

5). And the command of Christ is this: "If thou wilt enter into life keep the commandments." (Matthew xix., 17). Let all therefore, take this for certain that if the devotion they profess towards the Blessed Virgin do not keep them from sin or inspire in them the desire to amend their evil course it is fictitious and deceptive devotion since it fails to produce its natural fruit. Should any think that all this requires further proof, most opportune confirmation is supplied in the very dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. For to say nothing of Catholic tradition, which is a fount of truth in the same way that the Scriptures are, how comes it that the persuasion of the Immaculate Conception of Mary has at all times appeared so thoroughly in accord with the Christian sense as to seem grafted and innate in the soul of every member of the faithful? "We shrink in horror," thus does Denis, the Carthusian, admirably explain the matter, "from the thought that the woman who was to crush the head of the serpent should ever have been crushed by him, and that the Mother of the Lord was the child of the Demon." (3 Sent. d. 3, q. 1). The Christian people never could bring themselves to admit that the holy, undefiled and innocent flesh of Christ, could have been in the bosom of the Virgin, taken from a flesh which had ever for a single moment been stained. And why this, but that God and sin are divided from each other by an infinite chasm. This is without doubt the reason why Christendom has everywhere held that the Son of God, "before He washed us from our sins in His blood," by the assumption of human nature, must, by a singular grace and privilege have preserved free from all original sin from the first instant of her conception, her in whose breast He was to be made man. God, then, so thoroughly detesting sin that He willed the future Mother of His Son to be free not only from all voluntary stain, but also by a gift most singular bestowed through the future merits of Christ, from that stain which all of us, children of Adam, bring with us a fatal legacy—who can deny that the first duty of all who earnestly desire to win favor from the Virgin by their devotion, must be that of amending our vicious and corrupt habits and of subduing the passions which urge us to evil.

If too, we wish, as all of us should wish, that our devotion to Mary be full and in all ways perfect we must go further and study by all means to imitate the example she has given us. It is a rule established by God that all who earnestly desire to attain eternal happiness must reproduce in themselves, by imitation, the form of the patience and sanctity of Christ. "For whom He foreknew, he also made conformable to the image of His Son that He might be the first-born among many brethren." (Rom. viii., 29). But since our weakness is such that we are prone to be dazzled by the greatness of the Exemplar, Divine Providence has proposed for us another exemplar, who, being the nearest possible to Christ that human nature is capable of, answers still better to our littleness. And this second exemplar is no other than the Virgin. "Such was Mary" says St. Ambrose on this subject, "that her life alone is a lesson for all." And from this he justly concludes: "Let there be delineated before us as in an image the virginity and the life of Mary most holy, from whom, as from a mirror, is reflected the beauty of chastity and the form of virtue." (De Virginitate, 1-2, ch. 3). But albeit it is fitting that her sons should not omit to imitate any of the excellencies of their most holy Mother, We desire the faithful to be particularly earnest in copying these virtues, which are the chief of all, and, as it were, the nerves and strength of Christian wisdom, by which We mean faith, hope and charity toward God and man. The life of the Virgin in all its parts was ever resplendent with the brilliancy of these virtues, but that same splendor was most strikingly manifested when she was standing by her dying Son. Jesus is crucified, and He is rebuked in blasphemy "for having made Himself

the Son of God." (John xix., 7). Yet she, with unshaken constancy, recognizes and adores His divinity. She lays Him dead in the sepulchre, yet doubts not that He will rise again. The love for God which consumes her makes of her a sharer and a companion in the passion of Christ; and, together with Him, as if forgetful of her own sorrow, she asks pardon for the slayers, though they cry out in their obstinacy: "His blood be upon us and upon our children." (Matthew xxvii., 25).

A HELP TO VIRTUE.

But lest it be thought that We have lost sight of Our subject, which is the Immaculate Conception, what great and effectual succor will be found in it for the preservation and right development of those same virtues. What truly is the point of departure of the enemies of religion for the sowing of the great and serious errors by which the faith of so many is shaken. They begin by denying that man has fallen by sin and been cast down from his former position. Hence they regard as mere fables original sin and the evils that were its consequence, namely, the corruption of the very origin of the human race, and the consequent ruin of all human offspring, and the evils introduced among mortals and the necessity of a Restorer. Once all this is admitted, it is clear that there is no longer place for Jesus Christ, or for the Church or for grace or for an order that transcends nature—in short, the whole edifice of faith is uprooted from its foundations. But, on the contrary, let the nations believe and confess that the Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception was free from all stain, and it follows that they admit both original sin and the redemption of mankind by Christ, and the Gospel and the Church, and even the very law of suffering—by all which everything savoring of rationalism and materialism is torn up by the roots and destroyed and to Christianity remains the glory of guarding and defending the truth. Nor is this all—all the adversaries of the faith, especially in our time possess in common the vice of repudiating and of professing that they repudiate, all obedience to the authority of the Church, and even to all human authority, in order that they may thus more easily tear the faith from the minds of men. Hence those beginnings of anarchism, that most pestiferous obstacle to natural as well as supernatural order. Now even this plague, which is equally destructive of civil and of Christian society, finds its antidote in the Immaculate Conception of Mary, by which we are all constrained to recognize in the Church a power to which not only the intellect, but the will, must submit, since it is through this subjection of the intellect that the Christian people salute the Virgin with the hymn: "Thou art all fair, O Mary, and there is no original sin in thee." (Gradual of Mass for Feast Immac. Con.) And thus we have another proof of the justice with which the Church attributes to the august Virgin "the merit of having destroyed by herself all heresies in the whole world."

And since, as the Apostle says, faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, it is clear that by the Immaculate Conception faith is confirmed and that we are at the same time excited to hope. All the more since the Virgin herself was exempt from original sin, because she was to be the Mother of Christ; and she was the Mother of Christ in order that the hope of eternal blessings might be revived in us.

Passing over charity toward God, who can contemplate the Immaculate Virgin without feeling moved to fulfill that precept which is called peculiarly His own, namely, that of loving one another as He loved us. "A great sign," thus the Apostle St. John describes a vision divinely sent him, "appeared in the heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, and with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars upon her head." (Apoc. xii., 1). Everybody knows that this woman signified the Virgin Mary, the stainless one who brought forth our Chief. The

Apostle continues: "And being with child she cried travailling in birth ans was in pain to be delivered." John therefore, saw the Most Holy Mother of God already in eternal happiness, yet travailling in a mysterious childbirth. What birth was it? Surely it was the birth of us who, kept still in exile are yet to be generated to the perfect charity of God and to eternal happiness. And the birth pains show the love and desire with which the Virgin from heaven above watches over us and strives with unwearring prayer to bring about the fulfilment of the number of the elect.

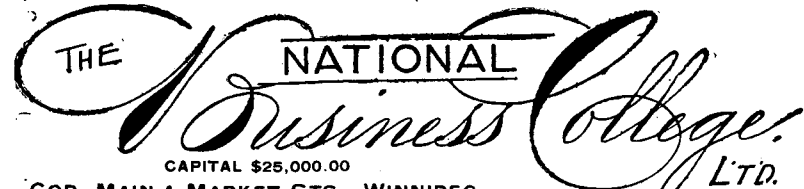
This same charity we desire that all should earnestly endeavor to attain, taking special occasion from the extraordinary feasts in honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. O how bitterly and fiercely is Jesus Christ now being persecuted, and the most holy religion which He founded! And how grave is the peril that threatens many of being drawn by the errors that crawl on all sides, and abandoning the faith! "Then let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." (I. Cor. x., 12). And let all with humble prayer and entreaty implore of God, through the intercession of Mary, that those who have abandoned the truth may repent. We know indeed, from experience that such prayer, born of charity and leaning on the Virgin, has never been in vain. "True, even in the future the strife against the Church will never cease, "for there must be also heresies, that they also who are reproved may be made manifest among you." (I. Cor. xi., 19). But neither will the Virgin ever cease to succor us in our trials, however grave they be, and to carry on the fight fought by her since her conception, so that every day we may repeat: "To-day the head of the serpent of old was crushed by her." (Office Immac. Con. at II. vespers, Magnifi).

A JUBILEE INDULGENCE.

And that heavenly graces may help to perfect the imitation of the Blessed Virgin more abundantly during this year in which we pay her fuller honor, and that thus We may more easily attain the aim of restoring all things in Christ, We have determined, after the example of our predecessors at the beginning of their Pontificates, to grant to the Catholic world an extraordinary indulgence in the form of a jubilee.

Wherefore, confiding in the mercy of Almighty God, and in the authority of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, by virtue of that power of binding and loosing which, unworthy though We are, the Lord has given Us, We do concede and impart the most plenary indulgence of all their sins to the faithful, all and several of both sexes, dwelling in this Our beloved City, or who come to it, who from the first Sunday of Lent, that is from the 21st of February, to the second day of June, the solemnity of the Most Sacred Body of Christ, inclusively, shall three times visit one of the four Patriarchal basilicas, and there for some time pray God for the liberty and exaltation of the Catholic Church and this Apostolic See, for the extirpation of heresies, and the conversion of all who are in error, for the concord of Christian princes and the peace and unity of all the faithful, and according to Our intention; and who within the said period shall fast once using only meagre fare, except the days not included in the Lenten Indult; and after confessing their sins shall receive the most holy Sacrament of the Eucharist; and to all others, wherever they be, dwelling outside this city, who within the time above mentioned or during a space of three months, even not continuous, to be definitely appointed by the ordinaries according to the convenience of the faithful, but before the eighth day of December, shall three times visit the cathedral Church, if there be one, or, if not, the parish Church, or, in the absence of this, the principal church, and shall devoutly fulfill the other works above mentioned. And We do at the same time permit that this indulgence, which is to be gained only once may be applied in suffrage for the souls which have

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