

Then, for the first time we know that Peter was recovering his natural tone, for he actually opened his lips to ask a question about some one else, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" This man who has kept so close to me, and but for whom I could not have lived: shall I have his fellowship to rely on to the end? And even this promise Peter was able to elicit. Yes, if you will, you may even make sure of him to the very end. "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" If you must know, there is no cross waiting to shorten his life before the time. But "What is that to thee? Your Master is enough for you, if you only knew it. Follow thou Me."

What shall I say in conclusion? How shall I apply it to ourselves? Let me end where I began, with the words of our text. If that Ecclesiastical Absolution, even when ratified by our Lord, had been sufficient, what need was there for this further break-down, this hopeless despair of the Apostle, when his sins had been forgiven by his brethren, and their forgiveness sealed by the spoken word of the Lord in His Bodily presence? Why should "Simon Peter, and Thomas that is called Didymus" be coupled together after that. The fall and scandal against the Body was easily pardoned, by men who had learned their own weakness, and who, in the like temptation, felt that they might have been put to the like shame. But what could they know of the inner meaning of that fall to one like Simon Peter? What could they see of the self-revelation, the loss of self-respect, the danger never thought of before, and all the more terrible when suddenly realized, of the like temptation recurring, and the weakness repeating itself? How could such a man "strengthen his brethren," who had no strength to stand alone? What ecclesiastical absolution ever could, or ever can, touch the real heart of the sinner, so as to heal the soul that has sinned as the Apostle did?

In the absolution passage and the story that follows, St. John has set forth the plain truth of the whole matter. The Disciples can deal with offences against the Body of Christ. The Head alone can heal sin in its inmost seat and sore and grief, where it is a matter between the soul and God.

