

Faith of Our Fathers

[A WEEKLY INSTRUCTION FOR YOUNG AND OLD.]

OF THE INEFFABLE GOODNESS AND LOVE OF GOD TOWARDS MAN AND OUR DUTY IN GRATITUDE TO KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS.

Q. 1. What things are chiefly to be considered in explaining the goodness and love of God to man?

A. They are all comprehended by St. Paul under four heads; to wit: The length, the breadth, the height, and depth of His love; and the apostle earnestly prays for his beloved Ephesians, that they may have a full sense and comprehension of the infinite goodness of God in all these its four dimensions. "I bow my knee," says he, "to the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that . . . being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length, and height and depth; to know also the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. iii. 14, 17). In which words he also declares, that this holy knowledge of the love of God and of Christ, is the powerful means to fill us with *the fulness of God*; that is, to implant in our souls all heavenly virtues and graces, by which God dwells in our souls, and satiates all our powers and faculties with the sweets of His divine presence; and consequently is a most efficacious motive to excite and enable us to keep all His holy commandments.

§ 1. Of the Length of the Love of God.

Q. 2. What is meant by the *length of the love of God*?

A. By this is meant its *eternal duration*. Great honor would it be for us, had Almighty God loved us only from the first moment of our existence, when we were first formed in our mother's womb; but His love for us was long before we had a being; and what He said to His prophet Jeremias, is, in regard to His love for us, equally true of every one of us, "Before I formed thee in the bowels of thy mother, I knew thee" (Jer. i. 5). Still more honorable for us would His love have been, had it only begun with the creation of the world, but it was prior to that also; even before the world began, we were present in the mind of God; before He created the heavens or the earth, He knew us, and we were the objects of His love; so that each of us may say with truth, what the Divine Wisdom says of itself, "The depths were not as yet, and I was already conceived. . . . The mountains with their huge bulk had not yet been established; before the hills I was brought forth" (Prov. viii. 24); to wit, I was conceived in the knowledge of the Almighty, and brought forth in the resolution which His love for me had taken to bring me in due time into being; even then He had appointed to heap His benefits upon me, and chose me to be a member of His Holy Church, and to sanctify me by the blood of His Son Jesus: "He hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in His sight in charity" (Eph. i. 4). But how long before the foundation of the world did God know and love us? Oh! here no term can be assigned; the knowledge and love of God are as essential as Himself; what He knows and loves in time, He knew and loved from all eternity. From all eternity then we were present in the mind of God; from all eternity He loved us; from all eternity He decreed to bring us into being in time; to draw us out of nothing, in which we then were, and to bestow upon us all those admirable effects of His love, compassion, and goodness for us, which, since the first moment of our existence we have actually received. "I have loved thee," says He Himself, "with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee" (Jer. xxx. 3). Oh! what an amazing idea does it give us of the love of God, to reflect that so great a Being, perfectly happy in Himself, and who had not the smallest need of us, should from all eternity have been employed in thinking upon, and loving such poor ungrateful creatures as we are! What return can we make for such eternal goodness? How incumbent must it be on us, always to employ our thoughts on so loving an object, and make it our continual study to love and serve Him, and to obey His holy commands?

§ Of the Breadth of Divine Love.

Q. 3. What is meant by the *breadth of the love of God* for us?

A. By this is meant the extension of His benevolence towards us, which embraces all that immensity of benefits and favors which His love for us makes Him daily bestow upon us here; and that still greater store of good things which He has prepared for us hereafter. For to love, is, properly speaking, to wish well to the beloved object, and do him good; and as, the doing good is the natural effect, and the most convincing proof of the sincerity of our love, so the more excellent the good is, which we do, and the more numerous the benefits which we confer, the more we show the greatness of our love to the object of it. In this view then, the benevolence or good-will of God to man is no less infinite in its breadth or extension, than eternal in its duration; for it embraces all possible good things, both in the order of nature and in the order of grace, and in the order of glory, both for soul and body, for time and for eternity; vast numbers of which He actually does bestow upon all mankind; and all others He wills and desires to give us, and undoubtedly would do so, did not we ourselves by the perversity of our hearts, put a hindrance to the designs of His mercy towards us.

Q. 4. What is understood by the goods in the order of nature?

A. All those benefits of God, which we enjoy as human creatures, and which are common to all mankind in general. Now concerning these, the following particulars are chiefly to be considered:—First, our very being itself, which is wholly the gift of God; for as to the share our parents had in bringing us to existence, it is so trifling when compared to what is done by God, that it does not even deserve to be named; they neither created the soul, which is our most excellent part, nor did they form any member or portion of the body; no, not even a hair or a nail, nor did they so much as know, whether we were to come to light or not, or what kind of a being we were to be. This the holy mother of the seven Machabees was very sensible of when exhorting her sons to suffer martyrdom, she put them in mind that they owed their whole being to God alone who created it; and that if they lost it for His sake, He would restore it to them again; but as for me, says she, "I know not how you were formed in my womb; for I neither gave you breath, nor soul, nor life, nor did I frame the limbs of every one of you. But the Creator of the world formed the nativity of man" (2 Mach. vii. 22). Now this benefit of our existence is a favor of the highest value, far exceeding any other natural good that we can enjoy; it is indeed the foundation of all other goods whatsoever, since without it, we can enjoy no other; hence our Saviour says, "Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment" (Matt. vi. 25), and do we not cheerfully part with everything we possess, to preserve our life when it is in danger? yea, to preserve or recover any of our senses or faculties which are necessary for the welfare of our being? Now, if we are so much indebted to our parents for the part they contributed to this so great a benefit, though it was so little, and though they were only as mere instruments in the hand of God, that we can never repay them to the full of what we owe them on that account; what must our obligation be to the Almighty, to Whom we owe the whole of what we are, Who created our soul out of nothing, Who with the most exquisite wisdom and art formed all our members in our mother's womb, gave us all our senses, powers, and faculties, an understanding to know Him, and a heart to love Him, our memory, our power of speech, and in short every thing we are or have? what return of gratitude can we make to Him, that can bear the smallest proportion to what we owe Him? How indispensable then must our duty be, to make Him at least all the return we can, by loving Him, serving Him, and obeying His holy commandments? But to show the greatness of this benefit in its proper light, the following considerations are not to be passed over.

Each Summer's eve as the sun goes down,
I watch till Daddy comes home from town.
To pass the time while I gaily wait
I sing and swing on the garden gate.
But when the days are gloomy and chill
I perch within on the window-sill,
Till Daddy arrives and I make sure
He thought of Woods' Great Peppermint Cure.

E. S. Robson

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