

THE CATHOLIC.

QUOD SEMPER, QUOD UBIQUE, QUOD AB OMNIBUS CREDITUM EST.—WHAT ALWAYS, AND EVERY WHERE, AND BY ALL IS BELIEVED.

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THE CATHOLIC

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ON THE CHARITY OF CHRIST.

"That being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend with all the Saints what is the breadth, and length, and height and depth: to know also the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge."—EPHES. iii. 17.

To comprehend the charity of Christ, that is, his love for the human race; though, as divine, it surpasseth all knowledge; we are desired by the great Apostle of the Gentiles, who had been "rapt up even to the third heaven, and heard in paradise secret words which it is not granted to man to utter;" ii. Cor. 12. We are desired by that illustrious Saint, who had caught a supernatural glimpse of that charity in the regions of bliss above, to contemplate it in its four different aspects, its *breadth* and *length*, and *height* and *depth*; in order to form to ourselves, with all the Saints, some proper idea of it in our present state of existence.

The *breadth* of the charity of Christ is the boundless extent, the immeasurable expansion, and the endless variety of the enjoyments which he has prepared for us in the world to come; as the same holy Apostle, citing from the prophet ISAIAH, lxiv. 4, says, "neither eye has seen; nor ear has heard; nor has it entered into the heart of man; what things God has prepared for those who love him;" Cor. ii. 9. For what mind can conceive, or tongue describe, the pure joys; the ecstatic bliss; the ravishing delights, which the glorified and immortal beings feel, who are once admitted to the beatific vision: who behold God face to face; who contemplate, now fully unveiled to their view, the Author himself, and supreme source of all beauty, loveliness and perfection, who can freely roam through all the wonders of the creation, and admire his wisdom, power and goodness in all his works. The royal prophet David exclaims, in exulting anticipation of the happy event; "I shall behold the heavens, the works of thy fingers; the moon and the stars which thou hast founded."—Ps. viii. 4.

And, indeed, in contemplating the wonders of this lower world, we may imagine how great the wonders of the heavenly world must be. Let us look aloft, and view the bright and beauteous canopy, which God has spread forth all around our terrestrial habitation: we there behold the sun, the glorious orb of day, so true to the appointed moment of his appearance and disappearance round our globe; gilding our place of exile with his cheering rays, and enlivening all things with his genial heat. The moon too, with her nightly lamp, is ever found ministering to us at her place assigned; when the starry myriads, scattered by the hand of the Omnipotent all over the firmament, numerous as the sands on the sea shore, enlighten our lowly dwelling with their sparkling radiance; and prevent our apprehension of relapsing into the dismal horrors of primeval night.

Let us next consider the rich and grand, and goodly scenes displayed all over the surface of our earth; its hills and valleys, and extended plains, every where refreshed and fertilized with lakes, rivers, fountains, and purling streams, adorned with trees and herbs; fruits and flowers; and every thing calculated for our use and comfort. What numberless animals are made subject to our controul, which daily furnish new dainties to our board, and bear the burthen of our toil! Even the fowls of the air are placed within our reach, and also the inhabitants of the watery deep. Nature, and all her elements, earth, air, fire, and water, are subjected to

our sway, and made subservient to man. But who can enumerate, much less describe all the good things; the beautiful and delighting objects; the consoling sweets, with which God has furnished forth the temporary dwelling of his earthly child! What still enlarges the idea of the charity of Christ, through whom alone is obtained all that we receive of good for time and eternity, is, that even the sinner here; the insulting enemy of God; as long as his present life endures, is not deprived of his share; nay, (as having nothing better to expect in the life to come,) is rather allowed the largest share of God's benefits in his present state; for "God now makes his sun to rise upon the good and bad; and commands it to rain upon the just and the unjust;" MATT. v. 45. If then such is the *breadth*, or extent of Christ's charity for man, in his present state of trial here below, of temporary banishment from his eternal home; if even here, where the number of God's saints and friends is far exceeded by that of his enemies, the wicked; if in this life, which is passing fast away, like a dream, he has reared for our momentary abode so magnificent a fabric, and stored it for us with so many comforts; how grand must be the fabric; and how inconceivable the delights, which he has destined for the everlasting habitation and enjoyment of his chosen creatures; his finally rescued progeny, from sin and woe!

The *length* of Christ's charity is its eternal duration. It is not like the changeable affection of mortals. It continues for ever; and secures the creature's bliss beyond the chance of its being ever lost or impaired.—And, as all, who truly love, take every occasion to prove their affection, by their endearing attentions to the beloved; what will he not do, who is the source supreme of all that is good, and grand and glorious; of all that is delighting and desirable; what will he not do, who can do all he pleases, to perfect the happiness of those he loves!

The *height* of Christ's charity is the all-surpassing dignity to which, in his own divine person, he has exalted, by assuming it, our lowly and degraded humanity; and has thus raised us, as his kindred, to a close participation in the same.

But, in order to raise us up so high from our fallen and wretched condition; to what a depth of humiliation did he not himself descend! O, this is the *depth* of Christ's charity to man, the last, and least, and lowliest of his creatures; and one too who had sinned against his Sovereign Majesty. For the sake of such a worthless worm, he made himself as a worm. "I am a worm," says he, "and no man; the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people;" Ps. xxi. 7. "He humbled himself becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross;" PHILIP. ii. 8. To such extreme abjection did his charity for us impel him to submit. He stooped thus so low, to raise us up, when fallen; and laid down his life for us to convince us of his love; for "greater love than this" said he, "no man hath, than that he lay down his life for his friend."—JOHN xv. 13.

In what tender and affectionate strains does he not console his followers, when he is about to leave them; telling them that "he goes but to prepare a place for them; that he will come again, and take them to himself; that, where he is, they may be also; for that in his Father's house there are many mansions." He promises to send them "the paraclete, or comforter, the spirit of truth; to abide with them, and be in them." Nay, he assures them that "he himself will be ever near them. I will not leave you orphans," said he, "I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world sees me no more; but you see me. In that day you shall know that I am in my father; and you in me, and I in you;" JOHN xiv. Yes, we see him in the sacramental disguise, which he so often, and so solemnly declared he would take; but the world sees him not, "for it keepeth his word;" ib. v. 23; that Almighty word which renders him present; the word which he spoke at his last supper, when he said, "take and eat; this is my body, &c.;" and desired his Apostles to do, as he had done. We behold him still in the midst of us, who has said, "my delight is to be with the children of men;" PROV. ix., and

"where two or three are gathered together in my name: there am I in the midst of them."—MATT. xviii. 20.

This, indeed, is the wonder of wonders, and the greatest prodigy of divine love. This is "the depth of the charity of Christ," for man; for, in this stupendous and adorable mystery, we behold him reduced to an apparent atom; though a spirit, or a spiritual body, such as his now is, in its immortal state, is not restricted to any particular size, shape or space; for there he is wherever he wills to be; and in whatever form he chooses to manifest himself.

But why has he thus deigned in guilty man's behalf to shew such *breadth* and *length*, and *height* and *depth*, of love; while for their first offence he cast down from heaven the angels who rebelled; stripped them of all their goodness and glory, and delivered them over to never ending torments, the hopeless victims of his unappeasable wrath? Because his merciful gifts are at his own free disposal, as he himself declares, "I will have mercy," says he, "on whom I will; and I will be merciful to whom it shall please me;" EXOD. xxxiii. 19; and, because he is just, he can leave evil to its own dismal consequences; as he has left it in the fallen angels, to work their endless misery. So might he, in the rigour of his justice, have done to fallen man. But, as he is the source of all goodness, and can bring good out of evil, it has pleased him to show forth his infinite mercy in our regard; and to such a degree that, according to Saint Paul "where sin has abounded, grace has abounded more;" ROM. v. 20. And how? By his raising man to a more dignified state of being than the one from which he fell; by himself assuming our nature; and, in that nature which had offended, atoning superabundantly for our guilt; thus stooping to become our brother, that we might be made his brethren; the adopted children through him of his heavenly Father! "heirs indeed of God," says St. Paul, "and fellow heirs of Christ;" ROM. viii. 17; finally, by transferring to us the superabundant virtue of his own merits, so as thereby to render precious and acceptable to God, and meritorious in his sight, whatever actions we perform in obedience to his commands. He has hereby opened to us an inexhaustible mine, from which we may draw forth, and make all our own, those inestimable treasures, which he exhorts us "to lay up to ourselves in the kingdom of heaven;" MATT. vi. 20. There is nothing so small, or trifling in itself, not even "the giving of a cup of cold water in his name, and for his sake; but what secures to us an eternal reward;" MARK ix. 40. Hence the Apostle exhorting, says, "whether you eat or drink; or whatever else you do; do all to the glory of God;" i. Cor. x. 31. This, however, is the secret of the saints, or of those who remain in friendship with God; of those who alone know how to turn to good account their present time, the precious talent just now, and for an uncertain term, entrusted to their keeping; with the proceeds of which they may be hourly purchasing higher dignities, and greater glory in the kingdom of their heavenly Father, where he "will render to every one according to his works;" APOC. xxii. 12. And surely such a state of profitable existence, in spite of all its trials and tribulations, is preferable, if well improved, even to that from which in paradise our first parents fell; for, as the great Apostle Paul affirms, "the present tribulation, which is momentary and light, worketh for us above measure, and exceedingly, an eternal weight of glory;" ii. Cor. 4, 17. But as for sinners, who remain at variance with God, instead of thus laying out their entrusted talent, time, in purchasing for themselves the everlasting goods of the world to come; employ it only in "treasuring up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the just judgment of God;" ROM. ii. 5; nor can they, unless reconciled with him, deserve the least favour at his hand; for he owes nothing to his enemies, but punishment. They are dead to all that is good, while they love not God; for, "he who loves not," says St. JOHN, "remains in death" 1 John, iii. 14. They are fallen under that sentence of death pronounced against us for our first transgression, and from which our Saviour has