

PASTORAL OF LAST LENT

- or -

His Grace the Archbishop of Toronto.

(Continued.)

THE SACRAMENT OF MERCY.

The Sacrament of Penance is another wondrous institution of God's tender mercy and compassion for sinners, and it is a most powerful and efficacious means of salvation. Through this divine Sacrament the truly penitent are forgiven the most grievous sins, even though they were as red as scarlet in their enormity and as numerous as the grains of sands on the sea shore. "Whatever," said Christ to his ministers, "you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Mathew xviii: 8.) And again, "As the Father hath sent Me I send you. Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain they are retained." (St. John xx: 23.) As often as men sin, and however grievous and heinous and numerous their sins may be, so often they may apply to this sacred tribunal of mercy, and its pardoning power forgives always with a divine and perfect absolution. For all transgressions, for all post-baptismal sins whatsoever, for all the sad long catalogue of grievous transgressions that outrage God and ruin man there is but one condition of pardon required, and that is sincere sorrow and the firm resolve to sin no more, and then the absolution imparted is certain in its effects, is full and complete. "And now," as Cardinal Manning beautifully says, "this Sacrament of the love of Jesus to many is necessary, and to all is a fountain of grace. To those who after Baptism have fallen into mortal sin it is necessary. No other Sacrament of life remains to them; no other means of rising from the death of sin to the life of justice is ordained. They cannot raise themselves to life again. The charity of God has departed from them, and the Holy Ghost has withdrawn His habitual grace. The interior acts of their souls are dead. Their good actions have no power of merit. One act of mortal sin has destroyed all. One such sin in youth has cankered the root of a long life, or one such sin has shattered all the growth and fruit of the longest obedience. If they so die they are lost, and lost forever. To die out of the love of God is eternal death. Nor shall they be revived again except only by this second Sacrament of the dead. If they come with the sorrow of faith and hope, even though they have not charity, the compassion of Jesus will give them a full forgiveness and breathe into them the breath of life once more."

Let us then cherish a deep, abiding devotion for this Sacrament of the Divine Mercy, and let us approach it frequently with worthy dispositions, confident that if, in this respect, we sow in tears, we shall reap in joy. One of the worst efforts of the enemy of souls is to inspire sinners with aversion and fear of this sacred ordinance of salvation. The world hates it and condemns it because the world is the enemy of God's interests and is the friend and ally of Satan in the destruction of souls. But all who wish to be at the side of Jesus, all who value their immortal souls, all who seriously wish to work out their salvation, will make frequent use of this powerful means of grace, and will not fail through it to come with humble and contrite hearts to the Good Shepherd for mercy and pardon, to come to Him as Magdalen did for the remission of many sins, to come to him as the Prodigal to his father, for the recovery of their lost privileges and merits; for the receiving of their lost dignity as sons of God and co-heirs with Christ to the kingdom of eternal glory.

THE SACRAMENT OF LOVE.

Our Lord tells us that it is not on bread alone that man lives. Man is a compound being made up of soul and body united in one person; he is a child of eternity as well as of time. The human body is of the earth and must draw its sustenance from it. The immortal soul, made in the image of God, touches the immaterial world and as it were, reaches up to heaven, and from heaven must derive its nutriment. The food of the soul is the sovereign truth, and beauty and the Supreme good, in other words, is God himself—God in His pure essence and in the beatific vision will be the food of the soul in heaven during the eternal ages, God behind veils and symbols is its food during the days of its exile. But by what scheme, by what invention of Divine love can God become the food of the soul while yet imprisoned in the human body? How can the hungry soul lay hold of God and be united with him? The answer to these questions is to be found in the institution of the Sacrament of Divine Love—the Blessed Eucharist. In and through this Sacrament our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ gives His body and blood, soul and divinity under the appearance of bread and wine, to be the food and nourishment of the soul. "I am," says Christ, "the living bread which came down from heaven, if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever, and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." (John vi: 52.) This holy Sacrament is the means by which the soul reaches God and is united to Him, soul to soul, and heart to heart. "Amen, I say to you, he that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in Me and I in him." (John vi: 57.) As Jesus Christ liveth of the life of His Eternal Father, so the soul partaking of this divine food liveth of the life of Jesus Christ, the King of Ages, immortal and impassible. "As the Father had sent me and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me the same also shall live by me." (John vi: 57.) As the branch of the living vine draws its sap and nourishment from it, and in due season produces flowers and fruits, so we, engrafted on the true vine, Jesus Christ, share His life and bring forth the fruits of virtue and holiness. The Blessed Eucharist is the tree of life which grows in the garden of God—His Church—whose fruits impart immortality to all who worthily eat thereof. Just as in the primeval paradise the body of unfallen Adam was, by a divine privilege, given immortality, so in the Church of God the bodies of all who worthily eat of the Blessed Eucharist are given the gage and pledge of immortal life. True, the bodies of worthy communicants shall die the death, and moulder away into dust and ashes in forgotten graves, but they bear within them the seeds of a glorious immortality, and on the Resurrection morning they will arise in power and honour and incorruptibility, shining with a special glory, and a special beauty of holiness: "He that eateth my flesh," saith the Lord, "and drinketh my blood hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up on the last day." (John vi: 55.) What an inestimable treasure we have in this adorable Sacrament! It is the mercy, and love, and compassion, and tenderness, and benignity, and kindness of Jesus Christ dwelling amongst us under sacramental veils. It is all the fulness of the Godhead dwelling corporally amongst us. It is our Emmanuel, our Incarnate God, whose desire is to be with the children of men, whose loving heart goes out to us in all the strength and power of His divine affections, in all the riches of His bounty, and all the boundless wealth of His goodness. It is the Good Shepherd that is there with His love for the lost sheep, it is the friend of publicans and sinners, it is the father of the prodigal, it is He who

proved His divine personality and mission not by stupendous miracles that would over-awe and terrify, but by the exercises of Almighty power in healing the ills that afflict humanity, in comforting the afflicted, consoling the sorrowful, in drying the tears of those who weep, in a word, in filling the earth with His mercies, and commissions and charities like the covering waters of the sea. "Go and tell John," said He, "what you have seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the lepers are cleansed, the dead rise again, and to the poor the Gospel is preached." (Matthew xi: 45.) And this same merciful Redeemer, through this Sacrament of Love, daily exercises His gracious ministry in the plentiful bestowals of spiritual favours, graces and mercies that are but typified and adumbrated by the healings of bodily infirmities and diseases. From the tabernacle He sweetly invites all the weary toilers of the world, all heavily laden and care-burdened men, all whose hearts are heavy with sorrow, all whose spirits are faint with sore trials, all who are borne down by difficulties and disappointments, all for whom life is but one weary struggle, one vast sorrow and constant companionship with hardship and poverty, He invites all to come to Him and He will refresh them and uplift the burden of their sorrow, and dry their tears and cheer up the faint-hearted, and bring hope and light and joy into sad and darkened lives. "Come unto Me all you who are weary and heavy burdened and I will refresh you." (Matthew xi: 28.) During the past year countless multitudes visited the City of Treves to venerate the Holy Coat, the seamless garment once worn by the Incarnate God and made holy by contact with His adorable body. But in the Blessed Sacrament we have Jesus Himself, the fountain of all sanctity; and yet how few there are that visit Him in the prison tabernacle of His love! He stays on our altars during the long weary days and the silent vigils of the night, and yet we give Him no thought, we pay Him no visit, our hearts are cold and frozen towards Him. Where is our faith, where is our gratitude, where is our love? May we not well imagine our Blessed Lord complaining of us as He did of His people of old, "*Tota die expandi manus meas ad populum non credentem et contradicentem.*" The whole day long I reach out my hands in gracious invitation to a people that believeth not and contradicteth me." (Romans x: 21)

Dearly beloved brethren let us not continue to deserve this reproach from our Divine Saviour. Let us frequently visit the Blessed Sacrament. There our Divine Saviour sits on His mercy seat, to receive our petitions, to relieve our spiritual miseries, to console us in our sorrows, and help, encourage and sustain us in our trials. There he will quicken our faith, animate our hope and inflame our charity. There our hearts will warm and glow with the flames of Divine charity caught from the fire of love that burns in the heart of the Man God, and there our souls can commune with their Lord and their God who is their centre and their resting place. As the stag panteth after the fountains of water so should our souls pant after the living God who abides with us in the Blessed Sacrament. Those who are truly devout to this Sacrament of love are on the high road to heaven.

Let us frequently assist at the heavenly banquet of the Eucharist, that Christ has prepared for us, let us feed our hungry souls on this bread of life, let us slake our thirst at this fountain of our Saviour whose regenerating waters spring up into life everlasting. Let us frequently eat of this heavenly manna of which those who partake shall not taste death for ever. It is indeed a sad commentary on

man's indifference to his highest interests, on his criminal apathy and neglect in the affair of his eternal salvation, and on his base ingratitude to God for His innumerable mercies and boundless goodness and love in the institution of the Sacrament of His mercy and in that of His love, that our holy mother the Church has felt herself compelled to enjoin on her children the worthy reception of these two great Sacraments at least once in the year, and that under the most grievous penalties. In the fourth Council of Lateran the Church decrees as follows:

"The faithful of both sexes after they come to the use of discretion shall in all private faithfully confess all their sins at least once a year to their own pastors; and take care to fulfil to the best of their power the penance enjoined on them; receiving reverently at least at Easter the Sacrament of the Eucharist, unless, perhaps, by the council of their own pastors, for some reasonable cause, they judge it proper to abstain from it for a time; otherwise let them be kept out of the Church when living, and when they die let them be deprived of Christian burial."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

The Church of St. Prisca.

On the Aventine Hill, in a part of Rome now dreary and deserted looking, but which was the abode of the nobles two thousand years ago, stands the church of St. Prisca. Here dwelt a family which, however rich and powerful then, finds renown only because of two Jewish inmates of the household, Aquila and Priscilla. It was through these converts of St. Peter that St. Paul became an inmate of this house upon the Aventine, where both he and St. Peter celebrated Mass, and from whence he sent the message to the Corinthians when he wrote them: "Aquila and Priscilla, with whom I also lodge, and the church that is in their house, salute thee much in the Lord."

With whom I also lodge! How close and familiar these words seem to make the great Apostle! And now we, in the nineteenth century, may also enter into that house, preserved and consecrated as a Christian church. In the crypt is the old stone font in which tradition says St. Peter baptized, and the same tradition tells us that here St. Peter consecrated an altar. The altar in the crypt is dedicated to St. Peter, and the ancient font stands in a niche in the wall opposite.

Aquila and Priscilla, whose message of brotherly love St. Paul transmitted to the Corinthians, are titular patrons of this church with St. Prisca, and their relics lie under the altar. They were tent makers, and when they were banished from Rome, under Claudius, went to live in Corinth.

Of St. Prisca, who was a noble Roman lady, there is little known, except the brief and glorious, oft-repeated record that she suffered dreadful tortures for her faith till the sword released her. Her relics are also preserved in the venerable church on the Aventine bearing her name, and which gives title to a cardinal. The immemorial tradition held in Rome that this, as well as the house of Pudens, consecrated under the names of his daughters, Praxedes and Pudetiana, was the meeting-place of the Christians in the apostolic days, is confirmed by St. Paul's reference to "the church in their house;" and standing in this spot of holy and venerable memories we may fervently repeat: "I believe in the Communion of saints."—*Irish Catholic.*

Have You Asthma?

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