

in the cold and comfortless retreats of poverty, for modest pining worth and merit in distress; for virtue on the brink of ruin, from which your timely aid might snatch her; for the fatherless and the widow; when instead of causing to circulate among such the overflowings of your plenty; you spurn from your door, and frighten from your near approach, those of them, whom your inhuman and unchristian neglect, and strong imperious necessity have forced reluctantly upon the public.

Murmur not, ye poor, at the hard and mortifying treatment you so often meet with; nor at the very unequal distribution of the goods of this life.

Your sufferings and privations are but of short duration; as are also all the comforts and enjoyments of the rich and great. The time will soon come when they too shall mourn; and mourn in earnest, that their condition was not once like yours. Remember that the Lord of all nature chose himself to be poor; and so very poor, that he had not a home of his own, nor a house to shelter him from the inclemency of the weather. *The birds of the air, says he, have their nests, and the foxes have their lurking holes; but the Son of Man has no where to lay his head.* Luke ix. 58. If you resemble him, my dear Brethren, in your poverty, O take care to resemble him also in the sanctity of your lives. Then shall you not have cause to envy the condition of the wealthy and great. The Lord has declared you blessed in your poverty, provided you are poor not only in condition, but also in mind and affection; that is, contented with your lot, and not coveting more than God sees fit to allow you. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Whereas he fulminates his woes against the rich. *Woe to you rich, he says, because you have your consolation.* Luke vi. 24.

Is it then true, what is so very contrary to the received notions, and general opinion of mankind, that poverty is a blessing; riches a misfortune and a curse? Our Saviour most plainly affirms it is really so. And why? Because the portion of the poor is reserved for them in the next life, and is nothing less than the kingdom of heaven; while the rich, says he, have their consolation here. These seldom or never think of using but for their own comfort those goods, which God has only entrusted to their management and keeping; and for which, as his stewards, they shall have to render him one day a most strict account. Therefore does our Saviour assure us, if at it is not only difficult, but almost impossible, for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Matt. xix. 24.

Yet notwithstanding this dreadful denunciation pronounced against the rich by the mouth of Truth itself, we are assured by the same unerring and divine authority, that these very riches, which are to almost all who possess them, the cause of their perdition, might be made, as we have shown, and only in the way we have shown, the very means of securing their salvation. For charity, says St. James, covers a multitude of sins. Ep. v. 20. And in Proverbs we are assured that he who gives

to the poor, lends to the Lord: who will repay him. Prov. xix. 17. In this manner are we desired by our Saviour to make to ourselves friends of the mammon of iniquity; who, when we fail, may receive us into everlasting dwellings. Luke xvi. 9. Thus may the perishable riches of this world be exchanged for riches which shall never fail: for treasures laid up in the kingdom of heaven; where neither rust corrodes, nor moth consumes, nor thieves break through and steal. Matt. vi. 20.

But while the rich are so indispensably obliged to divide their earthly treasures with the poor; let not others imagine that their more limited circumstances exempt them altogether from a similar obligation. All are more or less obliged to practice charity to the poor. This is a duty incumbent on all Christians. Every one must contribute his proportional share to the relief of the distressed. If some have but a mite to give, even that mite is expected; and, like the widow's mentioned in the gospel, is often more acceptable in the eyes of God who knows and estimates the abilities of each, than the larger, but less generous donations of the rich. The smallest trifle given from a proper motive secures to us a recompense. *Even a cup of cold water, says our Saviour, given in my name shall not want its reward.* Mark ix. 40. Thus does God constitute himself our debtor for all that we give to a poor brother in his name; and he promises us besides a hundred fold in return for our gift. O what an easy opportunity is here offered of laying in stores for the here to come! We ourselves are debtors to Almighty God for all the good things we possess; and yet he gives us a rightful claim upon himself to be refunded, and with an interest infinitely surpassing the whole capital amount for whatever portion we can spare, and consent to bestow, on our indigent brethren.

But if at all times we are bound, according to our abilities, to practice charity to the poor; the obligation of doing so is still greater during this holy season of penitential exercise, in which we have now again entered. Indeed, without charity to the poor, and alms-deeds, our fasting, and all the other austerities we may subject ourselves to, were but of little or no avail. It were just like planting and sowing, without watering or manuring, in a dry and barren soil. "Imagine not," says St. Augustine, "that fasting alone is sufficient to heal the wounds of sin. No: you must accompany it with alms-deeds. And while you chastise yourself, be careful to bring comfort to your neighbour. Then will you find the benefit of your austerities, when you open your bosom, and pour forth your heart in relieving others." *Serm. 65. de Temp.* St. Chrysostom, St. Ambrose, and indeed all the holy fathers of the Church, unanimously affirm that Charity to the poor is essentially necessary in order to render our fasting and penance either profitable to ourselves, or at all acceptable to God.

And shall we then, for not complying with this indispensable duty, shall we my dear Christians, run the risk of losing the whole benefit to be derived

from this other Lent, which our merciful God has granted us; the last, perhaps, to be allowed us of such extraordinary helps to salvation. It will certainly be the last of the kind granted to thousands, and probably the last to several of those, who are at present here assembled. Yes, Christians! some of those, to whom I am at this moment addressing myself, who are just now hearing me, shall before this holy season recurs again, have bidden a long perpetual adieu to this world, and to all its vain soderies; that used so much to engross their attention: shall have accounted to the supreme Judge for the use they have made of this present warning and exhortation, and the advantages they have derived from this very Lent, the last to be numbered out to them in the course of their mortal existence.

Ah, Christians! you are little aware, perhaps of the misfortune it would be to render vain so great a grace; and to lose so precious an opportunity of effecting a thorough reconciliation with your offended God; and of securing to yourselves the one thing necessary, the salvation of your souls; an opportunity which occurs but seldom in the course of the longest life: when all the faithful over the whole world, in compliance with the command of their holy Mother the Church, join together in besieging the throne of mercy, and using on their heavenly Father that holy violence, which pleases him, and which is sure to prevail. *The kingdom of heaven says our Saviour, suffers violence; and the violent snatch it away.* Matt. xi. 12.

Now then, indeed, is the acceptable time, as the apostle exclaims in this day's epistle; now is the day of salvation. The sinner needs no more fear to approach his angry Lord, and to prefer his humble and repentant suit. He stands not now alone, as formerly; but as a member of the Church of Christ, and in communion with the saints, he comes to implore in company of all the just. And what he himself may not deserve to obtain; what on other occasions might perhaps be refused on account of his own particular unworthiness will doubtless now be granted him, for the sake and at the request of all. Now in particular is the time to shake off the yoke of Satan, and to vindicate to ourselves the glorious liberty of the children of God: to break loose once for all from our evil habits: like Sampson, to rouse ourselves, in sin, from the lap of pleasure, where we have slept too long a dangerous sleep: and in the might of that divine spirit, that is so profusely poured abroad upon the faithful at this holy time, to burst at once all the bands and fetters which have hitherto bound us over an unresisting, a willing prey, to our most cruel and inveterate enemies. Such dear Christians, and so precious, is the occasion, which you run the risk of losing by hard-heartedness, or even indifference for the poor.

In order to facilitate the recollection of the important truths, which I have been inculcating, and which it behoves us ever to keep in mind; let us gather up, and carry home with us, their brief sum; which is merely this: the love of God, without