

Pastoral Letter

Continued.

We have, then, two things clearly established by God's revealed word, 1st, that intercessory prayer is an ordinance of God, and, 2nd that the efficacy of that prayer is in direct proportion to the holiness and goodness of the one who offers it. In fact, so much in accord with the wants of human nature are these principles, so much in union are they with the dictates of right reason and with the common-sense of mankind, that even in the worldly concerns of life men unceasingly act on similar principles. Thus, if persons desire favors from those in power—if they desire, for instance, a government situation,—they invariably solicit the influence and intercession of the friends of those from whom the favors are sought—the friends and supporters of the government. Now, bearing in mind the two aforesaid incontestable truths, how can we exaggerate when speaking of the efficacy, the power, the irresistible mightiness of the prayers of God's Blessed Mother, offered up for those whom Her Divine Son redeemed in His precious blood. Who so holy, who so near to our Blessed Redeemer, who has such irresistible claims upon Him as His own Mother? She bore Him for nine months in her virginal womb. She saw Him born and saw Him die. She nursed Him in His infancy, flew with Him into Egypt to save him from the wrath of a tyrant, she labored for Him, bore poverty with Him, hungered with Him, was for years associated with Him in His daily life, was, in a word, His most tender and loving Mother whom He obeyed during the years of His hidden life at Nazareth. She gave Him all that He had of that human nature with which His divinity was hypostatically united and with which He worked on earth. She gave Him that heart into which she transfused her own blood and which He poured out on the tree of the cross for us as the price of our redemption—that breath and life which He gave in atonement for sin, and for the redemption of the world. O, what creature then, could be as near and dear to our adorable Lord as His own dear Mother? Who could have such claims upon Him as she? Not all the saints that ever glorified God and honored human nature by the splendour of their virtues, not all the Cherubim and Seraphim that surround His eternal throne, not all the angelic choirs that sing forever the praises of their Creator. If, then, the power and efficacy of intercessory prayer are in proportion to the holiness and merit and closeness to God of the person who offers it, we have the most positive assurance, the most unshaken certainty, that the prayers of the Blessed Virgin must be most powerful with her eternal Son, and most beneficial to her supplicants.*

And, in fact, we find that this was the case while yet Mother and Son still lingered on the earth. The very first recorded grace given by the incarnate God to man was bestowed at the voice of Mary. After the annunciation, the Blessed Virgin visited her cousin, Saint Elizabeth; and it came to pass, says

* So reasonable is Catholic teaching on this point, and so much is it in accord with the dictates of common-sense, as well as with the revealed word of God, that even enlightened Protestants are forced to admit it. Thus the late pure-minded Longfellow beautifully expresses this teaching:—

This is indeed the blessed Mary's land;
Virgin and Mother of our dear Redeemer;
All hearts are touched and softened at her name;
Alike the bandit, with the bloody hand,
The priest, the prince, the scholar, and the peasant,
The man of deeds, the visionary dreamer,
Pay homage to her as one ever present!
And even as children, who have much offended
A too-indulgent Father, in great shame,
Penitent, and yet not daring unattended
To go into his presence, at the gate
Speak with their sister, and confiding wait,
Till she goes in before and intercedes;
So men, repenting of their evil deeds,
And yet not venturing rashly to draw near
With their requests an angry father's ear,
Offer to her their prayers and their confession,
And she for them in heaven makes intercession.
And if our Faith had given us nothing more
Than this example of all womanhood,
So mild, so merciful, so strong, so good,
So patient, peaceful, loyal, loving, pure,
This were enough to prove it higher and truer
Than all the creeds the world had known before.

St. Luke, 1st chap. 41st verse, "that as Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant in her womb leaped for joy, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost." Now the Fathers unanimously maintain that at the sound of Mary's voice St. John the Baptist was sanctified in his mother's womb by a special grace from Jesus Christ, for the recognition of the presence of the Redeemer given by the child, if not accompanied by the remission of his original sin, would, in their estimation, not cause him joy, but rather sorrow, as he would feel that by that sin he was estranged and separated from his blessed Redeemer. "There is no doubt," says Origen, "that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost because of her son; for the mother did not then deserve to receive the Holy Ghost, but as John, as yet confined in his mother's womb, was filled with the Holy Ghost, then Elizabeth, after the sanctification of her son, was filled with the Holy Spirit." Now, this grace of sanctification given to St. John could have been bestowed, had God so willed, either before or after the visit of the Blessed Virgin, but it pleased the Redeemer to grant it only at the moment that his mother's voice sounded in the ears of Elizabeth to signify that it was through her instrumentality, and at her instance, grace was accorded.

We find, also, that the first miracle which Jesus wrought was performed at the request of his blessed Mother, and that, even before the time marked out in the divine decrees for the manifestation of his Almighty power had arrived. This miracle took place at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee (St. John, ii. chap.) Jesus and Mary were invited to the marriage feast. And the wine failing, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine;" and Jesus said to her, "Woman, what is it to Me and to thee—my hour is not yet come;" but Mary, who well knew that her request would not be refused, said to the waiters, "Whatsoever he shall say to you, do ye." Then Jesus saith to the waiters, "Fill the water-pots with water;" and they filled them up to the brim. Then Jesus, by a miracle of almighty power, converted the water into wine. The Evangelist adds: "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee; and He manifested his glory." From the tenor of this text it is perfectly manifest that it was only at the request of his blessed Mother Jesus wrought this first miracle, and that in order to comply with her prayer, he performed it even before the time of his working miracles had arrived. We may therefore conclude that as our Blessed Redeemer bestowed his first grace and wrought his first miracle at the request of his holy Mother, he would for all coming time work miracles of grace and mercy for the salvation of those for whom Mary's powerful voice would be raised in advocacy; and as the relation of mother and son has not ceased to exist in heaven, where Jesus is enthroned in the glory of his Father, and where Mary reigns above the heavenly hierarchies; and, as Jesus is still the Father of mercies, and the charity and compassion of Mary for poor repentant sinners is, if possible, more inflamed and intensified, we may rest assured that Jesus will never refuse to listen to the voice of His blessed Mother when she pleads in accents of tender pity and compassion for the poor sinners whom he has redeemed in His precious blood. For the Blessed Virgin will not cease to plead and intercede for us with her divine Son now that she is in the eternal heavens. The communion of Saints is a great fact attested by the revealed word of God and embodied as an article of faith in the Apostles' Creed. The church is a vast society embracing the Saints in heaven, the suffering souls in Purgatory and its members who are still detained in the flesh. There is a bond of sympathy, of union and of charity binding all these children of the church into one great family of God; death cannot separate their souls nor raise up a barrier that would divide them, "for Christ, Who is our peace, hath broken down all the walls of partition which sin and death had interposed between God's children, and hath made both one"—that is, hath united the Saints in heaven and his people on earth into his own body, which is His church. And as in the human body all the members are interdependent, and minister to each other's wants, and feel for each other's sufferings, and contribute to the well-being of the whole body, so, in the church, which is the body of Christ, the various members thereof do, by the appointment of God, and according to their position and the measure of their capacity, minister to each other's spiritual needs, interchange kindly and merciful offices, and are bound together by the bonds of active charity and friendship, stronger than death. We invoke the prayers and influence of the Saints; they intercede for us with God, and we bring relief to the souls in Purgatory by our prayers and other good works. In this