwell in us, it will always warn us of the approach of evil by its natural and striking contrast with every species of defilement. This is the only real watchfulness. The Word of God will not only enable us to detect evil, by giving more acuteness and depth to our discernment, and to our whole Christianity the firmness of an edifice, built not upon the shifting sand of human opinions, but upon the Rock of Ages; but it will be to us, in the presence of temptation, our most potent weapon to combat with and overcome it. This is what St. Paul calls the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Our divine Master, who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin, has given us an example of the manner in which we ought to use this weapon: IT IS WRITTEN! Such was the barrier which he opposed to the assaults of the enemy, the buckler from which the fiery darts of the enemy fell powerless. It is written! and that which is written is the expression of the sovereign will of God, which no man can violate with impunity, and which we ought to love above everything in this world. What can the insinuations of the devil, or the most attractive allurments of sin, do in the presence of this great thought?

See that child of God thus armed, watchful, ready to cry unto his God! Some action which he sees committed, or some line of conduct which he sees followed, not merely by the multitude, but by persons otherwise respectable, makes him doubt for a moment the principles which he has drawn from the Bible, sets off to his eye that which the Word of God disapproves of, and shows in an unfavorable light that which it commands. Am I right? he asks with some inward anxiety. How shall I combat this temptation? The sword of the Spirit is in his hand; it is written,;! Wo unto him that calleth evil good and good evil, that putteth darkness for light and light for darkness!” and though the whole universe were to judge differently, he is re-assured, he has overcome! In a happy moment of success, of prosperity, or of signal mercy, some indiscreet praises meet his ear; he

feels his heart lifted up, while he ascribes the glory to himself and forgets his natural misery... The temptation is dangerous; he feels it; he seizes the sword of the Word; it is written^ “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall,” and he fears, he is humbled, he has overcome! Is he, on the contrary, in an hour of discouragement and at the view of his sins, tempted by a painful doubt of his salvation, of the efficacy of his Saviour's work, his adoption, or the faithfulness of God towards his children; he examines his faith anew, assures himself that he is trusting only in the cross of Christ, and in the free grace and mercy of God, and seizes his weapon, It is written: “There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” It is written^ “My sheep shall never perish;” and he rises by faith and is comforted! Do we mean that all temptations are thus easily overcome? O no! the conflict is sometimes long, obstinate, and terrible. The combatant is sometimes out of breath, almost sinking beneath the blows of the enemy, “his soul melteth for very heaviness;” if he comes off victorious, he may bring with him painful wounds; if he is overcome, if he succumbs, if he sins,... oh what agonizing remorse! what bitter regret! what profound and ignominious humiliation! how the offender hates himself! how he deplores his corruption! his weakness, his unfaithfulness! how ardently he longs for holiness! O the infinite mercy, and tender compassion of the Saviour of sinners! Here, again, in the prayer which he permits us to address to God, we find a remedy for this great evil, a balm for the bleeding heart, a proof that the Redeemer has not abandoned it; out of the depths shall ascend unto the throne of grace this last and fervent supplication, “Deliver us from evil!”

Until this prayer be answered for us, temptation will return incessantly and with all its force; so long as sin dwells in us, so long as it exists in our heart as the echo which answers to evil without, as the electric spark which may, at any moment, produce a conflagration, our life will be but travail, our peace will be constantly troubled, our joy often changed into tears. Disciples of Jesus, you whom God, in his faithfulness has often delivered from temptation, you whom he has so often made victorious by the power of his grace, stop not at this stage of your spiritual development, abuse not the goodness of God!

Rather descend into the bottom of your hearts with the torch of his Word, measuring yourselves “according to the stature of Christ;” and if you still discover some defilement there, some pride, some vanity, some seeking of self, of your own interests, your own reputation, your own glory, which waits but for a favorable opportunity to issue forth like troubled and polluted waters, cry to your God, “Deliver us from evil!” If, comparing your present state with what you were after you first believed the Gospel, you find that you have made little progress “in righteousness and true holiness.” if you still discover in yourselves much lukewarmness, many earthly and carnal dispositions, little real spirituality, little love to Him who first loved you, little real, active, devoted charity towards your brethren in the faith, and towards all men, cry, cry to your God, “Deliver us from evil.” And if you are sincere in this prayer (for here delusion is easy, thousands have offered this prayer to God a thousand times, who yet would have been very sorry to have been taken at their word), if you thus pray because you are burdened by the temptations which arise from your indwelling sin, because you groan to see that, notwithstanding your firmest resolutions, you still offend against your heavenly Father, because you deeply feel that to you deliverance from evil would be a real happiness, ah! be assured your request shall be heard. It shall be heard, because your deliverance from all evil, my beloved brother, is a part of the great deliverance wrought out by the Redeemer; his work is the guarantee of your salvation; you are, for your part, the price of his

sufferings and of “ the travail of his soul.” “ He who hath begun a good work in you will carry it on until the day of Jesus Christ.” Your request shall be heard, for your life until this hour has been but one uninterrupted succession of deliverances, without which you would long since have perished; God hath thus confirmed the faithfulness of his promises, which are henceforth to you the Rock of Ages; the past answers for the future. “If we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.’ Your request shall be heard, for it is its own voucher. It is the Saviour that put it into your anguished heart and upon your trembling lips, that you might send it up to God, to whom he himself presents it; he cannot deny himself, he cannot lie, he cannot deceive us. You do not, then, pray alone, my brethren! Has not our gracious Saviour himself addressed this prayer to God his Father on behalf of his beloved disciples, and “of all those who shall believe through their word?” Like you they were in a world where sin dwells; but hear the accents of the Saviour, which have traversed ages and still ascend up for you before the throne of God. “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.” Your request shall be heard, heard even to the utmost limits of your career, whatever you may still have to encounter in it. Be of good courage! A few days more of temptation, conflicts, and tears, and “you shall see the salvation of God!” To be delivered from evil! Does not this thought animate your faith? does it not verify your eternal hopes? does it not give you new strength for the struggle? does it not renew your strength like the eagle’s? is it not heaven itself to you? And yet raise your eyes still higher, stretch your hopes still farther! Evil! ah! it is not only from that which we carry about in ourselves that we have to suffer, from which we ask to be delivered, and from which we shall eventually be delivered. Members of suffering humanity, whose hearts have been taught by the Gospel to feel, and who can never remain selfishly strangers to any of the ills that pray upon your fallen race, you have seen, and you have seen it with grief, that evil is spiritual darkness, ignorance of God and his Word, unbelief and idolatry, those errors and prejudices, those lying systems and that impiety which overspread so many parts of the earth with darkness, though the bright Sun of righteousness has risen upon them; that evil, is that infernal art with which men who ought to love one another, so often put forth their natural corruption to make one another suffer; that evil, is that mass of injustice, fraud, violence, hatred, vengeance, wars, oppression, and ingratitude which fill the pages of man’s history and the days of human life: that evil, is those impure passions, that avarice, that discord, those bitter reproaches, those grievous disputes which rankle in the bosom of families; that evil, is the bitter fruit of sin, physical and moral sufferings, remorse, anguish, privation, poverty, sickness, and death; in a word, that evil, according to the touching language of an Apostle, is, “ the whole creation groaning and travailling together in pain until now.” Oh! Christians, who know the only but infallible remedy for all these evils, which of you has not cried a thousand times in his life of anguish, embracing in that aspiration of comprehensive charity the whole world, “Deliver us from evil!” But in this respect also, my beloved brethren, your request shall be heard! The work of eternal redemption shall not remain imperfect. Do we not see it going forth conquering and to conquer until it shall reach its last triumph over evil? God himself has marked out the hour of that triumph: who shall delay it. 1 He wills it; he has promised it; who shall hinder it? “If he tarry, wait for him!” It would ill become us to say with the mockers of the last times, “Where is the promise of his coming?” we who know that “ with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day,” and who already see in the horizon the glimmerings of morning, which announce the coming of that day when Zion shall rejoice in the God of her salvation. Christ has overcome the world, sin, and hell; he must

reign “ till he hath put all enemies under his feet.” We shall see with our eyes the day when, either through love or through fear, “Every knee shall bow to Jesus, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Oh! how those holy men of God who have given us these promises on the part of the great Redeemer, in the prospect of that deliverance which they hailed afar off, lift up their voices with joy! how their hymns of rejoicing ascend up on high! how their accents penetrate the hearts of those who still groan under the weight of evil, but yet believe in deliverance! “ We, according to his promise, look for new heavens, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” “ And I saw a new heaven and a new earth. And I John saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

These promises of God who cannot lie; this glory, this felicity in the presence of him who hath so loved us, are, to thousands of the redeemed of Christ, no longer a matter of hope, but a reality. Strangers and foreigners, like us, sinners and sufferers, like us, they but a short time ago breathed forth this aspiration from the midst of these corruptions and miseries, “Deliver us from evil!” and they have been “ delivered from evil!” They now no longer send up to God the prayer which we are considering; they have no more need of it! To us they are a cloud of witnesses; we have the same God, the same Saviour, the same hopes. Are we ready to join them; to mingle our voices in their songs of triumph and thanksgiving? I ask again, are we ready? for “He that shall come, will come and will not be late.”

08 - Meditation 8

MEDITATION VIII.

JESUS BLESSING LITTLE CHILDREN.

“ And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he has much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.”

Mark 10:13-16.

THERE is 'not in the sacred writings a passage at once more affecting and more instructive than that with which the book of Samuel opens. A pious woman, the wife of Elkanah, is plunged in the deepest affliction, because God has withholden from her the privilege of having children to consecrate to his service, which among the Hebrews was regarded as a grievous reproach as well as a painful privation. The tender cares of an affectionate husband suffice not to mitigate her trial; we share her grief when she pours out her suffering soul before the Lord, notwithstanding the reprimand of a priest who is unable to understand her; we hear her earnest prayer, her vow to consecrate to the Lord the first-fruit of her womb; we see her answered by him who hears the prayers of his children; we sympathize in her joy as we had shared in her grief; and soon we see her, faithful to her vow, consecrating her first-born son to the Lord. Does God condescend to accept the sacrifice after having heard the prayer? Yes, my brethren, and far beyond the pikers and the thoughts of the pious mother. The young Samuel grows up under the shadow of the altar at Shiloh, and under the care of the same priest who had censured the silent request of the mother. The Lord has his eye upon the child of prayer; he reveals himself to him, confides to him his designs of mercy towards his people; and soon we see him placing the crown upon the head of the kings of his nation, effecting a glorious reformation among the people of Israel, who had forgotten and outraged the God of their fathers; bringing back Jacob unto the Lord, and reviving in the nation the fear and love of God, after having destroyed, by the power of the Most High, the minister of idolatry. I

And, my brethren, when we see in the historical narration which our text presents, pious- j mothers, new Hannahs, bringing their children again to the Saviour, that he may put his blessing upon their heads, think ye not, that like the mother of Samuel, they also shall be heard?

Yes, my brethren, times and circumstances, names and persons may change, but God is always the same to bless; and had the Gospel not told us how Jesus received these young children which their parents placed in his arms, we might have inferred it from the example of the young Samuel; we might have said that the blessing which rested upon his whole earthly career would be conferred by the merciful hand of the Saviour upon the head of these little children.

Come, then, my Brethren, come with holy attention, and laying aside earthly thoughts and inoccupations, come and contemplate with us for a moment the most affecting scene that this earth ever witnessed, Jesus blessing children.

Let us first cast a glance at the touching scene which our text places before our eyes; then let us endeavor to impress our hearts with the sacred and delightful duties which it brings home to all parents. The first thing which strikes us in these parents thus bringing their children to the Saviour, I is their faith, that is, their confidence in him. They recognised in Jesus, the Messiah, the mighty Saviour promised to Israel, Him who consoles and saves. Doubtless they had seen him perform some of those works of charity and tender condescension of which his whole life was full; perhaps even they had felt in their souls all the love which he displayed towards poor sinners whom he came to save. Perhaps some of these mothers had wept at his feet like Mary; like Mary she had felt her heart eased of the overwhelming burden of her misery, while she heard the word of Him who came to seek and to save that which was lost: " Daughter, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace!" Perhaps another of these women had come to Jesus, like the wife of Elkanah, with a heart oppressed with some secret grief, which none of her fellow-creatures could comprehend; she had opened to him her sorrowing heart; she had received from him the balm of those ineffable consolations which are not of this earth, for Jesus has brought them from heaven. In a word, these parents know the Saviour, and the power of his grace, and they think that perhaps He who received them as sinners, and made them partakers of his grace, will be pleased to receive their children also, and to insure to them the same blessings. This pious mother cannot separate the happiness of her child from her own happiness; the life of her child is her life, and she believes that the condescension of her Saviour is so immense, that it can stoop even to the feeble creature that is confided to her, and for whom she feels so lively a solicitude. Why, thinks she, why should he refuse to my child the blessing which he has granted to myself? Why should I put bounds to his love? Has not Moses included our children in the blessings of the promise? Has not the Psalmist, in celebrating the works of the Lord, sung, "He will not hide them from our children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done!" Yes, let us go and place in the bosom of the Saviour those beings who are so dear to us!

Thus she speaks, and thus she acts. And that which proves that such are indeed the feelings of these parents, is, that when they present their children to the Saviour, they ask of him neither temporal advantage, nor earthly goods, nor a career marked by honor, or glory, or influence, or grandeur, or any of the things which this world desires. They do not even ask of Jesus to instruct them, for according to St. Luke, they were " infants." What, then, do they want? Their whole desire is expressed in these words of the text: " They brought young children unto him, that he should touch them," that is, that he might lay on them his mighty and protecting hands, which never open but to pour down blessings, and according to Matthew, that he might "pray for them."

How noble, how commendable, how sacred is this desire of Christian parents for their children! Ah! it is in this we like to see the love of a mother, the affection of a father: not when they lavish on their children a blind and idolatrous tenderness, which is fatal to themselves, and which produces the bitterest fruits; not even when they impose upon themselves the most costly sacrifices, and submit to the severest trials, solely with a view to secure for them upon earth a brilliant future; not when they make their children serve to feed their own vanity or pride; but when they consecrate to

Jesus, from the first days of their life, those children which God has given them, when they bring them to him in their prayers, when their first desire, their dearest wish, is to place them for ever in the secure sanctuary of his grace and love, and thus, in time, to withdraw them from the corrupting influence of a world which lieth in wickedness.

Yes, this is paternal love, according to God; this is natural love sanctified!

Such were the dispositions of these pious parents, such were their wishes for their children.

Let us see how the Saviour answered them. But what do I hear? A voice is lifted up; it blames the conduct of these mothers; it condemns their holy desire! a rash hand interposes between it and the Saviour! It is the disciples that have thus spoken and acted, "And they rebuked them."

Poor disciples! If we did not know for what end Jesus had chosen them, we might be led to suppose that they were at his side, merely to act as a foil to the luminous picture of his life.

Scarcely ever did they understand his meaning; almost always did they oppose his designs. Oh, let this sight prove to us, with a painful conviction, the blindness and weakness of the human heart! Alas! Jesus having come upon this sinful earth, wished to have around him, a few friends while he went about doing good; and instead of finding in the men of his choice, hearts to understand his heart, and minds in communion with which he might obtain something to sweeten the bitterness which a sinful world continually distilled into his cup; alas! he finds them, after such a course of long and patient instruction, only ignorant and earthly souls, without intelligence, without compassion, and without love! But, my brethren, let us be thankful to them for having thus described themselves in the New Testament, with an unexampled candor and sincerity; they show themselves to us as they were, with all their weaknesses, that we might know that it is not human nature, but the omnipotent grace of God that makes such men as St. John, St. Peter, or St. Paul.

"The disciples rebuked them; but when Jesus saw it he was much displeased" O, my beloved brethren, if this displeasure accuses the heart of man, and condemns the disciples, how does it proclaim to us the tender compassion of the Saviour! how consoling it is to us, miserable sinners! O, humble and fearful souls, "weary and heavy laden souls!" you who groan under the weight of your sins, and who scarcely dare to look to Jesus, and to embrace him as your Saviour, see him sore displeased because men would forbid to weak and helpless creatures, even to little children, access to his grace and to his love! Were you the feeblest of his creatures, the chief of sinners, he would still be displeased if you doubted his grace, he would be displeased if you supposed that he was no longer sufficiently powerful and merciful to save your souls, if the natural unbelief of your hearts, the feeling of your corruptions, hindered you from clinging to his cross, and, as little children, receiving his free salvation. O, give no cause for this displeasure; if you believe in your sins, believe also in his pardon; if you believe in your condemnation, believe also in his grace!

"He was displeased at it!" What, then, does he feel in heaven, where he reigns, whenever some worldling, some unbeliever, some despiser of the cross of Jesus, keeps back from him the weak and unstable soul, and draws away from the fountain of living waters the sincere and upright heart, that is thirsting after pardon and peace? O, if one of these little ones that desire to believe perish, that displeasure of the Saviour will burn in the day of judgment against every one that shall have contributed to his ruin. "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me," saith the Saviour, "it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he

were drowned in the depths of the sea.” Better for such a man that he had never been born!

“Suffer the little children to come unto me,” adds the Saviour, “and forbid them not.” How precious are these words, my brethren, and what consolation do they* contain for our hearts! Instead of seeking to draw out of them a dogmatic system, or a subject of speculation for our understanding, let us rather allow them to sink into the depths of our hearts, with all the delightful encouragement and consolation which they contain. Let us beware of pressing them into the lists of controversy on “the doctrine of baptism;” they do not belong to it: let us rather shut them up in our hearts, as a balm which will often heal its bleeding wounds. Let us simply draw from them this affecting truth, that Jesus wishes our children, even our little children, to come to him; far from rejecting them, he gives them a rich part in his blessing, in his grace, in his love, and, consequently, in his eternal inheritance. O, what a cheering light do these words throw into the mysterious darkness that would otherwise envelop the tomb and the eternal destiny of those little children whom Jesus calls to himself! Jesus receiving poor little children, displeased when his disciples would put them away, causing his eternal blessing to rest upon their tender heads, praying for them, does not this abundantly confirm the promise of eternal life which is made “unto us and to our children?” Yea, further, in taking 1 into his arms those children which were presented to him, in pressing them to his heart, thrilling with compassion, does he not also pledge himself, in like manner, to receive them into eternal mansions, when their mothers no longer, but death places them in his arms? To doubt it, would it not be again to provoke the displeasure of the Saviour, and to incur his reproach?

O, incarnate love! though thou art holy and just, thou offerest grace even to those sinners who have grown old in forgetfulness of God, in hardness of heart, and in crime; thou givest pardon even to those who have offended thee by a long life of sin; and, that we might know that there is no class of Adam’s fallen race that has not a part in thy love, thou callest little children to thee and pressest them to thy breast! Though thou art King of kings, and Lord of lords, who hast created all things, by whom and for whom all things subsist, yet thou humblest thyself to the meanest of thy creatures, thou condescendest to stoop down to the lowest degree of the infirmities and weakness of the human race, and from that depth thou criest, Here, even here, my love ends not! “Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not!”

How I love, my brethren, how I love to contemplate the picture which our text places before our eyes! How I love to see little children in the arms of the Saviour! I imagine I see here the accomplishment of that word of the prophet “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.” It seems as if he wished to ward off from those helpless creatures who are still ignorant of life, all the miseries and sufferings which await them in it; it seems as if he wished to make his protecting arms a refuge for them against the storms of which they have as yet no anticipation! And, indeed, what sanctuary more secure, what port more tranquil, can they have than the arms of Jesus 1 Ah! if he bless their entrance into life, will not everything in its progress be a blessing to them? If he permit them to repose in his bosom, who will deprive them of his peace and of his rest?

Tradition relates that the celebrated Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, who received, in so glorious a manner, the crown of martyrdom, was among the number of the children whom Jesus blessed.

I like this tradition. But what is better than a tradition, is the assurance, that the blessing of Jesus cannot have been ineffectual with regard to any of them, and that the prayers which he addressed on their behalf to God his Father (“ who heareth him always”), ascended not in vain to the throne of grace. My brethren, shall we confine ourselves to a mere barren admiration of the pious solicitude of these parents presenting- their children to Jesus, and of the charity with which he receives them? God forbid! The picture which we have just been contemplating must lay our souls under an immense responsibility, and call forth in our lives the most sacred duties. Fathers and mothers who hear me, and all you, whosoever ye be, who have it in your power to exercise any influence over others, think not that the conduct of Christian parents who love the Saviour has been thus described in the sacred pages with any other object than that we should imitate it.

Think not that this merciful goodness, which the Saviour of the world displays on this occasion, is recorded for us with any other view but to speak at once to our consciences and our hearts; to our consciences, by teaching us what talents are confided to us, through the knowledge of such a Saviour, and what a responsibility results to us there from; to our hearts, by showing us in so touching a fact, all that we may expect from the Lord, not only for ourselves, but for our children, and for those that are dear to us. Ah! woe to us, if this incident teach us nothing of our duties as fathers, mothers, and Christian relatives!

Alas! is there not reason to fear that the most faithful among us have to lament over culpable negligence in -this respect, and a culpable dereliction of the most sacred duties? Who in the world, who among Christians, thinks primarily and chiefly of the soul, the immortal soul of his child?

Who, imitating the conduct of the parents in our text, seriously and decidedly leads his children to the Saviour 1 My brethren, the subject is a serious one; it involves the salvation of souls, the destiny of churches, I was going to say the destiny of the world. Permit me, then, to dwell on it for a moment. And first, to take up the matter at the outset. Is it not true that with the greatest number, when God vouchsafing to a family his powerful protection and deliverance, enriches it with a new member, a new object of affection, is it not true that most frequently, amid the joy and agitation which succeed the previous hours of anguish and terrible suspense, their thoughts, and their whole attention are directed to what concerns the earthly life of the being which God has confided to them? Is it not true, that cares of a character altogether earthly absorb their time, their strength, their whole soul? And who, then, in the first moments, feels impressed with a serious and fearful responsibility? Who thinks of uttering such language as the following? Here is a soul, an immortal soul, confided to me by God, and of which I have to give an account to him. In this cradle, where that helpless little creature reposes, there is an eternity, for to every one the soul is eternity. And upon me, upon me after God, depends this eternity of happiness or misery! Fathers and mothers, Christian parents, does this solemn thought never fill your minds with a deep and salutary awe?

Alas! how few there are that can conscientiously bear this testimony to themselves! And if it be so with regard to your children at their entrance into life, if for the most part you are present at their birth with dispositions and cares entirely earthly, with joys and solitudes altogether carnal, what will be your feelings for them as they advance in the course upon which they have entered? When you see them grow up before your eyes, and while you follow with such pleasure their physical and intellectual development, is it their soul, their immortal soul, that is the object of your attention, of your care, of your dearest wishes, of your most anxious solicitude, of your hopes and fears 1 O,

what a serious question, my brethren! How sad and deplorable is the education of the world! Think of parents, who certainly consider themselves good parents, in the highest sense of the word, who are far from being deficient in tenderness for their children, and who yet seek to develop in them exclusively those faculties of the mind which shall enable them to shine in the world, to the detriment of the dispositions of the heart, which would facilitate their moral and religious development, who exclusively encourage them in the acquisition of knowledge, and cultivate the talents calculated to ensure a brilliant success in society, and in their worldly calling, but leave them deplorably ignorant of the one thing needful, of the knowledge of salvation, on which depends their eternal destiny; who speak to them of everything except God and the Saviour; who awaken their solicitude much more as to the means of pleasing the world, and of securing for themselves in it an honorable career, than of pleasing God and saving their souls; who open to them every terrestrial resource, but never lead them to Jesus; and who, in a word, though they desire for them a certain shade of piety, because, even in the eyes of the world, it is a shame to be openly ungodly, yet would be afraid, yes, afraid, to see them giving up their hearts seriously and unreservedly to the Saviour! And if you think of the future life of your children, ye who recognize your features in this portrait, if you think with solicitude of the time when you shall be taken away from them, does not this consideration awaken in you a new ardor to secure for them beforehand an advantageous existence here below, treasures and riches which the moth and the rust corrupt, to the exclusion of those riches which never perish, and of that "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away?"

But, mistake us not, my brethren, we do not here blame the varied and extensive information which you are called upon to give your children, nor the care which you ought to take to secure to them an independent and honorable future; this, on the contrary, is a sacred duty of parents. But if you give your children nothing else, I pity them! and they are to be pitied! Your wishes are accomplished; and behold, your child launched into a world of which he is ignorant, assailed with formidable temptations from within and from without; and to resist their rudest assaults, he has nothing but a worldly education, which is itself in league with the temptation, and worldly goods with which he could not purchase one particle of moral strength, one virtue, nor one religious feeling, though he possessed the riches of the universe What will become of him?

He will inevitably fall, and with sin will come remorse and agony of mind. He knows no remedy, no peace; you have not opened to him the source of them; you have not taught him to know the Saviour of sinners; you have not brought him to Him, as those holy women of Judea of whom our text speaks; on the contrary, you have kept him away from him, both by your lessons, and what was still more influential, your example. Happy for him, then, if "deep crieth not unto deep at the noise of the waterspouts!" Poor youth, happy for thee if iniquity doth not plunge thee from one degree of irreparable ruin into another! Happy if some terrible fall fill not thy whole life with bitterness!

Happy if the day of trial and affliction which shall find thee without consolation, sink thee not into an abyss of despondency and despair!

Happy for you, poor parents, if "your grey hairs descend not with sorrow to the grave;" and, if pierced to the heart with a ruin which you have prepared with your own hands, you realize not in your family those awful words of a celebrated philosopher: "The parents wonder to find the waters

bitter, when they themselves have poisoned the source!"

Oh! how different, beloved brethren, is the lot of the child, who, like Samuel, Timothy, and the children in our text, knows his God from the earliest dawn of his life, whom pious parents have placed in the arms of his Saviour before the evil day arrives, and who is in the haven before the storm arises! He also, doubtless, has to pass through life; he also is about to know, alas! too soon, a corrupt and corrupting world; he also will have to encounter in life temptations which advance against him in battle array; he also will see gathering around his head gloomy clouds which shut up within them fearful strokes of trial and affliction; he also will experience sufferings and tears; but shall not the arms of the Lord be spread around him! Is not that celestial Friend whom he knows, whom he loves, whom he invokes is he not present to hold him up with his mighty hand on the verge of the precipice, to rescue him from evil, to lead him into the smooth paths of peace and true virtue? And if he falls, is not Jesus present to raise him up immediately? If he goes astray, is not Jesus the good Shepherd there to seek in the wilderness and on the mountains his wandering sheep, which he layeth upon his shoulders with joy," and bringeth back into his fold? Yes, he is there, for a pious mother who has brought her child to Jesus from its cradle that he might bless it, still anxiously prays for the same child in the day of danger, and like another Monica whose fervent prayer saves another Augustine, she also joyfully experiences the truth of the words addressed to that woman by the venerable Ambrose: "The child of so many tears and so many prayers can never perish!" Nor will the day of sorrow, affliction, or of tears, find this Happy child of prayer more devoid of succor and of strength, than the day of temptation. Since he knows his divine Saviour, belongs to him, and loves him, the source of real consolation is abundantly open to him. The God upon whom he calls, and who hath blessed him from his infancy, will be with him in his trials to comfort him, to cheer him, and to load him with favors, as he was with him to save him from danger.

Besides, he will know nothing of all the bitter disenchantments of the world, because he never courted its favors. Ah! how many griefs and vexations will he avoid! how many tears will he be spared! what a rich heritage of consolation and joy is secured to him! But as yet I have spoken only of the present life and of this earth. Ah! what shall we say when we throw into the balance of our considerations... eternity! Here, my brethren, I confess I shrink back from one part of my task; I confess I have not courage to follow the steps of that being whom we have seen already so miserable in this life, because he was without the knowledge of God; to follow him with you down to the grave, appearing before the just Judge, charged with a whole life of sin and of transgressions, without a Saviour, without pardon, without hope!

I confess that I have not the strength to picture to myself the unhappy and guilty authors of its days to whom that soul was entrusted, appearing with it before the bar of the Eternal; hearing its condemnation, reproaching themselves with its ruin No, no, I will not go on; I will not cast a glance into an eternity which opens so frightfully; I turn away my eyes from it!

Oh! if he had never been born! or if, at least, unhappy mother, he had never sucked death from thy breast! Yes, better would it have been for him a thousand times if he had been cut down before the age of sin if he had been taken away when you admired, with the greatest tenderness, the graces of his earliest infancy! But what do I say? even then would that mother, have been an unhappy mother; she had never presented her child to the Saviour; she had never consecrated him to the

Lord; she had then made an idol of him; and when the Lord, withdrawing from her that deposit which she had unfaithfully appropriated to herself, would have said to her, in the way of death, 'Suffer this little child to come unto me,' she would have been without consolation, perhaps without submission, overwhelmed with a grief rendered culpable by a spirit of murmuring!

Thus, my brethren, on whatsoever side we turn our regard, there is no peace nor happiness for us, from the moment we have become the depositories of an immortal soul, save in consecrating it to the Saviour, in placing it in his arms in asking him to bless it; otherwise this deposit is too heavy for our weakness it is a load which oppresses us! Ah! let us then hear the voice of the Saviour; let us suffer our little children to come unto him, and our grown up children and ourselves, and all that we have, and all that we are!

Then, and not till then, will the sweetest and most powerful of the human affections be, as it ought to be, brought back to its real destination, subjected to God and sanctified to his glory.

Then let his will be done, whether as it concerns our children or ourselves! Then if he leaves them to us, they shall be consecrated to him, and knowing and loving their God and Saviour, they shall glorify him on earth, and they shall be his to all eternity. Oh! what glory, what pure delight, Christian parents! in the thought of having given to the Saviour a faithful disciple upon earth, and an heir of his eternal glory and of his eternal felicity! But if, on the contrary, a hope so dear is, as to this earth, cut down in its blossom, if your infant pass from the cradle to the tomb, then, even then, the sovereign will of God shall find your head bowed down and your heart submissive. You had already consecrated that child to Jesus; you had committed it into his arms... if he keeps it, if he restores it not to you again, his compassionate voice will speak in the bottom of your heart, and will say to you, "Suffer, suffer little children to come unto me!" And then you would no longer wish to keep it back; you will weep, but your tears will have no bitterness! my brethren, if all parents were Christian, if the Lord were known and adored in every family, one generation alone would be sufficient to make our churches, to make an entire people, yea, the whole world, change its appearance.

Fully convinced am I, my brethren, that among the means which it will please God to employ to bring about on earth those happy and glorious truths promised to the Church in his Word, there is none more powerful, or whose effect shall be more infallible than the influence of truly Christian parents upon their children.

What a responsibility, then, is ours! What a talent we have to account for! What a trust is committed to our charge! Now, let us say it. and let this thought sink deep into our minds, if we would have our children Christians we must be so ourselves; we must preach to them by our example much more than by our words. It would be useless for us to endeavor to lead them to Jesus, if we belonged not to him ourselves.

Children are essentially creatures of imitation; during their whole life they follow your example whether good or bad. And hence what will it serve them to hear in their religious instruction, and even from your own mouth, the whole Gospel of Christ, if they see not the Gospel of Christ living in your houses? What use to speak to them of prayer, if there be in your houses no altar consecrated to the Lord around which your families bow the knee? What use to teach them to read the Word of God, if that word be neglected under your own roof? What use to speak to them of the Christian

life, of a life of faith, of prayer, of love to God. if they see in those whom they ought to imitate only examples of an altogether worldly life? None whatever! It would be to demolish with one hand what you built with the other.

It would be to decree the ruin of those whom you ought to have saved even at the price of your own life. Ah! if you will not be Christians for the love of your own souls and for the love of your God, you ought at least to be Christians for the love of your children.

I shall not conclude, my brethren, without earnestly recommending to the interest and to the prayers of this Church, and especially of the parents in it, the young persons who shall commence to-morrow their course of religious instruction.. My brethren, help us, help us to lead them to Christ Jesus. You know that this alone is their happiness. Help us by your prayers, by your words, by your example. If you grant us this request, if you enter into the spirit of the text which we are meditating upon, we shall cherish the most cheering hopes with regard to those dear children and to yourselves.

If, from the special nature of it, this discourse is not capable of a particular application to all the members of this assembly, we yet find in our text one word which we shall only repeat in conclusion, a word which, well understood and applied, would be sufficient to convert and save a soul; a word which I would leave impressed at the same time upon the hearts of parents, upon the hearts of children, and upon the hearts of all. That word is this: Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.”

09 - Meditation 9

MEDITATION IX. THE LAST ENEMY.

“ The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death”

1 Corinthians 15:26.

I CAN scarcely imagine, my brethren, that you can have passed the solemn days which have just elapsed, without having seriously examined into your own hearts, or at least reflected upon the shortness of your years, and the instability of your earthly existence. When the traveller has reached some important point in his journey, where he is obliged to stop, will he not say to himself, So far have I come on my way; how much have I yet to go? When shall I arrive at the end? And although we are naturally so little disposed to regard ourselves as “ strangers and pilgrims” upon earth; notwithstanding the force of habit which permits us to have death every day before our eyes without thinking of our own death; notwithstanding the earthliness and materiality of our thoughts; notwithstanding the devices of Satan who continually throws over our eyes a veil of deceitful illusions; notwithstanding the skill with which the world multiplies its vain distractions and its noisy pleasures, in proportion as opportunities for serious reflection multiply around us; notwithstanding all this, can you have passed through the first week of a new year without saying to yourselves, This year, perhaps, may be my last; nay, it is not even certain that I shall see the end of it. When lately you enjoyed the pleasure of being united in a family circle with those you love, have you been able to shut out from your minds the reflection that, on the next occasion, it is very possible there may be an empty place there, and that place may be yours! And then has not an involuntary feeling of dread and anguish passed over your hearts? Have you not made a sudden effort to shake off a thought too serious and unwelcome? Would you not fain have shunned that painful impression as a man avoids a mortal enemy of his repose? I say an enemy, and is not this the name that describes the thing? But this name is not ours, it is from the Bible which knows perfectly the heart of man and all its impressions; it is St. Paul’s. Yes, that gloomy thing, that sinister object which an imagination shows us in the obscurity of the future, and from, which you hastily turned away your eyes because it made your heart shudder, St. Paul, in our text, calls “ an enemy,” and that enemy is death! But if, as we have just supposed, you have succeeded in putting away from you this troublesome thought, if you have even continued so far strangers to serious reflection that this thought has not come into your hearts, is there not a degree of cruelty in thus conjuring up this enemy before you, placing him under eyes, exhibiting him in all his fearful power, in all his frightful deformity, in all his appalling triumphs over your souls and over every thing that you hold most dear? Ah! it would indeed be cruelty, and indeed we would not attempt it, if in thus disturbing your repose we saw nothing but the terrible prospect of falling under the inevitable strokes of that enemy. But hear, my brethren, hear ye who fear death and perhaps tremble at the bare thought, that you may meet that enemy before the end of the year upon which we have entered! Our text, while it acknowledges that death is an enemy, while it gives it that name, speaks of its destruction: “ The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” Here, then, is the reason why we venture to

speak of it, why we even come to invite you to contemplate it, face to face, in its most terrible aspect, to familiarize yourselves with the thought of it, and no more to shun it! This is what we intend to do in the first place on the present occasion, and we shall do it without any fear, because afterwards we can speak to you of victory and triumph over this enemy! May God be pleased to bless our meditation! May He, in his great mercy, grant that none of you may be reduced to the deplorable expedient of flying from an enemy from which you cannot escape, or of seeking in a guilty and unavailing dissipation a deceitful remedy for your ills!

God, in creating man, and establishing him as sovereign of this lower world, had ordained that every thing in nature should serve him, and liberally contribute to support and adorn his life, and to multiply his pure enjoyments. Suddenly an enemy makes an inroad upon the abode of man, and thus transforms into foes all the friendly beings that surround him, and makes them subserve the designs of death. Contemplate from that moment the history of humanity and the end of every man. Henceforth, not only shall the destroying angel have at his command the elements let loose against man, and conspiring his destruction; storms, and tempests, and floods, and earthquakes, and the thunders of heaven, and epidemical diseases which depopulate whole countries; bloody wars in which man, becoming his own enemy, lends his hand to his own ruin; all these things shall be but extraordinary means of the enemy. He shall seldom have occasion to employ them, for the slightest accident, a fall, a drop of blood diverted from its course, the very air which we breathe, the food which supports us, in a few days will accomplish his designs.

We bring with us into the world, at our birth, the instruments of his work; a secret, but ever active, power of destruction continually fights against the preserving power which God maintains in nature, to prevent it from falling into nothing; the angel of darkness deals about him his strokes blindly, and without regard to the objects of his ravages; every thing falls beneath his blows; man, the noblest work of the visible creation, is continually sinking under them; that admirable conformation of his body, every part of "which would fill us with adoring wonder, if we were attentive to it; those wondrous faculties which serve so well as organs for the understanding and for the expression of thought; that strength, activity, and beauty of youth, which it is impossible not to admire as the work of God; the venerable head of hoary age nothing is respected by it, all fall under the strokes of the enemy, and in this new work of Vandalism, all are disorganized, destroyed, reduced to ruins, and to dust: become the prey of connoption, the food of worms!...

Poor mortal! where are now those vast projects of fortune, those brilliant hopes of glory which made thy heart beat, and in the faith of which thou didst launch out into a seducing future, like the vessel which cleaves the billows at full sail? Where are those joys, those festivities which intoxicated thee by their attractions? Where is that repose which thou didst dream of in thy lusts, and which thou expectedst to attain to, when saying to thy soul, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry!" The strokes of the enemy have brought them all to a tragical end; projects, hopes, joys, and rest, are all shut up in the narrow and dismal compass of a tomb! Where are those tender and more noble bonds which enchained our hearts to the objects of our affections, and which seemed to us imperishable from their strength, and as it were the life of our lives? Ah! would not the inexorable enemy at least bow with respect before these wants and these sufferings of our afflicted heart?... Alas, no! when have the tears of a mother over the cradle of her dying infant the lamentations of a child at the bed-side of his father, about to leave him an orphan the heart-rending grief of the husband who was soon to be left

desolate or of the wife who was soon to be without support arrested for a moment his irresistible arm?

Never! never! On the contrary, it would seem (though this is not the place to inquire into the reasons of it), that the more tender mercies, the more often and the more quickly are they broken!

What is said of the Divinity himself, may be said of this formidable enemy, "With him there is no respect of persons!" The king the rich man in his palace dies the poor man in his cottage dies the young man is cut off in the bloom of his age the old man perishes by a protracted death. Each generation of mankind flows without interruption into the grave, as a stream pours its waters into the ocean. During the fleeting hour that I am speaking to you of this enemy, three thousand victims succumb beneath his strokes] multiply that number by days, those days by years, those years by the centuries which have passed since this enemy has taken possession of the abode of man; think of the sufferings which preceded his arrival; the tears, the anguish, the cries of grief which followed it; the sorrow which he introduces into each family; hear "the groaning of creation, which," to use the language of St. Paul, "laboreth and travaileth until now," and say if the Apostle is wrong in calling that exterminating angel which wrings this groan from the bosom of the whole human race, "an enemy."

What adds still more to the sinister character of this enemy is the inscrutable mystery that surrounds it. The natural man, by the aid of his unassisted reason, knows neither its origin, its nature, nor the end for which it is sent.

Whence does it come? Whither does it tend?

What shall be the end of its work of destruction 1 Wisemen of the world! proud philosophers, who make man the subject of your studies say, what is death? what is the cause of it and its end? what is the remedy for that evil which preys upon humanity of which you wish to be the masters and the benefactors! To all these questions human reason gives no answer; our life is an enigma to it our death an abyss the world a mass of darkness! But further, man, as sin has made him, is in contradiction with himself. Capable, in his noble faculties, of an indefinite, intellectual, and moral developement, scarcely has he begun the work of that developement when his enemy smites him and reduces him to dust! Aspiring in his hopes and desires after an indeterminate future, scarcely has he made a few steps towards that future, when he falls and behold, he is at the end of it! Capable of loving to infinity, his love consumes like a burning fire whatever miserable aliment which he may give it on earth; then he dies without ever having known satisfaction. He feels himself immortal, and he dies! Every thing within him gives utterance continually to that cry of a deep-felt want the future! the future! immortality! and his terrible enemy immediately responds death! the grave! Thus, you see, death makes man a living contradiction a real lie! And if, from amid the darkness in which he is enslaved and imprisoned, he sighs after liberty; if he interrogates his reason and the sages of the world, if he asks them to point out to him some issue whereby he may escape out of the pit in which he is plunged, reason and the sages are silent. They are as ignorant of the remedy as of the nature of the evil. Did then the mighty and the merciful God create man thus the slave of death, and place him upon earth to water it with his tears, and afterwards to return into its bosom? Wherever we set our foot we tread upon the dust of the departed... Vile dust! art thou the noblest work of creation? the sovereign of this universe? My brethren, let us not remain in this uncertainty; we need not do so; no, we have in our hands a book which contains all

the annals of our race, the complete explanation of the engine which we have pointed out. Let us open that book, and however terrible the discoveries which we may still make in it concerning the origin and the nature of our enemies, let us study it. In its very first pages we read that God created man "in his own image, and after his likeness," that is to say, pure, free, and happy.

After each new act of God's creating power, it is said, " And God saw that it was good!" Man comes forth from his hand, and it is said, " God saw that he was very good!" What a chasm between that "very good," and the miserable creature which we have just been contemplating! Ah! his terrible enemy did not then exist, for under his strokes and with his work of destruction, what would there have been good with respect to man? "Whence, then, did that enemy come? Who gave it birth? My brethren, it is the offspring of a curse and that curse was pronounced by the Lord against sin, rebellion, and disobedience to the law: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; dust thou art, and unto dust thou shall return." And revelation, confirming this sentence in the New Testament, declares: " By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Such is the origin of our enemy sin. Sin hath conceived it, and the curse hath brought it into the world! What an awful discovery! What an overwhelming truth! To the misery of being subject to its strokes, man has to endure in addition, eternal remorse for having brought them down upon his own guilty head. Say not that we are not responsible if our enemy existed before us in the world! Ah! if the first sinner hath left us a deplorable heritage of corruption, where is the man that can say that he has not made an ample use of it? that he has not provoked, confirmed, and justified by his transgressions the execution of the sentence of death? To a sinless being death would not be so terrible; it would not be " an enemy." But " the sting of death," says the Apostle, (that which makes it pierce the soul with terror and anguish that which makes it really " an enemy,") " the sting of death is sin." Sin, and condemnation! such is the language of every stroke which death inflicts around us of every funeral procession that passes through our streets of every grave that is opened to receive one of our fellow-men.

Such is the inscription that is written in lugubrious characters upon the front of death, and that causes a shivering of horror to pass over our heart every time we contemplate it with our eyes! In this sense let us reject the distinction that is sometimes made between a violent and a natural death. In the divine order there is no natural death that was impossible; God could not create death; but each stroke the enemy inflicts, he only executes a sentence of death pronounced against the sinner. Overwhelming truth!... Must we follow it out?

But, at least, is the work of the enemy, whose ravages we are considering, finished? Yes, as it regards this world; but alas! it may have consequences a thousand times more dreadful hereafter! "It is appointed for men once to die," declares the word of God, " and after death the judgment!" The judgment of what? Of the soul that sinned of the immortal soul which may appear before God polluted, laden with the sins of a whole life, and may incur an interminable and remediless condemnation?...

Here at this thought of " outer darkness, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth; of the worm that dieth not; of the smoke of the torment of the reprobate which ascendeth up for ever and ever," at this tremendous thought I stop, because you all may avoid even the apprehension of it; the enemy whom we contemplate this day cannot follow us there. All that we

have to establish is, that death is now no more than the summons to appear before the bar of the just Judge; there ends his work; but in achieving it he leaves us in the presence of a holy God, who shall decide upon our eternity! My brethren before we come to the second head of our discourse, let us make a passing observation which concerns us all. We are often called to bring into the pulpit truths which, though very solemn and very clearly revealed in the Word of God, yet make little or no impression upon the minds of most of our hearers. And why? because at bottom they do not really believe these truths; to them they are not realities which take a powerful hold upon their heart; they are, in their eyes, mere ideas opinions.

But, on the present occasion, this kind of unbelief is impossible; the Apostle here demands not faith "to believe," but only eyes "to see:" yes, with regard to our subject, we can "walk by sight," by a daily experience. I preach to you of your death: which of you doubts of his death? Not one! You admit, then, every thing which we have advanced; you admit, each for himself, whatever be your age, your rank, your condition, that you have to encounter a formidable enemy, which follows you continually, and beneath whose strokes you must inevitably succumb; an enemy which shall speedily put an end to all your projects and all your hopes; an enemy which shall break the dearest and tenderest ties of your heart; which will bring mourning and tears into your families; you admit that, in consequence, you find yourselves in contradiction with your own nature, that nothing can explain this mystery but the Word of God; you admit that the Bible teaches you to regard death as a punishment, the curse of sin; you admit that death will summon you before the Most Holy One to give an account of your life; you admit, further, that for you all this may be realized in a very short time, in the course of the year, in a few days; that at all events it must infallibly be realized in a few short years... and you scarcely think of it! My beloved brethren, do you not ask yourselves, individually, with fearful anxiety: Am I prepared? am I ready to meet my enemy? am I ready to descend into the grave, and to appear before my judge? Men of the world! ere that fatal and inevitable moment arrive, you have a few days, perhaps a few years, to spend, and you employ those few days, or few years, exclusively in amassing a little gold which you shall never enjoy, a little consideration, celebrity, or prosperity which will vanish like smoke beneath the stroke of death! And you, women of the world! you employ these days, these years, in adorning a body which shall crumble into ruins; in decking a person which corruption shall make its prey, and the sepulchre consume to dust! A few of the good things of this world, a few pleasures, a few vanities, a little earthly success, a little of the incense of praise, such is the price for which you barter the time that remains to you, your immortal souls and your eternity! The enemy is at the door, and you quietly await his tremendous strokes and their frightful consequences!

But, what can we do? you will say; what can we do? Since we cannot escape him, whither shall we fly. Since death is inevitable, what remedy have you to propose to us? how miserable should we be if we could not give an answer to that question! How miserable should we be if, ministers of condemnation, we preached death to you, without having it in our power to speak to you a single word of consolation and of hope! But, my brethren, if you are serious in putting this question, hear again the Bible, and out of the depths you may send up a song of triumph! Terrible death! formidable enemy! we can meet thee face to face! "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death!"

How shall the words of my text be accomplished? What being in the universe can help and save us in this dreadful extremity? Who will rescue us from the grasp of the enemy? Who will enter the

lists in our place to combat, overcome and destroy him'?

We have seen, my brethren, that what invests death with its real terrors, what gives it "its sting," what makes it really "an enemy" is that it is the fruit of sin, and the effect of a curse; and so long as it retains this character, it can never be destroyed; it will, on the contrary, always be "the king of terrors." But who will prevail to efface from its livid front this character of malediction which the Lord has impressed upon it? Who will prevail to abrogate the sentence of condemnation pronounced by the Almighty? None in heaven, or on earth, but God, God himself. And again, as he cannot contradict himself, nor deny his justice, at what price will he do it?

Oh! contemplate, under this point of view, Jesus, our Saviour and our God, moved with the tenderest compassion for our misery, leaving the glories and the felicities of heaven, coming down among us to help us, becoming man, that he might bear in our room the sentence of our condemnation, dying under that sentence which could not be abolished, and thus purchasing, by his cross, the eternal right to exercise mercy, to proclaim pardon, and to make those who before were "children of wrath," children of the living God! Contemplate him going down into the grave to drain even to the dregs the cup of death, and to apply even to the most secret wounds of our hearts an efficacious remedy!

Consider attentively under this point of view, those deep and lucid words of the epistle to the Hebrews: "Forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, (that is to say, human nature.) he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

O ye, who are still subject to this bondage, if ye believe in the Word of God, meditate, for your consolation, upon this deep and sublime declaration of your deliverance! In it, in it you will find the remedy for that tremendous evil whose origin and cause the Bible has disclosed. And say not, that as Jesus has fallen beneath its stroke he was but a new victim of it. Contemplate his resurrection, his bursting the bonds of death, plucking out its sting, annihilating its power, triumphing over it, and destroying our terrible enemy! Contemplate him as the representative of humanity; the head of the Church, which is his body, of which all believers are members, the first-fruits from the dead, ascending up in triumph, to glory, "leading captivity captive, and obtaining gifts for men!" Contemplate him as thus putting the seal to his work of redemption, assuring us forever of our own resurrection and triumph over death, and "reigning until his enemies become his footstool!" But you will still say, notwithstanding all this, the enemy is not disarmed; he still inflicts his deadly strokes; the children of God, as well as others, fall beneath them. Fear not, my brethren, the triumphs of the Saviour in his members are progressive, successive, but they are certain. Observe here the change which is wrought in the nature of death by means of Christianity. We have said, after the Bible, that the Divine Saviour has "obtained gifts for men," and it is by dispensing these that he carries on his work; and what are these gifts? the gifts of his Spirit of power and holiness by which we are united to him as "the branches to the vine," so that we become partakers of his life, a life over which death hath no dominion, a heavenly life. Possessed of this imperishable life, which shall develop itself to infinity in eternity, assured of the favor, the pardon, the eternal love of his God, shall the disciple of Jesus see in death a frightful enemy which, reducing his body to dust, destroys his projects for the future, frustrates his desires, withers his hopes, dissolves for ever the

dearest and the tenderest bonds, makes him a contradiction, a lie, and hurries his trembling and sinful soul before the tribunal of his God? No! no! Quite the contrary; death, delivering him from all sin and all misery, fulfils his most ardent desire, for he longs after holiness; it realizes and surpasses his most brilliant hopes, for now he is in possession of heaven; it puts the seal to all his connexions, for they are eternal like the God that formed them; it puts his soul in full possession of the love of God, and of the presence of his Saviour. Where the grace and the love of God reign, there death has no sting to wound, no curse to terrify.

O my beloved brethren, have you never had the happiness, yes, I say the happiness, to be present at the death-bed of a Christian who could say, "I know in whom I have believed?"

Ah! if you have seen that calm and peaceful resignation of a child in the arms of its father; if you have seen that Divine ray of "hope which maketh not ashamed," break forth like life from his dying look; if you have gazed upon the image of peace resting upon that colorless brow; if you have felt that cold hand pressing yours in token of an adieu not eternal; if you have heard those trembling lips still murmuring with an expression of secret joy the name of Jesus, as him in whom all who have believed, loved, and prayed upon earth, shall soon be re-united; if you have contemplated such a scene, you have no need of further demonstrations; you must have exclaimed within yourselves, "The last enemy is overcome, is destroyed: O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" You must have thought within yourselves, "Is this to die?" To lay aside this gross envelope of flesh and blood, the source of so many pains, infirmities, and sins is this to die? To be released from these chains of bondage; to escape from this prison-house, thus opening to let us go, in order to be put in possession of "the glorious liberty of the children of God;" is this to die? To be delivered from the corruption of this present evil world, from this atmosphere poisoned with sin, in order to be clothed with incorruption and holiness is this to die? To leave a world where self-love reigns; where the noblest and purest affections are imperfect and defiled; to love with all the powers of the soul, without end, without measure, and yet without idolatry; is this to die? To exchange these outgoing's of a piety still so cold, these prayers so languid, that charity so tardy, for the love of heaven and the eternal contemplation of Him who loved us, and whose likeness we shall hear is this to die? No; it is the commencement of true life. "The last enemy," the last of all, for to that happy Christian there remain no others, "the last enemy!" is he not vanquished "destroyed? a Some one, perhaps, carrying even to the end the objections of an unbelieving and distrustful heart, will say, that notwithstanding this, the enemy still carries off and keeps an important triumph, since our body, the work of God, moulders beneath his destroying influence.

No, no; Jesus, the resurrection and the life, will not leave him even this victory; he will wrest it from his hands and "destroy" him.

There is a final stage in those successive triumphs; Jesus will accomplish it at the last day, when he shall come again in his glory. "The hour cometh, when all that are in their graves shall hear his voice and come forth."

Then shall the enemy be compelled, by the creating power of the Sovereign Judge, to deliver up into his hands the last trophy of his victory over the children of God; he shall retain no vestige of it. He shall have served, according to the designs of God, to make us pass from infirmity to glory; for

the Lord “ shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body.” “ It is sown in corruption, it shall be raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor, it shall be raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it shall be raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it shall be raised a spiritual body.” Then shall commence life in all its plenitude, life in God, the life of the “new heaven and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” Then, the Bible tells us, as if to mark the consummation of happiness and deliverance, then “ there shall be no more death.” Death shall be swallowed up in victory! “ The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death!”

What triumph! what deliverance! what happiness to those who shall have part therein!

O, ray brethren! you who know and love Jesus, sing even now a song of deliverance to the glory of the Saviour! Say to his praise that you are “ more than conquerors through him that loved you.” Bless him, love him with all the powers of your souls. Be not ashamed of him before a world which passeth away. What do you care for the vain glory of the world? It will soon fade away beneath the stroke of death. What do you care for its favor or its disapprobation?

You follow the glorious Captain, whose triumphs we have enumerated; this, this is your glory and your happiness; there is no other.

“ And seeing that we have such promises, let us purge ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit.” Let not our thoughts, our affections, or our works, cleave to the dust of a world “which lieth in wickedness,” since all that is in us, even this mortal body, is destined to share the glory and holiness of the Lord. Let us walk worthy of our vocation. The time is short; “He that cometh will come, and will not tarry.”;

Finally, be of good courage for the rest of your earthly career. Weak souls, fearful souls; “ broken reeds,” to you we would repeat, be of good courage, whilst looking to the Saviour!

He himself saith to you, “ In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world!” If trials and afflictions await you, you know the inexhaustible source of true consolation. If the great enemy which remaineth to be destroyed summon you to his last encounter; if during the course of this year you should see, and walk through “ the valley of the shadow of death,” fear no evil. You know the Conqueror who has done all. If the enemy, instead of reaching yourselves, smite around you; if he make some painful breach in the hearts of those you love, “ weep not as those that have no hope;” mourn not if they arrive at the haven of rest before you. A few more days of trial, and you also will reach it; and “ there shall be no more death.” And you, unhappy as you are guilty, who hitherto have remained strangers to the love of the Saviour, to his salvation, his triumphs, to repentance, to faith, to love, what shall we say to you? only one word. You know the terrible enemy that follows you, and shall soon overtake you; you know his work of curse and death upon the body and upon the soul, for time and eternity. Well, then, if you are not found in Jesus Christ, who alone can triumph over it, you submit to bear alone the strokes of destruction and death which shall fall upon you! Ah! we beseech you from the bottom of a heart that loves you, and ardently desires your salvation, think of it, reflect upon it before it be too late.

It will well repay you for so doing.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
 - 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net