

PASTORAL LETTER

Of the most Rev., the Archbishop, and the Right Rev., the Bishops, of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States of America, assembled in Provincial Council at Baltimore, in May, 1843, to the Clergy and Laity of their charge.

Venerable Brethren of the Clergy and Beloved Brethren of the Laity: Grace to you, and peace from God our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ. Encouraged by the assurance of our Divine Redeemer: "Where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them;" we have assembled in council, according to the most ancient practice of the Church, and having humbly invoked the Holy Ghost, we have deliberated on various matters appertaining to the good order of ecclesiastical affairs, and the advancement of piety. Before separating, we feel impelled to address you, with a view to impart to you some spiritual grace to strengthen you, and stir you up by admonition to labour the more, that by good works you may make sure your vocation and election. We can add nothing to the deposit of revelation committed to the special guardianship of Peter and the other apostles, and preserved in the Church of God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth; nor dare we take away an iota from it: but it is our duty to exhort you to stand fast in the faith, and to beware, lest, being led away from the error of the unwise, you fall from your own steadfastness. God requires you to captivate every understanding in obedience to Christ, and not to be wise more than it becometh to be wise, but to be wise to sobriety. The pride of man is always ready to revolt against the truth of God. Confidence in the strength of our intellectual faculties, leads us to scan the depths of heavenly mysteries, and investigate the works of God; but he that is a searcher of majesty, shall be overwhelmed with glory. The homage of humble faith is required of us, when evidence is presented of the fact of divine revelation, and we must adore all that God reveals, however it surpass our comprehension. Of all the errors that assail divine truth, the most dangerous, because the most insidious, is that which appears to respect it, while it holds it in question, as it were impossible to ascertain it with certainty. It were unworthy of God to have made a revelation, and left it without such marks of its origin as would satisfy the sincere inquirer, acting under divine influence: and it is absurd to suppose that we can, with impunity, reject any thing of which we have evidence that God is its author. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Beware, then, brethren, of preferring in the least point the dictates of your erring reason to the truth, wisdom and authority of the Most High.

It is your duty to make public profession of the

faith whenever the divine honor, or the edification of your neighbour is in question, for "with the heart we believe unto justice, but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Public worship and private devotion must be regulated by the revealed law of God, as declared by his Church; for God must be worshiped in spirit and in truth. You should, therefore, never make acts of religion mere matters of courtesy, wherein the good pleasure of your fellow-men might be regarded rather than the sovereign will of God. It is on this account, and to avoid all participation in error, that the Church commands her children not to communicate in spiritual things with those who are out of her fold. It has nevertheless come to our knowledge that the consciences of many independent situations are aggrieved by vexatious measures adapted to coerce them into conformity, under the penalty of wanting bread, and that in various public institutions attendance at Protestant worship is in many instances exacted of Catholics, notwithstanding the liberty of conscience which is guaranteed by the constitution to all citizens. We are aware that mere considerations of order have induced this custom, but as it is repugnant to the genius of our institutions, as well as to the spirit of our religion, we trust that the proper authorities, on respectful remonstrance, will afford relief to afflicted consciences.

The transmission of faith to their children was a special object of the solicitude of our fathers; for which they thought no sacrifice too great. It must be your care, brethren, to let the precious inheritance descend without diminution. You must, therefore, use all diligence that your children be instructed at an early age in the saving truths of religion, and be preserved from the contagion of error. We have seen with serious alarm, efforts made to poison the fountains of public education, by giving it a sectarian hue, and accustoming children to the use of a version of the Bible made under sectarian bias, and placing in their hands books of various kinds replete with offensive and dangerous matter. This is plainly opposed to the true genius of our civil institutions. We admonish parents of the awful account they must give at the divine tribunal, should their children, by their neglect or connivance, be imbued with false principles, and led away from the paths of salvation. Parents are strictly bound, like faithful Abraham, to teach their children the truths which God has revealed; and if they suffer them to be led astray, the souls of the children will be required at their hands. Let them, therefore, avail themselves of their natural rights, guaranteed by the laws, and see that no interference with the faith of their children be used in the public schools, and no attempt made to induce conformity in any thing contrary to the laws of the Catholic Church.

We would have you, brethren, most conscientiously in every thing that principle and duty