

The Catholic.

Quod semper; quod ubique; quod ab omnibus.

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ON CHARITY TO THE POOR.

Give, and it shall be given to you again, good measure, heaped up, shaken together and running over. Luke vi. 38.

To judge by the conduct of the generality of Christians, and even of those who are at some trouble to please God, and to secure their salvation; it would appear as if they imagined that nothing more were required of them, in order to attain to that endless bliss, for which they were created, than merely to repent for the sins they have had the misfortune to commit; and to avoid relapsing into them for the time to come. Still, however, when we have done all this, we have accomplished nothing more than the first necessary half of our duty. We have only just entered upon the path of righteousness, without advancing forward one single step towards that perfection, to which all the followers of Jesus Christ are called. *Be ye perfect,* says our Saviour, *as your heavenly father is perfect.* Mark v. 48. We are commanded not only to avoid evil, but also to do good: (1 Pet. iii. 11.) *and to use diligence by good works to make our calling and election sure.* 2 Pet. i. 10,

We have all of us here below our several tasks allotted us. Every one has the particular duties of his own situation in life to fulfil. It is only, however, the spiritual father, who can enter in private into all the varied, minute, and intricate detail of these particular obligations, with his penitent in the confessional; where he can adapt his instructions and advice to the capacity, disposition, and circumstances of every individual. The usual object of public exhortation is to recommend those duties, which are more or less incumbent on all. Of this class, but in the first degree, and above all others, is the duty which I am about to inculcate to you: I mean the great, the indispensable duty of Charity to the poor.

I shall next direct your attention to a particular case, which not only deserves, but imperiously calls for the immediate interference of your charitable exertions.

Charity to the poor is the most indispensable of all Christian duties, because it is inseparable from the very first and greatest of all obligations, that of loving God. *We have received this command from God,* says the Apostle St. John, *that he who loves*

God, loves also his brother. If any one says that he loves God, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for if he loves not his brother, whom he sees, how can he love God, whom he does not see? 1 John iv, 20, 21. The love of God supposes then the love of our neighbour. The one is but a necessary consequence flowing from the other. Whenever the cause exists, the effect must ensue. The love of God above all things must ever imply the love of our neighbour as ourselves.

But can such brotherly love, such fraternal charity exist in those, whose seeing a brother in distress, take not the least step to relieve him? Christians! here is an infallible rule laid down for you, by which you may judge of the degree of love which you bear to God; and calculate upon that, the chances you have to eternal salvation. *For he who loves not,* says the same apostle, *remains in death.* 1 John iii. 14. Do you wish to know if you really love God, as you should, and if your souls live in his grace? Look at your neighbour. Is there any one among your fellow-creatures, I do not say, whom you hate or dislike; but whom you love not as you would wish to be loved; whom you oblige not, even as you yourselves would wish to be obliged in similar circumstances? Say then without any doubt or hesitation; for, alas! it is too true: say, and shudder in uttering the sentence that you love not God—that consequently you remain in death. That your portion is not then with the friends but with the enemies of God. That heaven and endless felicity, is no more the object of your hope; but that hell is your doom and a miserable eternity. As you wish then, and expect to be saved, never be so mad in future as to think of separating in practice, what is absolutely inseparable in practice as well as in theory, the love of your neighbour from the love of God. These two virtues, so closely linked together, are the very hinges, on which the whole system of Christian morality and perfection hangs and turns. *On these two commandments says our Lord, the whole law and the prophets depend.* Matt. xxii. 40.

But can any one pretend to love his neighbour, who can view with cold indifference the sufferings of a fellow-creature, and not put himself to the smallest inconvenience in order to alleviate them? On whose callous heart the timid request, the meek imploring eye of want, the sickly, maimed, emaciated and tattered form makes no other impression but that of disgust? Who feels not that sweet, though sorrowing, sympathy for a brother in distress, which impels him almost blindly to afford the immediate relief, without allowing him to calculate the merit he bestows; to investigate the personal

merits of the needy craver; or, what is worse, to enhance his sufferings with the bitter taunt and scornful rebuff.

Charity to the poor is indeed nothing else but fraternal love, exerting itself, as occasion requires, in behalf of the needy and distressed. Whoever feels this charity stirring within him, has in the kindly sensations it excites inwardly, and the beneficent effects it produces outwardly, the clearest evidence that can be afforded him, that he loves his God; and, therefore, that he belongs to the society of the just: while the want of it is a certain and indubitable mark of reprobation.

So true is this, that our Lord himself, in the description he gives of the last judgment, seems to make the eternal happiness of each depend on the practice alone of this virtue. For addressing himself first to the just, he says: *Come ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in: naked, and you clothed me; sick and in prison, and you visited me.—For what you have done to the least of my brethren, that do I account as done to myself.—* Then turning to the wicked, he says: *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave me not to eat: I was thirsty, and you gave me not to drink: I was a stranger, and you took me not in; naked, and you did not clothe me; sick and in prison, and you visited me not.* Matt. xxvi 41;—Here indeed, Christians, is realized the beatitude spoken in favour of the merciful; *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall find mercy.* Here does our Lord at length fulfil his promise to those who are liberal to the poor; *Give, and it shall be given to you again, good measure, heaped up, shaken together and running over; for with the same measure as you mete to others, it shall be measured to you again.*

It were needless to cite further scripture authority to prove what is already thereby so clearly demonstrated; that charity to the poor is the most indispensable duty of all Christians. It suffices to say that there is no duty whatever so often and so strongly inculcated in holy writ, as this one; nor any, to the fulfilment of which Almighty God has annexed such high rewards: and for the neglect of which he threatens us with such dreadful and lasting chastisements.

Christians! are you aware of this, when you shut your ears against the piteous supplications of the poor, and turn away your eyes from all their wants? When instead of searching, as you ought,