

# Sunday Afternoon Readings

(By RIGHT REV. MGR. POWER for the N.Z. Tablet.)

## XL—LOVE OF GOD THE GREAT PREVENTATIVE OF SIN.

The thirteenth chapter of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians contained the Scriptural panegyric on the Love of God. It would be well for all my readers to get this short chapter off by heart and to meditate frequently upon it. Not only is the Love of God the most sublime of all the virtues; it is also their fruitful mother and their brightest ornament and crown. Without its fostering care, patience and meekness, chastity and brotherly love, and all the virtues that builds up the spiritual life, would lose their celestial grace and charm; indeed, they could not even exist.

We have been considering the end of our creation and its great enemy, mortal sin: we can never overcome this enemy, we can never reach that end unless we are filled through and through with the love of God. Light and warmth bring rich harvests and flowering fields, and it is the light and warmth of the love of God that purifies the heart, strengthens the will, and ennobles the whole nature. God is our strength, God is our Saviour from sin; and so the Psalmist cries: "I love Thee, O Lord my strength"; and Our Lady, lifting her heart to God, says: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." St. John tells us that God's proper name is Love; all His works are actuated by love: therefore the more we love Him and make that love the motive of our actions, the more God-like we become. Love, therefore, is our patent of nobility, and this should be sufficient inducement to grow in it.

But there are other reasons why we should love God. Happiness here and hereafter comes with the love of God—God Himself comes with it, and he who has God within him has the secret and source of all happiness; "If any man love Me . . . My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and will make our abode with him." It was the consciousness of this indwelling of God that inspired Saint Paul when he wrote that great passage in the end of his eighth chapter to the Romans, declaring that no trials could rob him of hope or weaken his courage. And if this consciousness of the love of God sweetens what is most bitter, makes persecution joyful and death welcome, what will not be the happiness it will provide for us in the life to come? "What eye hath not seen, what ear hath not heard—what hath not entered into the heart of man—all these things God hath prepared for them that love Him." None of the ills of earth shall enter there: and the heritage of the just shall be only joy: "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away. . . . The redeemed of the Lord shall return, and shall come into Sion with praise, and Everlasting Joy shall be upon their heads." If it is natural to man to seek after happiness, he has the secret of it in the love of God.

We should love God, because He deserves

our love. He is the supreme and absolute good, and the human heart was made to love what is good. This is why nothing earthly can satisfy it. No riches, no honors, no pleasures, no intellectual ascents, no refinements of art can satisfy the heart, or allay its divine discontent. It is only in the living God that heart and flesh can really rejoice. Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God, and our hearts must be restless until they find their rest in Thee.

Again, God deserves our love because He is our greatest benefactor before and during our earthly existence, as He will be during eternity. What the Lord said in His promise to restore Israel, we may well apply to each of ourselves: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn thee." It is His love that has brought us out of nothing into existence: "The spirit of the Lord made me." He has not only brought us into being, as He brought the earth, the sea, the sky, the stars, but has given us life also; we are not only beings but living beings: "The Spirit of the Lord made me, and the breath of the Almighty gave me life." He has not merely given us that lower form of life by which the trees and shrubs and flowers live and grow, but life with five senses, and has supplied all that these senses need; "The eyes of all look to Thee, O Lord, and Thou givest them food in due season. Thou openest Thy hand, and fillest every animal with blessing." But for each of us He had even a richer gift. Not content with giving us the sensitive life of the mere animal, He has called us to a higher grade of being, giving us spirituality and immortality, making us human beings, and to His own image and likeness. "Great and wonderful are Thy works, O Lord God Almighty, . . . Thou art worthy, Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. . . . To Thee O God of our fathers, I give thanks, and I praise Thee, because Thou hast given me wisdom and strength." Endowing us with intellect and free will, He has crowned us with honor and glory. He has enabled us on the wings of lofty thought to fly along the interminable corridors of almost infinite space, and unravel its secrets with such certainty as makes us almost the peer of the angels even while we are in this life. With free will He has given us dominion over our own lives, the inalienable right of shaping our own destiny, the inestimable privilege of giving Him a voluntary service.

If He has proved Himself our benefactor in calling us out of nothing to be His highly favored creatures. He continues his benefactions during life, pouring His grace in copious streams upon us.

If you would test this beneficent love in the scales of suffering, come to Gethsemane and Calvary; see Him scourged that we might escape suffering, see Him bound with ropes that we might go free, dying that we might live, and buried that our graves of

shame might become sacred places in which our poor bodies would gather up strength to mount the heavens.

Once again, if you would weigh His mighty love in the most precious scales of all, gather with Him in the Supper Room on Holy Thursday night, behold the Mystery of Faith, the giving of His Body and Blood in the Holy Communion, that He and we might be intimately united, heart to heart in life, as we shall be in eternity. And, finally, when this life is over, and we fall upon the eternal shores, He will be there to welcome us and become Himself our Rewarder and our Reward exceeding great. This is a ladder, each of whose five steps radiates with increasing ascensions of love that must thrill our heart of hearts and bring it in willing, loving homage to the feet of our Almighty Benefactor. When St. Thomas had finished his great Theology, Our Lord spoke to him from the Crucifix: "Well hast thou written of Me, Thomas; what wilt thou have for thy reward?" "Nothing but Thyself, O Lord," replied the great Saint. So shall it be with us, who can make no earthly habitation an abiding place, who can be satisfied with no learning wrested from sea and sun and stars, whose hearts cannot be filled or satisfied with earthly delights, whose darkness cannot be dissipated by all the lights of God's creation, whose only abiding place can be around the Throne of God and of the Lamb. The Psalmist has expressed our inmost longing: "As the heart panteth after the fountains of water, my soul panteth after Thee, O God. My soul hath thirsted after the strong, living God. For I shall be satisfied when Thy glory shall appear."

What now shall we say of the ingrate who loves not God? What else except what the inspired writer has said: "Anathema to him who loves not Jesus!" Do we love God? Do we foster in our souls a growing love for Him? Our souls can never grow and ripen spiritually unless we learn to feel that He is more to us than Creator and Judge. He wishes to be known as merciful, gracious, compassionate, and true—our true Father, our compassionate Friend. Do we love Him as our Father and Friend? Do we labor in His service and prove that our love is genuine? What is the nature of our service, what are its qualities? Are our best efforts reserved for the world and its cause, giving Him only a half-hearted service and a second-best? If His cause is our cause, if we keep close to Him in the battle for souls, our reward will be that promised by Christ to His co-workers: "In My Father's House there are many mansions, I go to prepare a place for you." What will that place be like? "What eye hath not seen, what ear hath not heard, what hath not entered into the heart of man—all these things God hath prepared for them that love Him."

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