

But before he left it Silvertown was one of the most complete Catholic missions in London, with a fine church, presbytery, schools and parochial hall. Dean Ring is well known in the East End as a parish priest and no less in the wider Catholic world for his educational work. He was the last chairman of the West Ham School Board, and has been for twenty years a member of the Catholic Education Council. He has already received many congratulations on his new dignity.

A LOVING INVITATION

"COME TO ME, ALL YOU THAT LABOR AND ARE BURDENED AND I WILL REFRESH YOU!"

BY REV. CHARLES COPPENS, S. J.
Catholic Press Association

Many texts of Holy Scripture are become so familiar to our ears that they have ceased to make on our minds the impression which their real meaning deserves. Such is the 28th verse of the 11th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, which contains the encouraging words of our Blessed Saviour: "Come to Me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you." For let us pause a few moments and attentively consider the rich promise it contains. It clearly assures us, on the authority of God Himself, that, in all the difficulties and anxieties of life, we have a ready help at hand, a refuge from every ill, a source of all consolation, provided only we have proper recourse to the goodness of the Lord. He who utters this magnificent promise is the eternal truth itself, the Son of God, one with the Father and the Holy Ghost. He made this promise to all the members of the human race. His Sacred Heart, glowing with love for us, invites us to come to Him whenever we are in any need or trouble, and He says to us: "Come to Me all you who labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you."

PROMISE MADE BY THE ETERNAL GOD

If a mere mortal like ourselves, but possessed of uncommon riches, and animated with sentiments of extraordinary generosity, were to speak to us in the most earnest terms, and say to us: "You know that on many occasions I have shown you my sincere love; now listen to a most liberal promise that I wish to make to you for all future time. It is this: I invite you, on all occasions, whenever you will be in need of my assistance, to come to me with confidence and tell me what you desire; and I assure you, on my word of honor, that I will give you a favorable hearing, and grant you all your reasonable requests. If a mortal man would earnestly speak to us thus, we could scarcely believe our ears.

And yet we know that this promise has been made to us, not indeed by a mortal man, but by the lips of the eternal God, Who is all powerful to bestow all gifts, all faithful to keep His word, and animated with the most generous bounty towards us.

That we may better appreciate His immense condescension, we shall do well to reflect awhile on the majesty of Him who made the promise, on the condition of those to whom the promise is made and on the magnitude of the blessings promised.

IMPLORES US TO ACCEPT HIS GRACIOUS INVITATION

And first, it is the infinitely holy and truthful God who has deigned to pledge His infallible word that He will help us with His almighty power, if we will accept His invitation, and have recourse to Him in all our needs: "Come to Me all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you." No promise could be more reliable, for none could rest on a higher authority. Do we suddenly realize the fact that it is God Himself who invites us, who, as it were, implores us to accept His gracious invitation that we shall confidently come to Him, God who has explicitly promised that we shall not appeal to Him in vain, but that He will undoubtedly refresh us?

And to whom has the great God made this promise? Not to a few favorites only among His creatures, nor to His faithful angels, nor to the most holy only among men, but also to poor sinners, not to the great alone, but also to the small; to all in fact who stand in need of His assistance: "Come to me," He says, "all you who labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you."

Now who is there among us who does not frequently stand in need of God's aid? It is therefore to all and every one of us that the Lord's gracious invitation is personally addressed. He expects us to act upon it as often as we desire His assistance. As a helpless infant at every moment of distress utters an instinctive cry as an appeal for his mother's help, so every child of God should promptly raise its voice to its Heavenly Father as soon as it has a sensation of its need of assistance. For He is ever near us, ever ready to supply all our real wants, provided only we appeal to Him, ever whispering to us the encouraging invitation: "Come to Me all that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you."

HIS WORDS INSPIRE US WITH UNBOUNDED CONFIDENCE

The power of parents to assist their little ones, no matter how warmly they may love them, is confined within very narrow limits. They can only render them material help; but the great good God enters far more deeply into the inner recesses of our various needs. The very words in which He has deigned

to express His most liberal invitation are so wide in their application as readily to inspire us with unbounded confidence. We need only to recall to mind a few of His generous utterances to conceive new courage and a firm reliance on His paternal love for us all. For He has expressed His mind so clearly and so forcibly, saying to each of us: "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you." And He adds the explicit promise: "For every one that asketh receiveth and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." Furthermore, knowing the slowness of the human mind to understand the things of God, He has, deigned to reason with us, using arguments which appeal directly to our hearts; for He says to us: "What man is there among you, of whom if his son shall ask bread will he reach him a stone? Or if he shall ask him a fish will he reach him a serpent? And He draws thence the following forcible conclusion: "If you then, being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in Heaven give good things to them that ask him." (St. Matth. vii., 7-11).

A STRIKING EXAMPLE OF POWER OF PRAYER

Is it not almost inconceivable that such generous and emphatic invitation of our loving Lord should leave the hearts of any men unaffected by gratitude and eagerness to fly to Him in all their needs? And yet such is the case. There are multitudes of persons, even in this highly civilized land, who pay no heed whatever to these words of our Blessed Saviour. His earnest appeal is to them like a voice sounding in the wilderness. Let us give here a striking example of this fact.

Years ago a highly educated gentleman had himself introduced to me. He was an able physician, a lecturer in a medical college, and had been induced by a Catholic friend to look into the all-important matter of religion, of which till then he had been in total ignorance. The gentleman listened attentively to my explanations, and frequently returned to receive further instruction. He said he was desirous to believe our doctrine, because he knew that his friend was constantly kneeling in his moral conduct by the faithful practice of his religion. But he could not make up his mind to believe the truths proposed.

I told him to pray for the grace of God, for the gift of faith. He was willing enough to do that also; but he said he did not know how to pray, he had never prayed to God in his life. I handed him a printed copy of the "Our Father," and told him to go home, to lock himself in his room for a little while, then to kneel down and attentively read that prayer, taught us by Our Lord Himself. He willingly promised to do so.

When he called on me the next day, I asked him whether he had kept his promise and prayed to God. He said yes; he had done so; but that it had been the greatest mental effort he had ever made, to try to realize that, when he had thus put himself in perfect solitude, there was still present to him an unseen being that understood his words and listened to his requests.

And thus estrangement from the great good God is carried to such an extent in the midst of our material civilization that there are many persons who never pray, who are as total strangers to the Saviour's loving invitation: "Come to Me all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you," as if these words had been uttered by Confucius in China or Zoroaster on the Persian plains. The gentleman of whom I have spoken soon reaped the fruit of prayer and was received into the Church. How many there are who have grown up like him in total neglect of prayer no one can tell. But considering that at least one-third of the population of this country belong to no church organization, and make no profession in worshipping God in any manner, their number may amount to many millions.

But our thoughts become more practical for ourselves, when we apply our reflections to our own habitual way of turning to prayer whenever we are in any trouble or special need of God's assistance. No one of us but is sometimes distressed, sometimes in difficulty or perplexity. Then we turn perhaps to right and left, and seek for aid from every creature, or abandon ourselves to despondency and lamentation. It is well to try to help ourselves, or to appeal for human aid as far as reason approves; but it is not well to ignore the Divine assistance, and to turn a deaf ear to the loving accents of Our Lord; and yet do we not too often neglect that one best of all helps, and forget when we need most to remember the generous promise: "Come to Me all you who labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you?"

TO CONCENTRATE CHRIST'S ATTENTION ON OURSELVES ALONE

We need not be afraid lest the vast multitude of God's children will make Him less loving to each one of us, less attentive to every petition, or less solicitous to promote our individual happiness. As the sacred Book of Ecclesiastes remarks: "All the rivers run into the sea, and yet the sea does not overflow" (I, 7); and so all the desires of all human hearts may flow into the boundless ocean of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and yet there will ever be as much more room left as if no streams had entered it.

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If however we wish to feel at times as if we could concentrate Christ's exclusive attention on ourselves alone, we can on such occasions enter into the solitude of a devotional church or chapel, and there, remote from the bustle of the busy world without, forgetting for the time being all but the sacred presence of our Eucharistic Lord, there beneath the flickering flames of the sanctuary lamp, kneeling amidst the faithful hand of the adoring angels, we can commune more confidently and intimately with our benign Saviour, pouring out with concentrated attention the deepest sentiments of our hearts, feeling all along that we enjoy a private and mutual converse with the dearest and most devoted friend that any human being can entertain.

We may add still greater fervor to our prayer, and make still more certain of obtaining any special favor we desire, if we pay such a visit during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. On that occasion, day after day, our Blessed Redeemer deigns to present our humble petitions to His Heavenly Father, enriching them with the simultaneous offering of His Precious Blood, renewing in our special behalf, through the hands of His minister, the Holy Sacrifice of the Cross, under the humble appearances of bread and wine.

The Blessed Saviour Himself, in His infinite wisdom and generosity, is often ready to go further still, when in that most wonderful pledge of His boundless love. He comes frequently to impress the seal of His generous approbation on the earnest petitions of our hearts when He deigns to visit us in Holy Communion.

Jesus has thus provided a variety of means to arouse within us a holy confidence in the efficacy of prayer. All these are only various stones of that infinitely benevolent voice in which the God of all goodness appeals to the dull ears of human hearts, ever repeating to us the wonderful invitation: "Come to Me all that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you."

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

The parable of the good Samaritan is one of the best known gospels of the year and the lesson that it teaches is so plain that it is impossible to add aught to the simple beauty of the story. Christ spoke the parable to answer and, perhaps, to rebuke the questioning lawyer. If the man who asked the information was honest in his inquiry, or possessed a sincere desire to gain information, he would no doubt have answered with great directness. But the lawyer was one of the crowd that followed Christ, seeking to catch him in His words, in order that they might have a pretext to condemn Him. He had listened to Christ teaching the people, telling them they were blessed because they had seen and heard what kings had desired. The lawyer, puffed with his own importance, thought on occasion a fit opportunity to attract attention to himself and, mayhap, bring confusion to the Saviour. The crowd was intent upon listening to the Lord's words when, of a sudden, the interruption comes as the lawyer addresses the catch question to the Saviour: "What must I do to be saved?" That the man was not sincere was evident from his words of the gospel where he is said to be tempting Christ. This also appears from his very calling. He was a lawyer and his business was to know the law, not merely human laws as today, but at that time the lawyers must be expert expounders of the law of God. So it was not so much information he asked as notoriety. He directed to Christ the most fundamental question and the one that should have been the base of all his legal knowledge: what must I do to be saved?—as if the man were ignorant of what he must have learned at the very beginning of his studies.

Just as in our time there are men continually inquiring about our religion, not so much to know as to ridicule our doctrines. With bad faith and with ready insults they inquire not from those who are competent to answer but from half-informed persons and from mere children who cannot match them in debate or resort to their specious argu-

ments. They attack where there is little danger, and glory in contending in members of the Church whose faith is stronger than their knowledge.

The only way to meet such assailers of the faith is with silent contempt. When one asks about the faith and is actuated by an honest purpose, it is our duty to impart the information ourselves or to give these sincere inquirers the means of obtaining it. But when a man asks with the sole wish to expand his insult upon what we hold sacred, if you cannot match him in force of ridicule it is far wiser to allow his words to pass unnoticed. You cannot change his evil views and it is only a waste of energy and a risk of patience to pay the slightest heed to his jeering. Even though others are listening your silence will be a better defense than all ill understood answers. Sometimes when you can meet the questioner on his own ground and repel his attacks it may be necessary to silence him for the sake of others. In general, however, the silent is the better way with these ridiculers of religion.

Christ did not answer the lawyer of the Gospel but forced him to answer himself. The lawyer wanted the crowd to admire his powers, but

with one word Christ unmasked his insincerity and left him up to the ridicule of the people. You are one trained in the law, Christ seems to say, and you come to me with a question any child can answer: "What must I do to be saved?" You are a lawyer: how does the law answer that? The crest-fallen man answered at once, too confused at being thus humiliated to admit that Christ had gained a victory. For he will not stop with the first attempt to ensnare Christ, but when detected in his purpose he rushes thoughtlessly on to entrap the Saviour. The law said, as he quoted, that he must love his neighbor. Now let Christ tell him who is his neighbor. That lawyer must have exulted at what he no doubt considered a master stroke. It was all very well to report what was written in the law, but only the deepest wisdom could give the meaning of that law so as to satisfy all listeners. So the lawyer had caught Christ finally, for no matter how the Lord defined the word "neighbor" there would be some in the crowd to whom he should give cause for offense. The Lord, however, was not to be taken in the snare.

Again He would not answer directly, but made the lawyer reply to his own question. Christ according-

ly relates the story of the man who fell among robbers. To push the lawyer to the extreme, He introduces the Samaritan—of all men the least likely to be considered a neighbor by the people who were listening. The Samaritans were separated from the Jews by an intensity of personal and national hatred of which we have no parallel today. So fiercely hostile were these people to one another that when Christ asks a drink from the Samaritan woman at the well she is astonished that He should have addressed her or that He was willing to take water from her hand. No friendly intercourse passed between the two peoples, so that to say that a Samaritan could be a neighbor to the Jews seemed an impossible contradiction. But after Christ had narrated the parable there was nothing else for the lawyer to say. It was the lawyer then and not Christ that gave the offense to the crowd.

In the thwarting of the man and his evil intention, however, Christ was at pains to leave the world a standard whereby we may know true neighbors. The Saviour had us all in mind when He drew that picture of the charitable Samaritan. Do thou in like manner, He says, and show mercy; the test of true

neighborliness, therefore, is the willingness to aid those who need our assistance.—The Guardian.

We are in the dark about ourselves. The management of our hearts is quite above us. Like the forlorn Hagar in the wilderness we must say for consolation, "Thou, God, seeest me." He knoweth whereof we are made, and He alone can uphold us. From within ourselves, by His aid, we must work unto nobler things. Let "good deeds, not words and wishes," be the watchword of our warfare.—Rev. William J. B. Daly.

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