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DISCOURSES
TO MIXED CONGREGATIONS.
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DISCOURSE IV.

PURITY AND LOVE.

There are two especial manifestations under which divine grace is vouchsafed to us, whether in Scripture or in the history of the Church; whether in Saints, or in persons of holy and religious life; the two are even found among our Lord's Apostles, being represented by the two foremost of that favored company, St. Peter and St. John. St. John is the Saint of purity, and St. Peter is the Saint of love. Not that love and purity can ever be separated; not as if a Saint had not all virtues in him at once; not as if St. Peter were not pure as well as loving, and St. John loving, for all he was so pure. The graces of the spirit cannot be separated from each other; one implies the rest; what is love but a delight in God, a devotion to Him, a surrender of the whole self to Him? what is impurity, on the other hand, but the taking something of this world, something sinful, for the object of our affections, instead of God? what is it but a deliberate turning away from the Creator to the creature, and seeking pleasure in the shadow of death, not in the all-blissful presence of light and holiness? The impure then do not love God; and those who are without love of God cannot really be pure; in some object we must fix our affections, we must find pleasure; and we cannot find pleasure in two objects, as we cannot serve two masters, which are contrary to each other. Much less can a Saint be deficient either in purity or in love, for the flame of love will not be bright unless the substance which feeds it be pure and unadulterate.

Yet, certain as this is, it is certain also that the spiritual works of God show differently from each other to our eyes, and that they display, in their character and their history, some this virtue more than others, and some that. In other words, it pleases the Giver of grace to endue them specially with certain gifts, for His glory, which light up and beautify one particular portion or department of their soul, so as to cast their other excellencies into the shade. And then this grace becomes their characteristic, and we put it first in our thoughts of them, and consider what they have besides as included in it, or dependent upon it, and speak of them as if they had not the rest, though they really have them; and we give them some title or description taken from that particular grace which is so emphatically theirs. And in this way we may speak, as I intend to do in what I am going to say of two chief classes of Saints, whose emblems are the lily and the rose, who are bright with angelic purity, or who burn with divine love.

The two St. Johns are the great instances of the Angelic life. Whom, my brethren, can we conceive of such majestic and severe sanctity as the holy Baptist? He had a privilege which reached near upon the prerogative of the Most Blessed Mother of God; for, if she was conceived without sin, he at least without sin was born. She was all-pure, all-holy, and sin had no part in her; but St. John was in the first days of his existence a partaker of Adam's curse; he lay under God's wrath, deprived of that grace which Adam had received, and which is the perfection of human nature. Yet as soon as Christ, his Lord and Saviour, came in the flesh, and Mary saluted his own mother, Elizabeth, forthwith the grace of God was given to him, and the original guilt was wiped away from his soul. And therefore it is that we celebrate the nativity of St. John; nothing unholy does the Church celebrate; nor St. Peter's nativity, nor St. Paul's, nor St. Augustine's, nor St. Gregory's, nor St. Bernard's, nor St. Aloysius's; nor any other Saint, however glorious, because they were born in sin. She celebrates their conversion; their privileges, their martyrdom, their death, their translation, but not their birth, because in no case was it holy. Three natiivities alone does she commemorate: our Lord's, His Mother's, and lastly St. John's. What a special gift was this, my brethren, separating the Baptist off, and distinguishing him above all prophets and preachers, who ever lived, however holy, except, perhaps, the prophet Jeremiah! And such as was his commencement, was the course of his life. He was carried away by the Spirit, into the desert, and there he lived on the simplest fare, in the rudest clothing, in the cave of wild beasts, apart from men, for thirty years, leading a life of mortification and of meditation, till called to preach penance, to proclaim the Christ, and to baptize Him; and then, having done his work, and having left no sign or record, he was laid aside as an instrument which had lost its use, and languished in

prison, till he was suddenly cut off by the sword of the executioner. Sanctity is the one idea of him impressed upon us from first to last; a most marvellous Saint, a hermit from his childhood, then a preacher to a fallen people, and then a Martyr. Surely such a life fulfils the expectation, which the voice of Mary raised concerning him before his birth.

Yet still more beautiful and almost as majestic, is the image of his namesake, that great Apostle, evangelist, and prophet of the Church, who came so early into our Lord's chosen company, and lived so long after all his fellows. We can contemplate him in his youth and in his venerable age; and on his whole life, from first to last, as his special gift, is marked purity. He is the virgin Apostle, who on that account was so dear to his Lord, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," who lay on His bosom, who received His Mother from Him when on the Cross, who had the vision of all the wonders which were to come in the world to the end of time. "Greatly to be honored," says the Church, "is blessed John, who on the Lord's breast lay at supper, to whom a virgin did Christ on the Cross commit His Virgin Mother. He was chosen a virgin by the Lord, and was more beloved than the rest. The special prerogative of chastity had made him meet for larger love, because, being chosen by the Lord a virgin, a virgin he remained through life." He it was who in his youth professed his readiness to drink Christ's chalice with Him, who wore away a long life as a desolate stranger in a foreign land, who was at length carried to Rome and plunged into the hot oil, and then was banished to a far island, till his days drew near their close.

O how impossible is it worthy to conceive the sanctity of these two great servants of God, so different is their whole history, in their lives and in their deaths, yet agreeing together in their seclusion from the world, in their tranquillity, and in their all but sinlessness! Mortal sin had never touched them; and we may well believe that even from deliberate venial sin they were exempt; nay, at particular seasons or on certain occasions, perhaps, they did not sin at all. The rebellion of the reason, the waywardness of the feelings, the disorder of the thoughts, the fever of passion, the treachery of the senses, these did the all-powerful grace of God subdue. They lived in a world of their own, uniform, serene, abiding; in visions of peace, in communion with Heaven, in anticipation of glory; and, if they spoke to the world without, as preachers or as confessors, they spoke as from some sacred shrine, not mixing with it while they addressed it, as "a voice crying in the wilderness," or "in the Spirit on the Lord's Day." And therefore it is we speak of them rather as patterns of sanctity than of love, because love regards an external object, runs towards it and labors for it, whereas such as they came so close to the Object of their love, they were allowed so to receive Him into their breasts, and so to make themselves one with Him, that their hearts did not so much love heaven, as were a heaven, did not so much see light as were light, and they lived among men as those Angels in the old time, who came to the patriarchs and spake as though they were God, for God was in them, and spake by them. Thus these two were almost absorbed in the Godhead, living an angelical life, as far as man could lead one, so calm, so still, so raised above sorrow and fear, disappointment and regret, desire and aversion, as to be the most perfect image that earth has seen, of the peace and immutability of God. Such are the many virgin Saints whom history records for our veneration, St. Joseph, the great St. Anthony, St. Cecilia, who was waited on by Angels, St. Nicolas of Bari, St. Peter Celestine, St. Rose of Viterbo, St. Catherine of Sienna, and a host of others, and above all, of the Virgin of Virgins and Queen of Virgins, the Blessed Mary, who, though replete and overflowing with the grace of love, yet for the very reason that she was the "seat of wisdom," and the "ark of the covenant," is more commonly represented under the emblem of the lily; than of the rose.

But now, my brethren, let us turn to the other class of Saints. I have been speaking of those who in a wonderful, sometimes in a miraculous way, have been defended from sin, and conducted from strength to strength, from youth till death; but now let us suppose that God has willed to shed the light and power of His Spirit upon those who have misused the aids, and quenched the grace already given them, and who therefore have a host of evils within them of which they are to be dispossessed, who are under the dominion of obstinate habits, indulged passions, false opinions; who have served Satan, not as infants before their baptism, but with their will, with their reason, with their faculties responsible, and hearts alive and conscious. Is He to draw these elect souls to Him, without themselves; or by means of themselves? Is He to change them at His word, as He created them, as He will make them die, as He will raise them from the grave; or is He to enter into their souls, to address

Himself to them, to persuade them, and so to win them? Doubtless He might have been urgent with them, and masterful; He might by a blessed violence have come upon them, and turned them into Saints; He might have superseded any process of conversion, and out of the very stones have raised up children to Abraham. But He has willed otherwise; else why did He manifest Himself on earth? Why did He surround Himself on His coming with so much that was touching, and attractive, and subduing? Why did He bid His Angels proclaim that He was to be seen as a little infant in a manger, or in a Virgin's bosom, at Bethlehem? Why did He go about doing good? Why did He die in public, before the world, with His Mother and His beloved disciple by Him? Why does He now tell us how He is exalted in Heaven with a host of glorified Saints, who are our intercessors, about His throne? Why does He come to us in Mary and through Mary, the most perfect image after Himself of what is beautiful and tender, and gentle and soothing in human nature? Why does He manifest Himself by an ineffable condescension on our Altars, still humbling Himself, though He reigns on high? What does all this show, but that, when souls wander away from Him, He claims them by means of themselves, "by cords of Adam," or of human nature, as the prophet speaks, conquering us indeed at His will, saving us in spite of ourselves, and yet by ourselves, so that the very reasons and affections of the old Adam, which have been made "the arms of wickedness unto sin," should, under the power of His grace, become "the arms of justice unto God."

Yes, doubtless He draws us "by cords of Adam," and what are those cords, but, as the prophet speaks in the same verse, "the cords," or the twine of love? It is the manifestation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; it is the view of the attributes and perfections of Almighty God; it is the beauty of His sanctity, the sweetness of His mercy, the brightness of His Heaven, the majesty of His law, the harmony of His providence, the thrilling music of His voice, which is the antagonist of the flesh, and the soul's champion against the world and the devil. "Thou hast seduced me, O Lord," says the prophet, "and I was seduced; Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed; Thou hast thrown Thy net skillfully, and its subtle threads are entwined round each affection of the heart, and its meshes have been a power of God," "bringing into captivity the whole intellect to the service of Christ." If the world has its fascinations, so surely has the Altar of the living God; if its pomps and vanities dazzle, so much more should the vision of Angels ascending and descending on the heavenly ladder; if sight of earth intoxicate, and its chants are a spell upon the soul, behold Mary pleads with us, over against them, with her chaste eyes, and offers the Eternal Child for our caress, while sounds of cherubim are heard all round singing in the blessedness which they find in Him. Has divine hope no emotion? Has divine charity no transport? "How dear are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!" says the prophet; "my soul doth lust, and doth faint for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God. One day in Thy courts is better than a thousand; I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God, rather than to dwell in the tabernacles of sinners." So is it, as a great Doctor and penitent has said, St. Augustine; "It is not enough to be drawn by the will; thou art also drawn by the sense of pleasure? What is it to be drawn by pleasure? 'Delight thou in the Lord, and He will give thee the petitions of thy heart.' There is a certain pleasure of heart, to which that heavenly bread is sweet. Moreover, if the poet saith, 'Every one is drawn by his own pleasure,' not by necessity, but by pleasure; not by obligation, but by delight; how much more boldly ought we to say, that man is drawn to Christ, when he is delighted with truth, delighted with bliss, delighted with justice, delighted with eternal life, all which Christ? Have the bodily senses their pleasures, and is the mind without its own? If so, whence is it said 'The sons of men shall hope under the covering of Thy wings; they shall be intoxicated with the richness of Thy house, and with the flood of Thy pleasure shalt Thou give them to drink; for with Thee is the will of life, and in Thy light we shall see light?' 'He, whom the father draweth, cometh to Me.' Whom hath the father drawn? him who said, 'Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God.' You present a great branch to the sheep, and you draw it forward; fruit is offered to the child, and he is drawn; he is drawn who runs, he is drawn by loving; drawn without bodily hurt, drawn by the bond of the heart. If then it be true that the sight of earthly delight draws on the lover, doth not Christ too draw us when revealed by the Father? for what doth the soul desire more strongly than Truth?"

Such are the means which God has provided for the creation of the Saint out of the sinner. He takes him as he is, and uses him against himself. He turns

his affections into another channel, and defeats a carnal love by inspiring a heavenly charity. Not as if He used him as a mere irrational creature, who is impelled by instincts and governed by external incitements without any will of his own, and to whom one pleasure is the same as another, the same in kind, though different in degree. I have already said, it is the glory of His grace, that He enters into the heart of man, and persuades it, and prevails with it, while He changes it. He violates in nothing that original constitution which He gave him; He treats him as a man; He leaves him the power of acting this way or that; He appeals to all his powers and faculties, to his reason, to his prudence, to his moral sense; He rouses his fears as well as his love; He enlightens him in the depravity of sin, as well as the mercy of God; but still, on the whole, the animating principle of the new life, by which it is both kindled and sustained, is the flame of charity. This only is strong enough to destroy the old Adam, to dissolve the tyranny of evil habits, and to waste the fires of concupiscence, and to burn up the strong holds of pride.

And hence it is that love appears to us the distinguishing grace of those who were sinners before they were Saints; not that love is not the life of all Saints, of those who have never needed a conversion, of the Most Blessed Virgin, of the two St. Johns, and of those others, many in number, who are "first-fruits unto God and the Lamb;" but that, while in those who have never sinned, it is so contemplative as almost to resolve itself into the sanctity of God Himself, in those in whom it dwells as a principle of recovery, it is so full of devotion, of zeal, of activity, and good works, that it gives a visible character to their history, and is ever associating itself with one's thoughts of them.

Such was the great Apostle, on whom the Church is built, and whom I contrasted, when I began, with his fellow-Apostle St. John; whether we contemplate him after his first calling, or on his repentance, he, out of all the Apostles, who denied his Lord, is the most conspicuous for his love of Him. It was for this love of Christ, flowing on, as it did, from its impetuosity and exuberance, into love of the brethren, that he was chosen to be the chief Pastor of the fold. "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me more than these?" was the trial put on him by his Lord; and the reward was, "Feed My lambs, feed My sheep." Wonderful to say, the Apostle whom Jesus loved, was yet surpassed in love for Jesus by a brother not virginal as he; for it is not John to whom our Lord put this question, and gave this reply, but Peter.

Look back at an earlier passage of the same narrative; there too the two Apostles are similarly contrasted in their respective characters; for when they were in the boat, and their Lord spoke to them from the shore, and "they knew not that it was Jesus," first, "that disciple, whom Jesus loved, said to Peter, 'It is the Lord,' and then at once 'Simon Peter girt his tunic about him, and threw himself into the sea,' to reach Him the quicker. St. John beholds, and St. Peter acts."

Thus the very sight of Jesus kindled Peter's heart, and at once drew him to Him; also, on a former time, when he saw his Lord walking on the sea, his first impulse was, as afterwards, to leave the vessel and hasten to His side: "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me to come to Thee upon the waters." And when he had been betrayed into his great sin, the very Eye of Jesus brought him to himself: "And the Lord turned and looked back upon Peter; and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, and he went out, and wept bitterly." Hence, on another occasion, when many of the disciples fell away, and Jesus said to the twelve, "Do ye too wish to go away?" St. Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we have believed and know that Thou art Christ, the Son of God."

Such, too, was that other great Apostle, who, in so many ways, is associated with St. Peter, the Doctor of the Gentiles. He was converted miraculously, by our Lord's appearing to him, when he was on his way to carry death to the Christians of Damascus; and how does he speak? "Whether we are beside ourselves," he says, "it is to God; or whether we be sober, it is for you; for the love of Christ, doth urge us. If therefore, there be any new creature in Christ, old things have passed away, behold, all things are made new." And so again: "I am crucified with Christ; I live, yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me; and, that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." And again: "I am the least of the Apostles, who am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace in me was not void, but I labored more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God with me." And, once more: "Whether we live, unto the Lord we live; whether we die, unto the Lord we die;"