

Sunday Afternoon Readings

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

XVI.—THE PASSION.

By imitating the life of Christ our lives become enlightened, ennobled, perfected; it is the mission of the Church, therefore, to stamp His figure upon the hearts of her children. There is a terrible passage in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, which stands as a warning to parents, heads of States, and educational systems that would keep this Model of life and conduct from the eyes of youth. Thanks to our good Catholic parents, to our Catholic schools, and to the ministrations of Holy Church, we have been saved from this fatal form of ignorance. In us have been fulfilled the words of St. Paul to Titus: "The grace of God, our Saviour, hath appeared to all men, instructing us that denying ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live soberly and justly, and godly in this world, looking for the blessed hope and the coming of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." To live soberly and justly and godly, is to walk in the footsteps of Christ Who is our Model.

Having followed Him in our last two meditations through the Hidden Life of Nazareth and through the Public Life by the Lake, let us now follow Him through His Passion and learn the lessons it would teach us. Why does He suffer, for whom does He suffer? Many saints and learned men have tried to solve the mystery of pain. Whatever they individually hold, all are agreed that acts done under the stress of pain are more intense for good or evil. A service that costs us little is not of much consequence, but if to do it we undergo much suffering, then it is highly prized. To His much suffering for us Christ appeals: "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man should lay down his life for his friend." And in regard to this suffering St. Peter writes: "You have been bought with a great price . . . with the precious blood of the Immaculate Lamb." Again, the suffering of a good man softens his heart and brings it more easily to the feet of Christ. No man has been really great who has not suffered, and many have just failed to attain greatness only because the ennobling touch of the sword of suffering was wanting to them:

"Sorrow gives the accolade
With the sharp edge of the blade,
By which noblest knights are made."

Let us return to Jesus. See how the anticipation of His crucifixion bows Him down in agony. A great temptation comes to assail Him, and under its assault blood flows from His sacred body: Why go through with the crucifixion, since many will refuse to profit by it. Moreover, one prayer from Me will be enough to redeem mankind: "My Father, all things are possible to Thee, let this chalice pass!" Three terrible hours this temptation with its agony lasts, but He finally overcomes it: "O MY Father, if

this cup may not pass from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done." He arises refreshed, and rouses His sleeping disciples: "Rise up, let us go, behold he is at hand who betrayeth Me." Do you groan under the pressure of temptation? Now you know how to do battle with it—how to pray, how to struggle bravely, and come off with a victor's crown.

Judas has come, the traitor kiss is given, and Jesus is dragged into Jerusalem. He uses no force, nor will He permit His friends to use it; He is a willing Victim, freely offering Himself. His disciples cannot understand this, but they will understand it later. And if we keep our gaze upon Him, we shall understand it too, and will in our turn go out to die, if necessary, for Him leaving in His hands our justification and our reward.

He is on His trial before Pilate. This weak character knows that Jesus is innocent, but consents to deliver Him to death, lest he lose his own chance of political advancement. Pilate has many imitators to-day; men not radically bad, but weak; wishing well, anxious to do good provided it cost them nothing in the way of personal sacrifice, or kept back from right by an unwholesome fear of human respect. Friends of Caesar, they do more harm in the long run than the radically bad. Their efforts at cowardly compromise create situations of difficulty that would be guarded against did they come from the manifestly wicked. Beware of human respect! When for sake of it we forego principle, we are led on to ruin. A desire to make a creditable figure in society, to gain prestige, to be held respectable as the world understands the word, what a mean ambition for a Catholic, and with what terrible penalty weighted! "Thanks be to God," said an American judge a short time ago, "we have at last a Governor of New York who is not ashamed to make the sign of the cross in public."

Jesus is scourged. The saints tell us that sensuality damns more souls than any other sin. It is a great sin against Him Who created the human body to be a temple of the Holy Ghost. Early in His passion, Christ would make atonement for our sins of the flesh by His awful sufferings under the lash. If we would only think of this, how much a sweeter fragrance would go up to Heaven from our poor bodies! But sensuality does not stand alone: it has a companion sin, as every virtue has its companion virtue. You never meet sensuality without intellectual pride accompanying it. Father Thomas Gerard has noted this:

"The companion sin of sensuality is intellectual pride. Although on the surface they appear to be so different in their nature, yet there is an organic connection between them. And the mutual bond is selfishness. The sensual man is selfish even unto cruelty. The intellectually proud

man is not the man with a delicate conscience who follows the truth for truth's sake and for life's sake. He is not the man with a wide outlook and brilliant talents. He is the man with mediocre talents and all these, such as they are, centered on himself. Because, therefore, pride and sensuality have their common root in the vice of selfishness they may naturally be expected to flourish together."

But Christ would atone for intellectual pride, and so His head, the seat of the intellect, is crowned with thorns. Beware of pride, learn to discipline the intellect, crown it with thorns if necessary to keep it in due subjection. "Let that mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

And now He takes the cross and walks along the *Via Dolorosa*, falling but rising again, to teach us that though we fall we must not lose confidence. He is nailed to the cross and our sins are nailed with Him: "He took the handwriting of sin that was against us and nailed it to the cross." For three hours He hangs in agony, lifted up on high. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all things to Myself." A shout of triumphant derision goes up from His enemies, but what of that? Millions upon millions in every age gather round the cross and cry to Him Who hangs upon it: "Jesus, teach us how to die, Jesus receive our souls."

Thus, then, is Jesus our Model, in the privacy of the home, in the midst of public duties and affairs, on the bed of death. Keep your gaze ever fixed upon Him and make your lives according to His pattern; let the cross occupy a large share in them, for "This sign of the cross will be in heaven when the Lord shall come to judge. Then all the servants of the cross, who in their lifetime have conformed themselves to Him that was crucified, shall come to Christ their Judge with great confidence." Let us live in Christ that we may die in Christ; if life has its possibilities and probabilities, so has death. We know not when, where, or in what circumstances we shall die, but if we live as animals we shall probably die as animals, if as worldlings we shall probably die as worldlings. Let us repeat daily: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." The force of a daily good habit will put these same words on our dying lips and open to us the gates of Paradise.

HOW YOU MAY HELP

The writer of the historical notes on the Church in New Zealand, now running through the *Tablet*, having in mind the added interest imparted by illustrations, would be very grateful if those possessing photographs of priests who formerly labored in the Dominion—the early missionaries especially—would forward such (with name, etc., attached) to the *Tablet* office. After being reproduced, these would be carefully returned to the owners.

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