

ENCYCLICAL UPON THE ROSARY.

LEO XIII has addressed the following Encyclical Letter to the Catholic world.

To our Venerable Brethren, the Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops, and other Ordinaries having peace and communion with the Apostolic See

LEO PP. XIII.

VENERABLE BROTHERS,

Greeting and Apostolic Benediction.

The sacred joy caused in our heart by the happy completion of the fiftieth anniversary of our Episcopal consecration was greatly and sweetly multiplied by the sight of the participation of Catholics of all parts of the world in our happiness, as that of children in their father's pleasure—a brilliant witness to their faith and love. In that event, with an ever renowned sense of gratitude, we admire and magnify the counsels of Providence, towards ourself immeasurably gracious, and infinitely fruitful for the Church. At the same time we feel our soul stimulated to give thanks and glory for this good gift to the august Mother of God, most powerful mediatrix at the thrones of God. Inasmuch as the immense loving-kindness of Mary—which, during a long and varied course of years and in many ways, we have ever proved to be prompt and effectual—appears more clearly and more helpfully every day, it fills our soul with happiness, and encourages us to a superhuman confidence. We seem to hear the very voice of that heavenly Queen leading us lovingly amongst the difficult ways which the Church must follow, directing us in the fulfilment of our duty in the cause of the salvation of mankind, admonishing us that we should exhort the Faithful still further to piety and to the exercise of virtue. With her wishes it has many and many a time been sweet to us to correspond. And among the fruits which, with her blessing, we gathered after these exhortations, must be specially recorded the increase of devotion to her most holy Rosary, the multiplication and new institution of Confraternities bearing this title, the diffusion of valuable writings upon the same subject, and, finally, the glory rendered to the same devotion by the Fine Arts. This, as though the voice of the Blessed Mother were calling still more clearly at our ear, "Cry aloud and cease not," we rejoice once more, Venerable Brethren, to speak to you of the Rosary, now at the approach of October, the month which we, bestowing the favours of holy indulgences, have made sacred to this most sweet devotion. But our subject will be chiefly neither the giving of new praises to this excellent manner of prayer, nor the urging of Christian people to use it with greater assiduity; we shall speak of the precious gifts which the use of it will bring, gifts more than ever needful in the condition of the times. We believe that where the devotion of the Rosary is practised, great advantage may be gained by a thorough explanation of its fruits and consequences as regards not individuals merely, but the whole human race.

No man is there who can now be ignorant how much we, exercising the obligations of the supreme Apostolate, have laboured for the civil prosperity of the world, or how strongly we are resolved, with the help of God, to persevere to the same end. We have warned the legislators of nations that they should not make nor approve laws that were out of harmony with the equitable rule of the Divine intention. And we have admonished those who, by genius, merit, rank, or riches, are in positions of advantage amongst their fellows that they should conjoin force and opinion to promote and protect the chief and highest interests of human society. In that society, as it is in our day, too many causes have produced a relaxation of the bonds of public order, and the people are distracted from due attention to purity of moral conduct. Among such causes

three are most influential in working towards the ruin of the Commonwealth: dislike of obscure and laborious living; repugnance to suffering; disregard of the happiness to come.

We deplore—and those, indeed, also confess and deplore who acknowledge no rule except the light of reason, no restraint except that of utility—that a deep wound has been inflicted upon mankind by the neglect of those duties and virtues which may be termed private and which are ornaments of ordinary life. From this temper result the rebellion of children against the natural duty of obedience, and their restiveness against any kind of bringing up that is not indulgent and effeminate. From this, too, result the dislike and weariness of labourers at their daily task, their avoidance of hard work, and the discontent with which they raise their eyes to other courses, desiring we know not what impracticable equalisation of fortune. Hence, too, the general tendency of men to forsake their native places and their rush to the turmoil and evil course of cities. Hence the destruction of equilibrium amongst the various classes of citizens, their recklessness, the agitation of minds moved by hatred and envy, the open attack upon established rights, the disturbance of public peace, and the hostility against authority, of those who, deluded in their vain hopes, assume the part of agitators. Against these evils let a remedy be sought for in the holy Rosary, which comprises both a determined order of prayer and a meditation upon the Mysteries of Christ and of His Blessed Mother. If we but present to the mind the Mysteries that are called Joyful, we produce images and pictures of virtue, and make them familiar to children from their earliest years. Each may see for himself how full and how rich are the examples of righteousness that may be found therein, as an inspiration to right conduct; and by the contemplation of these the soul will be attracted with indescribable sweetness. Behold, we are before the House of Nazareth, the habitation of earthly and Divine sanctity. What a life together! What a model of domestic association! There abide simplicity of manners, perpetual concord, an order never disturbed, a mutual respect and honour, not false or capricious, but proved by the assiduity of service. There lacks no industry for the gaining of all that is needful for life; but all is got by the sweat of the brow, and—so much contentment is there with little—rather with the aim of lessening poverty, than with that of increasing riches. As a crown to all this, tranquillity of soul keeps rule, and joy of spirit, which never wholly forsake him who does righteously. Now, these examples of humility and modesty, of patience under burdens, and of neighbourly kindness, of faithful fulfilment of the small duties that belong to daily life, and of other like virtues, entering the soul and impressing themselves upon it, will certainly produce within it in time the wished for change and growth in good. Then will those private virtues, which so many despise, be once more pleasant and attractive, and wearisome no longer; and conscience, made joyful and sweet in her effect, will also be made strong to persuade and constrain. Manners will grow gentler, family life more dear, daily intercourse more loving. All this effect upon the individual will become an effect upon the family, next an effect upon cities, upon nations, for these are ruled and formed by the unit. So wide and so great are the blessings that the society of mankind may gain!

The second great and fatal evil which we deplore, and which we can never deplore sufficiently, inasmuch as it gains way daily to the ruin of men, is the growing desire to fly from pain, the resolve to avoid and escape

all that brings with it a touch of suffering. No longer is calm and liberty of the soul desired as the noble reward of those who meet and overcome peril and labour with unconquerable will. Men have made to themselves another ideal, the greater number of them aspire after a chimeric perfection and an illusory progress of civil society, to be rewarded and crowned with none but earthly triumphs, none but natural delights. That wild and desperate longing for happiness holds sway in too many hearts, which, even if they do not suffer the loss of all, are inevitably enervated, and too often sink miserably under the pain of life. In this peril, too, we must find hope and safety in the Rosary. Men must learn to have spiritual hopes and generous desires. And this shall come to pass if from their boyhood they sweetly and tranquilly pore upon the Mysteries of Sorrow. In these we behold how Christ, the author and finisher of our Faith, worked in such wise that we might find in his life, reduced to practice, all that has been taught us of the necessity of bearing pain. Nay, we see Him lay hold of all that is hardest to be borne. We contemplate Him as He grows exceeding sorrowful unto death, so that He sweats blood. We see him bound like a thief, subjected to the judgment of iniquity, cursed, outraged, calumniated. We see Him struck with scourges, crowned with thorns, fastened to the Cross, judged unworthy to live, judged worthy of death, amid the clamors of a people. And with the pains of the Son we recall to mind the sorrows of Mary most holy, whose soul was not wounded only, but pierced through by the soul of anguish, insomuch that she gained, and bears for ever, the name of the Mother of Sorrows. Truly he who shall not merely look, but shall meditate, upon such a splendour of suffering virtue shall be constrained to imitation. Even though this world, under the general malediction, should bring forth for him her thorns and thistles; even though his soul should be oppressed with distresses, and his body with disease; yet there shall happen to him no evil from the hatred of men or the anger of devils, there shall happen to him no calamity, public or secret, that he shall not be strong enough to bear with patience. Most just is the saying, "to do and to suffer is a Christian's business." For whoever is worthy of that name cannot but imitate the suffering Christ. Under the name of patience, however, we do not include the vain ostentation of a soul hardened in endurance; after the manner of certain philosophers of antiquity. We intend to describe the patience that is learnt of Christ, Who rejected enjoyment and, overcoming humiliation, became obedient to the death of the Cross; the patience that looks to Him for comfort and for grace, that refuses not to suffer but rejoices in the face of sorrow, and counts the greatest distress for gain. The Catholic Church has had, and has ever, signal disciples of that doctrine. She has in every place, and in multitudes, men and women of every condition, who, following Christ, endure every kind of insult and of bitterness for virtue's sake and faith's, repeating, by their life rather than their lips, the word of Thomas: "We too will go and die with Him." May such noble examples of constancy be yet multiplied, may they grow still more splendid, and may they gain Divine protection for civil society, virtue and glory for the Church!

And the third evil that so sorely needs healing chiefly affects mankind in this our day. Although men in ages past may have greedily amassed the wealth of this world, they yet did not despise the things of the world to come. The wisor among the Gentiles recognised this life as a place of pilgrimage and not of abiding, as a way-side station and not as a terminus.

But our contemporaries, although they are taught by the science of Christianity, for the most part lose their way in following after transitory things: they do not merely lose the remembrance of a better country and a blessed eternity; they deliberately intend to abolish and efface that hope. And yet the Apostle has said that we have here no abiding city, but are in search of a home in the future. If we shall seek for the origin of such a disorder we shall find it chiefly in the common delusion that thought of things to come quenches love of country and acts contrary to the prosperity of the community. There is no more foolish calumny than this. For that which we hope for in the life to come does not so absorb the thoughts of man as to withdraw them altogether from visible things; and Christ Himself intends that we should seek first of all the kingdom of God, yet not in such a manner as to cause our neglect of all else. In fact the use of present things and of the innocent pleasures that belong to them are the increase and the reward of virtue. The splendour and the beauty of earthly cities, which is augmented by the concourse of mankind, may inspire a thought of the magnificence of the city which is above. There is absolutely nothing lawful that contradicts human reason, nothing that opposes the counsels of religion. God is the author of nature and of grace. He wills not that the one should be hostile to the other. He would have them united in close alliance, not in collision, not apart, but leading by a friendly path to that immortal felicity to which the mortal is predestined. But men, given over to pleasure and loving themselves only, wilfully degrade all their hopes to earth and so can mount no higher. So far are they from using visible delights as incentives to hope for the eternal, that they lose all sight of eternity. Ignoble is the state of those men. God can hardly inflict greater punishment than is his who abandons himself to life-long self-pleasing without a thought of felicities that are to have no end. From such peril and evil shall he be free who uses the devotion of the Rosary with devotion and contemplates the Glorious Mysteries which it represents to him. From these the Christian receives great light for the discovery of those treasures which, albeit remote from corporeal sight, are yet, as we know by undoubted faith, laid up by God for those that love Him. From them we learn that death is not a force of disruption and destruction, but a mere passing and changing of life. We learn that the way of Heaven is open to all men; and, watching Christ as He returns thither, we call to mind the blessed promise He made at His departure. "I go to prepare a place for you." We learn that a time will come in which God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, and when sorrow shall be no more, neither mourning nor weeping; but when we shall dwell for ever together with our God, made like to Him, for we shall see Him as He is, when we shall drink of the torrents of His delight, shall be fellow-citizens with the Saints, in the most happy companionship of our Queen and Mother, Mary. A soul nourished upon such thoughts must needs be kindled by them, and go repeating the words of the Saint: "Oh, how vile seems the earth to me when I look into Heaven!" He will comfort himself, then with the word of the Apostle, who describes our tribulation here as a light thing when compared with the eternal weight of glory. Indeed, this is the one sole way to unite time with eternity, the earthly with the heavenly city. By this means alone shall noble and generous characters be shaped. And where these abound, there shall the dignity and the splendour of society be increased. All that is good will flourish, all that is true, all that is beautiful under the supernal law