

The Catholic.

Quod semper; quod ubique; quod ab omnibus.

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AMICABLE DISCUSSION.

Continued.

LETTER VII.

THE WORDS OF INSTITUTION.

THE strange and inconceivable proposition which our Saviour had just made in the synagogue, the disputes and contradiction it had generally excited among the crowd of his hearers, the repeated declarations of Jesus, which instead of quieting their minds and bringing them again to him, provoked the murmurs even of many of his disciples: the formal opposition of the latter, their defection, their desertion, the more successful appeal made to the twelve, their open and declared profession of faith, their persevering fidelity, all these circumstances should give importance and celebrity to the scene at Capharnaum. Those who had been present at it, must have long talked it over together, and likewise have related it to those who were not there: the fugitive disciples particularly, to justify their desertion and apparent ingratitude. It will then have made a noise in the world, as men were often discoursing upon the extraordinary personage who for more than two years had been astonishing Judea by the wisdom of his doctrines, by benefits and prodigies without number. But it is above all in the minds of the apostles and the faithful disciples that it must have left the most profound impressions. Amongst those who had left them, they had to regret the loss of friends and companions, with whom they had hitherto shared their assiduous attention to their gracious master. Without doubt it cost them much at that time to see them no longer by their side, and this striking absence called incessantly to their recollection the cause of their unfortunate separation. This cause itself, so very unexpected: so profoundly mysterious, must have been to them an inexhaustible source of reflection: of conversation, and confidential communications with one another. What then! we are one day destined to receive truly and really his flesh to eat and his blood to drink? Yes, we are certain of it because he himself has so strongly assured us of it. But when? How? In what manner? &c. It is natural to think that they must have put to themselves a thousand times these and similar questions upon this astonishing mystery, neither can we refuse to believe that they mutually strengthened one another in the faith that they had already publicly professed, and that they encouraged one another to expel from their minds the various suggestions of the senses, that might present themselves. Let us

put ourselves in their place. If at this distance of time, and with the mere reading of it, we are still so struck and confounded at the promise which they heard, we may easily conceive that, if it had been directly and for the first time addressed to us, it would have supplied us with abundant matter for reflection until its accomplishment. It is also to be presumed, I had almost said to be believed, that our Saviour who saw what passed in their heart, would in his goodness have condescended to recur frequently to this subject, and that to the instructions given in the synagogues, he would have added others to confirm them more and more in their faith, and to recompense the confidence they had so signally displayed in his words. It would be unreasonable to object to me the silence of the evangelists on this subject; we know very well that they have not related the thousandth part of what our Saviour has said. Even by St. John's account, if he had attempted to write the whole, the world would not have contained the books he must have composed. At all events, it is most certain that the apostles implicitly trusted to their Master for the moment in which he would be pleased to fulfil his promise, and that they waited for the accomplishment of it with a confused mixture of sentiments of impatience, inquietude, love, and terror. A whole year passed away in this manner. But the time was nigh at hand, the ministry of Jesus Christ was drawing to a conclusion; and soon does he announce to his disciples his near approaching death. The shorter time he has to spend among them, the more does he testify to them his affection: he treats them no more as servants but as friends. No sooner does he see them assembled around the paschal table, than he declares to them that he had ardently desired to celebrate this last pasch with them before he suffered: and a little after continuing to announce to them his death he told them he should no more eat the pasch with them until it should be fulfilled in the kingdom of God: then taking the chalice, he adds that he will no more drink of the fruit of the vine, till the kingdom of God should come. At the conclusion of this legal supper, Jesus rises from table, and to give to his disciples an example of humility and mutual charity, he abases himself so far as to wash their feet. He then invites them to the banquet and again sits down at table with them. What more then, has he to give to them? It is not the nourishment of their body, that now engages his attention, but that of their soul. The moment was arrived for the accomplishment of his promise: it is just going to take place. Already had he laid upon the bread his venerable and creative hands, and lifting up his

eyes to heaven, he begins to pray, whether we are to suppose, that the acts of thanksgiving here spoken of by the evangelists passed, mentally between him and his Father, or were heard by the guests at table. After having invoked the all-powerful virtue of his Father, he makes it fall upon the bread by blessing it: he breaks it, and solemnly says to his apostles: "Take and eat, this is my body, which is given for you." And in the same manner after blessing the chalice, drink ye all of this (says he,) this is my blood of the new testament which is shed for you." What were then the sentiments of the apostles, and what ideas must the whole of this ceremony have awakened in their mind? Who can doubt that what they had heard at Capharnaum was here distinctly brought to their remembrance? Those words committed to writing so long afterwards by St. John, were therefore still echoing in their ears "The bread that I will give you to eat is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. And at the moment our Saviour had said; this is my body which is delivered for you, they necessarily saw in these words the accomplishment of the former. The connection of the actual institution with the promise made by Jesus Christ was so manifest, they both accorded and corresponded so exactly in the things and in the terms, that they must evidently have seen that what had been announced to them and what they had been hitherto expecting, was then just accomplished. Hence there is no hesitation, no doubt on their part: no question is proposed: every thing passes in a profound recollection; and the apostles receive from his hand and take with silent adoration, that flesh which is meat indeed, and that blood which is drink indeed."

"The connection of the words we read in Saint John with those of the institution is visible. There to eat and here to eat there to drink, and here to drink; there flesh and here flesh: or, which amounts to the same, body. There blood, and here blood: there to eat and drink; the flesh and blood separately, and here the same thing. If this does not shew distinctly that all this is but one and the same mystery, one and the same truth, there no longer exists such a thing as analogy or agreement: there is no connexion nor consistency in our faith, or in the words and actions of our Saviour. But if the eating and drinking of St. John is the eating and drinking of the institution, then in St. John it is an eating and drinking with the mouth, since it is visibly of such a nature in the institution. If the flesh and blood of which St. John speaks is not the flesh and blood in spirit and in figure, but the true flesh and the true blood, in their proper and natural substance, it is the same in the institution: and we can no more interpret *this is my body, this is my blood*, of a figurative body, and figurative blood than in St. John, unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, of the figure of one or the other of them." Bossuet, *Meditations sur l'Evangile*, jour 23.