

SECOND PART OF PREPARATION FOR DEATH

CONSIDERATION XI

Value of Time.

Son, observe the time."—*Ecclus. iv. 23.*

FIRST POINT.

Time is a Treasure of the Earth.

SON, says the Holy Ghost, be careful to preserve time, which is the greatest and the most precious gift which God can bestow upon you in this life. The very pagans knew the value of time. Seneca said that no price is an equivalent for it." (De Brev. vit. c. 8). But the Saints have understood its value still better. According to St. Bernardine of Sienna, a moment of time is of as much value as God; because in each moment a man can, by acts of contrition or of love, acquire the grace of God and eternal glory.

Time is a treasure which is found only in this life; it is not found in the next, either in **hell** or in heaven. In **hell** the damned exclaim with tears: Oh! that an hour was given to us ! They would pay any price for an hour of time, in which they might repair their ruin: but this hour they will never have. In heaven there is no weeping; but, were the saints capable of weeping, all their tears would arise from the thought of having lost the time in which they could have acquired greater glory, and from the conviction that this time will never again be given to them. A deceased Benedictine nun appeared in glory to a certain person, and said that she was perfectly happy, but that if she could desire anything, it would be to return to life, and to

suffer pains and privations in order to merit an increase of glory. She added, that, for the glory which corresponds to a single *Ave Maria*, she would be content to endure till the day of judgment the painful illness which caused her death.

My brother, how do you spend your time ? Why do you always defer till to-morrow what you can do to-day? Remember that the time which is past is no longer yours : the future is not under your control: you have only the present for the performance of good works. "Why, O miserable man," says St. Bernard, " do you presume on the future, as if the Father had placed time in your power?" (De Cont. Mund. c. 16). St. Augustine asks: "How can you, who are not sure of an hour, promise yourself to-morrow ?" If then, says St. Teresa, you are not prepared for death today, tremble lest you die an unhappy death.

Affections and Prayers.

O my God ! I thank Thee for the time which Thou givest me to repair the disorders of my past life. Were I to die at this moment, the remembrance of the time I have lost should be one of my greatest torments... Ah, my Lord! Thou hast given me time to love Thee, and I have spent it in offending Thee. I deserve to be sent to **hell** from the first moment in which I turned my back upon Thee; but Thou hast called me to repentance, and hast pardoned me. I promised to offend Thee no more; but how often have I returned to sin ? how often hast Thou pardoned my ungrateful relapses? Blessed forever be Thy mercy! If it were not infinite, how couldst Thou have had so much patience with me ? Who could have borne with me so long ? Oh ! how sorry do I feel for having offended so good a God ! My Saviour! the patience alone with which Thou didst wait for me ought to enamour me of Thee. Ah ! do not suffer me to live any longer

ungrateful to the love Thou hast had for me. Detach me from every creature, and draw me entirely to Thyself. O my God ! I will no longer dissipate the time Thou givest me to repair the evil that I have done ; I will spend it all in serving and loving Thee. Give me holy perseverance. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness, and hope to love Thee for eternity. I thank thee, O Mary ! by thy advocacy thou hast obtained for me this time which is given to me. Assist me now, and obtain for me the grace to spend it all in loving thy Son, my Redeemer, and in loving thee, my queen and my mother.

SECOND POINT.

Neglect of Time.

There is nothing more precious than time; but there is nothing less esteemed and more despised by men of the world. This is what St. Bernard deplures when he says: Nothing is more precious than time, but nothing is regarded more cheaply." The same Saint adds: "The days of salvation pass away, and no one reflects that the day which has passed away from him can never return." (De Cont. mundi, c. 16). You will see a gambler spend nights and days in play. If you ask him what he is doing, his answer is: I am passing the time. You will see others standing several hours in the street, looking at those who pass by, and speaking on obscene or on useless subjects. If you ask them what they are doing, they will say: We are passing the time. Poor blind sinners ! who lose so many days; but days which never return.

O time despised during life ! you will be ardently desired by worldlings at the hour of death. They will then wish for another year, another month, another day; but they will not obtain it: they will then be told that time shall be no longer. How much would they then pay for another week,

or another day, to settle the accounts of their conscience? To obtain a single hour, they would, says St. Laurence Justinian, give all their wealth and worldly possessions. (De Vit. sol. c. 10). But this hour shall not be given. The assisting priest shall say to the dying sinner: Hasten, hasten your departure from this world; for your time is no more.

The prophet exhorts us to remember God, and to procure his friendship, before the light fails. *Remember Thy Creator . . . before the sun and the light be darkened (Eccles. xii, 1)*. How great the distress and misery of a traveler who, when the night has come, perceives that he has missed the way, and that there is no time to correct the mistake. Such at death will be the anguish of the sinner who has lived many years in the world, and has not spent them for God. *The night cometh, when no man can work (John, ix, 4)*. For him, death shall be the night in which he will be able to do nothing. *He hath culled against me the time (Lament. I, 15)*. Conscience will then remind the wordling of all the time that God gave him, and that he has spent in the destruction of his soul; of all the calls and graces that he has received from God for his sanctification, and that he has voluntarily abused. The sinner will then see that the way of salvation is closed forever. Hence he will weep and say: O fool that I have been ! O time lost ! O life misspent ! O lost years, in which I could have, but have not, become a saint ! And now the time of salvation is gone forever. But, of what use are these sighs and lamentations, when the scene is about to close,—the lamp on the point of being extinguished,—and when the dying sinner has reached that awful moment on which eternity depends ?

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus ! Thou hast spent Thy whole life for the salvation of my soul. There has not been a single moment of Thy life in which Thou hast not offered Thyself to the eternal Father to obtain for me pardon and eternal glory, I have been so many years in the world, and how many of them have I hitherto spent for Thee? Ah ! all that I remember to have done produces remorse of conscience. The evil has been great, the good very little, and ail full of imperfections and tepidity, of self-love and distractions. Ah, my Redeemer! all this has arisen from my forgetfulness of what Thou hast done for me. I have forgotten Thee, but Thou hast not forgotten me; when I fled from Thee, Thou didst follow me, and call me so often to Thy love. Behold me, O Jesus! I will resist no longer. Shall I wait till Thou abandon me? I am sorry, O Sovereign Good ! for having separated myself from Thee by sin. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness ! worthy of infinite love. Ah ! do not permit me ever again to lose this time, which Thou in Thy mercy givest me. Ah! remind me always, O my beloved Saviour! of the love Thou hast borne me. and of the pains Thou hast endured for me. Make me forget all things, that, during the remainder of my life, I may think only of loving and pleasing Thee I love Thee, my Jesus, my love, my all! I promise, whenever Thou remindest me, to make acts of love. Give me holy perseverance. I place all my confidence in the merits of Thy blood. I also trust in thy intercession, O my dear Mother, Mary!

THIRD POINT.

We must Profit by the Time.

Walk whilst you have light (*John, xii, 35*). We must walk in the way of the Lord during life, now that we have light; for, at the hour of death this light is taken away. Death is not the time for preparing, but for finding ourselves prepared. *Be ye ready.* At the hour of

death we can do nothing: what is then done is done. O God ! were a person told that in a short time a trial should take place, on which would depend his life and his entire property, with what haste would he seek an able counsel to plead his cause! how little time would he lose in adopting every means of securing a favorable result! And what are we doing? We know for certain that the most important of all causes—the affair of eternal salvation—will soon be decided; the decision may take place every hour, and still we lose time. Some may say: I am young ; I will hereafter give myself to God. But remember that, as the Gospel remarks, the Lord cursed the fig-tree the first time he found it without fruit, although the season for figs had not arrived. By this Jesus Christ wished to signify that men should at all times, even in youth, bring forth fruits of good works; otherwise they will be accursed, and will never more bring forth fruit. *May no man hereafter eat fruit of thee any more forever (Mark, xi, 14)*. Such the malediction of the Redeemer on the fruitless fig-tree; such is his malediction against all who resist his calls. Satan regards the whole time of our life as short, and, therefore, in tempting us he loses not a moment. *The devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time (Apoc. xii, 12)*. Then the devil loses no time in seeking our perdition; and shall we lose the time given to us to secure our salvation ?

Some will say, What evil am I doing? O God, is it not an evil to lose time in gaming, in useless conversations, which are unprofitable to the soul ? Does God give you time, that you may squander it ? No: the Holy Ghost says, *Defraud not thyself of the good day, and let not the part of a good gift overpass thee (Ecclus. xiv, 14)*. The workmen mentioned by St. Matthew, though they did no evil, but only lost time, were rebuked by the master of the vineyard. *Why stand ye here all the day idle? (Matt. xx, 6)*. On the day of judgment Jesus Christ will demand an

account of every idle word All the time that is not spent for God is lost time. "Believe," says St. Bernard, "that you have lost all the time in which you have not thought of God." (Medit. c. 6). Hence the Holy Ghost says, *Whatsoever thy hand is able to do, do it earnestly, for neither work nor reason shall be in hell, whither thou art hastening* (Eccles. ix, 10). The Venerable Sister Jane of the Most Holy Trinity, of the Order of St. Teresa, used to say that, in the lives of the Saints, there is no tomorrow. Tomorrow is found in the lives of sinners, who always say, Hereafter, hereafter; and in this state they continue till death. *Behold, now is the acceptable time (2 Cor. vi, 2). To-day, if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts (Ps. xciv, 8).* If God call you to-day to do good, do it; for to-morrow it may happen that for you time will be no more, or that God will call you no more.

If you have hitherto spent the time in offending God, endeavor, like King Ezechias, to weep, during the remainder of your life, over your misspent years. *I wilt recount to Thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul (Isa. xxxviii, 15).* God spares your life, that you may repair the time you have lost. In explaining this passage, St. Anselm says: " You will redeem the time if you do what you have neglected to do." (Eph. V, 16). Of St. Paul, St. Jerome says that, though the last of the apostles, he was, on account of his great labors after he was called, the first in merits. Let us reflect that at each moment of time we may acquire new treasures of eternal riches. Were all the land round which you could walk, or all the money which you could count in a day, promised to you, would you not hasten to walk over the ground, or to count the money? At each moment you can acquire eternal treasures: will you, notwithstanding, squander your time? Say not what you can do to-day you will be able to do to-morrow; for this day will then be lost, and never return. When his companions spoke of the world, St. Francis

Borgia conversed with God by holy affections; and so recollected was he, that when his opinion was asked on the subject of conversation, he knew not what to answer. Being corrected for this, he said: "I would rather be regarded stupid and unlearned, than lose time."

Affections and Prayers.

No, my God, I will no longer lose the time which Thou in Thy mercy givest me. I should at this hour be in hell weeping without fruit. I thank Thee for having preserved my life: I wish during the remainder of my days to live only for Thee. Were I now in hell I should weep in despair, and without profit: I will now bewail the offences I have offered to Thee: and if I weep over them, I know for certain that Thou wilt pardon me. Of this the prophet assures me: *Weeping, thou shalt not weep; He will surely have pity on thee (Isa. xxx, 19)*. Were I in hell, I could never more love Thee; and now I love Thee, and hope always to love Thee. Were I in hell, I could ask no more graces; but now I hear Thee say : *Ask, and ye shall receive* Since, then, I still have time to ask Thy graces, O God of my soul! I ask two graces: give me perseverance in Thy grace; give me Thy love; and then do with me what Thou pleasest; grant that in all the remaining moments of my life I may always recommend myself to Thee, saying: Lord! assist me; have mercy on me ; grant that I may never more offend Thee; make me love Thee. Most Holy Mary, my Mother! obtain for me the grace always to recommend myself to God, and to ask him for perseverance and for his holy love.

CONSIDERATION XII.

The Importance of Salvation.

" But we entreat ye, brethren, . . . that you attend to your

own business."—I *Thess.* iv. 10, 11.

FIRST POINT.

Salvation is our own most important Affair.

THE business of eternal salvation is to us the most important of all affairs; but it is also the most neglected by Christians. They are diligent, and lose no time in seeking to gain a lawsuit, or a situation of emolument. How many measures taken to attain these objects? How many means adopted? They neither eat nor sleep. And what efforts do they make to secure their eternal salvation? How do they live? To save their souls, the greater number of Christians do nothing; on the contrary, they do everything to bring their souls to perdition; they live as if death, judgment, **hell**, heaven, and eternity were not truths of faith, but fables invented by the poets. If a person lose a lawsuit, or a harvest crop, how great is his pain and distress of mind? With what zeal does he labor to repair the loss? If worldlings lose a horse, or a dog, with what diligence do they seek after it? But if they lose the grace of God, they sleep, and jest, and laugh. All blush at being told that they neglect their worldly affairs, but how few are ashamed to neglect the business of eternity, which is the most important of all. The worldling says that the Saints were truly wise, because they sought only the salvation of their souls; and still he attends to all worldly business, but utterly neglects the concerns of the soul. *Brethren*, says St. Paul, *let the great business of your eternal salvation be the sole object of all your care.* This is to you the most important of all affairs. Let us then be persuaded that eternal salvation is for us the most *important* affair,—the *only* affair,—and that if once neglected it is an irreparable affair if we ever make a mistake.

It is the most *important* affair, because if the soul be lost, all is lost. We ought to set a higher value on the soul than on all the goods of the earth. "The soul," says St. Chrysostom, "is more precious than the whole world!" (In 1 Cor. hom. 3). To be convinced of this truth, it is enough to know that God himself has condemned his Son to death in order to save our souls. The Eternal Word has not refused to purchase them with his own blood.

St. Philip Neri with reason could say that he who does not attend to the salvation of his soul is a fool. Were there on this earth two classes of men, one mortal and the other immortal, and were the former to see the latter seeking after the things of this world, its honors, goods, and amusements, they should certainly exclaim: O fools that you are ! you have it in your power to acquire eternal riches, and do you fix your thoughts on those miserable and transitory things ? Will you, for these, condemn yourselves, to an eternity of torments in the next life ? Leave us, for whom all shall end at death, to seek after these earthly goods. But no; we are all immortal. How then does it happen that so many lose their souls for the miserable pleasures of this life? How does it come to pass, says Salvian, that Christians believe in judgment, **hell**, and eternity, and still live as if they feared them not?

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! how have I spent so many years, which Thou hast given me in order to secure my eternal salvation ? Thou, my Redeemer, hast purchased my soul with Thy blood, and hast consigned it to me that I might attend to its salvation ; and I have labored only for its perdition by offending Thee who hast loved me so tenderly. I thank Thee for giving me time to be able to repair the great loss which I have suffered. I have lost my soul and Thy grace. Lord ! I am sorry with my whole heart

for my past offences, and I resolve, henceforth, to lose everything, even my life, rather than forfeit Thy friendship. I love Thee above all things, and I resolve always to love Thee, my Sovereign Good ! who art worthy of infinite love. Assist me, my Jesus, that this purpose may not be like my past resolutions, to which I have been always unfaithful. Take me out of life rather than suffer me ever again to offend Thee, or ever to cease to love Thee. O Mary, my hope, after Jesus ! save me by obtaining for me holy perseverance.

SECOND POINT.

Salvation is our only **Affair**.

The affair of eternal salvation is not only the most important, but it is the only affair to which we have to attend in this life. One thing is necessary (Luke, x, 42). St. Bernard weeps over the blindness of Christians, who call the occupations of children trifles, and their own employments business. If the amusements of children be trifles, the employments of men are still greater follies. *What, says the Redeemer, will it profit us to gain the whole world if we lost our souls? (Matt. xvi, 26).* My brother, if you save your soul, it will do you no harm to have lived here in poverty, afflictions, and contempt; for then you will have no more sorrows, and you Will be happy for all eternity. But if you lose your soul, what will it profit you, in **hell**, to have indulged in all the amusements of the world, and to have enjoyed its riches and honors ? If the soul be lost, amusements, riches, and honors, are lost—all is lost.

What answer will you give on the day of account ? Were a king to send an ambassador to a city to transact some important business, and were the legate, instead of attending to the charge entrusted to him, to spend all his

time in banquets, comedies, and festivities, and thus injure the rights of his master, what account would the sovereign demand of him at his return ? But, O God ! how strict must be the account which the Lord will exact of him who, after being placed in this world, not to indulge in amusements, nor to acquire wealth and dignity, but to save his soul, has attended to everything except to his own salvation ? Worldlings think of the present, but not of the future. St. Philip Neri conversing one day in Rome with Francis Zazzera, a young man of talent, who was attached to the world, said to him: "You will realize a great fortune; you will be a prelate, afterward, perhaps, a cardinal, and perhaps even Pope. But what must follow ? what must follow? Go," said the Saint, "and meditate on these last words." Francis went home, and after reflecting on the words what must follow? what must follow? he abandoned his secular pursuits, left the world, entered into the Congregation of St. Philip, and began to attend only to God.

It is our only affair, because we have but one soul. A prince asked, through his ambassador, a favor of Benedict XII., which could not be granted without sin. In answer, the Pope said—"Tell the prince that if I had two souls, I might, perhaps, lose one of them for him, and reserve the other for myself; but since I have but one, I cannot and will not lose it." St. Francis Xavier used to say that there is but one good and one evil in the world: the former consists in the salvation of the soul, the latter in its damnation. St. Teresa used frequently to say to her nuns—"One soul, one eternity." As if she said—One soul; if this be lost, all is lost; one eternity—the soul, if lost once, is lost forever. Hence David said—*One thing have I asked of the Lord: this I will seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord (Ps. xxvi, 4)*. Lord, I ask but one favor—save my soul, and I ask nothing else.

With fear and trembling work out your salvation (Phil. ii, 12). He that does not fear and tremble for his salvation will not be saved: to save the soul, it is necessary to labor, and to do violence to nature. The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away (Matt. xi, 12). To obtain eternal glory, our life must be found at death conformable to the life of Jesus Christ. Hence we must be careful, on the one hand, to avoid the occasions of sin; and, on the other, to adopt the means necessary for the attainment of eternal life. All would wish to be saved without trouble. " The devil," says St. Augustine, " sleeps not, but labors strenuously for your perdition: and will you slumber when your eternal happiness is at stake ?" (In Ps. 65).

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God ! I thank Thee, for making me now remain at Thy feet and not in **hell**, which I have so often deserved. But of what use would the life which Thou hast preserved be to me, should I continue to live without Thy grace. Ah ! may this never be ! I have turned my back upon Thee ; I have lost Thee, O my Sovereign Good ! I am sorry for it with my whole heart. Oh, that I had died a thousand times, rather than have offended Thee ! I have lost Thee; but the prophet tells me that Thou art all goodness, and that Thou art easily found by the soul that seeks Thee. If I have hitherto fled away from Thee, I now seek Thee, and seek nothing but Thee. I love Thee with all the affections of my heart. Accept me. Do not disdain to give Thy love to a soul that has at one time despised Thee, Teach me what I must do in order to please Thee ; I am ready and willing to do it. Ah, my Jesus ! save this soul, for which Thou hast given Thy blood and Thy life; and, in order to save me, give me the grace always to love Thee in this and in the next life. This grace I hope for through Thy merits. For this I also hope, O Mary

! through thy intercession.

THIRD POINT.

A Failure in Saving One's Soul is an Irremediable Evil.

Important affair! only affair! irreparable affair! No error, says St. Eucherius, can be compared with the error of neglecting eternal salvation. For all other errors there is a remedy: if you lose property in one way, you may recover it in another; if you lose a situation, there may be some means of afterwards regaining it; if you soon lose your life, provided your soul be saved, all is safe. But if you lose your soul the loss is irreparable. Death happens but once; the soul, if once lost, is lost forever. Nothing remains but to weep for eternity with the other miserable wretches in hell, where their greatest torment consists in the conviction, that the time of repairing their ruin is gone forever. The summer is over, and we are not saved (Jer. viii, 20). Ask the worldly wise who are now in the pit of fire, what are their present sentiments; ask them if, now that they are condemned to that eternal prison, they feel happy at having made a fortune in this life. Listen to their wailing and lamentation: We have erred (Wis. v. 6). But of what use is it to know their error, now that there is no remedy for their eternal damnation? Should a man who could have preserved his palace at a small expense find it in ruins, how great would be his pain in reflecting on his own negligence, and On the impossibility of repairing the evil!

The greatest torment of the damned consists in the thought of having lost their soul, and of being damned through their own fault. Destruction is thy own, O Israel; thy help is only in me (Osee xiii, 9). St. Teresa says that if a person loses through his own fault a ring or even a trifle, his peace is disturbed; he neither eats nor sleeps. O

God ! how great will be the torture of the damned Christian when, on entering hell and finding himself shut up in that dungeon of torments, he reflects on his misfortune, and sees that for all eternity there will be no relief, no mitigation of pain ! He will say, " I have lost my soul, paradise, and God; I have lost all forever ! And why ? Through my own fault."

But you will say—If I commit this sin, why should I not expect to escape damnation? I may still be saved. Yes; but you may also be damned: and it is more likely that you will be lost, for the Scriptures menace eternal woes to all obstinate traitors, such as you are in your present dispositions. *Woe to you, apostate children, saith the Lord (Isa. xxx, 1). Woe to them, for they have departed from me (Osee, vii, 13).* By committing this sin, you at least expose your eternal salvation to great danger. And is this an affair to be exposed to risk ? There is not question of a house, of a villa, or of a situation: there is question, says St. John Chrysostom, of being sent into an eternity of torments, and of losing an eternity of glory. And will you risk on a *perhaps* this business of sovereign importance?

You say: Perhaps I shall not be lost: I hope that God will hereafter pardon me. But what happens in the mean time ? You condemn yourself to **hell**. Tell me, would you cast yourself into a deep pool of water, saying, perhaps I shall not be drowned ? Surely you would not: why then should you trust your eternal salvation to such a groundless hope, to a *perhaps*? Oh ! how many has this accursed hope sent to **hell** ! Do you not know that the hope of those who are obstinately determined to commit sin is not hope, but an illusion, and presumption which move God not to mercy but to greater wrath ? If you say that you are now unable to resist the temptation and passion to whose domination you submit, how will you resist them hereafter, when, by yielding to sin, your strength will not

be increased, but greatly diminished ? For, on the one hand, your own malice will render you more blind and obdurate; and, on the other, the divine helps will be withheld. Do you expect that the more you multiply sins and insults against God, the more abundantly he will pour upon you his lights and graces?

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus ! remind me always of the death Thou hast suffered for me, and give me confidence. I tremble lest the devil should make me despair at death by bringing before my view the many acts of treason I have committed against Thee. How many promises have I made never more to offend Thee after the light Thou hast given me! and, after all my promises, I have, with the hope of pardon, again turned my back upon Thee. Then, have I insulted Thee because Thou didst not chastise me ? My Redeemer! give me a great sorrow for my sins before I leave this world. I am sorry, O Sovereign Good ! for having offended Thee. I promised to die a thousand times rather than abandon Thee. But make me in the mean time feel that Thou hast said to me what Thou didst say to Saint Mary Magdalene— *Thy sins are forgiven thee*—by giving me, before death, a great sorrow for all my iniquities, otherwise I fear my death will be troubled and unhappy. *Be not Thou a terror to me; Thou art my hope in the day of affliction (Jer. xvii, 17).* O my crucified Jesus ! be not a terror to me in my last moments. If I die before I have wept over my sins and have loved Thee, Thy wounds and Thy blood will inspire me with fear rather than with confidence. I do not ask of Thee consolations and earthly goods during the remainder of my life; I ask of Thee sorrow and love. O my dear Saviour! hear my prayer for the sake of that love which made Thee offer Thy life in sacrifice for me on Calvary. Mary, my Mother! obtain for me these graces, along with holy

perseverance till death.

CONSIDERATION XIII.

The Vanity of the World.

"What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?" —Matt. xvi. 26.

FIRST POINT.

The Goods of this World are Useless.

AN ancient philosopher called Aristippus was once shipwrecked, and lost all his goods. When he reached the shore, the people, through respect for his great learning, presented him with an equivalent of all he had lost. He wrote to his friends, exhorting them to imitate his example, and to seek only the goods which cannot be wrested from them by shipwreck. Now, our relatives and friends who are in eternity exhort us from the other world to attend only to the acquisition of goods which even death cannot take from us. Death is called *the day of destruction (Deut. xxxii, 35)*. It is the day of destruction, because on that day we shall lose all the goods of this earth—its honors, riches, and pleasures. Hence, according to St. Ambrose, we cannot call the things of this life our goods, because we cannot take them with us to eternity. Our virtues alone accompany us to the next life (In Luc. 1, 7).

What then, says Jesus Christ, does it profit us to gain the whole world, if, at death, by losing the soul, we lose all? Ah ! how many young men has this great maxim sent into the cloister ! how many anachorets has it sent to the desert! and how many martyrs has it encouraged to give their life for Jesus Christ! By this maxim St. Ignatius of

Loyola drew many souls to God, particularly the soul of St. Francis Xavier, who was then in Paris, attached to the things of the world. "Francis," said the Saint one day, "reflect that the world is a traitor, which promises but does not perform. And though it should fulfil all its promises, it can never content your heart. But let us grant that it did make you happy, how long will this happiness last? Can it last longer than your life; and after death what will you take with you to eternity? Where is the rich man that has ever brought with him a piece of money, or a servant to attend him? What king has ever carried with him a shred of the purple as a badge of royalty?" At these words St. Francis abandoned the world, followed St. Ignatius, and became a Saint.

Solomon confessed that *whatsoever, his eyes desired he refused them not; (Eccles. ii, 10)* but, after having indulged in all the pleasures of this earth, he called all the goods of the world *vanity of vanities*—"vanitas vanitatum." Sister Margaret of St. Anne, a Discalced Carmelite, and daughter of the Emperor Rudolph the Second, used to say: "Of what use are kingdoms at the hour of death?" The Saints tremble at the thought of the uncertainty of their eternal salvation. Father Paul Segneri trembled, and, full of terror, said to his confessor: "Father, what do you think—shall I be saved?" St. Andrew Avellino trembled, and, with a torrent of tears, said: "Who knows whether I shall be saved or lost?" St. Louis Bertrand was so much terrified by this thought, that, during the night, in a fit of terror, he sprang out of bed, saying: "Perhaps I shall be lost! And sinners, while they live in a state of damnation, sleep, and jest, and laugh!"

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, Jesus, my Redeemer! I thank Thee for making me see my folly and the evil I have done in turning my back on Thee who hast given Thy blood and Thy life for me. Thou didst not deserve to be treated by me as I have treated Thee. Behold ! if death now came upon me, what should I find but sins and remorse of conscience, which would make me die with great disquietude! My Saviour! I confess that I have done evil, and committed a great error in leaving Thee, my Sovereign Good ! for the miserable pleasures of this world. I am sorry from the bottom of my heart. Ah! give me a sorrow for my sins, which will make me weep during the remainder of my life over the injuries I have done Thee. My Jesus ! pardon me ; I promise to displease Thee no more, and to love Thee forever. I am not worthy of Thy love, which I have hitherto so much despised. But Thou hast said that Thou lovest him who loves Thee. I love Thee; love me, then, O Lord ! I do not wish to be any longer in enmity with Thee. I renounce all the grandeurs and pleasures of the world, provided Thou lovest me. Hear me, O my God! for the love of Jesus Christ, He entreats Thee not to banish me from Thy heart. To Thee I consecrate my whole being; to Thee I consecrate my life, my pleasures, my senses, my soul, my body, my will, and my liberty. Accept me; reject not my offering, as I have deserved for having so often refused Thy friendship; *cast me not away from Thy face*. Most holy Virgin, my Mother, Mary! pray to Jesus for me. In thy intercession I place unbounded confidence.

SECOND POINT.

The Goods of this World are Contemptible.

There is a deceitful balance in his hand (*Osee, xii, 7*). We must weigh things in the balance of God, and not in the deceitful balance of the world. The goods of this life are miserable goods; they do not content the heart; they soon end. *My days have been*

swifter than a post: they have passed by as ships carrying fruits (Job ix, 25). The days of our life pass and fly away; and of all the pleasures of this earth, what remains? They have passed like a ship, which leaves no trace behind. *As a ship that passeth through the waters, whereof, when it is gone by, the trace cannot be found (Wis. v, 10).* Ask so many of the rich and learned of the world, so many princes and emperors who are now in eternity, what they possess of all the pomps, and delights, and grandeur which they enjoyed in this life? They all answer, Nothing, nothing. "O man," says St. Augustine, "you attend to what he had here; but attend to what he brings with him." (Serm. 13). "You," says the Saint, "regard only the goods which the rich man possessed ; but observe what he takes with him at death—a fetid body and a rag of a garment to rot with him."

After death the great ones of the world are spoken of for a little while ; but they are soon forgotten. *Their memory hath perished with a noise (Ps. ix, 7).* And if they have gone to **hell**, what do they do and say in that place of woe ? They weep and say, *What hath pride profited us? or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? all those things are passed away like a shadow (Wis. v, 8).* What have our pomps and riches profited us, now that they are passed away like a shadow, and for us nothing remains but eternal torments, wailing and despair?

The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light (Luke, xvi, 8). How prudent are worldlings in earthly affairs ! What toil do they endure in order to obtain a situation, or to acquire an estate? With what care do they attend to the preservation of bodily health ! They adopt the safest means; they select the best physicians, the best remedies, and the purest air. But how careless are they about the concerns of the soul! And it is certain that health, situations, and possessions will one

day end; but the soul and eternity are everlasting. What do not the unjust, the vindictive, and voluptuous endure in order to attain their wicked objects? And will they refuse to suffer anything for the soul? O God! by the light of the death-candle, at that time of truth, worldlings know and confess their folly. Then they say, Oh, that I had left the world and led a life of sanctity! Pope Leo XI. said at the hour of death, "It were better for me to have been porter in my convent than to be Pope." Honorius III also said in his last illness, "It would have been better for me to have remained in the kitchen of my monastery to wash the plates than to be chosen head of the Church." In his dying moments, Philip II, King of Spain, sent for his son, and throwing off his royal robes, showed him his breast eaten away by worms, and said to him, "Prince, behold how we die, and how the grandeurs of this world end. Oh," he exclaimed, "that I had been a lay-brother in some religious community, and had not been king!" He then ordered a cross to be fastened to his neck by means of a cord, and, having made all his arrangement for death, he said to his son: "I wished you to be present at this scene, that you may see how the world treats monarchs in the end. Their death is like that of the poorest peasant. In short, he who leads the most holy life is in the greatest favor with God." This same son, who was afterward Philip III, dying at the age of forty three years, said: "My subjects, in the sermon to be delivered at my funeral, preach nothing but this spectacle which you behold: say that to have been king serves at death but to excite regret and pain." He then exclaimed, "Oh, that I had never been a king! Oh, that I had lived in a desert to serve God! I should now go with greater confidence to present myself at his tribunal, and should not now find myself in so much danger of being damned forever." But these desires at the hour of death serve only to increase the anguish and despair of those who have not loved God. Then, says St. Teresa, "we should make no account of

what ends with life; the true life consists in living in such a manner as not to have any reason to fear death." If then we wish to see the true value of earthly things, let us look at them from the bed of death and say, These honors, these amusements, these revenues will one day have an end; we ought then to labor to become saints, and rich in goods which will accompany us to the other world, and which will make us content and happy for all eternity.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Redeemer! Thou hast suffered so many pains and ignominies for my sake; and I have loved the pleasures and vanities of this earth to such an excess, that, for the sake of them, I have often trampled on Thy grace. But, since Thou didst not cease to seek after me when I despised Thee, I cannot, O my Jesus! fear that Thou wilt now cast me away, when I seek and love Thee with my whole heart, and am more sorry for having offended Thee than I should be for having suffered every other misfortune. O God of my soul! from this day forward I wish never to offend Thee, even by a venial fault. Make known to me what is displeasing to Thee. I will not, for any earthly good, do what I know to be offensive to Thee. Make known to me what I must do in order to please Thee. I am ready to do it. I wish to love Thee with a true love. I embrace, O Lord ! all the pains and crosses which may come to me from Thy hands give me the resignation I stand in need of: *here burn, here cut*. Chastise me in this life, that in the next I may be able to love Thee for eternity. Mary, my Mother! to thee I recommend my soul! do not ever cease to pray to Jesus for me.

THIRD POINT.

We must Work for Heaven.

T*he time is short: it remaineth that . . . they that use this world, be as if they used it not; for the fashion of this world passeth away (1 Cor. vii, 29).* What is our life on this earth but a scene, which passes away and ends very soon? *The fashion of this world passeth away?* "The world," says Cornelius a Lapide, "is like a stage; one generation passes away, another comes." He who acts the part of a king, takes not the purple with him. Tell me, O villa, O house, how many masters have you had? When the comedy is over, the king is no longer king; the master ceases to be master. You at present are in possession of such a villa and palace; but death will come, and they will pass to other masters.

The affliction of an hour maketh one forget great delights (Ecclus. xi, 29). The gloomy hour of death brings to an end and makes us forget all the grandeur, nobility, and pomp of the world. Casimir, king of Poland, while he sat at a table with the nobles of his kingdom, died in the act of raising a cup to take a draught; and the scene ended for him. In seven days after his election, the Emperor Celsus was killed, and the scene closed for Celsus. Ladislaus, king of Poland, in his eighteenth year, while he was preparing for the reception of his bride, the daughter of the king of France, was suddenly seized with a violent pain, which soon deprived him of life. Couriers were instantly despatched to announce to her that the scene was over for Ladislaus, and that she might return to France. By meditating on the vanity of the world, Francis Borgia became a Saint. At the sight of the Empress Isabella, who had died in the midst of worldly grandeur and in the flower of youth, he, as has been already said, resolved to give himself entirely to God. "Thus, then," he said, "end the grandeurs and crowns of this world: I will henceforth serve a master who can never die."

Let us endeavor to live in such a manner that what was

said to the fool in the Gospel may not be said to us at the hour of death: *Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee : and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?* (Luke, xii, 20). Hence, the Redeemer adds: *So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Ibid. 21)*. Again he tells you to acquire the riches, not of the world, but of God;—of virtues and merits, which are goods which shall remain with you for eternity in heaven. *Lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither the rust nor the moth doth consume (Matt. vi, 20)*. Let us then labor to acquire the great treasure of divine love. "What," says St. Augustine, "has the rich man, if he has not charity? What does the poor man want, if he has charity?" (Serm. 112, E.B. app.). If a man had all the riches in the world, and has not God, he is the poorest of men. But the poor man who possesses God, possesses all things. And who are they that possess God? *He, says St. John, that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in Him (John iv, 16)*.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God ! I do not wish that the devil should have any longer dominion over my soul: I wish that Thou alone be the lord and master of it. I will renounce all things in order to acquire Thy grace. I esteem it more than a thousand thrones and a thousand kingdoms. And whom shall I love but Thee, who art infinitely amiable, who art an infinite good, infinite beauty, bounty, and love ? Hitherto I have abandoned Thee for the sake of creatures; this is, and always will be, to me a source of sorrow, which will pierce my heart with grief for having offended Thee, who hast loved me with so much tenderness. But since Thou hast favored me with so many graces, I can no longer bear to see myself without Thy love. O, my Lord ! take possession of my whole will, and of all that I possess, and do with me what Thou pleasest. If I

have hitherto been impatient under adversity, I ask pardon. O, my Lord ! I will never complain of Thy arrangements ; I know that they are all holy, all for my welfare. Treat me, O my God ! as Thou wishest; I promise to be always content, always to thank Thee. Make me love Thee, and I ask no more. What goods, what honors, what world can I love ? O God ! O God ! I wish only for God. Happy thou, O Mary ! who didst love nothing in the world but God. Obtain for me the grace to imitate thee, at least during the remainder of my life. In thee I trust.

CONSIDERATION XIV.

Life is a Journey to Eternity.

"Man shall go into the house of his eternity."—*EccI. xii. 5.*

FIRST POINT.

Man is a Traveller on Earth.

SEEING that on this earth so many miscreants live in prosperity, and that so many saints live in tribulations, the very Gentiles, by the sole aid of the light of nature, have known this truth,—that, since there is a just God, there must be another life, in which the wicked are punished and the good rewarded. But what the Gentiles learned by the light of reason, we Christians know by faith. *We have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come (Heb. xiii, 14).* This earth is not our country; it is for us a place of passage, from which we shall soon go to the house of eternity. " Man shall go into the house of his eternity." The house, then, dear reader, which you inhabit, is not your house; it is a hospital, from which you will soon, and when you least expect, be dislodged. Remember that when the time of death has arrived, your dearest relatives will be the first to banish

you from it; and what will be your true house ? The house of your body will be a grave, in which it will remain till the day of judgment; but your soul will go to the house of eternity—either to heaven or to **hell**. St. Augustine tells you that you are a stranger, a traveller, a spectator.' It would be foolishness in a traveller to spend all his patrimony in purchasing a villa or a house in a country through which he merely passes, and which he must leave in a few days. Reflect, says the Saint, that in this world you are only on a journey; fix not your affections on what you see; look and pass on, and labor to procure a good house, in which you will have to dwell forever.

Happy you, if you save your soul! Oh ! how delightful is heaven ! All the princely palaces of this world are but stables compared with the city of paradise, which alone can be called *the city of perfect beauty*. There you will have nothing to desire; for you will be in the society of the Saints, of the divine Mother, and of Jesus Christ, and will be free from all fear of evil; in a word, you will live in a sea of delights, and in unceasing joy, Which will last forever. *Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads (Isa. xxxv, 10)*. This joy shall be so great, that at every moment for all eternity it will appear new. But unhappy you, if you are lost! You will be confined in a sea of fire and of torments, in despair, abandoned by all, and without God. And for how long ? Perhaps, after the lapse of a hundred thousand years, your pains will have an end ? A hundred and a thousand millions of years and ages will pass by, and your **hell** will always be at its commencement. What are a thousand years compared with eternity? Less than a day which is gone by. *A thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday, which is past (Ps. lxxxix, 4)*. Would you wish to know the house which will be your dwelling for eternity ? it will be that which you merit, and which you choose for yourself by your works.

Affections and Prayers.

Then, O Lord ! behold the house which I have deserved by the life which I led. Alas! it is hell, in which, from the first sin I have committed, I ought to dwell, abandoned by Thee, and without having it ever in my power to love Thee. Blessed forever be Thy mercy, which has waited for me, and which now gives me time to repair the evil I have done. O my God! I will no longer abuse Thy patience. I am sorry above all things for having offended Thee, not so much because I have merited hell, as because I have outraged Thy infinite goodness. Never more, my God! never more will I rebel against Thee ; I desire death rather than offend Thee. O my Sovereign Good ! were I now in hell, I could never love Thee, nor couldst Thou love me. I love Thee, and wish to be loved by Thee; this I do not deserve, but Jesus merits it, because he has offered himself to Thee in sacrifice on the cross, that Thou mightest be able to pardon and love me. Eternal Father! give me, then, for the sake of Thy Son, the grace to love Thee, and to love Thee intensely. I love Thee, O my Father! who hast given me Thy Son. I love Thee, O Son of God! who didst die for me. I love thee, O Mother of Jesus! who, by thy intercession, hast obtained for me time for repentance. O Mary! obtain for me sorrow for my sins, the love of God, and holy perseverance.

SECOND POINT.

Man can Secure Eternal Happiness.

If the tree fall to the south or to the north, in what place soever it shall fall there it shall be (*Eccles. xi, 3*). Wheresoever the tree of your soul will fall at death, there Will it remain forever. There is no medium; you will be forever a king in heaven, or a slave in **hell**; forever in bliss, in an ocean of delights, or forever in

despair in a pit of torments. In contemplating the fate of the rich glutton, who was esteemed happy in this world because he was rich, but was afterward confined in **hell**; and the condition of Lazarus, who was regarded to be miserable because he was poor, but was afterward raised to the glory of heaven, St. John Chrysostom exclaimed: "O unhappy felicity, which dragged the rich man to eternal misery ! O happy infelicity, which brought the poor Lazarus to the happiness of eternity !"

Of what use is it to torture yourself, as some do, saying: Who knows whether I am among the predestined or not ? When the tree is cut down, where does it fall ? It falls on the side to which it inclines. Brother, to what side do you incline ? What sort of life do you lead? Labor always to incline to the south; preserve your soul in the grace of God; fly from sin, and thus you will save your soul, and will be predestined. And in order to avoid sin, keep always before your eyes the thought of eternity, which St. Augustine calls " the great thought". This thought has led so many young men to abandon the world, and to live in deserts, in order to attend only to the care of the soul; and they have secured eternal life. And, now that they are saved, they will rejoice for all eternity at having sought during life nothing but the salvation of their souls. Father M. Avila converted a certain lady, who lived at a distance from God, by saying to her: " Madam, reflect on these two words—always and never." In consequence of a thought which he had one day of eternity, Father Paul Segneri could not sleep for several nights; and from that day forward gave himself up to a more rigorous life. Drexelius relates that a certain bishop was encouraged to lead a holy life by the thought of eternity, and by repeating within himself, "I stand every moment at the gate of eternity." (De Damn.Reg. c. 10, # 3). A certain monk shut himself up in a cave, and did nothing else but exclaim, *O eternity! O eternity!* " He who believes in

eternity," said Father Avila. "and does not become a saint, should be confined in a madhouse."

Affections and Prayers,

Ah, my God ! have mercy on me. I know that in committing sin I condemned myself to an eternity of torments; and I have been content to resist Thy will, and to incur this punishment. Ah, my Lord ! pardon me; I am sorry for my sins from the bottom of my heart. I do not wish ever more to oppose Thy holy will. How miserable should I be, hadst Thou taken me out of life during my career of sin ! I should at this moment be condemned to remain forever in **hell**, to hate Thy will. But now I love it. and wish forever to love it. Teach me and give me strength henceforth to do Thy will. I will no longer resist Thee, O infinite Goodness! This grace only do I ask; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Enable me to do Thy will perfectly; and I ask nothing more. And what, O my God ! dost Thou desire, but my welfare and my salvation ? Ah, eternal Father! hear my prayer, for the love of Jesus Christ, who has taught me to pray continually to Thee. In his name I ask this grace—*thy will be done ; thy will be done*. Happy me if I spend the remainder of my life and if I end my days doing Thy will. O Mary ! happy thou, who hast always done the will of God perfectly ! obtain for me, through thy intercession, the grace to do his will during the remainder of my life.

THIRD POINT.

Man shall go into the House of his Eternity.

" *Man shall go into the house of his eternity.*" The prophet says *man shall go*, to show that each shall go to the house to which he wishes to go: he shall not be carried to it, but will go of his own accord. It is certain that God wills the

salvation of all men, but he will not save us by force. He has placed before each of us life and death; whichever we choose, will be given us. *That which he shall choose, shall be given him (Ecclus. xv, 18)*. Jeremias likewise says, that the Lord has given us two ways in which to walk; one the way of heaven, the other the way of **hell**. "*Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death.*" (*Jer. xxi, 8*). The choice rests with us. But how will he who wishes to walk in the way of **hell**, be able to reach heaven? All sinners wish for salvation, and in the mean time they, by their own choice, condemn themselves to **hell**, with the hope of being afterward saved. But who, says St. Augustine, can be found so foolish as to take poison with the hope of escaping death? And still so many Christians, so many fools, kill their souls by sin, saying: I will hereafter think of a remedy. O delusion, which has sent so many souls to **hell**!

Let us not be so foolish; let us reflect that eternity is at stake. In erecting a house in which he expects to live for the remainder of his life, a man spares no trouble in seeking a healthful site, and submits to great toil and fatigue in endeavoring to make the house commodious and airy. And why are men so careless when there is question of the house in which they must dwell for eternity? The business for which we labor, says St. Eucherius, is eternity; there is not question of a house more or less commodious, more or less airy; but there is question of being in a place full of delights, among the friends of God, or in a pit of all torments, in the midst of an infamous crowd of abandoned miscreants. And for how long? Not for twenty nor forty years, but for all eternity. This is a great point; it is not a business of little moment; it is an affair of infinite importance. When Thomas More was condemned to die by Henry VIII, his wife Louisa went to him for the purpose of prevailing on him to yield to the wishes of the king. He said to her: "Tell me, Louisa, how

many years could I, who am now so old, expect to live ?" "You might," answered Louisa, "live for twenty years more." "O foolish woman," rejoined the holy man, "do you want me, for twenty years of life on this earth, to forfeit an eternity of happiness, and to condemn myself to an eternity of torments?" (*Sander, Schism. angl.*)

O God ! give me light. If eternity were a doubtful matter, or only resting on a probable opinion, we ought to make every effort in our power to lead a good life, lest, should the doctrine of eternity be true, we should expose ourselves to the danger of being eternally miserable; but it is not doubtful, but infallibly certain; not a mere opinion, but a truth of faith. " Man shall go into the house of his eternity." "Alas!" says St. Teresa, "the want of faith is the cause of so many sins, and of the damnation of so many Christians." Let us then always enliven our faith, saying: " Credo in vitam aeternam." I believe that after this life there is another which never ends. And with this thought always before our eyes, let us adopt the means of securing eternal salvation. Let us frequent the sacraments; let us make meditation every day; and let us reflect on eternal life; let us fly from dangerous occasions. And, if necessary, let us leave the world; for, to make ourselves sure of eternal life, no security can be too great.

Affections and Prayers.

There is, then, my God ! no medium; I must be forever happy, or forever miserable; either in a sea of joys, or in a sea of torments; either forever with Thee in heaven, or forever separated at a distance from Thee in **hell**. And this **hell** I know for certain I have so often deserved ; but I also know for certain that Thou dost pardon all who repent, and that Thou rescuest from **hell** all who hope in Thee. Of this Thou assurest me. *He shall*

cry to me . . . I will deliver him, and will glorify him (Ps. xc, 15). Pardon me, then, O Lord! pardon me immediately, and deliver me from **hell**. O Sovereign Good ! I am sorry above all things for having offended Thee. Restore to me Thy grace as soon as possible, and give me Thy holy love. Were I now in **hell**, I could never more love Thee ; I should have to hate Thee forever. Ah, my God ! what evil hast Thou done to me that I should hate Thee ? Thou hast loved me unto death. Thou art worthy of infinite love. O Lord ! do not permit me to be ever separated from Thee. I love Thee, and will always love Thee. *Who shall separate me from the charity of Christ? (Rom. viii, 35).* Ah, my Jesus! sin alone can separate me from Thee. Ah! through the blood which Thou didst shed for me, do not permit me to be ever separated from Thee. Strike me dead, rather than suffer me to lose Thy love. " Ne permittas me separari a te." Mary, my queen and my Mother! assist me by thy prayers; obtain for me death and a thousand deaths, rather than that I should be separated from the love of thy Son.

CONSIDERATION XV.

The Malice of Mortal Sin.

" I have brought up children and exalted them; but they have despised me."—*Isaias*, i. 2.

FIRST POINT.

The Sinner Insults God.

WHAT does the sinner do when he commits mortal sin ? He insults God, he dishonors him, he afflicts him. In the first place, mortal sin is an insult offered to God. The malice of an insult is, as St. Thomas says, estimated from the condition of the person who receives, and of the person who offers, the insult. It is sinful to offend a

peasant; it is more criminal to insult a nobleman; but to treat a monarch with contempt and insolence, is a still greater crime. Who is God ? *He is Lord of Lords, and King of kings (Apoc. xvii, 14)*. He is a being of infinite majesty, before whom all the princes of the earth and all the saints and angels are less than an atom of sand. *As a drop of a bucket . . . as a little dust (Isa. xl, 15)*. The Prophet Osee adds, that compared with the greatness of God, all creatures are as insignificant as if they did not exist. *All nations, he says, are before Him as if they had no being at all (Isa. xl, 17)*. Such is God; and what is man? He is, according to St. Bernard, a heap of worms, the food of worms, by which he shall be soon devoured. *He is miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked (Apoc. iii, 17)*. Man is a miserable worm, that can do nothing: he is so blind that he knows nothing, and so poor and naked that he possesses nothing. And this miserable worm voluntarily insults a God ! " Vile dust," says the same St. Bernard, "dares to provoke such tremendous majesty." (In Cant. s. 16). The angelic Doctor, then, had just reason to say that the sin of man contains, as it were, an infinite malice. And St. Augustine calls sin "an infinite evil." (P. 3, q. 1, a.2). Hence, were all men and angels to offer themselves to death and annihilation, such an offering would not satisfy for a single sin. God punishes sin with the pains of **hell**; but all theologians teach that this chastisement is less than sin deserves.

And what punishment can be sufficient for a worm who assails his Lord ? God is the Lord of all, because he has created all. *All things are in Thy power . . . Thou hast made heaven and earth and all things (Esth. xiii, 9)*. All creatures obey God. *The winds, says St. Matthew, and the sea obey Him. Fire, hail, snow, ice, stormy winds, which fulfil His will (Ps. cxlviii, 8)*. But when man sins, what does he do? He says to God, Lord, I will not serve Thee. *Thou hast broken My yoke ; thou hast burst My bonds ; thou*

saidst : I will not serve (Jer. ii, 20). The Lord says to him: Seek not revenge; take not that property which belongs to another; abstain from that unchaste gratification. But man answers: I will have revenge; I will take possession of that property; I will indulge in that forbidden pleasure. Like Pharaoh, when Moses, on the part of God, commanded him to allow the people to go into the desert, the sinner answers: *Who is the Lord, that I should hear His voice, and let Israel go? (Exod. v, 2).* The sinner says the same— Lord, I know Thee not, I will do what I please ; in a word, he insults the Lord to his face, and turns his back upon him. Mortal sin is precisely a turning away from God. Of this the Lord himself complains. *Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord; thou art gone backward (Jer. xv, 6).* You have, says God, been ungrateful to me; you have turned back upon me; you *are gone backward.* God has declared that he hates sin. Hence, he cannot but hate the sinner who commits it. *But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike (Wis. xiv, 9).* In committing sin, man dares to declare himself the enemy of God, and to contend single-handed with the Lord. *He hath, says Job, strengthened himself against the Almighty (Job, xv, 25).* What would you say if you saw an insect attack an armed soldier ? God is the Omnipotent Being, who, by a nod, has created heaven and earth out of nothing. And if he wishes, he can, by another act of his will, destroy all creatures. *The Almighty Lord, who, at a beck, can utterly destroy . . . the whole world (2 Mach. vii, 28; Ibid. viii, 18).* In consenting to sin, the sinner stretches out his arms against the Lord. *He hath, says Job, stretched out his hand against God. He hath run against Him with his neck raised up, and is armed with a fat neck (Job, xv, 25).* He raises his neck, that is, he swells with pride, and runs to insult God; he arms himself with a fat neck, that is, with ignorance; for a fat neck is the symbol of ignorance—of that ignorance which makes the sinner say, *What harm have I done? What great evil is that sin which I have*

committed? God is merciful—he pardons sinners. What an insult! What temerity ! What blindness!

Affections and Prayers.

Behold, O my God ! at Thy feet the rash and daring rebel who has had the temerity and the audacity to insult Thee so often to Thy very face, and to turn his back upon Thee. Thou hast said *Cry to me, and I will hear (Jer. xxxiii, 3)*. **Hell** is too little for me; this I already know. But, remember, O Lord ! that I am more sorry for having offended Thee, who art infinite goodness, than I would be for the loss of all my property and of my life. Ah, Lord! pardon me, and do not permit me ever to offend Thee more. Thou hast waited for me that I may forever bless Thy mercy and love Thee. Yes, I bless Thee, I love Thee, and I hope, through the merits of Jesus Christ, that I shall never again be separated from Thy love; Thy love has rescued me from **hell**, it is by Thy love that I am to be preserved from sin for the future. I thank Thee, my Lord! for the light and the desire Thou givest me to love Thee forever. Ah ! take possession of my whole being—of my soul and body—of my powers and senses—of my will and liberty. I am Thine—save me. Thou art my only good ; Thou art alone amiable : may Thou also be my only love. Give me fervor in loving Thee. I have offended Thee grievously. Hence, it is not enough for me to love Thee. I wish to love Thee ardently, in order to compensate for the injuries I have done Thee. From Thee, who art omnipotent, I hope for this love. I also hope for it through thy prayers, O Mary! which are powerful before God.

SECOND POINT.

The Sinner Dishonors God.

The sinner not only insults, but he also dishonors God. *By the transgression of the law thou dishonorest God (Rom. ii, 23)*. Yes; for he renounces God's grace, and for a miserable pleasure he tramples on the friendship of God. Were man to forfeit the divine friendship in order to gain a kingdom, or even the entire world, he should do a great evil; for the friendship of God is more valuable than the world and even a thousand worlds. But for what does the sinner insult the Lord? *Wherefore hath the wicked provoked God? (Ps. x, 13)*. For a little earth, for the gratification of revenge, for a beastly pleasure, for the indulgence of vanity or caprice. *They violated Me among My people for a handful of barley and a piece of bread (Ezek. xiii, 19)*. When the sinner deliberates whether he will give or refuse his consent to sin, he, as it were, takes in his hand a balance and examines whether the grace of God has more or less weight than the indulgence of his passion, vanity, or pleasure; and when he consents to sin, he declares that his passion, vanity, or pleasure is of greater value than the friendship of God. Behold the Lord covered with shame by the sinner!

Contemplating the greatness and majesty of God, David said, *Lord, who is like to Thee? (Ps. xxxiv, 10)*. But seeing sinners compare and prefer a miserable gratification to his friendship, the Lord exclaimed, *To whom have you likened Me, or made Me equal? (Isa. xl, 25)*. Then, he says, was that vile pleasure of greater value than my grace?—*Thou hast cast Me off behind thy back (Ezek. xxiii, 35)*. Were you to forfeit a hand, or ten dollars, or even a much smaller sum, you would not have committed that sin. Then, says Salvian, is God alone so contemptible in your eyes, that he deserves to be despised for the indulgence of a passion, or for a miserable gratification?

Moreover, by offending God for the sake of his pleasure,

the sinner makes that pleasure his god, by making it his last end. St. Jerome says: "What a person desires, if he worships it, is to him a god. A vice in the heart is an idol on the altar." (In Ps. lxxx). Hence St. Thomas says "If you love delights, delights are your god." And according to St. Cyprian, "Whatever man prefers to God, that he makes a god to himself." (De Dup. Mart.). When Jeroboam rebelled against the Lord, he endeavored to draw the people with him into idolatry. Hence, he placed before them his idols, saying: *Behold thy gods, O Israel (3 Kings, xii, 28)*. It is thus the devil acts; he represents a certain pleasure to the sinner, and says : "Make this your god: behold this pleasure, this revenge is your god: adhere to them and forsake the Lord." And in consenting to sin, the sinner obeys the devil, and in his heart adores as his god the pleasure in which he indulges.

If the sinner dishonors God he surely does not dishonor him in his presence ! Oh ! he insults and dishonors God to his very face; for God is present in all places. *Do I not fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?* This, sinners know, and still they dare to provoke God before his eyes. *They provoke Me to anger before My face (Isa. lxxv, 3)*.

Affections and Prayers.

Thou, then, my God ! art an infinite good, and I have frequently exchanged Thee for a miserable pleasure, which I had scarcely indulged when it vanished. But Thou, though despised by me, now offerest me pardon if I wish for it, and Thou promisest to give me Thy grace, if I repent of having offended Thee. Yes, my Lord ! I repent with my whole heart, of having outraged Thee so grievously : I detest my sins above all things. Behold ! I already return to Thee, as I hope, and Thou already receivest me, and embracest me as Thy child. I thank Thee, O infinite Goodness ! but assist me now, and do not permit me ever

again to banish Thee from my heart. **Hell** will not cease to tempt me ; but Thou art more powerful than **hell**. I know that I shall never more abandon Thee, if I always recommend myself to Thee. The grace, then, which I ask is, that I may always recommend myself to Thee, and that I may always say to Thee, as I now do Lord, assist me; give me light, give me strength, give me perseverance, give me paradise; but above all, give me Thy love, which is the true paradise of souls. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness! and I wish always to love Thee. Hear me for the love of Jesus Christ. Mary, thou art the refuge of sinners: assist, by thy prayers, a sinner who wishes to love thy God.

THIRD POINT.

The Sinner Afflicts God.

The sinner insults God, he dishonors God, and fills the heart of God with grief and bitterness. There is nothing more galling than to be treated with ingratitude by a person tenderly loved and highly favored. Whom does the sinner assail ? He insults a God who has created him, and has loved him so as to give his blood and his life for his salvation; and by committing mortal sin he banishes God from his heart. God comes to dwell in the soul that loves him. *If any one love Me . . . My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him.* (John, xiv, 23). Mark the words — *We will make Our abode with him.* God comes to dwell forever in the soul; he never departs from it, unless he is driven away. According to the Council of Trent, " He deserts not the soul, unless he is deserted." (Sess. 6, cap. 11). But, O Lord ! Thou knowest that the ungrateful sinner will, in a few moments, banish Thee: why dost Thou not instantly depart from him ? Wilt Thou wait until he expels Thee? Abandon him; depart from him before he offers

Thee this great insult. "No," says the Lord, "I will not depart until he himself chases Me away."

Then, in consenting to sin, the soul says to God: Lord, depart from me. *The wicked, says Job, have said to God, Depart from us (Job. xxi, 14).* The sinner, according to St. Gregory, says the same, not in words, but by acts. The sinner knows that God cannot dwell with sin; in yielding to sin, he sees that God must depart; hence, by his conduct he says to God: Since Thou canst not remain in me along with my sin, depart—farewell. And through the very door by which God leaves the soul, the devil enters. *Then he goeth and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there (Matt. xii, 45).* In baptizing an infant, the priest commands the devil to depart. "Go out from him, unclean spirit, and make room for the Holy Ghost," Yes; for the soul, by receiving the grace of God, becomes his temple. *Know you not, says St. Paul, that you are the temple of God? (1 Cor. iii, 16).* But, in consenting to sin, man does the very contrary: he says to God, who is in his soul: "Go out from me, O Lord, make room for the devil." Of this the Lord complained to St. Bridget, saying, that he is treated by the sinner as a king expelled from his throne. "I am like a monarch banished from his own dominions: and in my place the worst of plunderers is chosen." (Rev. 1, 1, c. 1). What pain should you feel if you received a grievous insult from a person on whom you had lavished favors? This is the pain which you have given to your God who laid down his life for your salvation. The Lord calls heaven and earth to pity him on account of the ingratitude of sinners. *Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth. . . . I have brought up children and exalted them, but they have despised Me (Isa. I, 2).* In a word, by their iniquities sinners afflict the heart of God. *But they provoked to wrath and afflicted the Spirit of the Holy One (Isa. lxiii, 10).* God is not susceptible of pain; but Were he capable of sorrow, a

single mortal sin should, as Father Medina teaches, be sufficient to make him die through pure grief. "Mortal sin would, were it possible, destroy God himself, because it would be the cause of infinite sadness in God." (De Satisf. Q. 1). Thus, as St. Bernard says, "Sin, as far as in it lies, destroys God" (In temp. Pasch. S. 3).

In committing mortal sin, the sinner, as it were, gives poison to God, and does all in his power to deprive him of life. *The sinner, says David, hath provoked the Lord (Ps. x. 4).* And according to St. Paul, he tramples on the Son of God. For he despises all that Jesus Christ has done and suffered in order to take away the sins of the world.

Affections and Prayers.

Then, my Redeemer, as often as I have sinned, I have banished Thee from my soul, and have done what would, were it possible for Thee to die, have taken away Thy life. I now hear Thee ask: *What evil have I done Thee? Tell Me. What displeasure have I given Thee that thou shouldst offer Me so many insults?* Lord, Thou hast given me existence, and hast died for me. Behold the evil Thou hast done me. What answer then can I make? I say that I have deserved a thousand hells; Thou hast just ground for sending me to everlasting torments. But remember the love which made Thee die on the cross for my salvation: remember the blood which Thou hast shed for my sake, and have mercy on me. But I know that Thou dost not wish that I despair; on the contrary Thou makest me feel that Thou standest at the door of my heart, and that by Thine inspirations Thou knockest for admission. *I stand at the gate, and knock.* Thou tellest me to open—*Open to Me, my sister.* Yes, my Jesus: I banish sin from my soul; I am sorry for it with my whole heart, and I love Thee above all things. Enter, O my love! the gate is open; enter, and never more depart from me. Bind me to Thyself by

Thy love, and do not permit me to be ever separated from Thee. No, my God! we will never again be disunited; I embrace Thee and unite Thee to my heart; give me holy perseverance. " Ne permittas me separari a Te." Mary, my Mother, assist me always; pray to Jesus for me; obtain for me this favor, that I may never more lose his grace.

CONSIDERATION XVI.

The Mercy of God.

" Mercy exalteth itself above judgment."—*St. James*, ii. 13.

FIRST POINT.

God Waits for the Sinner.

GOOD is naturally diffusive—that is, inclined to communicate its good even to others. But God, who is by nature infinite goodness, as St. Leo expresses himself, has an infinite desire to impart his own felicity to us ; and therefore his inclination is, not to chastise, but to show mercy to all. To punish is, according to Isaias, a work opposed to the inclination of God. *He shall be angry . . . that he may do His work, His strange work: His work is strange to Him (Isa. xxviii, 21)*. And when the Lord chastises in this life, he does it in order to show mercy in the next. *O God! . . . Thou hast been angry, and hast had mercy on us. (Ps. lix, 3)*. He appears angry that we may enter into ourselves and detest our sins. *Thou hast shown Thy people hard things ; Thou hast made us drink the wine of sorrow (Ps. lix, 5)*. And when he sends us any chastisement, he does it because he loves us, and wishes to deliver us from eternal punishment. *Thou hast given a warning to them that fear Thee, that they may flee from before the bow, that Thy beloved may be delivered (Ps. lix, 6)*. And who can sufficiently admire and praise the

mercy of God toward sinners in waiting for them, in calling them, and in receiving them when they return ? Oh ! how great is the mercy of God in waiting for our repentance ! My brother, when you offended God, he could have struck you dead ; but he waited for you, and instead of chastising you, he conferred favors upon you, he preserved your life, and provided for you. He pretended not to see your sins, that you might repent. *Thou overlooked the sins of men for the sake of penance (Wis. xi, 24)*. But, O Lord, how does it happen that Thou canst not bear to behold a single sin, and beholdest so many of them in silence? *Thou canst not look on iniquity ; why lookest Thou upon them that do unjust things, and holdest Thy peace (Habac. i, 13)*. Thou beholdest the blasphemer, the unchaste, the vindictive man, multiplying iniquities from day to day ; and Thou dost not chastise him : and why so much patience? *Therefore the Lord waiteth that He may have mercy on thee (Isa. xxx, 18)*. God waits for sinners, that they may amend, and that thus he may pardon and save them.

St. Thomas says, that all creatures, fire, the earth, air, water, by a natural instinct, would wish to punish and to take vengeance on the injuries done to their Creator (Wisd. Xvi, 24). But God in his mercy restrains them. But, O Lord! Thou waitest for these impious wretches, that they may see their wickedness: but dost not Thou see that they ungratefully take advantage of Thy mercy to offend Thee still more ? , *Thou hast been favorable to the nation : Thou hast been favorable to the nation: art Thou glorified? (Isa. xxvi, 15)*. And why so much patience? *Because God wills not the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live (Ezek. xxxiii, 11)*. O patience of God ! St. Augustine goes so far as to say that God, were he not God, would be unjust on account of his excessive patience toward sinners. To wait for those who abuse patience to become more insolent, appears to be an injustice to the divine

honor. " We sin," continues the holy Doctor, " we adhere to sin." Some make peace with sin, and sleep in sin for months and years. " *Gaudemus de peccato*"—*We rejoice at sin*; others go so far as to boast of their wickedness ; and Thou art appeased? We provoke Thee to anger—Thou invitest us to mercy. We appear to be engaged with God in a contest in which we labor to provoke him to chastise our guilt; and he invites us to pardon.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Lord! I know that I deserve to be at this moment in **hell**. Hell is my house. (Job, xvii, 13). But, through Thy mercy, I am not now in that place of woe, but I am here at Thy feet, and feel that Thou wishest and commandest me to love Thee. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God (Deut. vi, 5)*. I hear Thee tell me that Thou wilt pardon me if I repent of the injuries I have done Thee. Yes, my God : since Thou wishest me, a miserable rebel against Thy majesty, to love Thee, I love Thee with my whole heart, and I feel more regret for the outrages I have offered to Thee, than for any evil that could have befallen me. Ah ! enlighten me, O infinite Goodness; make me sensible of the wrongs I have done Thee. I will no longer resist Thy calls. I will give no more displeasure to a God who has loved me so tenderly, who has pardoned me so often and with so much love. Ah! that I had never offended Thee, my Jesus; pardon me, and grant that, from this day forward, I may love nothing but Thee: that I may live only for Thee, who didst die for me; that I may suffer for Thy love, since Thou hast suffered so much for the love of me. Thou hast loved me from eternity; Grant that for eternity I may burn with Thy love. I hope for all things, O my Saviour, through Thy merits; I trust also in thee, O Mary; save me by thy intercession.

SECOND POINT.

God Calls the Sinner.

Consider, moreover, the mercy of God in calling the sinner to repentance. When Adam rebelled against the Lord, and hid himself from his face, behold, God, having lost Adam, goes in search of him, and calls him as it were with tears. *Adam, where art thou? (Gen. iii, 9)*. "These," says Father Pereira in his commentary on this passage, "are the words of a father seeking a lost son." My brother, God has often done the same to you. You fled from God, and he sought after you, calling you at one time by his inspiration, at another by remorse of conscience, now by sermons, again by tribulations, and by the death of your friends. Speaking of you, Jesus appears to say *I have labored with crying: my jaws are become hoarse (Ps. lxxviii, 4)*. My son, I have almost lost my voice in calling you to repentance. Remember, O sinners, says St. Teresa, that that Lord who will one day be your judge, is now calling you to return to him.

Dearly beloved Christian, how often have you been deaf to the calls of God? You deserved that he should call you no more; but your God has not ceased to call you, because he wishes to make peace with you, and to save you. Who was it that called you? A God of infinite majesty. And what were you but a miserable fetid worm! Why did he call you? For no other purpose than to restore to you the life of grace which you had lost? *Return ye and live (Ezek. xviii, 32)*. To acquire the divine grace, it would be but little to live in a desert during your entire life. God offered to give you his grace at each moment, if you wished to obtain it by making an act of contrition, and you refused. And after all this, God has not abandoned you, he has gone in search of you, as it were weeping, and saying: Son, why will you bring yourself to perdition? *And why will you die, O house of Israel? (Ezek. xviii, 31)*.

When man commits a mortal sin, he banishes God from his soul. The wicked have said to God, *Depart from us (Job, xxi, 14)*. But what does God do ? He places himself at the door of that ungrateful heart. *Behold, I stand at the gate and knock (Apoc. iii, 20)*. He even appears to entreat the soul to allow him to enter. *Open to Me, my sister (Cant. v. 2)*. He grows weary praying for admission. *I am weary of entreating thee (Jer. xv, 6)*. Yes, says St. Denis, the Areopagite, God follows sinners like a despised lover, entreating them not to destroy their souls (Ad Demoph.). And this precisely the Apostle meant when he wrote to his disciples. *For Christ, I beseech you to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. v, 20)*. In explaining this passage, St. John Chrysostom makes a beautiful reflection "Christ himself entreats you; but what does he entreat you to do ? To be reconciled to God; for it is not God that acts like an enemy, but you. The Saint's meaning is, that the sinner has not to labor in order to move God to make peace with him; for he, and not God, refuses peace.

Ah ! this good Lord goes every day in search of so many sinners, continually saying to them: Ungrateful souls, do not fly away any longer; tell me why you fly away from me ? I love your welfare, and desire nothing else than to make you happy. Why will you destroy yourselves? But, O Lord, what is it Thou dost? Why so much patience and so much love toward these rebels? What good dost Thou expect from them ? It redounds but little to Thy honor to show such an excess of love for the miserable worms that fly away from Thee. *What is a man, that Thou shouldst magnify him ? or why dost Thou set Thy heart upon him (Job, vii, 17)*.

Affections and Prayers.

Behold, O Lord ! at Thy feet an ungrateful soul, imploring mercy. Father, forgive me. I call Thee Father, because Thou wishest me thus to call Thee. My Father, pardon me. I do not deserve pity, for I have treated Thee with ingratitude because Thou hast been bountiful to me. Ah, my God ! through that goodness which did not allow Thee to abandon me when I fled from Thee, receive me, now that I return to Thee. Give me, O my Jesus! a great sorrow for the offences I have offered to Thee, and give me the kiss of peace. I am sorry above all things for the injuries I have done Thee; I detest and abhor them, and I unite this hatred and abhorrence to that which Thou, O my Redeemer! didst feel for them in the garden of Gethsemane. Ah! pardon me through the merits of that Blood which Thou hast shed for me in the garden. I promise firmly never more to depart from Thee, and to banish from my heart every affection which is not for Thee. My Jesus, my love! I love Thee above all things : I wish always to love Thee, and love Thee alone: give me strength to execute this good will, make me all Thine, O Mary, my hope after Jesus ! thou art the Mother of mercy : pray to God for me, and have pity on me.

THIRD POINT.

God Receives the Sinner with Kindness.

The princes of the earth disdain even to look at the rebel who comes to ask pardon; but God acts not in this manner with us: *He will not turn away His face from you, if you return to Him (Par. xxx, 9)*. God cannot turn away his face from those who return and cast themselves at his feet: no; for he himself invites them, and promises to receive them as soon as they come. *Return to Me, saith the Lord, and I will receive thee (Jer. iii, 1)*. *Turn to Me . . . and I will turn to you, saith the Lord of Hosts (Zac. i, 3)*. Oh ! with what love and tenderness does God

embrace the sinner that returns to him. This love and tenderness Jesus Christ wished to give us to understand by the parable of the sheep, which the shepherd, when he found it, placed on his shoulders. *Doth he not lay it upon his shoulders, rejoicing; and coming home, call together his friends and neighbors, saying to them : Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost (Luke, xv, 5).* The Redeemer adds: *There shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance.* This tenderness the Saviour declared more fully in the parable of the prodigal son; in which he tells us that he is the father who, when he saw his lost son returning, runs to meet him, and before his son utters a word, embraces and kisses him, and in embracing him, almost swoons away through tenderness of consolation. *And running to him he fell upon his neck and kissed him (Luke, xv, 20).*

The Lord promises that, if sinners repent, he will even forget their sins, as if they had never offended him. *If the wicked do penance . . . living he shall live. . . . I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done (Ezek. xviii, 21).* He even goes so far as to say, *Come and accuse Me, saith the Lord; if your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow (Isa. i, 18).* As if he said : Sinners, *come and accuse Me;* if I do not pardon you, reprove me, upbraid me with having been unfaithful to my promises. But no; God knows not how to despise an humble and contrite heart.

The Lord glories in showing mercy and granting pardon to sinners. *And therefore shall He be exalted sparing you (Isa. xxx, 18).* And how long does he defer pardon ? Not an instant: he grants it immediately. *Weeping,* says the Prophet Isaias, *thou shalt not weep; He will surely have pity on thee (Isa. xxx, 19).* Sinners, exclaims the prophet, you have not long to weep ; at the first tear the Lord will be moved to pity: *At the voice of thy cry, as soon as He*

shall hear, He will answer thee (Ibid.). God does not treat us as we treat him: we are deaf to the calls of God : but *as soon as he shall hear, he will answer thee;* the very instant you repent and ask forgiveness, God answers and grants your pardon.

Affections and Prayers.

O my God ! against whom have I rebelled ? Against Thee, who art so good, against Thee that hast created me, and died for me. After so many acts of treason. Thee hast borne with me. Ah! the thought of the patience Thou hast had with me ought to make me live always on fire with Thy love. And who would have borne so long as Thou hast the injuries which I have done Thee? Miserable shall I be, should I ever again offend Thee, and condemn myself to hell! I already see that Thy mercy can bear with me no longer. I am sorry, O Sovereign Good! for having offended Thee. I love Thee with my whole heart: I am resolved to give Thee all the remainder of my life. Hear me, O Eternal Father! through the merits of Jesus Christ: give me holy perseverance and Thy love: hear me, O my Jesus! for the sake of the blood which Thou hast shed for me. We therefore beseech Thee, assist Thy servants whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood.' O Mary, my Mother! look upon me, "turn thy eyes of mercy to us." and draw me entirely to God.

CONSIDERATION XVII

Abuse of Divine Mercy.

"Knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance ?"—*Rom. ii. 4.*

FIRST POINT.

God is Merciful, but He is also Just.

WE read in the parable of the cockle, that the servants of the good man of the house, seeing that it had grown up in the field along with the wheat, wished to pluck it up. *Wilt thou, said they, that we go and gather it up? (Matt. xiii, 24).* No, replied the master; suffer it to grow up, and then it shall be gathered and cast into the fire. *In the time of the, harvest I will say to the reapers: Gather up first the cockle, and bind it in bundles to burn (Ibid. 30).* In this parable we see, on the one hand, the patience with which the Lord treats sinners; and on the other, the rigor with which he chastises the obstinate. St. Augustine says that the devil deludes men in two ways, *by despair and hope.* After the sinner has offended God, the enemy, by placing before his eyes the terror of divine justice, tempts him to despair; but before he sins, the devil encourages him to sin with the hope of divine mercy. Hence the Saint gives to all the following advice: " After sin, hope for mercy; before sin, fear justice." He who abuses God's mercy to offend him, is undeserving of mercy. God shows mercy to those who fear him, but not to those who avail themselves of his mercy to banish the fear of God from their hearts. Abulensis says that he who offends justice may have recourse to mercy; but to whom can he have recourse, who offends mercy itself?

It is hard to find a sinner so sunk in despair as to wish for his own damnation. Sinners wish to sin, without losing the hope of salvation. They sin and say: God is merciful, I will commit this sin, and will afterward confess it. They say, observes St. Augustine, " God is good, I will do what I please." (In Jo. Tr. 33). Behold, the language of sinners: but, O God, such too was the language of so many who are now in **hell**.

Say not, says the Lord, that the mercies of God are great;

that however enormous your sins may be, you will obtain pardon by an act of contrition. *And say not: The mercy of the Lord is great: He will have mercy on the multitude of my sins (Ecclus. v, 6).* Say it not, says the Lord; and why? *For mercy and wrath quickly come from Him, and His wrath looketh upon sinners (Ibid.).* The mercy of God is infinite; but the acts of his mercy, or his mercies are finite. God is merciful, but he is also just. "I am just and merciful," said our Lord to St. Bridget; "but sinners regard me only as merciful." (Rev. 1, 1, c. 5). St. Basil writes that sinners wish to consider God only as good and merciful. To bear with those who avail themselves of the mercy of God to offend him, would not, says Father M. Avila, be mercy, but a want of justice. Mercy is promised, not to those who abuse it, but those who fear God. *And His mercy,* said the divine mother, *to those that fear Him (Luke, I, 50).* Against the obstinate, threats of just retribution have been pronounced; and, says St. Augustine, as God is not unfaithful to his promises, so he is not a liar in his threats (De vera Poenit. c. 7). Beware, says St. John Chrysostom, when the devil, not God, promises you divine mercy, that he may induce you to commit sin. "Never attend to that dog that promises to you the mercy of God." (Scal. Spir. Gr. 6). "Woe," says St. Augustine, "to him who hopes in order to sin." (In Ps. 144). Oh! how many, says the Saint, has this vain hope deluded and brought to perdition! "They who have been deceived by this shadow of vain hope cannot be numbered." (Serm. 154, E.B. app.). Miserable the man who abuses the mercy of God to offer new insults to his majesty! St. Bernard says that Lucifer's chastisement was accelerated, because he rebelled against God with the hope of escaping punishment. King Manasses sinned; he afterward repented, and obtained pardon. His son Ammon, seeing that his father's sins were so easily forgiven, abandoned himself to a wicked life with the hope of pardon: but for Ammon there was no mercy. Hence, St. John Chrysostom

asserts that Judas was lost because he sinned through confidence in the benignity of Jesus Christ (In Mat. Hom. 83). In fine, God bears, but he does not bear forever. Were God to bear forever with sinners, no one would be damned: but the most common opinion is that the greater part of adults, even among Christians, are lost. *Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are that go in thereat (Matt. vii, 13).*

According to St. Augustine, he who offends God with the hope of pardon " is a scoffer, not a penitent." (Ad Frat. In er. s. 11). But St. Paul tells us that "God does not allow himself to be mocked." (Gal. vi, 7). To continue to offend God as often and as *long* as the sinner pleases, and afterward to gain heaven, would be to mock God. *For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap (Ibid. 8).* He that sows sin, has no reason to hope for anything else than chastisement and **hell**. The net with which the devil drags to **hell** almost all Christians who are damned, is the delusion by which he leads them into sin with the hope of pardon. Sin freely, he says to them; for, after all your iniquities, you will be saved. But God curses the man that sins with the hope of mercy. The hope of sinners after sin is pleasing to God, when it is accompanied with repentance; but the hope of the obstinate is an abomination to the Lord (Job, xi, 20). As the conduct of a servant who insults his master because he is good and merciful, irritates the master, so such hope provokes God to inflict vengeance.

Affections and Prayer;

Ah, my God ! I have been one of those who have offended Thee because Thou wert bountiful to me. Ah, Lord ! wait for me, do not abandon me. I am sorry, O infinite Goodness! for having offended Thee, and

for having so much abused Thy patience. I thank Thee for having waited for me till now.

Henceforth I will never more betray Thee, as I have hitherto done. Thou hast borne with me so long, that Thou mightest one day see me a lover of Thy goodness. Behold, this day has, I hope, arrived : I love Thee above all things, and esteem Thy grace more than all the kingdoms of the world : rather than lose it, I am ready to forfeit life a thousand times. My God ! for the love of Jesus Christ, give me holy perseverance till death, along with Thy holy love. Do not permit me ever again to betray Thee, or to cease to love Thee. Mary ! thou art my hope: obtain for me this gift of perseverance, and I ask nothing more.

SECOND POINT.

The Sinner Abandoned by God.

Some will say: God has hitherto shown me so many mercies, I hope he will treat me with the same mercy for the future. But I answer: And will you insult God again, because he has been so merciful to you ? Then, says St. Paul, do you thus despise the mercy and patience of God ? Do you not know that the Lord has borne with you to this moment, not that you may continue to offend him, but that you may weep over the evil you have done ? *Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and patience and long-suffering? Knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance? (Rom. ii, 4).* If through confidence in the divine mercy you continue to sin, the Lord will cease to show mercy. *Except you be converted, says David, he will brandish his sword (Ps. vii, 13). Revenge is mine, and I will repay thee in due time (Deut. xxxii, 35).* God waits; but when the time of chastisement arrives, he waits no longer, but executes vengeance.

Therefore the Lord waiteth, that he may have mercy on you (Isa. xxx, 18). God waits for sinners, that they may amend: but when he sees that the time given to bewail their sins is employed in multiplying crimes, he then calls the very time to judge them. He hath called against me the time (Lam. 1, 15). "The very time," says Gregory, "comes to judge." Thus the very time given, and the very mercies shown to sinners, will serve to make God chastise them with greater rigor, and abandon them sooner. We would have cured Babylon, but she is not healed: let us forsake her (Jer. li, 9). And how does God abandon sinners? He either sends them a sudden death, and makes them die in sin, or he deprives them of his abundant graces, and leaves them with the sufficient grace, with which they can, but will not, save their souls. The blindness of their understanding, the hardness of their heart, the evil habits which they have contracted, will render their salvation morally impossible; and thus they will be, if not absolutely, at least morally abandoned. I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be wasted (Isa. v, 5). Oh! what a chastisement! When the master of the vineyard takes away its hedges, and leaves it open to men and to beasts, does he not show that he abandons it? It is thus that God acts when he abandons the soul: he takes away the hedge of holy fear, and of remorse of conscience, and leaves it in darkness. And then all the monsters of crime will enter the soul. Thou hast appointed darkness, and it is night: in it shall all the beasts of the wood go about (Ps. ciii, 20). And the sinner, abandoned in that obscurity, will despise the grace of God, heaven, admonitions, and excommunications; and will make a jest of his own damnation. The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth (Prov. xviii, 3).

God will not chastise the sinner in this life; but, not to be

punished in this world will be the greatest chastisement of the wicked. *Let us have pity on the wicked, but he will not learn justice (Isa. xxvi, 10)*. On this passage St. Bernard says, " This mercy I do not wish for: it is above all wrath." (In Cant. s. 42). Oh! what a chastisement is it when God abandons the sinner into the hands of his sins, and appears not to demand any further account of them ! *According to the multitude of his wrath he will not seek him. (Ps. ix, 4)*. God appears not to be enraged against sinners. *My jealousy shall depart from you, and I will cease and be angry no more. (Ezek. xvi, 42)*.—He appears to allow them all that they desire in this life. *I let them go according to the desires of their heart (Ps. lxxx, 13)*. Miserable the sinner that prospers in this life ! His prosperity is a sign that God waits to make him a victim of his justice for eternity. *Why, said Jeremias, doth the way of the wicked prosper ?* He answers: *Gather them together as sheep for a sacrifice (Jer. xii, 1)*. There is no punishment greater than that which God inflicts, when he permits a sinner to add sin to sin. *Add thou iniquity upon their iniquity ... let them be blotted out of the book of the living (Ps. lxxviii, 28)*. In explaining these words, Bellarmine says that " there is no punishment greater than when sin is the punishment of sin." It would be a smaller punishment to be struck dead by the Lord after their first sin; for, by dying afterward they will suffer as many hells as they have committed sins.

Affections and Prayers.

Ay God! I know that in my miserable state I have deserved to be deprived of Thy grace and light: but seeing the light which Thou now givest me, and feeling that Thou now callest me to repentance, I have just reason to hope that Thou hast not as yet abandoned me. And since, O Lord ! Thou hast not abandoned me, multiply Thy mercies on my soul, increase

Thy light, increase my desire to serve and love Thee. Change me, O omnipotent God ! and from being a traitor and rebel, make me a great lover of Thy goodness, that I may one day enter heaven to praise Thy mercies for all eternity. Thou dost then wish to pardon me, and I desire nothing but the pardon of my sins and the gift of Thy love. I am sorry O infinite Goodness! for having so often offended Thee. I love Thee, O Sovereign Good ! because Thou commandest me to love Thee; I love Thee, because Thou well deservest my love. Ah, my Redeemer, through the merits of Thy blood, give Thy love to a sinner whom Thou hast loved so ardently, and whom Thou hast borne with so patiently for so many years: I hope for every grace from Thy mercy. I hope to love Thee always till death; and for eternity. *The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever (Ps. lxxxviii, 2).* I will praise Thy mercy, O my Jesus. I will forever praise thy mercy, O Mary! who hast obtained for me so many graces ; I acknowledge that I have received them all through thy intercession. Continue, O my Mother! to assist me by thy prayers, and to obtain for me holy perseverance.

THIRD POINT.

Unfortunate is he who allows the Time of Mercy to pass by.

It is related in the life of Father Louis La Nusa, that in Palermo there were two friends, who went one day to take a walk. One of them, called Caesar, who was a comedian, seeing the other oppressed with melancholy, said: How long is it since you were at confession ? Is it on account of your long absence from the sacraments that you are so much troubled ? Listen to me: " Father La Nusa told me one day that God gave me twelve years to live, and that if, within that period, I did not amend, I should die an unhappy death. I have since

traveled through so many parts of the world; I have had many attacks of sickness, one of which brought me to the brink of death; but, in this month the twelve years will be completed, and I now feel better than in any part of my past life." He then invited his friend to hear, on Saturday, a new comedy, which he had composed. But what happened ? On Saturday, the 24th of November, 1688, as he was going on the stage, he was seized with apoplexy, and died suddenly. He expired in the arms of a female comedian, and thus the comedy ended. But let us make the application to ourselves. Brother, when the devil tempts you again to sin, if you wish to be lost, you have it in your power to commit sin: but do not then say that you wish to be saved. As long as you wish to sin, regard yourself as damned, and imagine that God writes the sentence of your damnation, and that he says to you: *What is there that I ought to do more for my vineyard, that I have not done to it? (Isa. v, 4).* Ungrateful soul, what more ought I to do for you, that I have not done ? But, since you wish to be lost, go into eternal fire; the fault is your own.

But you will say, Where then is the mercy of God ? Ah, unhappy soul ? do you not feel that God has shown you mercy in bearing with you for so many years, after so many sins ? You should remain forever prostrate on the earth, thanking him for his mercy, and saying: *The mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed (Lam. iii, 22).* By committing a single mortal sin, you have been guilty of a greater crime than if you had trampled under foot the *first* monarch in the world. You have been guilty of so many mortal sins, that if you had committed against your brother the injuries which you have offered to God, he would not have borne with you. God has not only waited for you, but he has so often called you and invited you to pardon. *What is there that I ought to have done more?* If God had stood in need of you, or if you had conferred a great favor upon him, could he show you

greater mercy ? If, then, you offend him again, you will change his mercy into wrath and vengeance.

If, after the master had given it another year to produce fruit, the fruitless fig-tree still remained barren, who could expect that the Lord would have allowed it more time, or would not have cut it down ? Listen, then, to the admonition of St. Augustine: " O fruitless tree ! the axe is deferred; be not secure: you will be cut down. (Serm. 110, E.B.). Your punishment, says the Saint, has been delayed, but not taken away; if you abuse any longer the divine mercy, *You shall be cut down*: in the end vengeance will fall upon you. What do you wait for? Will you wait till God sends you to **hell** ? But should he send you there, you already know that your ruin is irreparable! The Lord is silent, but he is not silent forever: when the time of vengeance arrives he no longer holds his peace. *These things hast thou done, and I was silent. Thou thoughtest unjustly that I should be like to thee. I will reprove thee, and set before thy face (Ps. xlix, 21).* I will place before your eyes the mercies I have shown you, and will make these very mercies judge and condemn you.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! unhappy me, should I henceforth be unfaithful to Thee, and betray Thee again after the light Thou now givest me. This light is a sign that Thou wishest to pardon me. I repent, O Sovereign Good! of all the injuries I have done Thee because they have offended Thee, who art infinite goodness. In Thy blood I hope for pardon, and I hope for it with certainty; but should I again turn my back upon Thee, I would deserve a **hell** created on purpose for myself. And what makes me tremble, O God of my soul! is, that I may again lose Thy grace. I have so often promised to be faithful to Thee, and have afterward rebelled against Thee. Ah, Lord! do not

permit it; do not ever abandon me to the great misfortune of seeing myself again Thy enemy. Send me any chastisement, but not this. *Do not permit me to be separated from Thee.* Shouldst Thou see that I shall again offend Thee, strike me dead, rather than permit so great an evil. I am content to suffer the most cruel death, sooner than have to weep over the misery of being again deprived of Thy grace. *Do not permit me to be separated from Thee.* I repeat this prayer, O my God : grant that I may repeat it always. *Do not permit me to be separated from Thee.* I love Thee, my dear Redeemer! I do not wish to be separated from Thee. Through the merits of Thy death, give me an ardent love, which will bind me so closely to Thee, that I may never more be able to dissolve the union. O Mary, my mother! I fear that if I again offend God, thou too wilt abandon me. Assist me, then, by thy prayers; obtain for me holy perseverance and the love of Jesus Christ.

CONSIDERATION XVIII.

The Number of Sins.

" Because sentence is not speedily pronounced against the evil, the children of men commit evil without fear."—*Eccles. viii. 11.*

FIRST POINT.

The Measure is Determined for Each One.

IF God instantly chastises the man who insults him, we certainly should not see him so much outraged as we do at present. But because the Lord does not instantly punish sinners, but waits for them, they are encouraged to offend him the more. It is necessary to understand that, though God waits and bears, he does not wait and bear

forever. It is the opinion of many holy Fathers— of St. Basil, St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, and others —that as God, according to the words of Scripture, *Wis. xi. 21, Thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number and weight* has fixed for each the number of his days, the degrees of health and talent which he will give to him, so he has also determined the number of sins that he will pardon; and when this number is completed, he will pardon no more. Eusebius of Caesarea says the same thing: "God waits up to a certain number, and afterwards abandons;" and so speak also the above-mentioned Fathers.

And these Fathers have not spoken at random, but according to the sacred Scriptures. In one place the Lord says that he restrained his vengeance against the Amorrites, because the number of their sins was not as yet filled up : *For as yet the iniquities of the Amorrites are not at the full (Gen. xv, 16)*. In another place he says : *I will not add any more to have mercy on the house of Israel (Os. I, 6)*. Again he says: *All the men who have tempted Me ten times shall not see the land (Num. xiv, 22)*. *Thou hast, says Job, sealed up my offences as it were in a bag (Job, xiv, 16)*. Sinners keep no account of their sins; but God keeps an account of them, that when the harvest is ripe, that is, when the number of sins is completed, he may take vengeance on them. *Put ye in the sickles; for the harvest is ripe (Joel, iii, 13)*. In another place he says: *Be not without fear about sin forgiven, and add not sin to sin (Ecclus. v, 5)*. As if he said: O sinner! you must tremble even on account of the sins which I have forgiven you; for if you add another, it may happen that this new sin, along with those which have been pardoned, may complete the number, and then there will be no more mercy for you. *The Lord waiteth patiently, that when the day of judgment shall come, he may punish them in the fulness of their sins (2 Mac. Vi, 14)*. God waits till the

measure of iniquities is filled up, and then he chastises the sinner.

Of such chastisements there are many examples in the Scriptures. Saul disobeyed God a second time, and was abandoned. When he entreated Samuel to intercede for him, saying : *Bear, I beseech thee, my sin, and return with me that I may adore the Lord* , Samuel answered: *I will not return with thee, because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee (1 Kings, xv, 25)*. We have also the example of Balthasar, who, after having profaned the vessels of the temple at table, saw a handwriting on the wall—*Mene, Thecel, Phares*. Daniel came, and in explaining these words, among other things, said: *Thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting (Dan. V, 27)*. By these words he gave the king to understand that in the balance of divine justice the weight of his sins had made the scale descend. *The same night Balthasar, the Chaldean king, was killed*. Oh ! how many miserable sinners meet with a similar fate ! They live many years, multiplying sins; but when the number is filled up, they are struck dead, and cast into **hell** ! *They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment they go down to **hell** (Job, xxi, 13)*. There are some who spend their time in investigating the number of the stars, the number of the angels, or the number of years which each one will live. But who can discover the number of sins which God will pardon each individual ? We should, therefore, tremble. My brother, it may be that God will pardon you no more after the first criminal pleasure which you indulge, after the first thought to which you consent, or after the first sin which you commit.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah ! my God ! I thank Thee. How many for fewer sins than I have committed are now in **hell**! For them there is no pardon — no hope. And I am still living: I am not in **hell**: but, if I wish, I can hope for pardon and for Paradise. I am sorry above all things for all my sins, because by them I have offended Thee, who art infinite goodness. Eternal Father, *look on the face of Thy Christ (Ps. lxxxiii, 10)*. I behold Thy Son dead on the cross for my sake; and through his merits have mercy on me. I wish to die rather than offend Thee any more. When I consider the sins I have committed, and the graces Thou hast bestowed upon me, I have just reason to fear that, if I commit another sin, the measure will be completed, and I shall be damned. Ah ! assist me by Thy grace ; from Thee I hope for light and strength to be faithful to Thee. And if Thou seest that I should again offend Thee, take me out of my life, now that I hope to be in a state of grace. My God ! I love Thee above all things, and I feel a greater fear of incurring Thy enmity than of death. For Thy mercy's sake do not permit me any more to become Thy enemy. Mary, my Mother ! have pity on me; assist me; obtain for me holy perseverance.

SECOND POINT.

The Measure is not the Same for All.

Some sinners say: But God is merciful. Who, I ask, denies it? The mercy of God is infinite; but though his mercy is infinite, how many are cast into **hell** every day ? *The Lord hath sent Me to heal the contrite of heart (Isa. lxi, 1)*. God heals those who have a good will. He pardons sins, but he cannot pardon the determination to commit sin. These sinners will also say: I am young. You are young; but God counts not years, but sins. The number of sins which God pardons is not the same for all: some he pardons a hundred: others a thousand sins; others he

sends to **hell** after the second sin. How many has the Lord condemned to eternal misery after the first sin ? St. Gregory (Dial. 1, 4, c. 18) relates that a child of five years, for uttering a blasphemy was condemned to **hell**. The Most Holy Virgin revealed to that great servant of God, Benedicta of Florence, that a girl twelve years old was damned after her first sin. A boy of eight years died after his first sin, and was lost. In the Gospel of St. Matthew we find that the Lord instantly cursed the fig-tree the first time he saw it without fruit. *May no fruit grow on thee forever. And immediately the fig-tree withered away (Matt. xxi, 19)*. Another time God said: *For three crimes of Damascus, and for four, I will not convert it (Amos, I, 3)*. Perhaps some daring sinner may have the temerity to demand an account of God why he pardons some three sins, but not four. In this we must adore the judgments of God, and say with the apostle: *O the depth of the riches, of the wisdom, and of the knowledge of God! how incomprehensible are His judgments and unsearchable His ways ! (Rom. xi, 33)*. " The Lord," says St. Augustine, " knows whom he spares and whom he does not spare. To those who receive mercy, he gives it gratuitously; from those who do not receive mercy, it is justly withheld." (Ep. 217, c. 5, E. B.).

The obstinate sinner may say : But I have so often offended God, and he has pardoned me; I also hope he will pardon me the sin which I intend to commit. But, I ask, must God spare you forever, because he has not hitherto chastised you? The measure shall be filled up, and vengeance shall come. Samson continued to allow himself to be deluded by Dalila, hoping that, as on former occasions, he would escape from the Philistines. *I will go out as I did before, and shake myself (Judges, xvi, 20)*. But at last he was taken, and lost his life. *Say not, I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me ? Say not, says the Lord, I have committed so many sins, and God has not*

chastised me; for the Most High is a patient rewarder, (Ecclus. v, 4), that is, he will one day come and punish all; and the greater the mercy which he will have shown, the more severe shall be the chastisement which he will inflict. St. Chrysostom says, that God should be dreaded more when he beats with the obstinate sinner, than when he punishes him suddenly. Because, according to St. Gregory, if they remain ungrateful, God punishes with the greatest rigor those whom he waits for with the greatest patience. (In Evang. Hom. 13). And it often happens, adds the Saint, that they whom God has borne with for a long time, die unexpectedly, and without time for repentance. (Mor. 1, 15, c. 19). And the greater the light which God will have given, the greater will be your blindness and obstinacy in sin. Far it had been better for them not to have known the way of justice, than, after they have known it, to turn back. (2 Pet. ii, 21). And St. Paul says, that it is morally impossible for a soul that sins after being enlightened, to be again converted. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gifts, . . . and are fallen away, to be renewed to penance (Heb. vi, 4).

The threats of the Lord against those who are deaf to his calls, are truly alarming, *Because I have called, and you have refused, . . . I also will laugh at your destruction, and will mock when that shall come to you which you feared (Prov. i, 24).* Mark the words—I *also*: they mean that as the sinner has mocked God by his confessions, by promising fidelity, and afterward betraying him; so the Lord will mock him at the hour of death. The wise man says: *As a dog that returned to the vomit, so is the fool that repeateth his folly (Prov. Xxvi, 11).* In explaining this text, Denis the Carthusian says, that as a dog that eats what he has just vomited is an object of disgust and abomination, so the sinner who relapses into sins which he has detested in the tribunal of penance, renders

himself hateful in the sight of God.

Affections and Prayers.

Behold me, O my God! at Thy feet. I am that disgusting dog that has so often eaten the forbidden apples, which I before detested. I do not deserve mercy : but, O my Redeemer! the blood which Thou hast shed for me encourages and obliges me to hope for it. How often have I offended Thee and Thou hast pardoned me ! I promised never more to offend Thee, and I have afterward returned to the vomit: and Thou hast again pardoned me ! What do I wait for ? Is it that Thou mayest send me to **hell**, or that Thou mayest abandon me into the hand of my sins, which would be a greater punishment than **hell**? No, my God ! I wish to amend : and in order to be faithful to Thee, I will put all my confidence in Thee. I will, whenever I am tempted, always and instantly have recourse to Thee. Hitherto I have trusted in my promises and resolutions, and have neglected to recommend myself to Thee in my temptations: this has been the cause of my ruin. Henceforth Thou shalt be my hope and my strength, and thus I shall be able to do all things.

I can do all things in Him that strengthened me. (Phil. iv, 13). Give me grace then, O my Jesus, through Thy merits, to recommend myself to Thee, and to ask Thy aid in my wants. I love Thee, O Sovereign Good, amiable above every good: I wish to love Thee alone ; but it is from Thee I must receive aid to love Thee. O Mary, my Mother! do thou also assist me by thy intercession ; keep me under thy protection, and make me always invoke thee when I am tempted. Thy name shall be my defence.

THIRD POINT.

We Must Always Fear.

My son, hast thou sinned? do so no more; but, for thy former sins, pray that they may be forgiven thee (*Ecclus. xxi, 1*). Behold, dear Christian, the advice which your good Lord gives you because he desires your salvation. Son, offend me no more: but from this day forward be careful to ask pardon for your past transgressions. My brother, the more you have offended God, the more you should tremble at the thought of offending him again; for the next sin which you commit will make the balance of divine justice descend, and you will be lost. I do not say absolutely that after another sin there will be no more forgiveness for you; for this I do not know: but I say that it may happen. Hence, when you are tempted, say within yourself: Perhaps God will pardon me no more, and I shall be lost. Tell me; were it probable that certain food contained poison, would you eat it? If you had reason to think that on a certain road your enemies lay in wait to take away your life, would you pass that way as long as you could find another more free from danger? And what security, or even what probability, have you that if you relapse into sin, you will afterward repent sincerely of it; and that you will not return again to the vomit? What just reason have you to believe that God will not strike you dead in the very act of sin, or that, after your sin, he will not abandon you?

If you purchase a house, you spare no pains to obtain all the securities necessary to guard against the loss of your money; if you take medicine, you are careful to assure yourself that it cannot injure you; if you pass over a torrent, you cautiously avoid all danger of falling into it; and for a miserable gratification, for a beastly pleasure, you will risk your eternal salvation, saying: I expect to go to confession after this sin. But when, I ask, will you go to confession? Perhaps on Sunday. And who has promised that you will live till Sunday? Perhaps you intend to go to

confession to-morrow? But who promised you to-morrow? "Do you cling," says St. Augustine, "to a day, who are not sure of an hour?" How can you promise yourself that you will go to confession to-morrow, when you know not whether you will be among the living in another hour? "He, continues the Saint, " who has promised pardon to penitents, has not promised to-morrow to sinners; perhaps he will give it, and perhaps he will not." If you now commit sin, God, perhaps, will give you time for repentance, and perhaps he will not; and should he not give it, what will become of you for all eternity? In the mean time, by consenting to sin, you lose your soul for the sake of a miserable pleasure, and expose yourself to the risk of being lost forever. Would you, for that vile gratification, risk a sum of one thousand ducats? Would you, for that momentary pleasure, expose to danger your all —your money, your houses, your possessions, your liberty and life? Surely you would not. Will you then, for that wretched delight, lose all—your soul, heaven, and God? Do you believe that heaven, **hell**, and eternity are truths of faith, or that they are fables? Do you believe that if death overtake you in sin, you will be lost forever? Oh, what temerity! what folly! to condemn yourself by your own free act to an eternity of torments with the hope of afterward reversing the sentence of your condemnation. No one is so foolish as to take poison with the hope of being preserved from death; and will you condemn yourself to eternal death, saying, I will, perhaps, be hereafter delivered from it? O folly, which has brought, and brings, so many souls to **hell**! *Thou hast*, says the Lord, *trusted in thy wickedness. . . . Evil shall come upon thee, and thou shalt not know the rising thereof (Isa. xlvii, 10, 11)*. You have sinned through a rash confidence in the divine mercy: vengeance will unexpectedly fall upon you, and you will not know whence it comes.

Affections and Prayers.

Behold, O Lord ! one of those fools who have so often lost their soul and Thy grace with the hope of afterward recovering them. And hadst Thou struck me dead in those nights in which I was in sin, what would have become of me ? I thank Thy mercy, which has waited for me, and which now makes me sensible of my folly. I see that Thou desirest my salvation ; and I too wish to save my soul. I am sorry, O infinite Goodness for having so often turned my back upon Thee. I love Thee with my whole heart. And I hope in the merits of Thy Passion. O my Jesus! that I will never again be one of those fools. Pardon me at this moment, and give me the gift of Thy grace. I will never leave Thee again. *In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped; let me never be confounded (Ps. xxx, 2).* Ah no ; I hope, O my Redeemer! never more to suffer the misfortune and confusion of seeing myself deprived of Thy grace and love. Grant me holy perseverance and give me the grace always to ask it of Thee by invoking Thy holy name and the name of Thy Mother, and by saying : Jesus assist me; most holy Mary ! pray for me. Yes, my Queen, if I have recourse to thee, I shall never be conquered. And when the temptation continues, obtain for me the grace not to cease to invoke thy aid.

CONSIDERATION XIX.

The State of Grace and of Disgrace with God.

" Man knoweth not the price thereof."—Job, xxviii. 13.

FIRST POINT.

Dignity to which the Grace of God raises us.

If, says the Lord, *thou wilt separate the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth (Jer. xv, 19)*. They who know how to distinguish what is precious from what is vile, are like God, "who knows how to refuse the evil and to choose the good." Let us examine how great a good it is to be in the grace of God, and how great an evil to be in enmity with God. Men do not understand the value of divine grace. *Man knoweth not the price thereof (Job, xxviii, 13)*. Hence, they exchange it for vanity, for a little earth, or for a beastly pleasure; but it is an infinite treasure, which makes us worthy of the friendship of God. *For, says the Wise Man, she is an infinite treasure to men, which they that use become the friends of God (Wisd. vii, 14)*. Hence, a soul in grace is the friend of God. The Gentiles, who were deprived of the light of faith, deemed it impossible for a creature to attain to the friendship of God; and they; who were guided only by the light of nature, could scarcely think otherwise; for, as St. Jerome says, "Friendship either finds or makes equals." (In Mich. 7). But God has declared in several places in the holy Scriptures, that by means of this grace we become his friends if we observe his law. *You are my friends if you do the things which I command. I will not now call you servants, but I have called you friends (John, xv, 14)*. Hence, St. Gregory exclaims: "O goodness of God ! We do not deserve to be called even servants, and he condescends to call us friends." (In Evang. Hom. 27).

How fortunate would the man esteem himself, who should have the king for his friend ! In a vassal, it would be temerity to presume to seek the friendship of his sovereign; but it is not temerity in a soul to aspire to the friendship of its God. St. Augustine' relates that two courtiers entered into a monastery of hermits, and that one of them began to read the life of St. Anthony the Abbot. He read, and in reading his heart became gradually divested of worldly affections. Turning to his companion,

he said : " What do we seek ? We can hope for joining more than the friendship of the emperor. And through how many perils do we reach this greater danger ? And how long will this last ? Friend, fools that we are, what do we seek ? The most we can expect to gain in the service of the emperor is, to become his friends : and should we succeed in gaining his friendship, we shall expose our eternal salvation to greater risk. It is with difficulty we can ever become the friends of Caesar: " but, if I wish, I am this moment the friend of God."

Whosoever, then, is in the state of grace is the friend of God. He also becomes the son of God: *You are gods, and the sons of the Most High (Ps. lxxxii, 6)*. This is the great gift which we have received from the divine love through Jesus Christ. *Behold, says St. John, what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us—that we should be called, and should be, the sons of God (1 John, iii, 1)*. Moreover, the soul in the state of grace is the spouse of God. *I will espouse thee to me in faith (Osee, ii, 20)*. Hence the father of the prodigal, when his son returned, ordered a ring to be put on his finger, in token of his espousal. Lastly, the soul becomes the temple of the Holy Ghost. Sister Mary d'Oignies saw a devil go out from an infant who was receiving baptism, and the Holy Ghost enter with a multitude of angels.

Affections and Prayers.

Therefore my God! when my soul had the happiness of being in Thy grace, it was Thy friend, Thy child, Thy spouse, and Thy temple; but, by committing sin, it lost all, and became Thy enemy and the slave of **hell**. But I thank Thee, O my God, for giving me time to recover Thy grace. I am sorry above all things for having offended Thee. O infinite Goodness! and I love Thee above all things. Ah! receive me again into Thy friendship. For Thy

mercy's sake do not reject me. I know that I deserve to be banished from Thy face; but, by the sacrifice which He offered on Calvary, Jesus Christ has merited for me mercy and pardon. *Thy kingdom come. My Father* (it is thus Thy Son has taught me to call Thee),—My Father, come with Thy grace to reign in my heart; grant that I may serve Thee alone, that I may live for Thee alone, and that I may love Thee alone. *And lead us not into temptation. Ah ! do not permit my enemies to tempt me so that I may be conquered. But deliver us from evil. Deliver me from hell; but deliver me first from sin, which alone can lead me to hell. O Mary ! pray for me. and preserve me from the great misfortune of ever seeing myself in sin and deprived of the grace of thy and my God.*

SECOND POINT.

Advantages that the Grace of God Procures for us.

St. Thomas of Aquino says that the gift of grace surpasses every gift that a creature can receive, since it is a participation of the divine nature. (I, 2, q. 112, a. 1). And before him, St. Peter said the same: *"that by these ye may be made partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. i, 4)*. So great things Jesus Christ has merited for us by his Passion: he has communicated to us the same splendor that he received from the Father. *And the glory which Thou hast given to Me, I have given to them (John, xvii, 22)*. In fine, a soul in the state of grace is one thing with God. *He, says St. Paul, that is joined to the Lord is one spirit (1 Cor. vi, 17)*. The Redeemer has said that in a soul that loves God, the Three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity dwell. *If any one love Me, my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and we will make our abode with him (John, xiv, 23)*.

So great is the beauty of a soul in the state of grace, that

God himself extols it. *How beautiful art thou ! how beautiful art thou!* (*Cant. iv, 1*). The Lord appears never to take his eyes off the soul that loves him, nor to close his ears to its petitions. *The eyes of the Lord are upon the just: and His ears unto their prayers. (Ps. xxxiii, 16)*. St. Bridget used to say that a man could not behold the beauty of a soul in the grace of God, without dying through joy. And St. Catharine of Sienna, seeing a soul in the state of grace, said that she would willingly have given her life to prevent that soul from losing such beauty. Hence she kissed the ground on which priests walked, because through them souls recover the grace of God.

How many treasures of merits can a soul in the state of grace acquire ? Each moment it can merit an eternity of glory. St. Thomas teaches that every act of love merits for the soul eternal life. (1, 2, q. 114, a. 7). Why then should we envy the great ones of the earth ? If we are in the grace of God, we can constantly acquire far more greatness in heaven. A certain lay-brother of the Society of Jesus, as Father Patrignani relates in his Menologies, appeared after death, and said that he and Philip the Second, King of Spain, were in the enjoyment of glory; but that his glory in heaven was as far superior to that of Philip, as that monarch was raised above him on this earth. Moreover, he alone who has experienced it, can conceive the peace which a soul in the grace of God enjoys in this life. *O taste and see that the Lord is sweet (Ps. xxxiii, 9)*. The words of the Lord cannot fail. *Much peace have they that love thy law (Ps. cxviii, 165)*. The peace of a soul that is united with God, surpasses all the pleasures that the senses and the world can give. *The peace of God which surpasseth all understanding (Phil. iv, 7)*.

Affections and Prayers.

O my Jesus! Thou art the good pastor, who allowed Thyself to be slaughtered in order to give life to Thy sheep. When I fled away from Thee, Thou didst not cease to follow and seek after me; Thou receivest me now that I seek Thee, and cast myself with a penitent heart at Thy feet. Give me again Thy grace, which I have miserably lost through my own fault. I am sorry for it with my whole heart; I would wish to die of sorrow at the thought of having so often turned my back on Thee. Pardon me through the merits of the painful death which Thou didst suffer for me on the cross. Bind me with the sweet chains of Thy love, and do not permit me ever more to fly away from Thee. Since I have merited the eternal torments of **hell**, give me strength to bear with patience all the crosses which Thou sendest me. Since I have deserved to be for eternity under the feet of the devils, make me embrace with love all the contempt and insults which I shall receive from men. Finally, make me obedient to all Thy holy inspirations, and give me grace to conquer all human respect for the love of Thee. I am resolved henceforward to serve Thee only: let others say what they please, I will serve Thee alone, O my most amiable God ! Thee only do I wish to please. But give me Thy aid, without which I can do nothing. I love Thee, O my Jesus! with my whole heart, and I trust in Thy blood. Mary, my hope! assist me by thy prayers. I glory in being thy servant, and thou dost glory in saving sinners who have recourse to thee. Come to my relief and save me.

THIRD POINT.

Enmity with God.

Let us now see the misery of a soul that is in enmity with God. It is separated from God, his sovereign good. *Your iniquities*, says the prophet Isaias, *have divided between you and your God (Isa.. lix, 2)*. Hence the

soul is no longer his, and he is no longer its God. *You are not my people and I will not be yours (Os. I, 9)*. The soul not only belongs no longer to God, but God even hates it and condemns it to **hell**. God does not hate any of his creatures; he does not hate the wild beast, the viper, or the toad. *Thou lovest all things that are, and hatest none of the things which Thou hast made (Wis. xi, 25)*. But he cannot refrain from hating sinners. *Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity (Ps. v, 7)*. Yes; God cannot but hate sin, which is diametrically opposed to his will; and in hating sin he must necessarily hate the sinner who is united to his sin. *But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike (Wis. xiv, 9)*.

O God ! if a man has for his enemy a monarch of the earth, he cannot sleep, he is every moment in dread of death. And how can he who is the enemy of God enjoy peace? He may escape the vengeance of his sovereign by concealing himself in a wood, or by taking refuge in a distant country. But who can fly from the hands of God? *Lord, says David, if I shall ascend into heaven, if I shall hide myself in hell, wheresoever I go, Thy hand can reach me. If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there; if I descend into hell, Thou art present. . . . Even there also shall Thy hand lead me (Ps. cxxxviii, 8, 10)*.

Poor sinners ! they are cursed by God, cursed by the angels, cursed by the saints, cursed, also every day on earth by all priests and religious, who, in reciting the divine office, proclaim them accursed. *They are cursed who decline from thy commandments (Ps. cxviii, 21)*. Moreover, the soul that is at enmity with God has lost all its merits. Should a man be equal in merit to St. Paul the Hermit, who lived forty-eight years in a cave; to St. Francis Xavier, who gained ten millions of souls to God; or to St. Paul the Apostle, who, according to St. Jerome, surpassed in merit all the other apostles—that man, if he

commit a single mortal sin, loses all. *All his justices which he hath done shall not be remembered (Ezek. xviii, 24).* Behold the ruin which the enmity of God produces: it transforms the child of God into the slave of Lucifer; his beloved friend into an enemy whom he sovereignly hates; and the heir of heaven into one condemned to **hell**. St. Francis de Sales used to say that, were the angels capable of weeping they should shed tears of pity at the sight of a soul that commits mortal sin and loses the divine grace.

But the greatest misery is that the angels would, if it were in their power, weep; and the sinner weeps not. "A Christian," says St. Augustine, "if he loses a sheep or any other valuable animal, weeps over the loss, and neither eats nor sleeps; but when he loses the grace of God, he eats and sleeps, and sheds not a single tear."

Affections and Prayers.

Behold. O my Redeemer! the miserable state to which I have brought myself. To make me worthy of Thy grace. Thou didst spend thirty-three years in toil and pains ; and I, for the poisoned pleasure of a moment, have despised and lost it. I thank Thy mercy, which still gives me time to recover it if I wish. Yes, I wish to do everything in my power to regain it. Tell me what I must do in order to obtain Thy pardon. Dost Thou wish me to repent ? O my Jesus! I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended Thy infinite Goodness. Dost Thou wish me to love Thee? I love Thee above all things. Hitherto I have unfortunately employed my heart in loving creatures and vanities. From this day forward I will live only for Thee; I will love only Thee my God, my treasure, my hope, my strength. *I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength (Ps. xvii, 2).* Thy merits, Thy wounds, O my Jesus! shall be my hope and my strength; from Thee I hope for strength to be

faithful to Thee. Give me then. O my Redeemer! the gift of Thy grace, and do not permit me ever again to depart from Thee. Divest my soul of all worldly affections, and inflame my heart with Thy holy love. Kindle in it the fire of Thy love. Mary, my Mother! who wert always on fire with divine love, make me burn like thee with the love of God.

CONSIDERATION XX.

The folly of the Sinner.

"For the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God."—I Cor. iii. 19.

FIRST POINT.

The Large Number of Fools.

THE Saint John Avila would have divided the world into two prisons, one for the incredulous, the other for Christians who live in sin at a distance from God. The prison of the latter he would have called the prison of fools. But the greatest misery and misfortune is, that these miserable men esteem themselves wise and prudent, though they are the most foolish and imprudent of mortals. And unfortunately they are exceedingly numerous. *The number of fools is infinite (Eccles. i, 15).* Some are foolish through love of honors; some for the sake of pleasures; and others from attachment to the miserable goods of this earth. And great as their folly is, they have the temerity to call the saints fools, because they despise the goods of this life in order to gain eternal salvation and the possession of God, who is the true and supreme good. They deem it folly to embrace contempt, and to pardon injuries; folly to abstain from sensual pleasures, and to practice mortification; folly to renounce honors and riches, to love solitude and an humble and hidden life. But they never reflect that the Lord has called

their wisdom folly. *For, says the apostle, the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God (1 Cor.iii, 19).*

Ah! they will one day confess their folly; but when? When there will be no remedy for it. They will then say in despair *We fools esteemed their life madness and their end without honor (Wis. v, 4).* Ah ! fools that we have been ! we regarded the lives of the Saints as folly; but now we know that we have been miserably foolish. *Behold how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints (Wis. v, 5).* Behold how they have obtained a place among the happy number of the children of God, and have secured their lot among the saints—an eternal lot, which will make them happy for eternity; and we are among the number of the slaves of the devil, condemned to burn in this pit of torments for all eternity. *Therefore we have erred, thus they shall conclude their lamentation, from the way of truth, and the light of justice hath not shined unto us (Wis. v, 6).* Then we have erred by shutting our eyes to God's light; and what renders our condition still more forlorn is, that for our error there is no remedy, and there will be none as long as God will be God. How great then the folly of sinners, who, for a worthless gain, for a little smoke, for a transient delight, lose the grace of God ! What would not a vassal do in order to gain the favor of his sovereign ? O God ! for a miserable gratification, to lose God, the supreme Good ! to lose paradise ! to forfeit peace in this life, by bringing into the soul the monster sin, which, by its remorse, will torture it unceasingly ! and to condemn yourself voluntarily to everlasting woe! Would you indulge in that forbidden pleasure if, in punishment, your hand was to be burned ? or if you were to be shut up for a year in a grave ? Would you commit that sin, if after consenting to it, you should forfeit a hundred crowns ? And still you believe and know that in yielding to sin, you lose heaven and God, and that you are condemned to eternal fire: and

after all you transgress the divine law.

Affections and Prayers.

God of my soul! what should be my lot at this moment, if Thou hadst not shown me so many mercies? I should be in **hell** among the number of the foolish to which I have belonged. I thank Thee, O my Lord! and I entreat Thee not to abandon me in my blindness, I feel that Thou tenderly callest and invitest me to ask pardon, and to hope for great graces from Thee, after the insults I have offered to Thee. Yes, my Saviour! I hope Thou wilt admit me among Thy children: I am not worthy to be called Thy child, after having so often insulted Thee to Thy face. *Father, I am not worthy to be called Thy child: I have sinned against heaven and before Thee (Luke, xv, 18).* But I know that Thou goest in search of the strayed sheep, and that Thou feelest consolation in embracing Thy lost children. My dear Father! I am sorry for having offended Thee. I cast myself at Thy feet, and embrace them; I will not depart till Thou pardon and bless me.

I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me (Gen. xxxii, 26). Bless me, O my Father! and let the fruit of Thy benediction be, a great sorrow for my sins, and a great love for Thee. I love Thee, O my Father! I love Thee with my whole heart. Do not permit me ever more to depart from Thee. Deprive me of all; but do not strip me of Thy love. O Mary! if God is my Father, thou art my Mother. Do thou also bless me. I do not deserve to be thy son: accept me for thy servant; but make me a servant who will always love thee tenderly and always confide in thy protection.

SECOND POINT.

Great Folly.

Foor sinners ! they labor and toil for the attainment of worldly sciences, or the art of gaining the goods of this life, which will soon end, and neglect the goods of the next life, which is everlasting! They lose their reason to such a degree, that they become not only fools, but senseless beasts; for, living like brute animals, they attend not to what is lawful or unlawful, but only follow the beastly instincts of the senses, and embrace what is pleasing to the flesh, without ever reflecting on what they lose, or on the eternal ruin which they bring upon themselves. To live in this manner is, to act not like a man, but like a senseless beast. St. John Chrysostom says: "We call him a man who preserves intact the image of man; but what is this image of man: To be rational." (In Gen. hom. 23). To be a man is, to be rational—that is, to act according to reason, and not according to the sensual appetite. Were beasts to receive from God the use of reason, and to act according to its dictates, we should say that they acted like men; and, on the other hand, when a man follows the impulse of the senses in opposition to reason, it must be said he acts like a beast.

O that they would be wise, and would understand, and would provide for their last end (Eccles. iv, 13). He who acts according to the rules of prudence, looks to the future—that is, to what must happen at the end of life—to death and judgment, and after judgment, **hell** or heaven. Oh ! how much wiser is the peasant who saves his soul, than the monarch who brings himself to **hell**. *Better is a child who is poor and wise, than a king that is old and foolish, who knoweth not to foresee hereafter (Eccles. iv, 13).* O God ! would not all pronounce the man to be a fool, who, in order to gain a shilling, would risk his entire property? And will he not be considered foolish, who, for a momentary gratification, forfeits the grace of God, and

exposes his soul to the danger of eternal perdition ? The care of present, and the total neglect of eternal goods and evils, is the ruin of the immense multitude of the damned.

God has certainly not placed us in this world to become rich, or acquire honors, or to indulge our senses, but to gain eternal life. *But the end life ever-fasting (Rom. vi, 22)*. And nothing but the attainment of this end is of importance to us. *One thing is necessary (Luke, x, 42)*. But there is nothing that sinners despise more than this end: they think only of the present; they each day walk toward death, and approach the gate of eternity, but know not whither they are going. "What would you think," says St. Augustine, "of a pilot, who, when asked where he is going should answer, that he did not know? Would not all exclaim, that he is bringing the ship to ruin? Such," adds the Saint, "is the man who runs out of the way." (In Ps. 31, enarr. 2). Such are the wise of the world, who know how to acquire wealth, to indulge in amusements, to gain posts of honor and emolument, but know not how to save their souls. The rich glutton knew how to lay up wealth; but *he died, and was buried in hell (Luke, xvi, 22)*. Alexander the Great knew how to acquire many kingdoms; but in a few years he died, and was lost forever. Henry VIII knew how to preserve his throne by rebelling against the Church; but seeing at death that he lost his soul, he exclaimed: *We have lost all*. How many miserable sinners now weep and cry out in **hell**: *What hath pride profited us? or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us ? all those things are passed away like a shadow (Wis. v, 8)*. Behold, they exclaim, for us all the goods of the world have passed away like a shadow, and nothing remains but eternal wailing and everlasting torments.

Before man is life and death, that which he shall choose

shall be given him (Ecclus. xv, 18). Beloved Christian, God places before you in this world, life and death—that is, the voluntary privation of forbidden pleasures, by which you will gain eternal life; or the indulgence of them, by which you merit everlasting death. What do you say ? What choice do you make ? In making the choice, act like a man, and not like a senseless beast. Act like a Christian who believes in the Gospel and says: *What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul? Mat.. xvi, 26).*

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! Thou hast given me reason, Thou hast given me the light of faith, and I have acted like a senseless beast, by losing Thy grace for the miserable pleasure of the senses, which have passed away like air; and now I find nothing but remorse of conscience, and debts to Thy divine justice. *Enter not into judgment with Thy servant (Ps. cxiii, 2).* Ah, Lord ! judge me not according to my merits, but treat me according to Thy mercy. Give me light, give me sorrow for the offences that I have committed against Thee, and pardon me. " I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost: seek thy servant." I am a lost sheep: and unless Thou seek after me, I shall be lost forever. Have pity on me for the sake of that blood which Thou hast shed for me. I am sorry, O Sovereign Good ! for having left Thee, and for having voluntarily renounced Thy grace. I would wish to die of sorrow, but give me an increase of sorrow. Bring me to heaven that there I may sing Thy mercies. Mary, my Mother! thou art my refuge; pray to Jesus for me : beg of him to grant me pardon and holy perseverance.

THIRD POINT.

True Wisdom.

Let us be persuaded that the truly wise are they who know how to acquire the divine grace, and the kingdom of heaven; and let us incessantly implore the Lord to give us the science of the saints, which he gives to all who ask it from him (Wis. x, 10). Oh ! what a precious science to know how to love God, and to save our souls ! This science consists in knowing how to walk in the way of salvation, and to adopt the means of attaining eternal life. The affair of salvation is of all affairs the most necessary. If we know all things, and know not how to save our souls, our knowledge will be unprofitable to us, and we shall be forever miserable: but on the other hand, though we should be ignorant of all things, we shall be happy for eternity, if we know how to love God. " Blessed is the man," says St. Augustine, "who knows Thee though he be ignorant of other things." (Conf. 1, 5, c.5). One day, Brother Giles said to St. Bonaventure: Happy you, Father Bonaventure, who are so learned. I am a poor, ignorant man, who knows nothing. You can become more holy than I can. "Listen, " replied the Saint: " If an ignorant old woman love God more than I do, she shall be more holy than I am." On hearing this, Brother Giles began to exclaim: O poor old woman ! poor old woman ! listen, listen: if you love God, you can become more holy than Father Bonaventure.

"The unlearned rise up," says St. Augustine: "and bear away the kingdom of heaven." (Conf. 1, 8, c. 8). How many rude and illiterate Christians, who, though unable to read, know how to love God and are saved ! And how many of the learned of this world are damned! But the former, not the latter, are truly wise. Oh! how truly wise were St. Paschal, St. Felix the Capuchin, St. John of God, though unacquainted with human sciences ! Oh ! how truly wise were so many holy men, who, abandoning the world, shut themselves up in the cloister, or spent their

lives in the desert! How truly wise were St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Louis of Toulouse, who renounced the throne ! Oh ! how truly wise were so many martyrs, so many tender virgins, who refused the hand of princes, and suffered death for the sake of Jesus Christ! That true wisdom consists in despising the goods of this life, and in securing a happy eternity, even worldlings know and believe : hence of persons who give themselves to God, they say : Happy they, who are truly wise, and save their souls ! In fine, they who renounce the goods of the world to give themselves to God, are said to be undeceived. What then should we call those who abandon God for worldly goods? We should call them deluded men. Brother, to what class do you wish to belong ? In order to make a good choice, St. Chrysostom tells you to visit the sepulchres of the dead. The grave is the school in which we may see the vanity of earthly goods, and in which we may learn the science of the Saints. "Tell me," says St. Chrysostom, "are you able there to discover who has been a prince, a noble, or a man of learning? For my part," adds the Saint, "I see nothing but rottenness, worms, and bones. All is but a dream, a shadow." (In Matth. hom. 77). Everything in this world will soon have an end, and will vanish like a dream or a shadow. But, dearly beloved Christians, if you wish to be truly wise, it is not enough to know your end, it is necessary to adopt the means of attaining it. All would wish to be saved and to be Saints; but because they do not employ the means, they never acquire sanctity, and are lost. It is necessary to fly from the occasions of sin, to frequent the sacraments, to practice mental prayer, and above all, to impress on the heart the following maxims of the Gospel: *What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world? (Matt. xvi, 26). He that loveth his life shall lose it (John, xii, 25).* That is, we must even forfeit our life in order to save the soul. *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself (Matt. xvi, 24).* To follow Jesus Christ it is necessary to refuse to

self-love the pleasures which it seeks. *Life is His good will (Ps. xxix, 6)*. Our salvation consists in doing the will of God. These, and other similar maxims, should be deeply impressed on the soul.

Affections and Prayers.

Father of mercies! behold my miseries, and have pity on me; give me light, make me sensible of my past folly, that I may bewail it, and make known to me Thy infinite goodness, that I may love it. My Jesus! *do not deliver up to beasts the souls that confess to Thee (Ps. lxxiii, 10)*. Thou hast expended Thy blood for my salvation: do not permit me ever more to be, as I have hitherto been, the slave of the devils. I am sorry, O my Sovereign Good! for having abandoned Thee. I curse all the moments in which I voluntarily consented to sin ; and I embrace Thy holy will, which desires nothing but my welfare. Eternal Father! through the merits of Jesus Christ, give me strength to do all that is pleasing to Thee. Strike me dead rather than permit me to oppose Thy holy will. Assist me by Thy grace to banish from my heart every affection which does not tend to Thee. I love Thee, O God of my soul! I love Thee above all things: and from Thee I hope for every good, for pardon, for perseverance in Thy love, and for paradise, that there I may love Thee for eternity. O Mary! ask these graces for me. Thy Son refuses thee nothing. My hope! I trust in thee.

CONSIDERATION XXI.

Unhappy Life of the Sinner: and happy Life of him who loves God.

"There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord."—Isa. xlvi. 22. " Much peace have they that love Thy law."—Ps.

cxviii. 165.

FIRST POINT.

The World cannot make us Happy.

IN this life all men seek after peace. The merchant, the soldier, the man who goes to law, labor with the hope of making a fortune, and of thus finding peace, by worldly fortune, by a more exalted post, by gaining a lawsuit. But poor worldlings seek from the world that peace which the world cannot give. God alone can give us peace. The holy Church prays in the following words: "Give to Thy servants that peace which the world cannot give." No; the world with all its goods cannot content the heart of man: for he was created not for them, but for God alone: hence God alone can make him happy and content. Brute animals, that have been made for sensual delights, find peace in earthly goods. Give to an ox a bundle of hay, and to a dog a piece of flesh, and they are content, they desire nothing more. But the soul that has been created for no other end than to love God, and to live in union with him, will never be able to find peace or happiness in sensual enjoyments: God alone can make it perfectly content.

The Son of God gave the appellation of fool to the rich man who, after having reaped a rich harvest from his fields, said to himself: *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy rest, eat, drink, and make good cheer (Luke, xii, 19)*. "Miserable fool!" says St. Basil, have you the soul of a swine, of a brute, that you expect to make it happy by eating, drinking, or by sensual delights?" A man may be puffed up, but he cannot be satisfied, by the goods of this world. On the words of the Gospel, *behold we have left all things (Matt. xix, 27)*. St. Bernard writes, that he saw different classes of fools

laboring under different species of folly. All had a great thirst for happiness: some were satiated with the goods of the earth, which is a figure of the avaricious; others with wind, the figure of the ambitious, who seek after empty honors: others seated round a furnace, swallowing the sparks that were thrown from it; these were the passionate and vindictive: others, in fine, drank putrid waters from a fetid lake: and these were the voluptuous and unchaste. Hence, turning to them, the Saint exclaims: O fools! do you not see that these things increase, rather than diminish your thirst ! The goods of the world are but apparent goods, and therefore they cannot satisfy the heart of man. *You have eaten*, says the Prophet Aggeus, *but have not had enough (Agg. i, 6)*. Hence, the more the avaricious man possesses, the more he seeks to acquire. " The possession of great wealth," says St. Augustine, "does not close, but rather extends, the jaws of avarice. " (Serm. 50, E.B.). The more the unchaste man wallows in the mire of impurity, the greater is his disgust, and, at the same time, his desire for such beastly pleasures; and how can dung and carnal filthiness content the heart? The same happens to the ambitious man, who wishes to satisfy his desires by smoke; for he always attends more to what he wants than to what he possesses. After having acquired many kingdoms, Alexander the Great wept, because he had not dominion over other countries. If worldly goods could content the human heart, the rich and the monarchs of the earth would enjoy complete happiness; but experience shows the contrary. Solomon tells us that he refused no indulgence to his senses. *Whatsoever my eyes desired, I refused them not. (Eccles. ii, 10)*. But after all his sensual enjoyments what did he say ? *Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity (Ibid. i, 2)*. That is, everything in this world is mere vanity, a pure lie, pure folly.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! what now remains of all the offences I have offered to Thee, but pain, bitterness, and merits for **hell** ? I am not sorry for the pain and remorse which I now feel; on the contrary, they console me, because they are the gift of Thy grace, and make me hope that, since Thou inspires! these sentiments, Thou wishest to pardon me. What displeases me is the pain I have given Thee, my Redeemer, who loved me so tenderly. I deserved, O my Lord ! to be abandoned by Thee; but, instead of abandoning me I see that Thou offerest me pardon, and that Thou art the first to ask for a reconciliation. O my Jesus ! I wish to make peace with Thee, and desire Thy grace more than every earthly good. I am sorry, O infinite Goodness! for having offended Thee : I would wish to die of sorrow for my offences. Ah! through the love which Thou didst entertain for me when Thou didst expire on the cross, pardon me, receive me into Thy heart, and change my heart, so that henceforth I may please Thee as much as I have hitherto offended Thee. I now renounce, for Thy sake, all the pleasures that the world can give me, and I resolve to forfeit my life rather than lose Thy grace. Tell me what I must do in order to please Thee; I wish to do it. What pleasures, what honors, what riches can I seek? I wish only for Thee, my God, my joy, my glory, my treasure, my life, my love, my all. Give me, O Lord ! strength to be faithful to Thee. Give me the grace to love Thee, and then do with me what Thou pleasest. Mary, my Mother and my hope! take me under Thy protection, and obtain for me the grace to belong entirely to God.

SECOND POINT.

Interior Torments of the Sinner.

But, according to Solomon, the goods of this world not only do not content the heart, but they are even a source of pain and affliction of spirit. *And behold all is vanity and affliction of spirit (Eccles. i, 14)*. Poor sinners ! they seek for happiness in their sins, but they find nothing but bitterness and remorse. *Destruction and happiness in their ways, and the way of peace they have not known (Ps. xiii, 3)*. What peace ? What peace? *There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord (Isa. xlvi, 22)*. In the first place, sin brings with it a dread of divine vengeance. The man that is beset with powerful enemies neither eats nor sleeps in peace. And can he who has God for his enemy enjoy repose ? *Fear to them that work evil (Prov. X, 29)*. When the man who is in the state of sin hears the roaring of thunder, oh! how does he tremble ! Every leaf that moves excites terror. *The sound of dread is always in his ears (Job, xv, 21)*. He is always flying away though no one pursues him. *The wicked man fleeth when no man pursueth (Prov. xxviii, 1)*. He is pursued by his own sin. After having killed his brother Abel, Cain said; *Every one therefore that findeth me, shall kill me (Gen. iv, 14)*. God assured him that no one should injure him. *And the Lord said to him; No; it shall not be so (Ibid. ver. 15)*. But, notwithstanding this assurance, Scripture tells us that *Cain dwelt a fugitive on the earth (Ibid.)*. He was always flying from one place to another. And who, but his own sin, was the persecutor of Cain ?

Sin also brings with it remorse of conscience, that cruel worm which unceasingly gnaws the soul. If the miserable sinner go to a festivity, to a comedy, to a place of amusement, his conscience will say to him, you are the enemy of God: should you die in your sin, where will you go ? The torture of remorse of conscience is so great even in this life, that to free themselves from it, some have committed suicide. It is related of a certain man, who had killed an infant, that, in order to get rid of the stings of

remorse, he entered into a monastery; but finding no peace even there, he went before a judge, confessed his crime, and was condemned to death.

What is a soul without God ? The Holy Ghost compares it to a sea agitated by the tempest. *The wicked are like the raging sea, which cannot rest. (Isai. lvii, 20).* Were a person brought to a musical exhibition, or to a ball, and obliged to remain suspended by a cord, with his head downward, could he enjoy the entertainment ? Such is the state of a man who lives in the enjoyment of worldly goods, but without God: his soul is as it were turned upside down. He may eat and drink and dance, he may wear costly apparel, and may acquire honors, dignities, and possessions; but he never will have peace. *There is no peace to the wicked.* God alone imparts peace; but he gives it to his friends, not to his enemies.

"The goods of this earth," says St. Vincent Ferrer, "do not enter the soul. They are waters which do not penetrate where there is thirst." The sinner may wear embroidered robes and the richest jewels; he may indulge the palate as much as he pleases; but his poor soul will be full of thorns and gall; and therefore with, all his riches, pleasures, and amusements, you will see him always unhappy and ready to fly into a rage and fury at every contradiction. He who loves God resigns himself to the divine will in adversity, and enjoys peace; but he who lives in opposition to the divine will, cannot conform to it, and therefore he has no means of tranquillizing the soul. The miserable man serves the devil, he serves a tyrant who repays him with gall and bitterness. Ah ! the word of God can never fail. *Because thou didst not serve the Lord thy God with joy and gladness, thou shalt serve the enemy in hunger, and thirst, and nakedness, and in want of all things (Deut. xxviii, 47, 48).* What do not the vindictive suffer after they have gratified their resentment

? the unchaste, after they have attained their wicked object ? What do not the ambitious, the avaricious, endure ? Oh, how many are there, who, if they suffer for God as much as they suffer to bring themselves to their own damnation, would become great Saints ?

Affections and Prayers.

O my lost life! O my God ! if to serve Thee I had suffered the pains which I have endured in order to offend Thee, how many merits should I now find treasured up for Paradise ! Ah, my Lord ! for what have I abandoned Thee, and lost Thy grace ?

For poisoned and momentary pleasures, which, as soon as they were indulged, disappeared, and left my soul full of thorns and bitterness. Ah, my sins, I detest you, I curse you a thousand times. I bless Thy mercy, O my God ! which has borne with me so patiently. I love Thee, O my Creator and Redeemer! who hast given Thy life for me ; and because I love Thee, I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended Thee. My God, my God! why have I lost Thee ? for what have I exchanged Thee ? I now know the evil I have done ; and I resolve to lose everything, even life, rather than lose Thy love. Give me light, O Eternal Father ! for the sake of Jesus Christ: make known to me Thy greatness, and the nothingness of the goods which the devils present to me in order to make me lose Thy grace. I love Thee but I desire to love Thee with greater ardor. Grant that Thou alone may be my only thought, my only desire, my only love. I hope for all from Thy goodness, through the merits of Thy Son. Mary, my Mother ! through the love which thou bearest to Jesus Christ, I entreat thee to obtain for me light and strength to serve him and to love him till death.

THIRD POINT.

Happiness of the Just on Earth.

Then all the goods and delights of this world cannot content the human heart. Who can satisfy all its desires ? God alone. *Delight in the Lord and He will give thee the requests of thy heart (Ps. xxxvi, 4)*. The heart of man is always in search of goods that will make him happy. He enjoys riches, pleasures, honors, and he is not content; for these are finite goods, and he was created for an infinite good. But, let him seek God, let him unite himself to God, and behold he is content, all his desires are satiated. *Delight in the Lord and He will give thee the requests of thy heart (Ps. xxxvi, 4)*. During all the time which St Augustine spent in sensual delights, he never found peace. This he afterward confessed when he gave himself to God.

"Our heart is restless till it rests in thee." (Conf. I, 1, c. 1). My God I know that all is vanity and affliction, and that Thou alone art the true peace of the soul. " All things are hard, and thou alone repose." (Conf. I, 6, c. 16). Hence he afterward wrote: "What do you seek, O miserable man ? seek one good, in which are all goods." (Manual. c. 34). While he was in sin, David went to his gardens, and indulged in the pleasures of the table and all other royal entertainments; but the table, the gardens, and the creatures in which he took delight, said to him: David, do you expect that we shall make you happy ? It is not in our power to content your heart. *Where is your God? Go and find your God; he alone can satisfy the cravings of your soul. Hence, in the midst of all his enjoyments, David wept continually. My tears have been my bread day and night, while it is said to me daily: Where is thy God? (Ps. xli, 4)*. But, oh ! how content and happy does God make the faithful souls that love him ! After having left all for God, without shoes, almost naked, and dead from cold and

hunger, St. Francis of Assisi enjoyed a paradise in saying " My God and my all." After he had become a religious, St. Francis Borgia was obliged, in travelling, often to lie on a bed of straw; but so abundant were the consolations which he experienced, that he could not sleep. When St. Philip Neri left all things, he used, after going to rest, to receive so much consolation from God, that he would say: O my Jesus, allow me to sleep. Father Charles of Lorraine, who was descended from the princes of Lorraine, and entered the Society of Jesus, began sometimes to dance through joy in his poor cell. In the plains of India, St. Francis Xavier would uncover his breast and exclaim: "Enough, O Lord." No more consolation: my heart can bear no more. St. Teresa used to say that a single drop of heavenly consolation gives more content than all the pleasures and amusements of the world can give. Ah ! God cannot but fulfil his promises to give peace and happiness to all who renounce worldly goods for his sake. *And every one that hath left home, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, for My name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall possess life everlasting (Matt. xix, 29).*

What then do we seek after? Let us go to Jesus Christ, who calls us, saying: *Come to Me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you (Matt. xi, 28).* Ah ! the soul that loves God enjoys that peace which surpasses all the pleasures and gratifications which the world and the senses can give. It is true that in this life, even the saints have to submit to pains and crosses: for this earth is a place of merit, and it is impossible to merit without suffering. But, according to St. Bonaventure, divine love, like honey, renders things the most bitter, sweet and amiable. He that loves God, loves the will of God, and therefore he rejoices in sorrows, because in embracing them he knows that he gives delight and pleasure to his God. " We see the cross," says St. Bernard,

" but not the unction." We behold only the mortifications which the lovers of God endure, and the pleasures from which they abstain; but we do not see the spiritual delights with which the Lord consoles them. Oh ! if sinners tasted the peace enjoyed by a soul that wishes for nothing but God.

O, taste and see, says David, that the Lord is sweet (Ps. xxxiii, 9). My brother, begin to make meditation every day, to communicate frequently, to converse with God; and you will find that during the short time which you spend with him, he will give you greater consolation than the world, with all its amusements, has ever given you. *O, taste and see!* He who has not tasted, cannot understand how God contents the soul that loves him.

Affections and Prayers.

My dear Redeemer! how have I been hitherto so blind as to abandon Thee, who art an infinite good, and the fountain of all consolation, for the miserable and momentary gratification of the senses ? I am astonished at my blindness, but I am still more astonished at Thy mercy, which has so bountifully borne with me. I thank Thee for making me now sensible of my folly, and of my obligation to love Thee. I love Thee, O my Jesus! with my whole soul, but I desire to love Thee with greater fervor. Increase my desire and my love. Enamor my soul of Thee, who art infinitely amiable—of Thee, who hast left nothing undone to gain my love; of Thee, who so ardently desirest my love. *If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean (Matt. viii, 2).* Ah, my dear Redeemer, purify my heart from all impure affections, which hinder me to love Thee as I would wish ! It is not in my power to inflame my whole heart with the love of Thee, and to make it love nothing but Thee. This requires the power of Thy grace, which can do all things. Detach me from every creature,

banish from my soul every affection that is not for Thee, make me all Thine. I am sorry above all things for all the displeasure I have given Thee. I resolve to consecrate all the days of my life to Thy holy love; but it is only Thy grace that can make me fulfill this resolution. Grant me, O Lord, this grace for the sake of the blood which Thou didst shed for me with so much pain, and so much love. Let it be the glory of Thy power to make my heart, which was once full of earthly affections, now become all flames of love for Thee, O infinite Good! O mother of fair love, O Mary ! by thy prayers make my whole soul burn, as thine did, with the charity of God.

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