

THOUGHTS FROM THE FATHERS.

ST. HILLAIRE. BISHOP OF POICTIERS. 355.

SUCH is the power of the love of God, that it maketh us to be of one spirit and affection with God, as distance of place or time cannot alter or change a settled affection. The loadstone of love is love. God's love allureth ours. God first loved us, and that in a high degree, when we were vile and contemptible. A strong inducement to render love for so great love.

The elect clothed with the wedding garment do shine in the newness of regeneration, neither is our election merit, but our merit proceedeth from election. God electeth none for their own sakes, or anything in them, but of his meer free mercy. Wherefore did he love Jaakob and hate Esau? Search not into God's secret counsell. Cannot the potter make one vessel for honour, another for dishonour? As the clay in the potter's hand, so we were in God's hand, who chose or rejected us, either for the magnifying of His mercies, or the manifesting of His justice.

What is sweeter than Christ's yoke? What is lighter than His burthen? To abstaine from wickednesse, to desire that which is good, to love all, to hate evil, to obtain eternitie, not to be taken with things present, and not to impose on another that which thou wouldest not thyself suffer.

Christ is to be followed by taking up His crosse, and though not in act, yet in will we should be ever ready to suffer with Christ as companions of His passion; though not in act, yet in affection, for when Christ comes to judgment, how shall eternal life be obtained?—by wealth, gentilitie, or dignity? These things and the like are to be condemned, and Christ to be followed, whereby eternitie with losse of earthly felicitie is gained.

It is an hard matter at once to look up to heaven with one eye, fixing the other upon earth: we must either adhere to ourselves and deny Christ, or adhere to Christ, denying ourselves. No man can serve two masters, that is commanding contrarie things. We must denie ourselves, and say with the apostle, we have forsaken all and followed Thee.

The inward part of the cup is most useful; if it be foule within, the outward washing is to no purpose, and so the inward integritie of the conscience doth purifie the body.

God requireth truth in the inward parts, and of all the sacrifices of the Old Testament, most esteemed was the fat of the inwards. He will have no dissembling. The woman before the King Solomon would have all the childe or none; she was the childe's mother: but that other harlot said, Let it be neither thine nor mine, but let it be divided. God hateth division, we must not have one heart for God, and another for the devil; give Him all or none at all.

By the similitude of hidden treasure the riches of our hopes are showed, because God was found in man, for obtaining of whom all is to be sold, that wading through all wants we may attain the riches of heaven.

That man can want nothing, which hath Him, who is all in all. And as the philosopher said, Whosoever is mine, I bear about me. So may a Christian rich in grace say, Since I enjoy God, I enjoy all, without whom enjoying all, I enjoy nothing; other things I may enjoy for their use, but have no true contentment in enjoying them.

Christ did so highly commend concord and peace, that he affirmed that prayers made in the unity of the spirit should be heard, and hath promised that where two or three are gathered together in His name, He would be in the midst of them.

Custom is a strong obligation, and therefore he is a better Christian, who not only by remission of sinne, but by ignorance in sinne is blameless and innocent. Whence it was that the prophet denounceth a woe against such as draw iniquity together with cords of vanity. Such are the cords of long continued custome, which habituate a man in an evil way, making him irrecoverably wicked.

As slips of trees that are ingrafted, and inoculated into another stocke, partake of the nature of the stocke whereunto they are ingrafted, so whatsoever vice a man accustometh himself unto, so the same are his affections, glued, as it were, and inseparably joined, and the corruption thereof concentrated and made co-essentiall unto it.

MILES COVERDALE.*

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In the passion of Jesus Christ we children of beleeve should diligently ponder and consider what Christ hath done for our sakes—how He loved His owne until the end; and with what desire He longed to eat the Easter Lamb with His disciples before He suffered, thereby giving them to understand that He was the true Pascale Lamb, which, being slain for us, should take away the sinnes of the world, that the figures of the Old Testament might be reduced into the truth.

As the Jews (to whom with a prescribed ordinance it was commanded yearly to eat the Easter Lamb) did the same for a memoriall of their deliverance out of Egypt, so believers also in the New Testament have a remembrance and exercise of the gracious redemption, whereby we, by His death, are delivered from the power of darkness, of the devil, and of sinne, and brought to eternal life.

The death of Christ ought never to come out of our hearts; that wee may do and suffer all things for His sake that dyed for us.

The peace of the world seeketh quietnesse and rest of the bodie, throweth awaie the crosse, and fleeth from it. The peace of Christ rejoiceth in the midst of adversitie, and overcome the crosse.

If we would live to please the world, to serve it, and to hunt after the favour and praise of it, wee should not be faithful servants of Jesus Christ. We ought not to look for worldly honour, but to have respect to the eternall glorie, which we shall have with Christ our Head; yea, so farre as we suffer rebuke and dishonour with Him.

We are branches in Christ, the true vine, albeit as yet verie weak and tender, soone blowne awaie with the winde, or smitten down other waies; but forasmuch as out of Christ wee receive the sap and vertue of spirit and life, we are in life preserved, that we wither not away.

There should no feare make us to shrink from the confession of Christ and His truth. We are not they that speake, but it is the Spirit of the Father which speaketh in us.

In all trouble and distresse of this world we ought to comfort ourselves, and trust onely in the grace and strength of Christ. The world is not able to hurt and plague us, more than of our gracious Father is permitted unto them for our wealth.

While we live here, we are in miserie, affliction, and distresse; but seeing the Head hath overcome, the members ought not to doubt of the victorie. Afflictions shall serve us unto high honour, as they served Christ the Lord unto glorie.

Awake up now, O thou faithfull and devout soule, and go after thy Redeemer, follow His footsteps, gather up diligently the drops of His blood, and sprinkle them with a true faith in thine heart. Take up the bundle of mirrhe and lay it at thy breast, O thou noble bride and spouse of Christ. His passion that He suffered for thee write, then, in thy minde. Learn to die from all sinne, from thyselfe, and from the world, that thou maiest bee crucified unto the world, and the world unto thee.

Nothing is there upon earth that so kindleth, draweth, and pierceth the heart of man as dooth Christ's love declared upon the crosse. In His death standeth our life, for in His death is our death slaine. Through His shame cometh eternal honour and glorie unto us. His passion is the wholesome playster for all woundes; His crosse the overthrow of all enemies, and victorie against all vice.

Christ shoveth to His disciples, after His resurrection, His woundes to heal the woundes of their unbeleeve. As if Hee would say, Look upon me and fight manfullie; without a battaile shall no man be crowned.

No man must bee wise and learned for [himselfe onely]; no man ought to be rich for himselfe, but everie man's gifts must serve to the profite one of another, and to the edifying and sustaining of the whole bodie. Every one is bound to serve the bodie, according to the gifte and measure which the Spirit of God hath distributed unto him.

God answers the prayers of His people oftentimes by wonderful and terrible things in righteousness. The most dreadful revolutions of Providence are in answer to prayer; and that which makes prayer so powerful, is because the altar of incense is sprinkled with the blood of the sin offering.

SAMUEL MATHER, 1671.

* From "Fruitful Lessons upon the Passion, Buriall, and Resurrection" By Miles Coverdale. Printed in the year 1573.