

OUR WEEKLY SERMON.

Prayer and Penance in View of Purgatory.

Prayer and penance cancel sin and the temporal punishment due to sin. Every Christian, to save his soul, must fast and pray and do penance. Prayer is absolutely necessary for the salvation of every adult. Without the grace of God we cannot be saved, and grace is obtained by prayer. For the above truth we have the word of God "Without Me," says the Redeemer, "you can do nothing" (John vi 5). "Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves as ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor. iii 5). For it is God who works in you both to will and to accomplish according to His good will (Phil. ii 13). The Council of Trent defines "If any faith that without the prevalent inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and without His help man can believe, hope, love, or be penitent as he ought, let him be anathema" (Sess. XI Can. III).

The power of prayer to do all things, to cancel sin, and the debt due to sin, is as clear from the sacred text as is necessary. A few texts will suffice. Our Blessed Redeemer declares, "Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you. For everyone that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and he that knocketh, it shall be opened" (Math. vii 7-8). Amen, amen I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in My name He will give it to you. Whosoever, you shall ask the Father in My name, that I will do that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John xiv 13).

We cannot omit a few exquisite texts from the Old Testament. "Turn to me, and I will turn to you, saith the Lord of Hosts" (Zac. i 3). "As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, and why will you die? O house of Israel?" (Ezech. xxxiii 2). One text more: "Come and accuse Me, saith the Lord. If your sins be as scarlet they shall be made as white as snow; if as red as crimson they shall be made as wool" (Isai. i 18).

Such is the necessity and power of prayer, such the infinite mercy of God, and the sweet, tender love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

We shall say only a few words of the necessity and efficacy of penance to cancel sin, and the punishment due to sin.

Penance, self-denial, or mortification is necessary for the salvation of every Christian. Our Blessed Redeemer says: "If any man will come after Me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me" (Math. xvi 24). "Unless you do penance you shall all likewise perish" (Luke xiii). "If you live according to the flesh you shall die" (Rom. viii 13). St. Paul says: "I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection, lest perhaps when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway" (Rom. viii 13). To overcome the three deadly enemies of our salvation—the world, the flesh, and the devil—the constant habit of self-denial is essential. "Our wrestling," says St. Paul, "is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in high places" (Eph. vi 12). The same saint says the devil "is a roaring lion, goes about seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter v 8). So essential for salvation is the spirit of penance and self-denial.

The poor penitent thief asked only a respite, and the dying Saviour gave him pardon and Paradise. "This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise" (Luke xxiv 43). Great sinners became great saints. What cancelled their sins, and the temporal punishment due to their sins? Penance and prayer. Mary of Egypt, Mary Magdalen, St. Peter, St. Augustine, Margaret of Cortona, and countless other great sinners went straight to Paradise at the moment of their death. What made their souls as pure as a sunbeam, as clear as a crystal, as white as the virgin snow? Penance.

Prayer and penance obtain heaven for the greatest sinner, and frequently gain Paradise without an instant in Purgatory. Let us for a moment review a few test-cases we have been considering. We have given examples from the upper class: For a gentleman or noble lady in the world to lead a saintly life, prayer and penance are essential. Frequently in the palaces and mansions of the noble there are more waterlilies and panaces than in the cabins of the poor, or even in the cloisters of the religious. It is well-known in Catholic circles that frequently noble ladies go to balls

and theatres, dressed in all the finery and fashion of the age, to please their husbands; and keep their rank in society, and yet wear hair-shirts as instruments of penance. The life of the poor is perpetual penance. Their privation in food, in clothes, in beds and bed-covering is their purgatory on earth. We here gladly record the opinion of a holy Irish Bishop, "I believe," said he, "if the Irish poor people accepted from the hands of God their privations and sufferings, and were resigned to God's will without murmur or complaint, they would have little or no suffering in Purgatory."

The life of the holy nun is prayer and penance. Before the morning dawn, when the world is asleep, at the first sound of the bell, she rises to sing the praises of God. Hours of the day are spent before the Divine Lamb in the Tabernacle, in the dusty school room among poor and repulsive children. Long is the fast every morning awaiting the heavenly banquet of Holy Communion. By her vows she has given in sacrifice to God her whole being, soul and body, life and death, to God. Surely, the life of the holy nun is prayer and penance.

We give a few texts on the power or efficacy of penance to cancel sin, and the punishment due to sin. God sent His prophet, Jonas, to the wicked city of Nineve to announce "Forty days and Nineve shall be destroyed" (Jonas iii 4). Three people of Nineve did penance in sackcloth and ashes, and God pardoned the doomed city. "God saw their works, that they were turned from their evil way, and God had mercy with regard to the evil He said that He would do them, and He did it not" (Jonas iii 10).

In the New Testament the sweet mercy of Jesus shines forth brilliantly before every other Divine Attribute. What a hope and consolation to us all "I will have mercy and not sacrifice. For I am not come to call the just, but sinners" (Math. ix 13). "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke xix 9).

The prayer, "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner, changed the publican and sinner into a saint. A tender look of Jesus, converted Zachaeus; and so sincere was his conversion that he cried out, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have wronged any man of anything I restore him four-fold" (Luke xix).

The life of a holy priest is that of prayer and penance. Prayer is the very life of his soul, and the very soul of his life. Long fasts every morning, especially on Sundays. Days spent in field atmosphere of the confessional amid sin and sorrow. At every hour of the day and night, no matter, in snow or storm, rain or hail to the bog, the mountain, or garret, he must be ready to answer the call of the sick and the dying. To the plague-stricken house, to the home of fever, smallpox, or cholera, the faithful priest carrying his life in his hands, cheerfully goes to prepare the departing soul to meet her God.—From "Purgatory, Its Pains and Consolations," by Very Rev. Dean Khane, P.P., V.G.

THE WORK OF CONVERSION.

A Convention of Converts Has Been Suggested.

It is timely to suggest anew the convention of converts. Little groups of converts are gathering in the larger centres of population for the purpose of giving prominence to the idea of conversion, as well as extending a warm hand of welcome to those who have braved the condemnation of friends by becoming Catholics. We who are born in the faith and are accustomed to the democratic methods of our churches find it very hard to appreciate the loneliness of converts when the first flush of conversion has worn away.

They have been very much accustomed to the social life in non-Catholic churches. One of the principal means of holding Protestant bodies together is the social bond. The fact of the matter is so much has this social factor entered into the life of the churches that there is little else left. They have become social clubs. When one disentangles himself from all those obligations and side functions and for conscience sake comes back to the old mother Church, where, after all, it is the religious element that is cultivated and the social side ignored, he is impressed with a sense of utter loneliness. A very highly educated convert said to me the other day—she had been a Catholic but seven months—"Oh," she said, "I have been affected with utter desolation since I became a Catholic. If I go into a Protestant church some one always comes to speak to me, invites me to a festival and makes me feel at home, but since I have been going to the Catholic Church, no one has even so much as spoken to me. I go to mass every Sunday because I know it is my duty

and I come away with a sense of having done what I could for God, there is not one bit of human comfort in it at all to me. All my friends go elsewhere, and they who still think I am sane tell me of the charming people they meet and of the agreeable chats with their clergyman, but I have to tread my path alone. I do not in any sense regret the step I have taken and God very largely makes up to me of his own sweetness for the human pleasures I have left behind, but I see no reason why there should not be a few more attractions from a human point of view in becoming a Catholic. It is so, and if these "Convert Leagues" that are forming in our large cities do no more good than the extending of a cordial hand to grasp a newcomer's, they will have achieved a blessing.

They will do more. They will give prominence to the idea of conversion. They will let the world see the calibre of the men and the women who leave all for conscience sake and come into the Church. They will be moreover, most powerful incentives to many others who are hesitating, urging them to make the important step.

The formation of Convert Leagues in various cities will be the material from which a convention will be gathered. We hope before long to see this project materialize.

When it does gather it will be a revelation to many to see the number and the high character of the delegates who will be accredited to it. There are in the summaries of this country as many as a hundred earnest, intelligent young men who have become convinced of the hollowness of Protestantism as a religion and have beaten the dust of it off their feet, and have come where there is peace for their minds and solace for their hearts. There are many hundreds of young women among the religious communities who have left all to follow the royal road of the cross, which has been trodden by a suffering Saviour.

These are all converts within the last few years. There are thousands among the devout, but, who, forgetting the things that are behind, have passed on to the supernatural prize, and many of these are in high station as well as in low station. Some of them have sacrificed the dearest things of life as only great souls can sacrifice, in order to be at peace with their own conscience. A very close estimate of the number of converts received into the church in this country every year, places the number at 40,000. It is an invariable practice to approach the matter of conversion in a spirit that forbids any publicity. It is a personal affair between the soul and God and both the priest who receives the convert, and the convert himself refuse to let the world know of what is being done. There is no effort to announce the fact and if it does get into the papers it is through some untoward occurrence. Hence little is known of it, but the good work is going on in every church in the land. Over and above the fruits of ordinary ministry, the missions to non-Catholics are reaping a glorious harvest. There are thirty odd priests who are exclusively engaged in these missions and it is no unusual occurrence nowadays to receive as many as thirty or forty converts as the direct result of these missions, to say nothing of all of the hundred or more who are disabused of their prejudices. These latter are received by their regular clergy sooner or later, or are "compelled to enter" when the next mission comes along.

At a recent mission given in Richmond, Va., by the Paulist Father Conway, forty-two were received and as many more left under instruction. It will not take many years at this rate to create a great movement that will bear on its bosom a mighty "through" Rev. A. P. Doyle, in Baltimore Mirror.

WHAT CATHOLICS DO NOT BELIEVE.

Rev. Morgan M. Sheedy, rector of St. John's Church, Altoona, closed his Advent series of sermons with an interesting discourse entitled, "Some Things that Catholics Do Not Believe."

After some introductory remarks to the effect that we ought to judge others as we ourselves would wish to be judged, to know their views, opinions or forms of belief we should inquire concerning them either of the persons holding such views or doctrines, or examine their authorized statements of belief. "This is surely the only fair and safe way to proceed. Perhaps there has been more misrepresentation in matters of religion than in any other. The sectarian partisan has done far more mischief in the world than the most bitter political partisan. Let us be just always with those from whom we differ. There is surely room for the application of the Golden Rule in religious discussion," he said. "Now let us notice some few things which we Catholics are said to believe,

but which we know we do not believe. "1. Catholics do not believe that there is any other mediator of redemption than our Saviour Jesus Christ, for there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved than that of Jesus, (Acts of Apostles iv. 12).

"2. Catholics do not believe that the Virgin Mary is in any way equal or comparable to God, for she being a creature though the most highly favored—full of grace—is infinitely less than God. Nor do we claim for her any power beyond that which she derives from Him, for she is entirely dependent on God for her existence, her privileges, her grace and her glory. The strong and tender expressions in frequent use among us arise quite naturally from the warmth of our devotion to the Mother of Our Saviour. It is a common practice in all things to use expressions that are only true in a secondary and limited sense. For instance, a great poet or artist is spoken of as 'divine,' mothers often call their children 'little angels,' and lovers are said to use sometimes very extravagant terms of endearment. No one takes offense at those expressions; indeed it would be capricious to do so, especially when the speaker declares his meaning.

"3. Catholics do not believe that there is any authority upon earth or in heaven that can give leave to commit sin, even the very least, or that a sin can be forgiven for money, or that a priest can give valid absolution to a sinner who does not repent and truly purpose to lead a Christian life.

"4. Catholics do not believe that the end justifies the means. This false and pernicious principle, which means that one may do evil if good comes of it; is reprobated and utterly condemned by the Catholic Church.

"5. Catholics do not believe that the Pope is infallible, that he cannot err when teaching the Christian world in matters of faith and morals we do believe; but this is quite different from saying he cannot sin, the one is infallibility, the latter impeccability, something quite distinct.

"6. Catholics do not believe that one religion is as good as another; because the proposition is absurd. There can be only one true religion, no other can be as good as that, no matter how closely it may resemble it. Christ did not give a hundred forms of belief; He gave us one, and that is the best. It is our duty to find it, and having found it to accept it, no other will do.

"7. Catholics do not believe the common saying that it does not matter to what church you belong or whether you belong to any, if you are a good, honest man or woman, you will be saved; it is deeds, not creeds that count. No one who reads the New Testament can hold this view. Christ insists that under pain of eternal loss, we must hear the Church, we must be of His kingdom.

"8. Catholics do not believe that all non-Catholics will be lost. On the contrary, we hold that all baptized persons who lead a good life, love God and their neighbor, are in 'good faith,' knowing nothing of the just claims of the true religion, and if they truly repent of their sins—all such will enter the kingdom of heaven.

"These are some of the things that Catholics do not believe. It may help others as well as ourselves to have them clearly understood. Fairness as well as sound sense, demands that one really know his neighbor's religious views and beliefs before condemning them. To put the Catholic teaching in its proper light has been the purpose of these Advent instructions. If you desire to know more on the matters touched upon, read any authorized Catholic book such as 'Catholic Belief,' 'Plain Facts for Fair Minds,' or Cardinal Gibbon's 'Little work,' 'The Faith of Our Fathers.'"

Thomas F. Walsh, the millionaire mine-owner of Denver, Colorado, has given to charity the salary of \$3,000 received by him as United States commissioner in Paris. One thousand dollars he sent to Father Malone, with the request that it be used for the associated charities of Denver, those of Washington, D.C., have also received \$1,000, while the other \$1,000 went to the Sisters of Mercy of St. Joseph's Hospital, Ouray, near the Camp Bird mine, of which Mr. Walsh is owner.

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