

The Catholic.

Quod semper; quod ubique; quod ab omnibus.

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ON THE VALUE OF TIME.

Why stand you here all the day idle? Matt. xx. 6.

THIS is the question which our Lord in the gospel puts to all those, who neglect to work in his service during the short day of their mortal life: who squander away their precious time in doing nothing to the purpose; or in doing every thing, but that, which it is their indispensable duty, and main interest, to do.

There is nothing so unaccountable as the folly of mankind in mispending their time. Some pass their whole life in idleness, useless to themselves, to their country, and to their fellow-creatures.—Others plunge into the hurry of business, and mingle in the bustle and tumult of human affairs.—Some seem born only to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of this world; and by the variety of their amusements and pastimes study only to beguile care, and that tedious irksomeness of life, which always pursues them close at the heels, how fast soever they seek to fly before it. Others, while they strive by their painful endeavours, to heap together the perishable goods of this life, deny themselves the necessary time to lay in proper stores for the life to come.

Thus Time seems a common enemy, whom all men seem to have conspired to make away with. Their whole life seems but one continued study how to get rid of it: and those are always deemed the most happy, who succeed best in contriving how to make it appear short; who feel least of its weight, and who are least sensible of its duration. Their frivolous amusements, or more serious occupations, are sweet and agreeable, only in as far as they seem to abridge their days and hours; and to make them pass away so insensibly as scarcely to be perceived till they are gone, and gone for ever.

Time, that precious depositum with which our God had entrusted us, is then become a heavy, an insupportable burthen to us! It is true, we would consider it as the greatest of misfortunes to be wholly deprived of it: but then when it is ours, we cannot support the tediousness of its duration. It is a treasure, which we would for ever keep, but which we are also impatient to waste and to squander away.

Nevertheless it is on the right use of this time, which we seem to value so little at present, that our happiness for eternity depends. Time then is of all things the most precious: but it is precious only in as far as it is well employed. We must

then employ it well, in order to render it precious. It shall therefore be my endeavour at present to shew how great the value of time, if well employed, may be; in order to induce you to employ it well. This shall be the whole subject of my discourse to you on the present occasion.

There are four considerations, which if properly attended to, must convince us of the exceeding great value of time; and these considerations deserve your utmost attention. Time is precious, 1°. Because it was purchased for us at an infinite price. 2°. Because if well employed, the advantages it produces are nothing less than infinite.—3°. Because it is very uncertain as to its duration: and 4°. Because, when lost, it is irreparable.

1°. The value of any thing is best known by the price paid down for it, if the purchaser is too good a judge to be overreached in the bargain. But here, my dear Christians, the purchaser is God himself, who cannot be deceived: and the price paid down for our time is nothing less than the sufferings and death of his only Son made man.—For you must recollect that by the sin of our first parents we had all of us forfeited our time. The dreadful sentence passed upon our first father Adam, extended to all his posterity, *In what day soever thou eatest the fruit of the tree, whereof I have forbidden thee to eat, thou shalt die the death.* Gen. ii. Our fate was inseparably linked with his. We were to be his children, and consequently his heirs. Had he never swerved from his duty, the kingdom of heaven, the promised reward of his obedience, was ours by inheritance. But as he fell by sin from his happy state, and incurred the divine displeasure, it was ours to share with him in the punishment of his transgression; and this punishment was death. *By one man, says St. Paul, has sin entered into the world, and by sin death.* Rom. v. 12. All our time was then at an end. Or if we had been suffered to make our appearance in this world for a while, it were only to entail death, and all its unhappy consequences on our wretched posterity; when having fulfilled the dreadful purposes of God's justice, we were doomed to become successively the prey of death; and to be cast forth for ever from the face of the Lord.

In this dreadful situation, born as we were but to die; or, if permitted for a while to linger here, when life itself was become a curse, and but the occasion of augmenting our guilt, by adding actual to original sin: when all our endeavours to effect a reconciliation with our offended God were of no avail; what would we not have given, what would we not have done or suffered in order to obtain the smallest portion of this time of mercy, of grace and

salvation, which we at present enjoy? Almighty God might have treated us, as he did the rebel angels, and denied us the possibility of being ever reconciled with him any more. Nay, his justice called aloud for satisfaction, and pressed the execution of the sentence pronounced against us.

But here his mercy interposes herself in our behalf; and thrusts herself between us and his avenging justice. The Deity is moved with a pity for lost man, which he had not felt for the rebel angels. He cannot bear to see his child of predilection, his last born, but the most beloved of all his creatures perish; and perish, not so much through any malice originating with himself, as through that of the infernal serpent, by whom he had been seduced. He therefore resolves to save him, and at whatever cost, to rescue him from utter destruction.

Great God! but how then shall thy insenced justice be appeased! She demands a full and complete satisfaction for our sins; and a price adequate to the value of that time, which was to be restored. But who shall be able to make the atonement required; or to pay up the enormous sum stated to our account? *O the death of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how incomprehensible are his judgments, and how unsearchable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?* Rom. xii. This debt of satisfaction, which all the creatures together could never have paid off, he himself resolves to cancel. And as man was the one by whom it was due, and of whom it was required, in order to render him capable of clearing it, he even deigns to take upon himself our nature, and to unite his own divinity so closely with our humanity, as that God was man, and man was God. Thus man, as God was able to cancel our debt, and to blot out the hand-writing that stood against us. *Coloss. i. ii. 14.* And God, as man, of whom satisfaction was exacted, could atone for sins committed by man. In this mystery is verified that saying of the Psalmist: *Mercy and truth have met each other; Justice and Peace have kissed.* Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

But to what humiliation did not this God-Man submit in order to complete the great work of our redemption! Ah, Christians! how dearly has he bought back for us this time, which we undervalue so much, and are apt to throw away with so little concern! *He became says the Psalmist as a worm and no man; the reproach of men and the outcast of the people.* Ps. cxi. 7.

Born into this world of a poor and humble maid, he had scarce made his appearance among the