

PEARLS FROM HOLY SCRIPTURE FOR OUR LITTLE ONES

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"Unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."—St. Matt. xviii. 3.

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HOLY COMMUNION.

'He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood, hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up on the last day: for My Flesh is meat indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed.'—St. John vi. 55-6.

In these beautiful words of St. John's Gospel our beloved Jesus tells us that His Flesh and His Blood, which we receive in Holy Communion, will give us everlasting life; and we shall be raised up by a glorious resurrection in the Day of Judgment, because His Flesh and His Blood will be meat and drink to preserve us from the corruption of sin and they will gain for us after death a glorious and immortal life.

Formerly, my dearest, boys and girls were not allowed to make their First Communion till they were ten or twelve years of age; but the saintly Pope Pius X. said that for the future all children, no matter how young, can receive the Blessed Eucharist, provided they are able to understand that our dear Lord is really present in the Most Holy Sacrament and that He gives Himself, His Body and His Blood, His Soul and His Divinity, to them when they go to Communion. A few years before his death that holy Pontiff granted an interview, or audience, to a large number of little French children, who had just made their First Communion and who went to Rome to see the Pope and thank him for allowing them to receive the Blessed Sacrament at so early an age. On the first Sunday after Easter that innocent and dove-like congregation streamed into the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican Palace where the Pope lives, and the great Vicar of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, came to them and spoke golden words, which you should look on as addressed to yourselves and which you ought to read often. Pope Pius X. said: 'I am grateful, my dear children, for the consolation you afford me of finding myself in your midst, when I reflect that I represent Jesus Christ Himself, who took pleasure in the company of young people like you, and said to His Apostles: "Suffer little children to come to Me . . . for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." I have a further reason for thanking you, dear children. This solemn showing forth of your love for the Pope, which has cost you the fatigue of a long journey, gives me the occasion for expressing my joy at your docility in listening to the invitation of Jesus Christ, conveyed to you through my mouth, for, in spite of your tender years, you have received Him for the first time in the most Holy Communion.'

'We read in the Gospel that, one day, our Divine Saviour called to Him a little child like you, and, placing it in the midst of His Apostles, said to them: "See that you despise not one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels always see the face of My Father, Who is in heaven" (Matt. xviii. 10). Alas! those heavenly guardians are but too often saddened and filled with horror at the corruption and sinful stains which they behold in those committed to their charge!

The angels of children, on the contrary, though never distracted by their watchful care from the ever-blessed vision of God, Whom they see face to face in His eternal light, find Him afresh in the souls of chil-

dren, reflected—as it were—in a mirror of innocence, purity, and candor. But if this be true of all children, as well as the child whom our Lord placed in the midst of His Apostles, what would He have said of you, dear little ones, who have received His very Self, together with His Divinity and Sacred Humanity, in Holy Communion, wherein you have united your flesh to His Flesh and your blood to His Blood, and your heart has throbbed so close to His? What would He have said about your holy angels, since your partaking of the Holy Eucharist raises you above them? They have never had granted to them the privilege which you enjoy of feeding upon Jesus Christ, forming one same thing with Him, and being united to Him so far as, in a certain manner, to make His Divine nature and infinite perfections your own. By thus communicating Himself to you, this amiable Saviour imparts truth and justice to your minds, holiness to your wills, and goodness to your hearts. And so the faithful Catholic who receives Communion can say in very truth, after St. Paul: "Jesus Christ is my life. . . ." "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Phil. i. 21; Gal. ii. 20).

'Thus, since God is unsullied purity, he who is united to Christ in Communion, rising like a spotless dove above the muddy waters of this wretched world, wings its flight and seeks refuge in the bosom of God—the bosom of Him Who is purer than the spotless snow that crowns the mountain tops. God being infinite beauty, the soul united to Christ draws upon himself the admiring and tender gaze of the angels, who—were they capable of any passion—would be filled with envy of his lot.'

Towards the end of his address, the Holy Father gave valuable advice to the children who listened to him, and that advice is just as valuable and necessary to you, my dearest. Hence, I here set it down for you in the Pope's own words. He said:—

'I recommend, first of all, that, as the outcome of your visit to the Pope, you resolve and solemnly promise to continue attending your catechism class for a long time to come. There, by perfecting yourselves with loving diligence in the knowledge of Christian doctrine, you will learn—along with other truths of our holy religion—that the Eucharist is the centre of faith, the final goal of all other devotion, source of all good, the stream of all graces, the balm for all sorrows, the bread of life, the "viaticum" sustaining us on our journey towards eternity, and at once the pledge and the foretaste of endless happiness.

My dear children and dear First Communicants, you have received our Lord for the first time. But that is not enough. Day by day we beg of God the bread that is to sustain the life of our bodies. We have equal need of the Heavenly Bread for the supporting the life of the soul. My second piece of advice is that you receive Communion frequently, if you cannot daily, so as to unite yourselves to your Saviour.

In conclusion, I desire that the love of our Lord should obtain full possession of your hearts so that He may change you into zealous apostles of His glory. You must be the treasure of your families, consoling them by your good conduct, and winning them to frequent Communion by your example. At school your piety must excite emulation among your young school-mates. In your parish, let all see in you protecting angels. All around you, in fine, you will help, as far as in you lies, by your prayers, good conduct, and by the very charm of your modesty to convert sinners and bring back the unbelieving and indifferent to Christ.'

In preparing for Holy Communion you will find great help in hoping in God and in loving Him with your whole heart. The following prayer is a good one to repeat with attention and fervor, the evening before and at Mass; but it is not necessary to say the whole of it at one time, you can take a bit now, and another part soon after, just as you please, and as you