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DISCOURSES TO MIXED CONGREGATIONS. BY JOHN HENRY NEWMAN, PASTOR OF THE ORATORY OF ST. PHILIP NERI.

DISCOURSE XV.

THE INFINITUDE OF THE DIVINE ATTRIBUTES.

We all know well and firmly hold, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the Cross in satisfaction for our sins. This truth is the great foundation of all our hopes, and the object of our most earnest faith and most loving worship. And yet, however well we know it, it is a subject which admits of drawing out, and insisting on in detail, in a way which most persons will feel profitable to themselves. I shall now attempt to do this in some measure, and to follow the reflection to which it leads; though at this season* many words would be out of place.

Christ died for our sins, for the sins of the whole world; but He need not have died for them, for the Almighty God might have saved us all, might have saved the whole world, without His dying. He might have pardoned and brought to heaven every individual child of Adam, without the incarnation and death of His Son. He might have saved us without any ransom and without any delay. He might have abolished original sin, and restored Adam at once. His word had been enough; with Him to say is to do. "All things are possible to Thee," was the very reason our Lord gave in His agony, for asking that the chalice might pass from Him. As in the beginning He said, "Let light be made, and it was made;" so might He have spoken, and sin would have vanished from the soul, and guilt with it. Or He might have employed a mediator less powerful than His own Son; He might have accepted the imperfect satisfaction of some mere man. He wants not for resources, but He willed otherwise. He who ever does the best, saw in His infinite wisdom that it was expedient and fitting to take a ransom. As He has not hindered the reprobate from resisting His grace and rejecting redemption, so He has not pardoned any who are to enter His eternal kingdom without a true and sufficient satisfaction for their sin. And this is why the coming of the Word was necessary; for if a true satisfaction was to be made, then nothing could accomplish this, short of the incarnation of the All-holy.

You see then, my brethren, how voluntary was the mission and death of our Lord; if an instance can be imagined of voluntary suffering, it is this. He came to die when He need not have died; He died to satisfy for what might have been pardoned without satisfaction; He paid a price, which need not have been asked, nay, which needed to be accepted when paid. It may be said with truth, that, rigorously speaking, one being can never, by his own suffering, simply discharge the debt of another's sin.† Accordingly He died, not in order to exert a peremptory claim on the divine justice, if I may so speak,—as if He were bargaining in the market-place, or pursuing a plea in a court of law,—but in a more loving, generous, munificent way, He shed that blood, which was worth ten thousand lives of men, worth more than the blood of all the sons of Adam heaped together, in accordance with His Father's will, who for wise reasons unrevealed, exacted it as the condition of their pardon.

Nor was this all; one drop of His blood had been sufficient to satisfy for our sins; He might have offered His circumcision as an atonement, and it would have been sufficient; one moment of His agony of blood had been sufficient; one stroke of the scourge might have wrought a sufficient satisfaction. But

neither circumcision, agony, nor scourging, was our redemption, because He did not offer them as such. The price He paid was nothing short of the whole treasure of His blood, poured forth to the last drop from His veins and sacred heart. He shed His whole life for us; He left Himself empty of His all. He left His throne on high, He gave up His home on earth; He parted with His Mother, He gave His strength and His toil, He gave His body and soul, He offered up His passion, His crucifixion, and His death, that man should not be bought for nothing. This is what the Apostle intimates in saying that we are "bought with a great price;" and the prophet, while He declares that "with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him a copious" or "plenteous redemption."

This is what I wished to draw out distinctly, my brethren, for your devout meditation. We might have been pardoned without the humiliation of the Eternal Word; again, we might have been redeemed by one single drop of His blood; but still on earth He came, and a death He died, a death of inconceivable suffering; and all this He did as a free offering to His Father, not as forcing His acceptance of it. From beginning to the end it was in the highest sense a voluntary work; and this is what is so overpowering to the mind in the thought of it. It is as if He delighted in having to suffer; as if He wished to show all creatures, what would otherwise have seemed impossible, that the Creator could practice, in the midst of His heavenly blessedness, the virtues of a creature, self-abasement and humility. It is as if He wished, all-glorious as He was from eternity, as a sort of addition, (if we may so speak,) to His perfections, to submit to a creature's condition in its most afflictive form. It is, if we may use human language, a prodigality of charity, or that heroic love of toil and hardship, which is poorly shadowed out in the romantic defenders of the innocent or oppressed, whom we read of in history or fables, who went about the earth, nobly exposing themselves to peril for any who asked their aid.

Or rather, and that is what I wish to insist upon; it suggests to us, as by a specimen, the infinitude of God. We all confess that He is infinite: He has an infinite number of perfections, and He is infinite in each of them. This we shall confess at once; but, we ask, what is infinity? what is meant by saying He is infinite? We seem to wish to be told, as if we had nothing given us to throw light on the question. Why, my brethren, we have much given us; the outward exhibition of infinitude is mystery; and the mysteries of nature and of grace are nothing but the mode in which His infinitude encounters us and is brought home to our minds. Men confess that He is infinite, yet they start and object, as soon as His infinitude comes in contact with their imagination and acts upon their reason. They cannot bear the fulness, the superabundance, the inexhaustible flowing forth, and "vehement rushing," and encompassing flood of the divine attributes. They restrain and limit them to their own comprehension, they measure them by their own standard, they fashion them by their own model; and when they discern aught of the unfathomable depth, the immensity, of any single excellence or perfection of the Divine Nature, His love, or His justice, or His power, they are at once offended, and turn away, and refuse to believe.

Now, this instance of our Lord's humiliation is a case in point. What would be profusion and extravagance in man, is but suitable or necessary, if I may say so, in Him whose resources are illimitable. We read in history accounts of oriental munificence, which sound like fiction, and which would gain not applause but contempt in Europe, where wealth is not concentrated, as in the East, upon a few out of a whole people. "Royal munificence" has become a proverb, from the idea that a king's treasures are such as to make large presents and bounties, not allowable only, but appropriate in him. He, then, who is infinite, may be only doing what is best, and holiest, and wisest, in doing what to man seems infinitely to exceed the necessity; for He cannot exceed His own powers or resources. Man has limited means and definite duties; it would be waste in him to lavish a thousand pieces of gold on one poor man, when with the same he might have done substantial good to many; but God is as rich, as profound and vast, as infinite, when He has done a work of infinite bounty, as before. He set about it. "Knowest thou not," He says, "or hast thou not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, who created the ends of the earth, shall not faint, nor weary; nor is there searching of His wisdom." He cannot do a small work; He cannot act by halves; He ever does whole works, great works. Had Christ been incarnate for but one single soul, who should have been surprised? who should have not praised and blessed Him for telling us, in one instance, and by a specimen, what that love and bounty are, which fill the heavens? and in like manner, when in

fact He has taken flesh for those, who might have been saved without it, though more suitable to His glorious majesty with it, and moreover has shed His whole blood in satisfaction, when a drop might have sufficed, shall we think such teaching strange and hard to receive, and not rather consistent, and merely consistent, with that great truth, which we all start with admitting, that He is infinite? Surely it would be most irrational in us, to admit His infinitude in the general, and to reject the examples of it in particular; to maintain that He is mystery, yet to deny that His works are mysterious.

We must not, then, bring in economical theories, borrowed from the schools of the day, when we would reason about the Eternal God. The world is ever doing so, when it speaks of religion. It will not allow the miracles of the Saints, because it pretends that those wrought by the Apostles were sufficient for the purpose which miracles had, or ought forsooth to have, in view. I wonder how it comes to admit that such multitudes of human beings are born and die in infancy; or that a profusion of seeds is cast over the face of the earth, some of which fall by the way-side, some on the rock, some among thorns, and only a remnant on the good ground. How wasteful was that sower! so thinks the world, but an Apostle cries out, "O the depths of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! how incomprehensible are His judgments, and how unsearchable His ways!"

The world judges of God's condescension as it judges of His bounty. We know from Scripture that "the teaching of the Cross" was in the beginning "foolishness" to it; thinking men scoffed at it as impossible, that God, who is so high, should humble Himself so low, and that One who died a malefactor's death should be worshipped on the very instrument of His execution. Voluntary humiliation they did not understand then, nor do they now. They do not indeed express their repugnance to the doctrine so openly now, because what is called public opinion does not allow them; but you see what they really think of Christ, by the tone which they adopt towards those who in their measure follow Him. Those who are partakers of His fullness, are called on, as the gift is given them, whether by His ordinary suggestions or by particular inspiration, to imitate His pattern; they are carried on to the sacrifice of self, and thus they come into collision with the world. A voluntary or gratuitous mortification, in whatever shape it comes, voluntary chastity, voluntary poverty, voluntary obedience, vows of perfection, all this is the very point of contest between the world and the Church, the world hating it, and the Church counselling it. "Why cannot they stop with me," says the world; "why will they give up their station or position, when it is certain they might be saved where they are. Here is a lady of birth; she might be useful at home, she might marry well, she might be an ornament to society, she might give her countenance to religious objects, and she has perversely left us all; she has cut off her hair, and put on a coarse garment, and is washing the feet of the poor. There is a man of name and ability, who has thrown himself out of his sphere of influence, and he lives in a small room, in a place where no one knows who he is; and he is teaching little children their catechism." The world is touched with pity, and shame, and indignation at the sight, and moralizes over persons who act so unworthily of their birth or education, and are so cruel towards themselves. And worse still, here is a Saint, and what must he do but practise eccentricities,—as they would be in others, though in him they are but the necessary antagonists to the temptations which otherwise would come on him from "the greatness of the revelations," or are but tokens of the love with which he embraces the feet of his Redeemer? And here again is another, and she submits her flesh to penances shocking to think of, and wears herself out in the search after misery, and all from some notion that she is assimilating her condition to the voluntary self-abasement of the Word. Alas, for the world! which is simply forgetful that God is great in all He does, and that He makes Saints and holy men in their degree partakers of His greatness.

Here too is another instance in point. If there is one divine attribute rather than another, which forces itself upon the mind from the contemplation of the material world, it is the glory, harmony, and beauty of its Creator. This lies on the surface of the world, like light on a countenance, and addresses itself to all. To few men indeed is it given to penetrate into the world's system and order so deeply as to perceive the wonderful skill and goodness of the Divine artificer, and even that order itself which an investigation brings to view is admirable for its beauty; but the grace and excellence which beams from the very face of the visible creation is cognizable by all, rich and poor, learned and ignorant. It is indeed so beautiful, that those same philosophers, who devote themselves to its study, come to love it idolatrously,

and to think it too perfect to allow of infringement or alteration, or to tolerate even the idea. Not looking up to the Infinite Creator, who could make a thousand fairer worlds, and who has made the fairest portion of this the most perishable, blooming, as it does to-day, and to-morrow burning in the oven, loving, I say, the creature more than the Creator, they have taken on them in all ages to disbelieve the possibility of interruptions of physical order, and have denied the miracles of Apostles and Prophets, on the ground of their marring and spoiling what is so perfect and harmonious, as if it were some work of human art, too exquisite to be wantonly dashed on the ground. But He, my brethren, the Eternal Maker of time and space, and matter and sense, as if to pour contempt upon the forward and minute speculations of His ignorant creatures about His works and His will, in order to a fuller and richer harmony, and a higher and nobler order, confuses the laws of this visible universe and untunes the music of the spheres. Nay He has done more, He has gone further still; out of the infinitude of His greatness, He has defaced His own glory, and wounded and deformed His own beauty,—not indeed as it is in itself, for He is ever the same, transcendently perfect and unchangeable, but in the contemplation of His creatures,—by the unutterable condescension of His incarnation.

Semetipsum exinanivit, "He made Himself void or empty," as the earth had been "void and empty" at the beginning; He seemed to be unbinding and letting loose the assemblage of attributes which made Him God, and to be destroying the idea which He Himself had implanted in our minds. The God of miracles did the most awful of signs and wonders, by revoking and contradicting, as it were, all His perfections, while He remained one and the same. Omnipotence became an abject; the Life became a leper; the first and only Fair came down to us with an "inglorious visage," and an "unsightly form," bleeding and (I may say) ghastly, lifted up in nakedness and stretched out in dislocation before the eyes of sinners. Not content with this, He perpetuates the memory of His humiliation; men of this world, when they fall into trouble, and then recover themselves, hide the memorials of it. They conceal their misfortunes in prospect, as long as they can; hear them perforce, when they fall on them; and, when they have overcome them, affect to make light of them. Kings of the earth, when they have rid themselves of their temporary conquerors, and are reinstated on their thrones, put all things back into their former state, and remove from their palaces, council-rooms, and cities, whether statue or pictures or inscription or edict, which bears witness to the suspension of their power. Soldiers indeed boast of their scars, but it is because their foes were well-matched with them, and their conflicts necessary, and the marks of what they have suffered is a proof of what they have done; but He, who *oblatus est, quia voluit*, who "was offered, for He willed it," who exposed Himself to the powers of evil, yet could have saved us without, who was neither weak because He was overcome, nor strong because He overcame, proclaims to the whole world: what He has gone through, without the tyrant's shame; without the soldier's pride;—wonderful it is, He has raised up on high, He has planted over the earth, the memorial that he, whom He cast out of heaven in the beginning, has in the hour of darkness inflicted agony upon Him. For in truth by the infinitude of His glory, He is more beautiful in His weakness than in His strength; His wounds shine like stars of light; His very Cross becomes an object of worship; the instruments of His passion, the nails and the thorny crown, are replete with miraculous power. And so He bids the commemoration of His Bloody Sacrifice to be made day by day all over the earth, and He Himself attends in Person to quicken and sanctify it; He rears His bitter but saving Cross in every Church and over every Altar; He shows Himself torn and bleeding upon the wood at the corners of each street and in every village market-place; He makes it the symbol of His religion; He seals our foreheads, our lips, and our breasts with this triumphant sign; with it He begins and ends our days, and with it He consigns us to the tomb. And when He comes again, that Sign of the Son of Man will be seen in heaven; and when He takes His seat in judgment, the same glorious marks will be seen by all the world in His Hands, Feet, and Side, which were dug into them at the season of His degradation. Thus "hath King Solomon made Himself a litter of the wood of Libanus. The pillars thereof He made of silver, the seat of gold, the going up of purple; the midst He covered with charity for the daughters of Jerusalem. Go forth, ye daughters of Sion; and see King Solomon in the diadem, wherewith His mother crowned Him in the day of His espousals, and in the day of His heart's joy."

I must not conclude this train of thought, without alluding to a sadder subject, on which it seems to

*Passion-tide.

†Dicendum videtur satisfactionem Christi, licet fuerit rigorosa quoad æqualitatem et condignitatem pretii soluti, non tamen fuisse rigorosam quoad modum solutionis, sed indignis aliqua gratia libera Dei. Si aliquis ita peccavit, ut juste puniatur exilio unius mensis, et velit redimere pecunia illud exilium, offeratque summam æquivalentem, immo excedentem, non dubium quin satisfiat rigori justitiæ vindicativæ, si attendas ad mensuram pœnæ; non tamen satisfiat, si attendas ad modum; si enim iudex gratiosè non admittat illam compensationem, jus habet ex rigore justitiæ punitivæ ad exigendam exilium, quantumvis alia æqualis et longe major pœna offeratur.—De Lug. Tacar. iii. 10.

‡Qui redemit captivum solvendo pretium, solvit quantum domino debetur ex justitiâ, solum enim debetur illi pretium ex contractu et conventionem inter ipsum et redemptorem. Nullum est justitiæ debitum cui non satisfiat per solutionem illius pretii. Ad vero pro injuria non solum debetur ex justitiâ satisfactio utrunque, sed exhibenda ab ipso offensore sicut nec qui abstulit librum, satisfaciit adæquate reddendq pretium æquivalens.—Ibid. iv. 2.

*Tanquam advenientis spiritus vehementis.