

SERMONS ON PENANCE,

AND ON

EVERYTHING REQUIRED FOR CHRISTIAN REPENTANCE AND
AMENDMENT OF LIFE.

ADAPTED FOR ALL THE SUNDAYS AND MOST OF THE HOLYDAYS
OF THE YEAR.

BY THE

REV. FATHER FRANCIS HUNOLT,

Priest of the Society of Jesus, and Preacher in the Cathedral of Treves.

VOLUME I.

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✠ JAMES D. RICARDS, D.D.,

*Bishop of Retimo and Vicar-Apostolic of the
Eastern Vicariate of the Cape Colony.*

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FIRST SERMON.

ON HEARING THE WORD OF GOD FOR SINNERS WHO ARE THINKING OF DOING PENANCE.

Subject.

The frequent hearing of the word of God in sermons is especially necessary for those sinners who are actually in the state of sin, and who are thinking of repenting. For if they do not hear the word of God, they must, humanly speaking, continue in their unhappy state, and be lost forever.—*Preached on the sixth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Si dimisero eos jejunos in domum suam, deficient in via.—
Mark viii. 3.

“And if I shall send them away fasting to their homes, they will faint in the way.”

Introduction.

Mark, my dear brethren, the wonderful zeal of those pious people; so anxious were they to follow Jesus Christ, and to hear His divine words, that they forgot to provide themselves with food and drink, and had to suffer the pangs of hunger. But at last our merciful Saviour said, “I have compassion on the multitude; for behold, they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat;” if I do not provide them with food, they will perish with hunger: “If I shall send them away fasting to their home, they will faint in the way.” Ah, my dear brethren, would that all Christians nowadays were as anxious and eager to hear the word of God, as some pious souls are, who are wont to say that they would rather go without their meals than miss their usual sermon! Would to God, I say, that all were so disposed! Nor would they therefore have to suffer

hunger; they would rather receive a spiritual strength to keep them from perishing. But, alas! I may well say with Christ, "I have compassion on the multitude;" I pity the numbers of Christians in a city or community, who for three weeks, three months, three years, and even longer, receive no food for their souls, because, through their own culpable negligence, they seldom or never hear the word of God in sermons. I have a heart-felt pity for them; for what will become of their souls? "They will faint in the way;" there is nothing else for them; they will perish on the way to eternity, and be lost forever. I have elsewhere shown that the frequent, and, if possible, constant hearing the word of God in sermons is necessary and most useful to all sorts and conditions of men, that they may work out their salvation properly. To-day I shall prove that the same is true in a special sense for those actually in the state of sin, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

The frequent hearing of the word of God in sermons is specially necessary for those sinners who are actually in the state of sin, and who are thinking of repenting some time or other; for, if they do not hear the word of God, they must, humanly speaking, continue in their unhappy state, and be lost forever. Such is the whole subject.

A constant hunger to receive food for our souls in sermons, and the speedy repentance and conversion of sinners, are the end and object of this discourse. Help us thereto, O Almighty God, by Thy powerful grace, which we ask of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angel.

If the sinner wishes to save his soul he must repent and be converted to God.

Without losing time in further preamble, I say to every sinner who is actually in the state of sin, if any such are here present, and I sincerely hope that there are none: Either you wish sooner or later to save your soul and go to heaven, or else you have given up all right to heaven, and are determined to be lost forever. One of these alternatives you must choose; there is no third way for you. Have you chosen the latter? Have you made up your mind to burn in the fire of hell amongst the demons? Alas! if such is the case, you are already in a despairing state, and I do not wonder that you have no desire to hear the word of God, to come to a sermon. But I can hardly believe that any Catholic who is in his right senses can form such a desperate resolution as that. Do you then expect some day or

other to save your soul, and to be happy forever with God in heaven? If so, I wish from my heart that your expectation may be fully realized! But if you are really in earnest about it, you must be converted to God by repentance, for that is the one, indispensably necessary means which you must adopt in order to save your soul. And your sorrow and repentance must be sincere, they must come from the very depths of your heart, they must be supernatural, and they must embrace all the sins you have committed. It will not do for you to be like the traitor Judas, who, driven to despair by the intolerable torment that his conscience caused him for having betrayed Jesus Christ, gave back to the high priests the money he had received from them; nor like the wicked king Antiochus, who, influenced by natural fear and dread of the death that was impending over him during his last illness, asked pardon of God, and promised to repent; your repentance must be founded on faith, you must hate and detest all your sins without a single exception, because they have offended God, and you must earnestly purpose never more to commit any sin whatever.

But this repentance and conversion you can never undertake with your natural strength alone; you require thereto the preventing and helping grace of God, and that, too, a special, extraordinary, powerful, and mighty grace, which God is not bound to give to any sinner, since He has the most indisputable right to condemn at once to hell him who has committed a mortal sin; and that grace must be one that enlightens your understanding so that you may see all the malice, gravity, and deformity of your sins, while, at the same time, it moves and impels your will to be sorry for and detest all your sins above all imaginable evils in the world. Now, when and where do you expect this extraordinary grace, which comes solely from the great mercy of God, this sudden change and conversion of your whole heart? Perhaps in your bed, where you waste the morning in unnecessary sleep? Or at home, where your mind is filled to distraction with worldly cares and business? Or at the parties and entertainments at which you spend your time in amusement? Or at table, while you are enjoying yourself eating and drinking and indulging your sensuality? Or even in the house of God, where the precept of the Church compels you to present yourself on Sundays and holydays, if you have still so much fear of the Lord left, and where you hear holy Mass with a cold and distracted heart? No; these are neither the places

This he cannot do without a special preventing grace from God.

nor the occupations in which the holy Spirit of God will find your heart ready for the influence of this great grace.

A grace that God is not wont to give, unless when the heart is disposed for it.

It is true that the Almighty God, in whose hand are the hearts of all men, can give you that grace in any place at any time, under any circumstances, and can at once excite you to true repentance and conversion; but, as theologians teach, He does not generally act in that way; He bestows His grace at a fitting time and in such places and circumstances in which the heart of man is disposed to receive it. I acknowledge that sinners have sometimes been converted suddenly, and, as it were, in a moment, when they were least thinking of such a thing, as was the case with Paul when he was struck blind by a light from heaven, while on his way to imprison and persecute the Christians. Sinners have been converted by being terror-stricken at seeing some dismal phantoms during the night, or because they were frightened by a terrible thunderstorm, or at the sudden death of some friend; or else they have been moved to repent and amend their lives by some great losses or misfortunes, or by having been put to shame before the world, or by having had some grievous illness to suffer. But a conversion of this kind is a rare, unusual, and, so to speak, miraculous event, which you cannot reasonably hope for, and certainly would not wish for. Still another means of repentance and conversion for the sinner is for him to devote his serious attention in the spirit of recollection to the meditation of heavenly things, according to the words of God to the Prophet Osee: "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and will lead her into the wilderness; and I will speak to her heart."¹ That is to say, I will speak to the soul, and represent vividly to her her unhappy state, so as to excite her to repentance and contrition. But a means of this kind is not apt to be adopted by a man of the world, who, being occupied the whole day with worldly cares, hardly knows what to meditate on, and still less by one who, being actually in the state of sin, has closed his heart to the voice and invitation of God. Besides, what inclination or desire could you have to practise meditation in that way? For that desire or inclination is already the first preventing grace that God gives you for your conversion, and according to the usual course of divine Providence, it is bestowed in a fitting time and place on a heart that is more or less disposed to receive it.

¹ Propter hoc, ecce, ego lactabo eam, et ducam eam in solitudinem, et loquar ad cor ejus.—Osee ii. 14.

Hence there is no other means for you but to hear frequently the word of God in sermons; for the Holy Ghost speaks to the hearts of men by the living voice of His servants, whom He has commissioned to announce His word in His name. And this is the ordinary and at the same time the most powerful means of moving the sinner to true repentance and conversion; this is the two-edged sword, as St. Paul calls it, which penetrates the heart and pierces it with sorrow for sin: "For the word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword; and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit."¹ This is the burning fire, as God Himself calls it by the Prophet Jeremias, which consumes all earthly and wicked desires and inclinations: "Are not My words as a fire? saith the Lord; and as a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?"² that is to say, have they not the power to move to contrition the heart of a sinner, even when it is hardened in guilt? This is that wonderful light which, as I have already said, displays before the eyes of the sinner the truths of eternity, and wakens him suddenly, by remorse of conscience, out of the deep sleep of sin, so that at last he surrenders to the irresistible influence of the known truth.

The ordinary means is to hear the word of God.

And such has been the experience of many who, through idle curiosity, and while their hearts were still hardened in evil, happened to hear a single sermon, and went away from it filled with true contrition by an unexpected ray of light from heaven. Palladius writes of a certain man named Moses, who, having been deprived of the office he held at court on account of some great crimes he committed, instead of acknowledging his guilt and trying to amend his life, plunged still deeper into the most enormous crimes, until he became at last the chief of a band of robbers. He happened once to enter a church, not out of piety, but probably with the intention of committing a robbery. Fortunately for him, the sermon had just begun, and the preacher was describing the strict account we shall have to render at the judgment seat, the terrible sentence that shall be passed on the wicked, and the joyful invitation that the children of God shall receive to eternal happiness. After hearing this sermon Moses became quite another man; filled with sorrow and weeping bitterly, he left the church and went to an adjacent monastery, where, having got rid of the heavy burden of his

As many have experienced; shown by examples.

¹ Vivus est enim sermo Dei, et efficax et penetrabilior omni gladio ancipiti et pertingens usque ad divisionem animæ ac spiritus.—Hebr. iv. 12.

² Numquid non verba mea sunt quasi ignis, dicit Dominus, et quasi malleus conterens petram?—Jerem. xxiii. 29.

sins, and having received permission to enter the order, he spent the remainder of his life in the greatest mortification and sanctity. In the Life of Father Jerome Lopez of our Society¹ I find a similar account of one who, having been insulted, swore that he would not rest until he had killed his enemy. Determined to glut his vengeance, he armed himself with six loaded pistols, and went into a forest, through which, he knew, his enemy was to pass. Through the mercy of God it happened that he met some peasants and shepherds who were running at full speed. "Where are you going in such a hurry?" he asked. "To the church in the village yonder," was the answer; "some preachers have just arrived there, and we wish to be in time for the sermon." The man at once felt curious to see what the strange preachers were like; he went with the peasants, and arrived in time to hear a sermon on the last judgment. But, long before it was over, he had to surrender to the grace of God; full of sorrow and repentance, he could hardly wait till the sermon was finished, when he fell on his knees before the preacher, and begged to be allowed to make his confession. For twenty-six years his conscience had been burdened by a grievous sin that he had wilfully concealed in confession, and during all that time he had been making bad confessions and Communion, but now, to the priest's great consolation, he laid bare all the wickedness of his life with every sign of sincere sorrow, he accused himself of the revenge he had been meditating, he forgave his enemy from his heart, and left his weapons in the hands of the priest. Such power and might has the word of God over the human heart.

Confirmed
by another
example.

There is another most remarkable example that I cannot help relating. Heroldus in his "Promptuarium" tells us of a certain father, a man of great wealth and position, who (as is unfortunately but too often the case nowadays) was rather careless of the religious training of his children. He had two sons and a daughter; the youngest son was so wicked as to commit a horrid crime with his sister, whereat the other son became enraged, and having bitterly reproached his guilty brother, threatened to make known the whole thing to his father. The wicked young man, impatient of reproof and maddened at the thought of his guilt being known, plunged his sword into his brother's side and took to flight immediately. The unhappy father, acknowledging too late the fault he had been guilty of in training his children,

¹ Vita, l. ii., c. 5.

disinherited his wicked son. The latter, hearing of this, stole into the house one night and killed his father, while he was asleep, with the same sword with which he had taken away his brother's life. Burdened with those fearful crimes, he despaired of finding mercy from God, and wandered away under an assumed name into foreign countries, where he abandoned himself to all kinds of vice, so that he never thought of receiving the sacraments, or even of hearing Mass, since he looked on himself as already lost. While in this miserable condition he heard of a certain preacher, who spoke so eloquently that people flocked in crowds to hear him. Urged by curiosity, the despairing sinner determined that he, too, would go to hear the great preacher. (O good God, how wonderful is Thy mercy!) And he went to the sermon, which happened to be on the great patience that God displays in bearing with the sinner, and in receiving him again into his favor when he repents. Every word he heard pierced his heart like a sharp arrow, so that, when the sermon was over, he fell on his knees before the priest, and with many tears confessed all his sins. Before giving him absolution the priest told him to go and bewail his sins at the foot of the crucifix; the repentant man obeyed, but he was so overwhelmed with sorrow and contrition that he fell dead on the ground. Oh, happy soul and most desirable death! you may well say, my dear brethren. But wait till you hear the end of it. On the following day, as the preacher was recommending the soul of the deceased man to the prayers of the congregation, a snow-white dove was seen to fly about the church and to drop from its beak a note, which fell at the preacher's feet; the latter picked up the note and read it out for the congregation. It stated that, in spite of the enormity of his sins, the extraordinary contrition of the deceased man and the copious tears he had shed had completely freed his soul from all guilt and all punishment, so that he went to heaven immediately after his death. What do you think of that, my dear brethren? You wonder, do you not, at the power of perfect contrition and sorrow? And true it is that it can in a moment change the worst sinner into a friend of God, even without absolution, when there is no opportunity of receiving it; but how was that guilty man excited to such perfect sorrow and contrition? It was that sermon in which he heard the word of God, a word that can penetrate and pierce a heart as hard as a rock: "For the word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword."

Therefore
the devil
tries to keep
sinners
away from
sermons.

Now, if effects of this kind are produced on sinners who go to hear a sermon merely by chance, or through curiosity, and with evil actually in their hearts, and are produced, too, by a single sermon, what may we not expect the word of God to do for those sinners who frequently and regularly hear sermons with a sincere desire to learn something good, and to be moved to repentance? Must they not be softened at last and brought to acknowledge their guilt and to return to God? Oh, well does the envious demon know that it is, humanly speaking, impossible for him to subject for any length of time to his yoke those who still have a desire to hear the word of God! And therefore he spares no effort to keep men away from sermons, lest they should become pious and escape out of his clutches. Thus, when the time comes for the sermon, he fills their minds with all kinds of business, which, he persuades them, is of the greatest importance and must be attended to at once; he gets them into talk with others, so that they may be kept at home; he excites wicked people to make fun of the preacher, so that they may not care to hear him; he persuades them that the hour appointed for the sermon is too early and inconvenient; that the weather is too warm or too cold, too damp, too windy, too harsh, and that they would injure their health if they ventured out of doors; he even suggests certain peculiar devotions, of which I have spoken on another occasion, and persuades them that it is better for them to practise those devotions than to hear a sermon. But if he cannot keep them away altogether, he at least tries to prevent them from coming in time, so that they cannot derive proper fruit from the sermon.

Therefore
they must
not allow
themselves
to be de-
ceived by
the devil in
this partic-
ular.

Woe to you, O Christian, if you allow the lying spirit to deceive you in any way, so as to prevent you from hearing the word of God! "Never trust thy enemy," is the warning that the Holy Ghost gives us all by the wise Ecclesiasticus; and still less should you trust the enemy of your soul, "for as a brass pot his wickedness rusteth."¹ But you especially, O sinner, who are still in the state of sin, do not, for God's sake, allow the tempter to befool you, if you have any hope of saving your soul and going to heaven! I tell you distinctly that if you do not hear the word of God, there is no other means of conversion and repentance left for you. And further, you may be perfectly convinced that, if you are not moved to repent and amend your life

¹ Non credas inimico tuo in æternum; sicut enim ærumentum æruginat nequitia illius.—Eccles. xii. 10.

by hearing the word of God, you will never be moved to repentance by any other means, even if God were to work a miracle in your favor, which He will not do. "Yes," says St. John Chrysostom, "even if one were to rise from the dead, or an angel to descend from heaven,"¹ to exhort you to repentance and contrition for your sins; not even then would you be induced to do sincere penance, or to be really converted, if the word of God, which is far more impressive and powerful than other means, cannot influence you.

This is what Our Lord wishes us to understand by the parable in the Gospel of St. Luke. When the rich glutton, in the midst of the fearful torments he was suffering in hell, raised his eyes and beheld Lazarus, whom during life he had looked upon as if of less account than a dog, reposing in glory in Abraham's bosom, "Ah!" said he, "Father, I beseech thee that thou wouldst send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torments."² And what answer did Abraham make? "They have Moses and the Prophets," he said, "let them hear them;"³ they will preach to them. But, "no," said the other; "No, Father Abraham; but if one went to them from the dead, they will do penance;"⁴ it would have such an effect on them, that they would amend their lives. No, said Abraham, you are grievously mistaken; if the word of God, which the prophets preach to them, cannot convert them, much less could a dead man help them; and if your brothers do not care to listen to the prophets, they will have still less inclination to hear one from the dead. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe if one rise again from the dead."⁵

Proved from
Sacred
Scripture.

As a proof of this, my dear brethren, listen to a well-known and most remarkable instance that occurred in England. There was a certain young man, who, to the great scandal of the neighborhood, lived on terms of improper intimacy with a person of the opposite sex. His friends, both lay and clerical, frequently exhorted him to put away this person and to amend his life, lest he should lose his soul; but all their exhortations were of no avail: he remained obstinate in his wickedness. God, in His mercy, see-

Confirmed
by an ex-
ample.

¹ *Etsi resurgat mortuus, etsi cœlitus descenderit angelus.*

² *Rogo ergo te, pater, ut mittas eum in domum patris mei; habeo enim quinque fratres ut testetur illis, ne et ipsi veniant in hunc locum tormentorum.*—Luke xvi. 27, 28.

³ *Habent Moysen et prophetas; audiant illos.*—*Ibid.* 29.

⁴ *Non, Pater Abraham: sed si quis ex mortuis ierit ad eos, pœnitentiam agent.*—*Ibid.* 30.

⁵ *Si Moysen et prophetas non audiunt, neque, si quis ex mortuis resurrexerit, credent.*—*Ibid.* 31.

ing that the living could not, with all their representations, induce him to repent, or make any impression on his heart, entrusted this office to the dead. His father, who had died some years previous, appeared to him one night. "Son," he said, in a terrible and impressive voice, "Son, give up your wicked ways! you are not acting on the instruction I gave you during my life. Be converted to God, and banish the object of your impure passion from your house, out of your sight and out of your heart, or else, woe to you!" Having spoken thus, he disappeared. The son was somewhat frightened at first, but he did not make the least effort to repent. The father appeared to him a second time, and repeated his former warning, adding that there was still time for grace, but that, if he deferred his conversion, an unhappy death was appointed for him by the divine justice; he should die suddenly on St. Martin's day and go at once into eternal torments. Who would not think that this threat, at all events, would induce the young man to open his eyes? But no such thing; he paid not the least attention to it, and continued on in sin as before. Nay, to show how little he thought of the threat, he prepared a grand entertainment for St. Martin's feast, and spent the day in feasting, carousing, and indulging his impure passion. On the following morning he was laughing with his boon companions at what he called his idle dreams. "See," he said, "I was to die on St. Martin's day, and here I am as well as ever I was in my life!" Hardly had he said those words, and as he was on the point of going to his paramour, he fell dead on the ground and that, too, on the feast of the holy Pope and Martyr, St. Martin, which immediately follows that of St. Martin, Confessor and Pontiff. Thus his father's threat was literally fulfilled. From this we can clearly see that, if one who is in the state of sin is so blinded by his passions and evil inclinations that he will not hear the word of God, or be moved by it to repentance, neither will he be induced to amend even if one were to rise from the grave to warn him. "Neither will they believe, if one rise again from the dead."

The very neglect of the word of God is a divine punishment.

Sinner, if, in spite of your wicked life, you do not perhaps fear a sudden and unprovided death, yet you have reason to shudder when you think of another punishment that an angry God may have already inflicted on you for your sins. And what is that? your very negligence and carelessness about hearing sermons, or the fact that you hear them without amending your life; that is one of the severest punishments that can be

inflicted on your sins. Hear the threat that God utters by the Prophet Jeremias: "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts: Behold I will send upon them the sword, and the famine, and I will persecute them with the sword and with famine; and I will give them up unto affliction to all the kingdoms of the earth; to be a curse, and an astonishment, and a hissing, and a reproach to all the nations." And why? what have they done? "Because they have not hearkened to My words, saith the Lord, which I sent to them by My servants, the prophets."¹ And what kind of a famine was God to inflict on them? He explains it by the Prophet Amos: "Behold the days come, saith the Lord; and I will send forth a famine into the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst of water, but of hearing the word of the Lord."² They do not care for my word; they hardly deign to hear it, and therefore their punishment shall be that I will deprive them of all inclination and desire to hear it; they are not worthy of that spiritual food, and therefore they shall perish with hunger, and shall live and die in the unhappy state of sin. Certainly a most fearful punishment! exclaims the holy Pope, St. Gregory; "thus, by a hidden decree of God's Providence, His holy word is withdrawn from those who do not deserve to be aroused by grace to amend their lives."³

It is a punishment which presages eternal punishment hereafter in hell. Remarkable is the well-known simile in which Jesus Christ distinguishes between the elect and the reprobate: "And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on His left."⁴ Thus the sheep are a figure of the elect, and the goats of the reprobate. But the Prophet David, speaking of sinners, says: "They are laid in hell like sheep; death shall feed upon them."⁵ And how can that be? If, according to the words of Our Lord, the sheep shall be on His right hand at the last day, how can the expression, "They are laid in hell like sheep," be justified? Yet, says St. Augustine, both those texts are true; all who belong to the true Church are sheep of

And a sign
of the sin-
ner's eternal
damnation.

¹ Hæc dicit Dominus exercituum: Ecce mittam in eos gladium et famem . . . et persequar eos in gladio et in fame, et dabo eos in vexationem universis regnis terræ: in maledictionem, et in stuporem, et in sibilum, et in opprobrium cunctis gentibus. Eo quod non audierint verba mea, dicit Dominus, quæ misi ad eos per servos meos prophetas.—Jerem. xxix. 17-19.

² Ecce dies veniunt, dicit Dominus; et mittam famem in terram, non famem panis neque sitim aquæ, sed audiendi verbum Domini.—Amos viii. 11.

³ Subtili ergo, occultoque iudicio a quorundam auribus prædicatio sancta subtrahitur, qui suscitari per gratiam non merentur.—St. Greg. hom. 4 in cap. 10 Matt.

⁴ Statuet oves quidem a dextris suis, hædos autem a sinistris.—Matt. xxv. 33.

⁵ Sicut oves in inferno positi sunt; mors depascet eos.—Ps. xlviii. 15

the fold of Jesus Christ, who says of Himself, "I am the good Shepherd;"¹ all who belong to My fold, are sheep; but all are not elect sheep. But how can we distinguish those who are chosen for heaven from those who are doomed to hell? They who acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Shepherd, are the elect; "I know mine, and mine know me."² They on the other hand, that do not acknowledge Him, are reprobate sheep. But who are they that acknowledge Christ as their Shepherd? Our Lord Himself answers this question: "My sheep hear My voice,"³ He says; and they will be placed on My right hand; they are the elect. Those who do not hear My voice, My word, are sheep indeed; but they are not My sheep; "they are laid in hell like sheep."

Shown by
an example.

Amongst the number of the latter was that unhappy man of whom James de Vitry writes; he could never be persuaded to go to a sermon; what do I want with sermons? he would say; I can preach well enough for myself. At last he died, and his body was brought to the church to be buried. During the funeral office that, according to the custom of the Catholic Church, was held for the soul of the deceased man, all who were present suddenly saw to their great consternation the crucifix, that was placed at the head of the coffin, tear its hands out of the nails and stop both its ears with them. The priest, seeing this, turned to the people and said to them: you know well what this means; during his life this man neglected the word of God, and never went to a sermon, "and therefore God now closes His ears, so as not to hear the prayers we are offering for his soul."⁴ It is clear enough, therefore, that his soul is in hell; there is no use in praying for him any more, nor shall his body be buried in consecrated ground; let it be buried out in the field. And so it was done.

Conclusion
and resolution
to hear
the Word of
God con-
stantly.

"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear,"⁵ said Christ, speaking of the seed of the word of God. I conclude with the same words, my dear brethren, "he that hath ears to hear," let him be diligent in hearing the word of God; for it is necessary for all men frequently to hear it, if they wish to save their souls. It is necessary for the innocent and the just, that they may be encouraged and strengthened to continue in the divine service,

¹ Ego sum pastor bonus.—John x. 14.

² Cognosco meas, et cognoscunt me meæ.—Ibid.

³ Oves meæ vocem meam audiunt.—Ibid. 27.

⁴ Propter quod Deus obduravit aures suas, ne audiat preces quas pro eo fundimus.

⁵ Qui habet aures audiendi, audiat.—Matt. xiii. 9.

to abstain from sin, and always to belong to the number of those chosen sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd. It is especially necessary for those who are actually in the state of sin, that they may be moved to repentance and amendment, unless they wish to be numbered among the reprobate sheep, who are rejected by the Shepherd and doomed to hell. Merciful God, save us from that terrible fate! We all who are here present declare that we desire to be together at Thy right hand, among Thy chosen sheep; and therefore we have met to-day to hear Thy voice, to learn Thy law, and to fulfil Thy holy will. We thank Thee, O God of goodness, that Thou hast given to us such frequent opportunities of hearing Thy word, in preference to so many people to whom the bread of life is broken but sparingly. We receive that word with the most heartfelt gratitude, and we shall be always ready to follow the light that Thou sheddest on us so abundantly. Nothing but absolute necessity shall prevent us from hearing Thy warning voice, so that we may one day, to our great joy, hear Thy sweet invitation to eternal bliss: Come, ye blessed of My Father, and follow Me into the eternal kingdom. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the first Sunday after Epiphany.

Text.

Invenerunt illum in templo, sedentem in medio doctorum, audientem illos, et interrogantem eos.—Luke ii. 46.

“They found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions.”

Introduction.

Mark those words, my dear brethren. He who, to show His unheard of love to men, could not wait for the time of His bitter passion and death, when He was to shed the last drop of His Blood, but already as an Infant eight days old poured out the first drops of His precious Blood in the Circumcision; He would not wait for the time of His public mission to instruct and convert men, but commenced that office already in the twelfth year of His age, when He was found amongst the doctors in the temple, explaining the law to them by question and answer. Ah! dearest Saviour, if we had only the happiness of hearing Thy sermons and instructions but once; what an effect

would they not have on our hearts! But what am I saying? Although it is now nearly two thousand years since Thou didst appear in the world in visible form, yet Thou still preachest Thy divine word, and explainest Thy law by the mouths of Thy preachers and priests. Alas! I should rather exclaim, would that all Thy Christians were diligent enough in hearing Thy word! How much would not the just profit thereby for their salvation, as well as sinners for their conversion! I have elsewhere proved, my dear brethren—*continues as above.*

Several Sermons on the Necessity and Advantage of hearing the Word of God are contained in the preceding First and Second Parts, as well as in the following Fourth and Fifth Parts.

ON THE MOTIVES THAT SHOULD EXCITE THE SINNER TO SPEEDY REPENTANCE.

SECOND SERMON.

ON THE VAIN LABOR OF THOSE WHO ARE IN THE STATE OF SIN.

Subject.

He who labors during the night, that is to say, while he is in the state of mortal sin, gains nothing by all the good works he performs, by all the trials he endures; therefore the state of sin is an unhappy and a miserable one, and he who is in that state should free himself from it as soon as possible, by true penance, while every one should be on his guard against falling into it.—*Preached on the fourth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Per totam noctem laborantes, nihil cepimus.—Luke v. 5.

“ We have labored all the night and have taken nothing.”

Introduction.

Fruitless labor is always painful. No matter what trouble one takes, one never regrets it as long as it is successful; but when all one's toil and labor come to nothing, then there is a bitter sense of disappointment. We see an example of that in the disciples in to-day's Gospel. “ Let down your nets for a draught,” said Our Lord to Simon. What is the use? answered the latter; “ Master, we have labored all the night, and have taken nothing;” we are tired of it. How many there are in the world now, my dear brethren, who resemble those disappointed fishermen, who labor and take nothing! How many there are who, at the hour of death, looking back on their past lives, must give vent

to this fruitless complaint; I have lived now for thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, or seventy years; I have troubled myself about a great many things; I have had a great deal to suffer, and many difficulties to contend with, and now I see that it is all of little or no use to my soul; "We have taken nothing!" And how is that? Most people are like Martha; they are careful about many things; during their whole lives they are busied about temporal concerns, while they forget that one important business, of which Our Lord said to Martha, "But one thing is necessary,"¹ the last thing they think of is their immortal souls and eternal happiness. These people will have to say, "We have taken nothing." There are others, too, who, according to their own idea, labor for the kingdom of heaven, and perform many good works, but not those which their state of life binds them to perform; they too will have to say, "We have taken nothing." Again, there are numbers who try to do what God wishes them to do according to their state, but they have not a pure intention, they forget to labor for God. Ah, poor people that you are! when you go to rest at night, you may well cry out, "we have taken nothing." Finally, there are some who perform many good works, but they labor during the night, that is to say, in the state of mortal sin; their lot is deserving of the greatest commiseration, for they take absolutely nothing; their labor is utterly useless. I shall speak to-day of those latter alone, since they are represented in the Gospel, and I say,

Plan of Discourse.

He who labors during the night, that is to say, while he is in the state of mortal sin, gains nothing by all the good works he performs, by all the trials he endures; therefore the state of sin is an unhappy and a miserable one, and he who is in that state should free himself from it as soon as possible by true penance, while all of us should be constantly on our guard against falling into it. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

May the great God enlighten our understandings to acknowledge the truth now proposed for our consideration, and excite our wills to follow and adhere strictly to the conclusion to be derived from it; this we ask through the intercession of Mary and the holy guardian angels, that we may not hereafter have to complain that we have labored all the night, and have taken nothing.

¹ Porro unum est necessarium.—Luke x. 42.

It does not require much argument to show that by the night, in a moral sense, is meant the time during which a soul is in the state of sin. No comparison is more frequently used than this by the Holy Scripture, and by the fathers of the Church, when they speak of sin and sinners. "What is the life of a sinner," asks St. Gregory, "but a night,"¹ from which, as soon as sin is consented to, the sun of justice is withdrawn, even in the daytime, and the light of the soul, sanctifying grace, disappears? "Let us therefore," is the exhortation of St. Paul to the Romans, "cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light;"² the "night is past, and the day is at hand."³ "For you were heretofore darkness," he writes to his Ephesian converts, "but now light in the Lord. Walk then as children of the light; and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness."⁴ And just as during the night, when no light is shining, and when all things are hidden from the eyes of men, no matter what signs or gestures one makes, no one can pay any attention to them, so that it is the time for thieves and robbers to ply their trade, which courts the darkness; so, if your soul is in the spiritual night of sin, all your good works, no matter how excellent they may be in themselves, will be passed over unnoticed by God, although He is present everywhere.

God does not regard good works that are performed in the state of sin.

And is there, then, a night so dark that the eye of God cannot penetrate it, or that it can conceal anything from Him? No! says the Prophet David; be on your guard, O sinners, for even in the dark, in the gloomiest corner, the omnipresent God sees all the abominations you commit: "Darkness shall not be dark to Thee, and night shall be light as the day."⁵ If I were to hide myself in the bowels of the earth, or in the darkest corner of hell, even there Thou art present, O my God; even there Thy all-seeing eye would behold me! "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy face? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I descend into hell, Thou art there."⁶ But God does not regard the good works of the sinner, because, since they are performed by one who is unworthy, on account of the state in which he is, they do not deserve to be

Because they are performed by one who is unworthy.

¹ Quid est peccatoris vita, nisi nox?

² Abjiciamus ergo opera tenebrarum, et induamur arma lucis.—Rom. xiii. 12.

³ Nox præcessit, dies autem appropinquavit.—Ibid.

⁴ Eratis enim aliquando tenebræ, nunc autem lux in Domino; ut filii lucis ambulatis. et nolite communicare operibus infructuosis tenebrarum.—Ephes. v. 8, 11.

⁵ Tenebræ non obscurabuntur a te, et nox sicut dies illuminabitur.—Ps. cxxxviii. 12.

⁶ Quo ibo a spiritu tuo, et quo a facie tua fugiam? Si ascendero in cælum, tu illic es, si descendero in infernum, ades.—Ibid. 7, 8.

looked on favorably by the Lord of holiness. For God does not regard the work itself so much as the disposition of him who performs it; He does not value the gift, but rather the hand that bestows it. We have an example of this in the Book of Genesis, in the two brothers Cain and Abel. Cain offered sacrifice to God, and Abel did the same; but how differently their offerings were received! "The Lord had respect to Abel and to his offerings," says the Holy Scripture; but to "Cain and his offerings he had no respect;"¹ if as they did not concern Him in the least. What was the reason of the difference? Abel was just and innocent; Cain was unjust and wicked; the one offered with a good, the other with a bad intention. "Abel," says St. Gregory, "was not made pleasing by his gifts, but Abel himself made the gift pleasing in the sight of God."² And on the other hand, God did not reject Cain on account of his gifts, but the gifts on account of Cain.

Who is altogether hateful in the sight of God.

Nor is this to be wondered at, my dear brethren, for men act on the same principle every day. Let the most dainty food be served up in a dirty dish, and you would turn away from it in disgust. And why? the food is very good? Yes; but it ought to be served in cleaner fashion. If there is one whom you dislike, either naturally, or because he has insulted you and given you just cause for anger, no matter what he does, he will never please you; you put a bad construction on his best acts, and you cannot even bear to hear him well spoken of. But who can adequately describe the bitter hatred, the aversion and disgust, with which the God of all holiness looks on the accursed and odious person of one who is in the state of sin? It is true that of Himself He is a God of infinite goodness and love, who looks upon with fervor and loves even the meanest things He has created. "For Thou lovest all things that are, and hatest none of the things which Thou hast made."³ But the sinner alone He has excluded from His work, He cannot bear the sight of him, but pursues him with the bitterest hatred, although in His infinite mercy He leaves him still in life, in the hope that he will repent. "Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity," says the prophet David to God, and that so bitterly that they dare not appear before Thee: "Neither

¹ Respexit Dominus ad Abel et ad munera ejus; ad Cain vero et ad munera illius non respexit.—Gen. iv. 4-5.

² Non Abel ex muneribus, sed ex Abel munera placuerunt.—St. Greg. in Job, l. 22, c. 8.

³ Diligis enim omnia quæ sunt, et nihil odisti eorum quæ fecisti.—Sap. xi. 25.

shall the wicked dwell near Thee; nor shall the unjust abide before Thy eyes.”¹

Do you wish, my dear brethren, to see a proof of the intensity of this hatred from its effects? Then imagine a soul that has lived for hundreds of years in the greatest innocence and sanctity; if it consents but in thought to a single mortal sin, in a moment the God of infinite goodness, in spite of that soul's long-continued service, and of the painful death by which He so superabundantly atoned for that same sin, will forget all its former good works and all the treasures of merit it had accumulated. Hear what He says Himself by the prophet Ezechiel: “But if the just man turn himself away from his justice, and do iniquity,” what shall befall him? “all his justices, which he had done, shall not be remembered.”² Is not this a mark of bitter hatred and displeasure against the sinner? To understand this still more clearly, descend in thought into the fiery prison of hell, and see there a soul condemned to burn in eternal flames, without hope of alleviation or release, for having consented to a single sinful thought. Who has condemned that soul to such a punishment? The God of infinite mercy and justice. Through all eternity He will see that soul, which He created to His own image and redeemed by His precious Blood, tortured by demons. He will hear its howlings and lamentings without being in the least moved to pity. Oh, certainly a most implacable hatred! Terrible it is to read what Louis of Blois says (but before I quote him, I must crave thy permission, O holiest of all creatures, dearest Mother Mary! I know well that thou hast never been guilty of the least fault. I rejoice and congratulate thee from my heart that, humanly speaking, it was impossible for thee to consent to a sin): “If the Mother of God, the most Blessed Virgin, had committed a mortal sin and had died without being truly very sorrow for it, she would never have gone to heaven, but would be tortured eternally amongst the demons in hell.”³ O just God, is Thy hatred of the sinner so great that Thou wouldst have cursed and cast off from Thee, into eternal fire, Thy own beloved Mother, on account of one mortal sin, if it had been possible for her to com-

The intensity of the hatred with which God regards the sinner appears from its effects

¹ *Odisti omnes, qui operantur Iniquitatem. Neque habitabit juxta te malignus; neque permanebunt injusti ante oculos tuos.*—Ps. v. 7, 6.

² *Si autem averterit se Justus a justitia sua, et fecerit iniquitatem, omnes justitiæ ejus, quas fecerat, non recordabuntur.*—Ezech. xviii. 24.

³ *Si Mater Christi Domini Virgo Beatissima peccasset mortaliter, et sine contritione mortuasset: cœlum nunquam obtinisset, sed cum dæmonibus in inferno cruciaretur.*

26 *Vain Labor of those who are in the State of Sin.*

mit it? How great, then, must it not be towards me and others, if we are actually in the deplorable state of sin! Consider now, my dear brethren, whether one who is so hateful to God can do anything pleasing to Him or can have any merit in His sight, whatever good works he performs. No; no matter what good is done, as long as it is done in the night, that is, in the state of sin, it will be of no value; and they who are in that state will ever have reason to say, "we have labored all the night, and have taken nothing."

Because such works are unworthy in themselves.

But supposing even that the person of the sinner were not so hateful and displeasing in the sight of God, and, as a matter of fact, the good God in His endless mercy and, so to speak, in spite of His anger and displeasure, often displays the greatest patience in bearing with the most wicked sinners for years, and in waiting for them to repent, while He never ceases showering down upon them temporal blessings, and visiting them with His inspirations and graces, as if He could not help loving them still; yet the works of those sinners, no matter how praiseworthy they may be in themselves, have not the least supernatural merit in the sight of God, because they are performed "in the night." On a dark night, when you have no light, place on one side of you a piece of precious gold, and on the other a lump of clay; or put on one side a beautiful statue, on the other the image of a hideous demon, and tell me which of the two you prefer, which you consider the more beautiful. If you consult your eyes alone, you cannot distinguish either the value or the beauty of the different objects, because it is night, and everything seems black to you.

As the least good works done in the state of grace are precious in the sight of God.

Oh, how precious, how indescribably beautiful in the sight of God, are the good works of him who is in the clear day, that is in the state of sanctifying grace! what great treasures they amass! A single sigh sent forth to God by such a man, a bit of bread, a drink of cold water that he gives to the poor, each step he takes, every movement of his hands, every blow of his hammer, every use that he makes of the different implements of his trade, nay every mouthful of food he takes, although he enjoys it, provided all this is done with a supernatural intention for God's sake, how valuable is it not in Thy sight, O Lord! No matter how trivial and worthless each of those actions is in itself, yet it merits an eternity of glory in heaven, which the just Judge will give him who performs it, if he dies in the state of grace. Amen, I say to you, such is the solemn asseveration of

Vain Labor of those who are in the State of Sin. 27

Our Lord Himself : “ Whosoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, amen, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.”¹ If in one side of the balance would be placed all the great and heroic deeds of the greatest generals, kings, and emperors, as they have been handed down to us in history, from the beginning of the world, would they not make a great weight indeed? What wonder and admiration they still excite in us, when we hear or read of them! But place in the other scale a single “ Our Father,” said by some poor woman with proper devotion, or a five minutes’ work that the ignorant ploughman offers to God, or the little trouble that the housemaid has in sweeping out a room; oh, how quickly will it not weigh down, in the sight of God, all the greatest deeds of the most illustrious men! All those great exploits which excite the wonder of the world, when compared to a single good work of one who is in the state of grace, resemble the labor of a fly in comparison to the celebrated tower of Babel; because, great as those exploits are, they do not exceed the limits of nature, while the good works of the just man are supernatural and, being united with the works of Jesus Christ, are pleasing to the God of infinite greatness, and deserve an eternity of happiness. O truly happy state of the just soul! what treasures and riches it can accumulate in a day, an hour, nay at every moment! O ye poor peasants, laborers, and servants, and all ye to whom Divine Providence has allotted either hard work, or trials and crosses, ah, see above all that you are in the state of grace, and do not forget the good intention! How rich you are! What an exceeding great reward is in store for that seemingly worthless labor of yours!

But miserable, indeed, is your soul, O sinner, since you labor in the night! All your undertakings are black, and useless, and unprofitable! Suppose that to-day or yesterday you have committed a grievous sin in thought; say that you remain in that sin for the next six months without confession and without true sorrow for it, although you have the intention of confessing it hereafter, and you commit no other sin during that time, while you live in other respects a Christian life: you go to church and hear Mass every day devoutly; you observe the appointed fasts; you give alms to the poor; you labor and work according to your condition with a good intention, because God requires you

So the greatest works performed in the state of sin are worth nothing before God.

¹ “ Quicumque potum dederit uni ex minimis istis calicem aquæ frigidæ tantum in nomine discipuli; amen dico vobis, non perdet mercedem suam.—Matt. x. 42.

to do so; you bear many a cross, and difficulty, and contradiction with Christian patience, contentment, and resignation to the divine will; nay more, suppose that you give all you have to the poor, that you practise every imaginable work of Christian charity, that you fast continually and scourge yourself daily even to blood, that you beat your breast with a stone, like St. Jerome, that you go through India and Japan like St. Francis Xavier and convert 1,200,000 souls, that you bear with the greatest patience and meekness all kinds of persecutions, sickness, poverty, hunger, and the most fearful torments, like the martyrs of Christ; when you have done all that, look back upon it in thought, and see what you have gained, what you have merited by it. Perhaps you will think that you have done wonders, and will say, like him whom St. John reproves in the Apocalypse, "I am rich and made wealthy, and have need of nothing," but I am sorry for you, because "thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;"¹ you are just as badly off as you were when you began.

Thus the
sterner
labors in
vain with-
out merit.

Hear what St. Paul says: "If I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."² That is to say, without sanctifying grace all these gifts and good works are of no avail. You have certainly made great strides with those good works of yours, but not on the right road; you have tired yourself running in a circle, but you have approached no nearer to the goal. "Your soul," as St. Basil says, "is like a bee hive, in which there is no honey, and in which none can be made." By your good works, you have gained no more for heaven, than one who pays a large sum of money in a lottery, hoping to win something, and draws nothing but blanks. You have borne with many trials and contradictions, but not otherwise than a heavily laden beast of burden, that is urged on during the day with blows, and, in the evening, is turned into a comfortless stable. "They are not in the labor of men,"³ says the Prophet David. They labor like the dumb animal; they bear their cross, they suffer hunger, and

¹ Dicit, quod dives sum et locupletatus, et nullius egeo, et nescis quia tu es miser et miserabilis, et pauper, et cæcus, et nudus.—Apoc. iii. 17.

² Et si habuero omnem fidem, ita ut montes transferam, charitatem autem non habuero, nihil sum; et si distribuero in cibos pauperum omnes facultates meas, et si tradidero corpus meum ita ut ardeam, charitatem autem non habuero, nihil mihi prodest.—I. Cor. xiii. 2, 3.

³ In labore hominum non sunt.—Ps. lxxii. 5.

want, and misery, caused by themselves or by others : whether they bear them patiently or not, they have no consolation from God, no merit for eternity, and at night they retire to rest with their miserable souls crushed under the yoke of the devil. In a word, you have nothing left, but to sigh like the disciples: "We have labored all the night and have taken nothing." because you have not sanctifying grace, which is necessary to give good works their life, their beauty, and their value. Such is the general teaching of theologians, taken from Holy Scripture.

Oh ! truly unhappy is the state of the sinner ! He labors and gains nothing ! The bare thought of this is enough to make me weep burning tears of pity ! When I see a man working hard for his daily bread, or a beggar stretching out his hands for an alms, a sick man lying on a bed of suffering, a destitute man bewailing his misery, or an unfortunate man oppressed with crosses and trials ; oh ! I think, if he is only in the state of grace, he enjoys consolation from God, he has the peace of a good conscience, and he can expect a reward in heaven for all his sufferings ; at least he need only offer them to God with a pure intention, in order to gain the reward, But if he is in the night, if he has lost sanctifying grace by one mortal sin, alas for his poor soul ! All his labors and trouble are fruitless. "Write this man barren," I say of him, as God said of King Jechonias to the Prophet Jeremias. But why ? Jechonias had still eight sons living ; how could he then be looked on as barren ? God Himself gives the reason : "For there shall not be a man of his seed that shall sit upon the throne of David, and have power any more in Juda."¹ Therefore write him barren. The same is true of the sinner ; in spite of the superabundance of his good works and all his labor and trouble, he remains barren, because not one of his works will ever reach the throne of God. You may see from this, my dear brethren, in what a gloomy and horrible night sin encamps the human soul, by taking away from the holiest and most praiseworthy acts of virtue, and from the otherwise most meritorious trials, all their beauty, worth, and reward.

And there is another circumstance which makes this night far more terrible than our natural night. For although the latter hides the beauty and value of objects from the eye, yet, no matter how black the darkness, it cannot interfere with the essential

What a miserable and deplorable state !

And all the more so because such good works can never revive, so as to become meritorious

¹ Scribe virum istum sterilem ; nec enim erit de semine ejus vir, qui sedeat super solium David, et potestatem habeat ultra in Juda.—Jerem. xxii. 30.

value or splendor of anything ; it leaves everything unaltered, so that, when the day comes, objects are seen in their proper colors, the gold glitters as usual, beauty shows itself in its splendor as before. But it is far worse with the night of sin ; for even after it is driven away and sanctifying grace restored to the soul by penance, the good works performed in the state of sin remain just as black as before, without merit and without reward, which they can never expect for all eternity.

Shown by a figure from Holy Scripture.

I find in the Old Testament a striking figure of what occurs in the soul of a sinner. According to divine command, if a Hebrew were bought as a slave, his purchaser was bound to give him his freedom after seven years: "If thou buy a Hebrew servant, six years shall he serve thee; in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing."¹ And, besides that, if he had a wife and children when he became a slave, they too were to be freed with him at the appointed time, and he was to receive the same kind of clothing as that he originally had. "With what raiment he came in, with the like let him go out; if having a wife, his wife also shall go out with him."² But if he had married and had children during the first six years of his slavery, he, indeed, was to be freed in the seventh year, but his wife and children had to remain in slavery. "But if his master gave him a wife, and she hath borne sons and daughters, the woman and her children shall be her master's; but he himself shall go out with his raiment."³ Do you see what is meant by this figure, my dear brethren? By baptism man is endowed with the freedom of the children of God; but when he commits mortal sin, he sells himself of his own accord as a slave to the devil, and God says by the prophet Isaias: "Behold, you are sold for your iniquities."⁴ Now the good God has given him a means of freeing himself from this slavery; not merely after six years, but in any year, at any moment that he wishes, as soon as he truly repents, he will be set at liberty, as the Apostle says: she "shall be delivered from the servitude of corruption, into the liberty of the glory of the children of God."⁵ But how? What will he take back with him when he is restored to freedom? His children, that is

¹ Si emeris servum Hebræum, sex annis serviet tibi, in septimo egredietur liber gratis.—Exod. xxi. 2.

² Cum quali veste intraverit, cum tali exeat; si habens uxorem, et uxor egredietur simul.—Ibid. 3.

³ Sin autem dominus dederit illi uxorem, et pepererit filios et filias; mulier et liberi ejus erunt domini sui. ipse vero exibat cum vestitu suo.—Ibid. 4.

⁴ Ecce in iniquitatibus vestris venditi estis.—Isa. l. 1.

⁵ Liberabitur a servitute corruptionis, in libertatem gloriæ filiorum Dei.—Rom. viii. 21.

to say, the good works he performed before he lost the state of grace, and which were brought by him into slavery, so that during that time he could receive no reward for them; but, according to the general teaching of theologians, when he has truly repented, those works revive and are freed with him, clad in their former garment of sanctifying grace, like the children that the Hebrew slave had before losing his liberty. On the other hand, all the works performed in the state of sin remain behind; they do not revive; they are and must remain without merit or hope of reward. The labor they entailed is profitless, because they were performed in slavery, in the night of sin; and therefore it still remains true of them, "we have labored all the night and have taken nothing."

What are we to infer from this, my dear brethren? That there is no use in doing good when we are in the state of sin? Oh, if that is so, one might say: as I have a mortal sin on my conscience, which I intend to repent of and confess hereafter, I can meanwhile give up praying, hearing Mass, giving alms, and visiting the church. If I cannot merit anything by those works of devotion, why should I trouble myself with them? I do not see the good of working to no purpose. Your argument, O sinner, is a very bad one; you say that, since you cannot do anything deserving of heaven, you will cease doing good altogether. But for that very reason you should be all the more diligent in doing good works. Suppose you have a piece of money that is broken into two parts, would you throw the pieces away? Not by any means! But what are they good for? they are no longer current coin. True, but the pieces are still worth something, and if I bring them to a silversmith he will give me a price for them. And so it is, due proportion being observed, with the good works you perform in the night of sin. They are not indeed current coin with which you can purchase heaven; they are broken and destroyed; but still they are good for something. And for what?

St. Thomas of Aquin tells us. "Works of this kind," he says, "have a threefold utility: they accustom us to do good, they are a means of obtaining temporal blessings, and they dispose the soul to receive grace."¹ I will say nothing now of the temporal blessings, for they are of the least importance. They serve, then, first, to accustom one to good works. Why do sol-

The sinner must not therefore cease doing good.

That he may be accustomed to do good.

¹ Opera ista ad triplex bonum valent: scilicet ad assuefactionem bonorum operum, ad temporalium consecutionem, et ad dispositionem ad gratiam.—St. Thom. in addit., q. 14, a. 4.

32 *Vain Labor of those who are in the State of Sin.*

diers in time of peace, when there is not an enemy near them, have to practise military exercises so often, to engage in sham fights, and to practise shooting and the management of their weapons, not otherwise than if they were engaged in real warfare? Why do hunters so often shoot at a target, although they know that they will not kill any game by the shot, and that at best they can hit only a piece of paper? Is not the labor fruitless in both those cases? By no means; practice of that kind serves to make the soldier expert in war, and the hunter in the chase; it enables the former to grapple with his enemy as soon as he sees him, and the latter to make sure of his aim, so as to secure the spoils of the chase. In the same way, O sinner, the practice of good works will be of use to you, although you are actually in the state of sin. In so far your labor is fruitless, that you will never attain your end thereby; but it gives you a good habit, a certain expertness in doing the same virtuous actions afterwards, when you are reconciled with God, and when they will be really meritorious of eternal life.

To avoid the divine vengeance, and to obtain the grace of repentance more speedily.

In the second place, works of this kind dispose your soul to receive the grace of God, and avert the divine anger from you for a time, so that you are not, as you deserve, punished with a sudden death and condemned at once to eternal torments. Do you know what that Roman general did when, having lost a great number of his men, he was again attacked by the enemy? He made a rampart of the dead bodies, and was thus enabled to fight with the remainder of his army so as to avoid a total defeat. So should you also act, O sinner! The good works that you perform in the state of sin are but the dead bodies of virtues; yet they can serve as a rampart to shield you from the wrath of God, and to preserve you from a fresh attack of Satan, until you are enabled to take to flight by true penance. And in virtue of this humble acknowledgment of His claims on you, God in His mercy will keep you from further temptations, that you may not fall into greater sins, and finally become obdurate, and He will give you more powerful inspirations, illuminations, impulses, and better opportunities for conversion, so that you may recover His grace.

Shown by an example.

As an instance of this, listen to the following example taken from the Annals of the Capuchin Order. When the celebrated preacher, Father Matthew de Pascio, Founder of that Order in the city of Venice, was at the height of his fame for sanctity, a certain learned man, wishing to make the acquaintance of the

servant of God, invited him to table. There was in the house an ape that could wait at table, and clean the plates and glasses so well, that there were few servants who could excel it. When its master came home the ape would open the door for him, take charge of his hat and cloak, pull off his shoes, and, in a word, serve him with the utmost diligence. When Father Matthew heard of the wonderful ape, he asked to see it, but the ape, when it heard the Father coming, crept under a bed, and could not be induced to come out, either by blows or coaxing. Then the servant of God took by the hand the man who had invited him. "Do you know," said he, "what kind of an ape you have in your house? Come with me, and you will hear it out of its own mouth." He then commanded the supposed ape in the name of Jesus Christ to declare who he was, and why he consented to perform such abject services. "I am the devil," answered the ape in an angry tone, "and my only object in coming here is to carry off the soul of that man, which is already mine on several titles." "And why," asked the holy man, "have you not done so during the many years that you have performed menial offices for him?" "Because," was the answer, "he was accustomed to say a few devout prayers to God and to the Blessed Virgin every night, and if he had omitted doing so but once, I had power from the Creator to strangle him, and carry him off with me to hell." The Father then banished the evil spirit and persuaded the man, who was more dead than alive through fright, to repent at once and to make restitution of some property he had unjustly acquired. See from this, O sinner, whether the good works performed in the state of sin are altogether useless. What would have become of that man's soul if he had used the same foolish reasoning as you do, and said: Why should I trouble myself about prayer? as long as I am in this state I can do nothing for heaven; I will give up praying and all other good works.

You should change your way of thinking, therefore, and if you wish to be reasonable, say rather: In the state in which I now am I cannot merit heaven by any good works; I must be mad and foolish, then, wilfully to bury my soul in this hideous darkness for the sake of a bad thought, a scandalous word, an impure look, a mere animal pleasure, that lasts but a moment; like the spendthrift tradesman that sells all the implements of his craft, so that he cannot work at his trade to support himself. Do I not act far more foolishly when I commit sin? For I have

Therefore
the sinner
must see
how foolish
it is to com-
mit sin.

thereby lost all the spiritual treasures that I had accumulated, and at the same time have deprived myself of all means of meriting.

And free
himself at
once from
that state by
repentance.

I am now laboring during the night and to no purpose. I must, then, at once free myself from my sins, and regain the clear light of grace. I will sincerely repent of and confess my sins. I will not defer repentance any longer, nor wait till next Easter, or the next feast of the Blessed Virgin, nay, not even till this evening. For why should I hear Mass so often on Sundays and holydays, mortify myself so frequently by fasting, and bear with so many crosses and trials, and yet gain no reward by it all? Since I can merit eternal glory in heaven every moment of this very day, will I neglect doing so, determined as I am some time or other to do penance? No, I will at once get rid of the heavy burden of my sins, and come forth out of this terrible darkness.

And never
fall into it
again.

And when you have once freed yourself from your sins, rejoice with all your heart, thank the divine mercy, and make this irrevocable resolution (hear all ye pious and just souls! this does not concern you): In future I will be on my guard against nothing so much as sin, which envelops the soul in such a gloomy night; I will avoid the occasions that may lead me into it; I will not go near that house, that person, that company, which has hitherto been a proximate occasion of sin to me; I will destroy that book, that picture, which has been a stumbling-block to me; I will keep a guard on my heart, my eyes, ears, tongue, and all my senses, by which I have so often sinned; every morning I will renew my resolution, and will earnestly and humbly beg of God to help me in temptations, and to keep me from sin. I will be diligent in looking after my children and servants, so as to keep them from the danger of sin, and I will perform all my works with a good intention for God's sake, in order that, as I am now in the state of grace, not the least of them may be unrewarded. Let this, then, my dear brethren, be your final resolution; be faithful to it until death. Rather death than sin! According to the advice of the wise Ecclesiasticus, "Have pity on thy own soul, pleasing God."¹ If you have no reverence for the great God, who is present everywhere, who sees everything you do, and whom you insult and offend; if the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, which you trample underfoot, can make no impression on your heart; if you feel no compassion for your loving Saviour, whose death, as the Apostle says, you renew by every mortal sin

¹ Miserere animæ tuæ placens Deo.—Eccclus. xxx. 24.

you commit; if you have no regard for your guardian angel, whom you sadden, and, as it were, drive away from you whenever you offend God; then at least have pity on your own soul, which you injure so grievously, so irretrievably, and for eternity, by bringing it into the night of sin. Be faithful, then, to your resolution; rather death than sin! O Almighty God of infinite goodness, give to me and all present the powerful help of Thy grace, that we may keep this resolution to the end of our lives. Amen.

THIRD SERMON.

ON THE INJURIOUS TREATMENT OF WHICH THE SINNER WHO DEFERS REPENTANCE IS GUILTY TOWARDS GOD.

Subject.

To intend to do penance and be converted, not now, but later on, is to treat most injuriously the good God who invites us again to return to Him.—*Preached on the second Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Cœperunt simul omnes excusare.—Luke xiv. 18.

“And they began all at once to make excuse.”

Introduction.

They must have been very unmannerly and uncourteous people who, being invited in such a friendly way to a magnificent banquet, paid no attention to the invitation. Enraged at their conduct, he who invited them excluded them forever from his table. “But I say unto you, that none of those men that were invited shall taste of my supper.” Do not most men, my dear brethren, act in the same way towards their Lord and God? He invites us to His Supper, in which He gives us His own Flesh and Blood as our food and drink; and yet, how many there are who make excuses and despise that Precious Banquet, by going but seldom to holy Communion? He invites us to the heavenly marriage-feast, that we may share in all imaginable joys with Him forever; but how many there are who excuse themselves and refuse to come, because they prefer to indulge in forbidden

pleasures and to satisfy themselves with the husks of swine, and thus renounce all right to heaven. He still daily invites sinners, his hated and sworn enemies, to His grace and friendship. He calls upon them to be converted and do penance, and promises that He will readily forgive them everything, so that they may not be excluded from His heavenly marriage-feast; but how many there are who make excuses, and reject the proffered grace by constantly deferring repentance and conversion, by putting off, to some indefinite time, the Lord who invites them in such a friendly manner, and by saying always, by way of answer, I will come, but not now: later on; I will do penance and be converted, but not immediately; at some other time! An insulting and injurious treatment, than which none worse can be imagined. This I undertake to prove to-day; and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

To intend to do penance and be converted, not now, but later on, is a great injustice towards the good God, who invites us again to return to Him. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

Christ Jesus! who hast said that Thou camest, not to call the just, but sinners, call out to-day with Thy powerful and penetrating voice to my heart and to the hearts of all sinners, that we may be attentive to Thy invitation, and may be converted to Thee at once! Prostrate at Thy feet, we beg this of Thee through the merit of Thy dearest Mother Mary, and the intercession of our holy guardian angels, that none of us may be amongst the number of those uncourteous guests who, "began all at once to make excuse."

Not to receive at once the grace and pardon offered by a great lord whom you have offended, is to treat him most injuriously.

If one of your equals, nay, one of inferior condition to you, who has offended and insulted you, were to come to you, and earnestly and humbly to implore your pardon; would you refuse to listen to him, turn your back on him, and shut the door in his face? If you did so, you would act very wrongly, and in direct opposition to the Christian law. For Christ our Saviour most earnestly and emphatically commands us to return good for evil, and instead of seeking revenge, to behave towards our worst enemies with meekness, friendliness, and charity, nay, even, as He says in the Gospel of St. Matthew, to be the first to ask pardon: "If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee; leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be

reconciled to thy brother.”¹ Mark those words; you must go to him yourself, and at once, and leave your offering until you are reconciled to your brother. And would it not be far worse for you to refuse to lay aside your hatred and enmity against one whom you have grossly offended, and who now humbly begs to be restored to your friendship? But if a great lord or prince, who is not at all in need of you, who has little to gain from your friendship, and nothing to fear from your enmity, and on whose favor you depend for your very livelihood; if he, I say, after having been offended by you, should, through sheer goodness and pity, either in his own person, or by an authorized ambassador, offer you full pardon and forgiveness, begging you at the same time to accept his offer at once; would you obstinately turn your back on him, and say that it does not suit you now to regain his friendship, that you do not want it yet, and that he must come some other time? Where is the child, with the least glimmer of reason, who will not condemn such conduct as most injurious?

Now, O sinner, look at the matter reasonably! Who is He who comes to you, calls and invites you, wishing to be reconciled to you and to be your friend again? Is He your prince and sovereign? Oh, if He were, how you would bow and scrape before Him! you certainly would not remain seated in His presence if He came to you; you would not even wait His coming, but would run out to meet Him, and in every possible way try to ingratiate yourself into His favor. But He is an infinitely greater Lord than your prince; before Him all the kings and emperors of earth, as well as the poorest beggar and simplest peasant, must bend the knee, and humbly beg of Him their daily bread. In a word, since we are unable to express His might and magnificence, He is the infinitely great God Himself, before whose Majesty the angels in heaven, the devils in hell, and all creatures on and under the earth tremble with reverence; whose calls and invitations even lifeless elements must obey; who makes a sign to the stars, and they are ready to do His bidding, as the Prophet Baruch says: “He that sendeth forth light, and it goeth; and hath called it, and it obeyeth Him with trembling. And the stars have given light in their watches, and rejoiced; they were called, and they said, here

He who invites the sinner to His friendship is God.

¹ Si ergo offers munus tuum ad altare, et ibi recordatus fueris, quia frater tuus habet alliquid adversum te: relinque ibi munus tuum ante altare, et vade prius reconciliari fratri tuo.—Matt. v. 23, 24.

we are; and with cheerfulness they have shined forth to Him that made them. This is our God, and there shall no other be accounted of in comparison of Him;"¹ who says to the raging sea: "Hitherto thou shalt come, and shalt go no further, and here thou shalt break thy swelling waves;"² nor dare it in the least disobey the voice of its Creator, who ever, according to St. Paul, calls to the things that are not. He "calletH those things that are not, as those that are;"³ and at the sound of His voice creatures come forth out of nothing. This great Lord and God deigns to speak to you, O man, O miserable worm of the earth! He offers you His favor, grace, and friendship, which you have forfeited forever, and do you still hesitate to accept His offer? Is it not yet convenient for you to hearken to His invitation? Do you still say to Him: "Go and come again, and to-morrow I will give to Thee,"⁴ I do not wish to be your friend to-day?

Who has
been first
offended by
the sinner.

And what has He then done to you? Has He perhaps hurt or injured you, so that you think you have just reason for rejecting His proffered friendship, and deferring to be reconciled to Him? What harm has He done you? Harm! What good things do you possess that this generous God has not freely given you? Are you not, from the crown of your head to the sole of your foot, a proof of His liberality and bounty? Consider everything you have; from whom have you received it, if not from God? That you are, that you live, that you see, hear, feel, walk, stand, sit; for all that you have to thank Him most humbly. What reason, then, have you to be angry with Him any longer? But what am I saying? Angry with Him! It is God who has first been offended by you! "Behold," cries out St. Gregory in astonishment, "Behold, He Whom we have despised, calls us."⁵ He it is whose commands you have neglected, whose blood you have trampled under foot, whom you have time after time offended, insulted, despised, for such a miserable thing as your worthless vanity, for a breath of honor, for a wretched piece of money, for a brutal lust, for the sake of grat-

¹ Qui emittit lumen, et vadit; et vocavit illud, et obedit illi in tremore. Stellæ autem dederunt lumen in custodiis suis, et lætatae sunt; vocatae sunt, et dixerunt, adsumus; et luxerunt ei cum jucunditate, qui fecit illas. Hic est Deus noster, et non aestimabitur alius adversus eum.—Baruch iii. 33-36.

² Usque huc venies, et non procedes amplius, et hic confringes tumentes fluctus tuos.—Job xxxviii. 11.

³ Vocat ea, quæ non sunt, tamquam ea, quæ sunt.—Rom. iv. 17.

⁴ Vade et revertere; cras dabo tibi.—Prov. iii. 28.

⁵ Ecce ipse quem despeximus vocat nos.—St. Greg. hom. 43 in Evang.

ifying your anger and vindictiveness, or of indulging in gluttony and drunkenness, or for fear of displeasing, or for the sake of pleasing men through human respect: "He it is whom we have despised!" And He whom you have treated so insultingly, and who, therefore, has just cause to reject you, to call out to you in a far different voice, to send down fire from heaven on you, to smite you with His thunderbolts, and to call upon the demons of hell and all the creatures on earth to take vengeance on you at this very moment, He it is Who calls you to repentance! He, the great God, who was first offended by you, (O ye angels, what did you think of me, when I dared even to deliberate with myself as to whether I should offend this great God?) He who has been so often offended by you, calls you! (O angels, still more reason have you to wonder at this!) He is the first to come to you and to invite you to return to Him! And for what object? What will he do with you? If you saw at a distance a man whom you have treated as shamefully as you have your God you would tremble with fear, and try to avoid him, and with reason, too, for you would have just cause to fear his vengeance.

But your God, whom you have thus offended, comes to you, (do not fear, O sinner; do not run away from Him!) not to punish and condemn you as you deserve, but to invite you to return to His grace and friendship, and that He does with as much earnestness and patience, nay, even humility, as if He were in need of your favor. He seeks you out in His own person; He begs of you to return to Him by His servants, whom He has commissioned for that purpose, as St. Paul says: "For Christ, therefore, we are ambassadors, God, as it were, exhorting by us. For Christ we beseech you, be reconciled to God."¹ We beg and implore of you, oh, be converted now to God! He comes Himself and makes the same request of you. What else is the meaning of those good inspirations, those salutary thoughts? Why else is this life a vale of tears? Why does death await you, O sinner, and you know not when it will come? Why must you appear before a most strict judge at the very moment after death? Why is your conscience torn by remorse day and night, knowing, as you do, that you are in such a miserable state that, if death surprised you, you would be hurled into hell? What is the meaning of those inefficacious desires by which you

And this too He does, as it were, suppliantly.

¹ Pro Christo ergo legatione fungimur, tanquam Deo exhortante per nos. Obsecramus pro Christo, reconciliamini Deo.— II. Cor. v. 20.

wish to be like the good and pious, and to enjoy peace of conscience? What is all this, but the voice of God calling on you to repent? "Behold I stand at the gate, and knock; if any man shall hear My voice, and open to Me the door, I will come in to him." ¹ As Rupert remarks on those words, is not that to stand at the door, like a beggar who asks an alms of a rich man? ² You know, my dear brethren, how a poor man acts at the door of a rich miser. He knocks and begs for a piece of bread; but he has to ask two or three times before he gets an answer. Does the poor man go away then? Oh, no; he remains at the door, and cries out, in more imploring tones, "give me a piece of bread, for God's sake!" And at last he gets the usual pitiless answer: "I have nothing for you." What does he do then? He does not yet despair; he repeats his request, and although he has been told that there is nothing for him, he still waits and hopes that his very importunity will gain for him what he could not get through Christian charity. In the same way does the merciful God act at the door of the sinner's heart. He knocks over and over again, and although He gets no answer, He does not turn away. "I called, I stretched out My hand;" ³ I am still calling and entreating you! And what wilt Thou have, O my God? Be reconciled to Me; give Me back your heart, which you have withdrawn from Me, and fixed upon creatures; lay aside the hatred and anger with which you have hitherto persecuted Me, although I have never done anything to injure you. I am quite ready to forgive all you have done against Me, if you will only cease despising Me. Even if your sins outnumber the hairs of your head. "return to Me, and I will receive thee." ⁴ Do not let shame or fear of the deformity of your sins keep you back; I know well what you have done. "Thou hast prostituted thyself to many lovers." ⁵ "Nevertheless, return to Me, and I will receive thee;" I will forget all the insults you have offered Me, and will no longer remember your sins. "Therefore, at the least from this time, call to Me, 'Thou art my father,'" ⁶ and you shall be My dearest child, and I shall be to you as before, full of fatherly love and kindness, for I wish to have you with

¹ Ecce, sto ad ostium et pulso; si quis audierit vocem meam, et aperuerit mihi januam, intrabo ad illum.—Apoc. iii. 20.

² Illud simile est stanti ad ostium cujusdam divitis, et roganti.—Rupert l. 2, in Apoc.

³ Vocavi, extendi manum meam.—Prov. i. 24.

⁴ Revertere ad me, et ego suscipiam te.—Jerem. iii. 1.

⁵ Fornicata es cum amatoribus multis.—Ibid.

⁶ Ergo saltem amodo voca me, Pater meus.—Ibid. 4.

Me in heaven. "Wilt thou be angry forever, or wilt thou continue unto the end?"'

O my Lord and my God! what dost Thou say? Would it not satisfy Thy goodness, would it not be even too great a favor to me, wicked sinner that I am, if Thou wert graciously to permit me to approach Thee in all humility, in order to implore Thy pardon? I have sinned, not Thou! I have offended Thee, not Thou me! And yet Thou art the first to come and ask me for my friendship! Yes, my dear brethren, so great is His love, so burning His desire to pardon sinners; and therefore, in the Parables, He represents Himself to us sometimes as a shepherd who seeks the lost sheep over mountain and valley, through thistles and thorns, running after it with bleeding feet, and when He has found it, enticing it in the most loving manner to come to Him, and then bringing it back to the fold of His elect sheep with great rejoicing; and again, as a father, running out to meet his returning prodigal son, who has squandered away all his spiritual graces and gifts by leading a sensual and wicked life, and when He sees him afar off, naked and hungry, falling on his neck, embracing him as if he were his dearest child, and celebrating his return by inviting all his friends and neighbors to a feast.

A goodness and mercy on the part of God!

Wonderful goodness and mercy of my God! Thou, O Lord, art wonderful in all Thy works! The seraphim and all the heavenly spirits stand before Thy throne and veil their faces, because they cannot bear the splendor of Thy divine Majesty, nor fathom the depth of Thy infinite perfections; but there is nothing surprises me so much as this goodness and mercy of Thine! When I have once understood that Thou art necessarily the true God, that Thou art not subject to change, and that Thy greatness is incapable of increase, it is not difficult for me to see that Thou must be present in all places; when I have learned by faith that Thy wisdom is infinite. I am not surprised that in one glance Thou seest all things, present, past, and future; when I have been taught to adore Thy infinite power, that nothing can withstand, I am not astonished to hear that, by a mere act of Thy will, the mere breath of Thy lips, Thou hast created out of nothing the heavens and the earth, with all they contain. I tremble with fear at Thy strict justice, according to which Thou hast not spared even the angels, and hurlest into a lake of fire among the demons, to burn there forever, away from Thy face,

Which cannot be sufficiently admired.

¹ Numquid irasceris in perpetuum, aut perseverabis in finem?—Jerem. iii. 5.

the soul purchased by the Blood of Thy only Son, on account of its having consented to a single, momentary thought against Thy law; yet even that I can easily understand, when I consider the infinite greatness of Thy Majesty, worthy of all honor and love, which is insulted most grossly by every sin, and the obstinacy and inconceivable wickedness of the sinner who, in spite of Thee, wilfully and deliberately transgresses Thy well-known law for some worthless thing. But the more I know of Thy greatness, the more vividly faith represents to me Thy infinite perfections, the more, too, does my astonishment increase when I hear, read, and experience that Thou, O God, goest after a mere mortal; that Thou, a God of such greatness, so patiently, so forgivingly, so humbly goest in search of, and callest out after, and offerest pardon to, and most earnestly implorest to return to Thee, a poor miserable worm of the earth, of whom Thou art not at all in need, whose everlasting damnation would not in the least interfere with Thy infinite happiness, and by whom Thou hast first been offended; and this Thou askest of him as if it were a great and necessary favor to Thyself! The more I admire and praise this goodness and mercy of Thine, the more I, a poor miserable sinner, am in need of them, the less can I understand or fathom them. In this matter I must surrender my understanding, and confess with Thy servant, St. Lawrence Justinian, that, "he who tries to investigate the ineffable wealth of the divine mercy, must be overwhelmed by the very effort."¹

Hence it is an inconceivable discourtesy on the part of the sinner to defer accepting the divine invitation.

And yet there is another thing, which possibly is still more to be wondered at; to me, indeed, it would seem incredible, nay, impossible, if experience did not prove it to be true, and that is, that the man whom Thou, O great God, seekest, invitest, and implorest to return to Thee, will not come at once, disdains to hear Thy loving invitation, turns his back on Thee, and shuts the door in Thy face. Come some other time, he says to Thee, as if he were speaking to a beggar; I have nothing for Thee now; I know well, O God, what Thou wishest me to do; Thy desire is that I should abstain from sin; but it does not suit me to gratify Thy desire now; some other time, perhaps, I may do so, after having committed still more sin. Thy desire is that I should do penance and repent of my sins; but I will not do it now; later on I will see what I can do in that way. Thou implorest and entrest me to grant Thy request; but I prefer not to listen to

¹ Quisquis dominicæ miserationis ineffabilis voluerit investigare divitias, omnino in ipsa inquisitione succumbet.

Thee now; at some future time I may do so. Thou offerest me pardon, grace and favor, fatherly love, and Thy eternal kingdom of heaven; but I do not desire Thy favors now; come some other time. O insolence! what words can I find to express thy malice! O patience of my God, who bears to be thus ill-treated by a lump of earth, and bears it in silence, Thy goodness surpasses my understanding! O sinner, how can you turn away your God so discourteously? Do you not (and if you have a spark of decency left, you ought to consider this attentively) act with the greatest discourtesy towards your sovereign Lord? Do you not treat Him as you would some worthless man, who has neither power nor authority, and who is dependent on your favor for the very means of livelihood? And yet it is for your own interest, and not for His, that you should at once be freed from the miserable state of sin, from the imminent danger of eternal damnation. Have you any reason for continuing to offend your Lord and your God? Is it right and just for you to do so? Will you still sing the same old tune: I will do penance, but not now. some other time; I will be converted, but not at once; I will abandon sin and amend my life, but not immediately? Do you, I ask again, do you intend to give no other answer to your God when He calls you?

Then, if so, listen to what I am now going to say, and learn from it how grossly unjust your conduct is: I use the argument of St. Bernard. If you are determined to go on sinning, you either believe that God will forgive you later on, or you do not believe it. In the latter case, what madness it is for you, if you have any hope for escaping hell and going to heaven, not to be converted at once, since God now so generously offers to forgive you! What folly, to defer penance to a time when, as you maintain, you will have no grace to expect! But if you believe, as you pretend, and I know not on what grounds, that, in spite of your having offended Him for such a long time, God will yet pardon you, what an injustice it is, what unpardonable insolence, what diabolical malice on your part, to find an occasion for further sin in the very fact that should make you at once begin to love God above all things with your whole heart! Will you then continue to offend Him who has borne with you so long and so patiently, who is so mercifully willing to receive you again into His friendship, and to make you eternally happy with Himself in heaven?

And to continue to offend Him from whom he expects forgiveness afterwards.

And besides, is it not most unjust for you to steal away from Although he

is not sure
of the
future.

God the present time, which is the only time you are certain of, and which you are bound by countless titles to devote to His service, and to put Him off with the promise of a future, of which you are not certain of having a single moment at your disposal? You say that you will serve God hereafter; but who has told you that you will be alive then? And if you are not sure of the years, months, weeks, and days that are to come, why do you reserve them for the service of God, to whom you are bound to devote every moment of your life? Are you not simply trying to deceive the Almighty? does not your conduct show that you have not an earnest desire of heaven? In fact, you are paying with ready money the devil, who should not have the least claim on you, while you put off to an indefinite period the payment of the debt you owe to God, to whom everything you have belongs.

And even if
the future
were cer-
tain, he will
not leave off
sinning till
he is tired of
it.

But even supposing you were certain of the future, you still act most unjustly to God by intending to give Him only the remnant of a vicious life. You will do penance, be converted, amend your life, and serve God; but not until you have satisfied to the full your evil inclinations and sensual appetites. Then you give to God the time that you have left after having served the devil. Your soul was consecrated in holy Baptism as the temple and dwelling place of God, and you will allow Him to enter it only after the devil has occupied it for many years, and defiled it with all sorts of abominations? Your whole life should be spent in praising and blessing God, and you give the best part of it to the devil, while God must be satisfied with the miserable remnant, when you have neither desire, nor power, nor opportunity to sin any more? In that way you do not so much abandon sin as sin abandons you, as St. Augustine says: "your sins have left you; not you, your sins."¹ Suppose that two people are sitting gambling at night by the light of a candle; suddenly the candle goes out and they are obliged to give up their game, do they give it up because they do not care to play any longer? Not at all, but because they have no light; if they had another candle they would play away. O sinner, amend your life; cease offending God, you have insulted Him long enough! What is your answer? Oh, I will amend by and by, when my appetites are sated, when my youth is passed, when old age comes on, when that person is dead or gone away from me, when the occasion is removed, when sickness comes on and

¹ Peccata te dimiserunt, non tu illa.—S. Aug. Hom. 41.

death is at hand; then I will give up sinning and will be converted and serve God. That is to say, that you will allow the torch of your life to be burnt out, and not amend your ways until you are on your death bed, when you will have neither power nor desire to sin any more; and you will not begin to serve God until you are wearied and worn out in the service of the devil.

If Cain was cursed because he selected the worst of his fruits to offer as a sacrifice to God, what sort of a curse will you then deserve, O man, since you offer to God the worst part of your life? What would you think of a man who would offer a prince nothing to eat but soiled bread crumbs, the refuse of meat and vegetables, and things of the kind that are given only to the dogs? Ah, my Lord and my God, there are many men who treat Thee, if I dare say so, like a dog! They eat the kernel themselves and give Thee the shell; the young and tender flesh they keep to satisfy their own greed, while the old worthless bones are thrown to Thee! The sweet wine of youth is poured out as a libation to the devil, while Thou must be satisfied with the sour dregs! Ah, far different, O Lord, is Thy treatment of us! There was not a moment of Thy long eternity in which Thou didst not think of us and love us! Thy whole life, O Jesus, was spent for our salvation; all Thy thoughts, words, and actions, Thy passion and death, were for our welfare, and Thou hast already prepared an eternal banquet of joys in heaven, as a reward for the small service we can render Thee here! And how do we act towards Thee? If we had an eternity to live on earth, we should in strict justice spend every moment of it in loving Thee, nor could we even then make a sufficient return for the love Thou hast shown us; and yet, though our lives are so short, and so uncertain that we are not sure of even a quarter of an hour, we are unwilling to spend any part of them in Thy service, except some future years, or it may be days or hours!

O sinners, do you not yet see how unjustly you act when you refuse to hearken to the voice of God, Who now calls and invites you, and put off your repentance and conversion? Oh, how I fear lest His goodness and mercy may soon be turned into stern vengeance! He has fixed a certain limit to all our works, as well as to His own inspirations and graces; perhaps He is calling to-day for the last time; perhaps He has determined, if you still continue to despise Him after this exhortation, to deal with you as you deal with Him. Hear the threat He utters by the Psal-

What fearful injustice on the part of the sinner!

He has therefore reason to fear that God will reject him hereafter.

mist David: "They shall return at evening, and shall suffer hunger like dogs;"¹ you have treated Me like a dog, you have given Me the very worst part of your lives, and have turned Me away from your doors like a poor beggar; but the time will come when I too shall treat you like dogs; when the evening approaches I shall see you chained up like dogs; I shall hear your moans and howls and shrieks when the dread of death shall be upon you; and what will you have to expect from Me then? My special grace and assistance to free you from the state of sin? No, they are not for such as you! I will give you the same answer that you so often gave Me; go away, I will say, I do not wish to give you My grace now, I will behold you suffering the pangs of hunger in hell like dogs, and I will rejoice thereat. "Because I called, and you refused; I stretched out My hand, and there was none that regarded;"² "I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock."³ I have so frequently offered you My grace, but you refused it then; I offered you pardon of your sins, but you did not accept it; my eternal kingdom, but you had no desire for it; and now I, whom you have so despised and ill-treated; I, who have before now wept over your miseries; I, who have shed My Blood for you; I, who have given My life for you; I, who have so often fruitlessly entreated and exhorted you, "I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock," when the demons, to whom you are now giving your lives, will carry you, body and soul, into hell; I will laugh, when you are howling in exterior darkness; I will laugh, when you are burning in the lake of fire; I will laugh, when you are tortured with an unsupportable stench; I will laugh, when you are calling upon death, that will not come to you for all eternity; I will laugh and will mock. O merciful Saviour, who didst come to call not the just, but sinners, what a bitter laugh is that for Thee! And wilt Thou then rejoice at our eternal destruction? Certainly, I will laugh at it, "because I called, and you refused."

Conclusion
and res-
olution to
repent at
once.

But, O my good God, I will come to Thee! Behold me prostrate at Thy feet, not so much through fear of Thy just anger and displeasure, as through love of the goodness and mercy with which Thou hast waited for me so long, and called me so often! It would be a most shameful thing for me to turn Thee again away from my door, and to despise Thy proffered grace! Thou,

¹ Convertentur ad vesperam, et famem patientur ut canes.—Ps. lviii. 15.

² Quia vocavi et renuistis; extendi manum meam, et non fuit qui aspiceret.—Prov. i. 24.

³ Ego quoque in interitu vestro ridebo et subsannabo. —Ibid. 26.

O great God, holdest out Thy hand to me, a poor mortal; shall I still refuse to take it? Thou, Whom I have so often offended, desirest reconciliation, shall I then still continue to hate and persecute Thee? I have given so few hours of my life to Thy service, but Thou art ready to forget all my ill treatment of Thee; shall I not then begin at once to love Thee? Or shall I still defer repentance and amendment? Oh, no, my most merciful God, I will follow the advice of Thy handmaid Judith, "For as much as the Lord is patient, let us be penitent for this same thing, and with many tears let us beg His pardon;"¹ yes, O Lord, even because Thou art good, and callest me, will I do penance, and I will do it at once. Now I will begin what I should have done long ago, to serve Thee with all my strength! I am sincerely sorry that I have acted so unjustly to Thee hitherto, that I have so grossly offended Thee, my merciful God, that I have so often closed my ears to Thy invitations. Never again, O Lord, will I treat Thee so vilely! From this moment forward I bid adieu to all those people, to all those worldly goods and pleasures, that have hitherto kept me from serving Thee! And Thou, O Jesus, who receivest sinners, receive me too in Thy mercy, now that I am filled with sorrow and repentance. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the time of a Jubilee.

Text.

Pro Christo legatione fungimur, tanquam Deo exhortante per nos. Obsecramus pro Christo, reconciliamini Deo.—II. Cor. v. 20.

"For Christ therefore we are ambassadors, God, as it were, exhorting by us. For Christ we beseech you, be reconciled to God."

When the great God speaks, then certainly must man be ready to listen. When the sovereign Lord desires and asks for anything by His inspirations, then, indeed, should man at once obey and grant His request, especially when what He asks is for our own good. My dear brethren, "for Christ we are ambassadors, God as it were exhorting you" by our voice, and we beg and implore of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, "be reconciled to God." Sinners should make peace with the God whom they have offended; that most desirable peace, in which our own conscience gives us testimony that we are children of God, now

¹ Quia patiens Dominus est, in hoc ipso pœniteamus, et indulgentiam ejus fuis lacrymis postulemus.—Judith viii. 14.

especially, since, by making peace with heaven, we wish to obtain that peace among Christian potentates which is so ardently and so generally desired, and to be freed from the greatest of all temporal calamities, the scourge of war. The conditions of this peace that we are to make with God are very favorable and advantageous to us; and therefore any Christian who does not profit by them, and sincerely repent of his sins, must indeed be an obdurate and a hopeless sinner. "For Christ we are ambassadors," God exhorting you by our words, and in His name we beg of you, "be reconciled to God;" make peace with Him at once! Mark those words; it is God who exhorts you by us; it is God who offers to make peace with you; He is the first to implore you, as it were suppliantly, to be reconciled to Him. To refuse Him, to say to Him, as some do, I will repent, but not now, later on, would be a gross and intolerable injury, as I shall now show. My Plan of Discourse then is: To desire to make peace with God, not now, but at some future time, is most unjust towards the good God, who is the first to offer to make peace with us. Such is the whole subject of the present exhortation. O God of mercy, grant that there be no sinner so hard-hearted, so discourteous, as not to hearken to Thee at once, and to do penance! This we beg of Thee, etc.

FOURTH SERMON.

**ON THE LITTLE HOPE OF SALVATION THERE IS FOR THE SINNER
WHO DEFERS REPENTANCE.**

Subject.

The sinner's hope of salvation, when founded on future repentance, is, if not a thoroughly false hope, at least a treacherous one, generally speaking, and always a presumptuous one; therefore the sinner should do penance at once.—*Preached on the third Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Gaudium erit coram angelis Dei super uno peccatore pœnitentiam agente.—Luke xv. 10.

"There shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance."

Introduction.

Last Sunday I showed how unjustly sinners act towards God by refusing to hear His calls and by deferring their conversion. And now I ask, how is it with themselves? Do they despair of salvation? Have they given up all hopes of heaven? If you put the question to them, they will all answer: No, God forbid; we hope to save our souls, and to be happy in heaven. And on what do they ground their hopes? On repentance and the amendment of their lives? O sinners, if that is the case, then your hopes rest on the one sure foundation! Hear what He who seeks and receives sinners assures you of, and be consoled: "there shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance!" Yes, they answer, it is on that assurance I depend. Come, then, at once! Do penance; amend your lives; run to your Shepherd, who is stretching out His arms to you! Certainly, they say; but not yet; later on. Oh! then I see that the foundation of your hopes is future penance? But I tell you now, by way of paternal warning, and I shall prove to you that

Plan of Discourse.

The sinner's hope of salvation, when founded on future repentance, if not a thoroughly false hope, is at least a treacherous one, generally speaking, and always a presumptuous one. Such is the whole subject of to-day's exhortation.

Therefore, do penance and amend your sinful lives at once, if you wish to give joy to the angels and to ensure your salvation. Such shall be the conclusion. Give us Thy powerful grace there. to, O merciful Saviour, who receivest sinners: we beg it of Thee through the intercession of Mary and the holy guardian angels.

I have still time enough; I am young and strong; I will repent by-and-by, confess my sins, and serve God faithfully. Such is the cry of most sinners. You may hear it from blasphemers and slanderers; from the impure, the unjust, the vindictive; from drunkards, and from all who are not earnestly resolved to give up their accustomed vices. Thus does the hellish hound seek to change the birds he has caught into crows and ravens, that always croak out, "*cras! cras!*" to-morrow! to-morrow! But you, who croak in that way, hear the threat that God utters by the Prophet Sophonias. Speaking of such sinners, the Prophet imagines himself to be walking through the streets,

The sinner who trusts his salvation to future penance, builds on a very treacherous foundation:

listening to all sorts of birds singing in the different houses, when over the door of one house he sees a raven; O unlucky house! he cries out; it is all up with you! you will soon fall to ruin! "The voice of the singing-bird in the window, the raven on the upper post;" and what follows? "I will consume her strength."¹ I will take away all her strength, so that she shall go to ruin. Sinner! says St. Augustine, you are living at ease in vice; there is a singing-bird in the open window; you are often warned and exhorted to do penance and be converted to God, and you cry out: Not now! some other time! "*cras! cras!*" There is the raven's croak over the door of your heart. "I tell you, that, as long as you utter that croak, you are hastening to destruction."²

Namely, on the future, of which he cannot promise himself a moment.

For, tell me now, on what do you ground your hopes of salvation? On the penance, you say, that I will do. And when will you do it? Oh, by-and-by, you answer. But you have said the same thing before, and have often repeated it, and yet the time for doing penance seems as far as ever! It will come, you say, sooner or later. O blind mortal that you are! You speak as if you carried the future about in your pocket! Tell me, in God's name, how long have you to live, how much time have you still left to do penance? Can you say that you are sure of a year, a month, a day, nay, even of an hour? You know nothing whatever about it, for you dare not contradict the God of truth, who says to you and to me, "watch ye therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour."³ "Be you then also ready; for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come."⁴ Whether you are old or young, weak or strong, sick or in good health, you know not whether you have a day or an hour of life still left.

For God can deprive him of life at any moment.

The end of life, says the philosopher Seneca, should always be before the eyes of young and old; "for our lives will not be demanded of us, as if they were an interest due at a fixed date."⁵ And how then? Let us hear what St. Paul says. "Keep the good thing committed to thy trust;"⁶ be careful of the deposit that God has entrusted to your keeping. There is a great difference between a deposit, and interest that has to be paid. The

¹ Vox cantantis in fenestra, corvus in superliminari; quoniam attenuabo robur ejus.—Sophon. ii. 14.

² Ecce tibi dico cum facis vocem corvinam, occurrit tibi ruina.—S. Aug., serm. 164. de tempore.

³ Vigilate itaque quia nescitis diem neque horam.—Matt. xxv. 13.

⁴ Et vos estote parati, quia qua hora non putatis, Filius hominis veniet.—Luke xii. 40.

⁵ Non enim citamur ex censu.

⁶ Bonum depositum custodi.—II. Tim. i. 14.

interest is due at a certain time, before which it cannot be demanded; whereas a deposit has no fixed time, the lawful owner can claim it whenever he pleases. This life is not an interest, but a deposit, so that there is not an hour in which one can be certain that it will not be demanded of him. If it were an interest, thou, O sinner, you might say, I am still young and strong; my time is not come to pay the interest and to die; and you might have some excuse for your daring hope that you will do penance hereafter, be reconciled to God, and amend your sinful life. But since it is a deposit entrusted to your care, which the Lord and Master of life can demand of you in a hundred different ways, at His pleasure, without giving you the least warning, how can you dare to think and to say, I will repent and amend by-and-by, at some future time? If the Lord of your life were this night to give power to the demons to strangle you, you would not be the first to whom that has happened. If you were now suddenly struck dead with a fit of apoplexy, you would not be the first to die in that way. If you were this evening to be pierced by a sword as you walk through the streets, or to be killed by a chance shot, you would only be the victim of an accident that has already caused the death of many who were of the same opinion as you are now, and who deferred repentance. Do you not see, then, how weak, treacherous, and uncertain is the foundation on which you build your hopes of eternal happiness, namely, the uncertain future time, which is not yours, which you cannot dispose of in the least, and which may never be for you?

And meanwhile you are now actually in that miserable, unhappy state, in which, if the Lord were to take the deposit away from you, you are sure of being unhappy with the demons for all eternity. Where are your prudence and common-sense? How can you be at ease in that state? Remarkable is the fable related by St. Cyril: A sailor on the high seas was once very desirous of coming to land; he saw far off what he thought to be an island; he made for it at once, disembarked, and lit a fire to warm himself and to cook some food; but in a few minutes the island began to move, and he, thinking that it was on account of an earth-quake, betook himself immediately to his ship. But when he looked round, he saw the supposed island swimming about, and then knew that it was an enormous whale. Enraged at being thus deceived, he cried out to it: "Why have you thus betrayed me by pretending to be an island?" "And why," asked

Therefore he acts foolishly and presumptuously; shown by a fable.

the whale in return, "did you trust to me, who am not fixed to any one spot?" See how foolish and presumptuous you are, O sinner, to trust to a treacherous future your repentance and your eternal happiness. The sailor was excusable, because he thought the whale was really an island; but you are building on what you know very well to be unstable ground that is always flitting away. The sailor had his ship to fly to for refuge; but your faith teaches you for certain that, if your foundation once begins to move, that is, when the time of life is past for you, you have no other means left to escape eternal ruin. The sailor saw before his eyes that which he thought to be an island, and he knew that he could land on it; while you are utterly blind as to the future, and know not whether you will ever see it or not; and yet you trust to it your eternal life. Can there be any greater folly and presumption?

By deferring penance, he makes it more difficult.

But suppose that that indefinite future time really arrives, do you know that you will then do penance, amend your life, and be converted? You know what you have now determined to do; but who has told you that you will do it when the time comes? I now say to you, repent of and detest your sins, and abstain from them in future. No, you answer, not yet. And why not yet? Oh, it is too hard for me now; too difficult altogether to give up my love for that creature, to abstain from that pleasure, that bad habit. And if that is too difficult now, what will it be afterwards, when you will have spent a long time in the indulgence of that foolish love, that sensual passion, that bad habit? Is it likely to be easier for you to abstain from it then, than now? If you will but use your common-sense in the matter, you will see that your difficulty will increase more and more.

Shown by a simile.

"A long sickness is troublesome to the physician," says the Holy Ghost by the wise Ecclesiasticus; "the physician cutteth off a short sickness."¹ That is to say, a long-continued sickness wearies out the physician; while he has no trouble in curing a slight one. The meaning of this is evident. The physician is called in all haste to the sick man; as usual he feels his pulse at once, and notices a great increase of inward heat. Where do you feel the pain? he asks the sick man. Oh, answers the latter, over my whole body. This is a serious matter, thinks the other; it must be a case of violent fever. When, he asks further, did you feel ill first? Yesterday, is the answer; I knew there was

¹ *Languor prolixior gravat medicum; brevem languorem præcidit medicus.*—Ecclesi. x. 11, 12.

something wrong, because I had no appetite for my meals. Oh, then, if it is only since yesterday that you are ill, we will soon have you all right again. It is well for you that you sent for me in time. He is called to another sick person, whom he finds to be quite worn out, weak, and languid. Oh, he thinks, this is a bad sign! How long has he been ill? he asks those who are in attendance. He has now been ill for a long time, is the answer; we have tried all sorts of remedies; but nothing has done him any good. Ah, my good friends, says the physician then, there is no help for him now; he had better make his will, for he will never recover. But can you not prescribe something for him? Certainly I can, but to what purpose? The disease is an inveterate one; it has eaten into the marrow of his bones; it might have been cured if the remedy had been taken in time; but there is no chance now; it would take a miracle to save him. See how difficult it is to heal an illness of long standing, which, if it had been attended to in the beginning, might have been easily cured.

The Holy Ghost applies all this to the moral maladies of the soul. A man commits a mortal sin through natural weakness and frailty, or by being careless in a dangerous occasion, or because he is overcome by some violent temptation; he commits it two or three times, and even oftener. Alas! he is already in a dangerous and fatal illness. But what does it take to cure him of it? A single thought prompted by his uneasy conscience. My God, he says to himself, what have I done! A single good inspiration of God or of his holy guardian angel, to remind him that he has lost heaven, and deserved hell; the hearing a sermon in which his conscience is touched, so that he begins to think of the wretched state in which he is; any of these remedies is quite enough to cure him, to move him to earnest repentance and detestation of his sin, with a firm resolution never to commit it again; because his sin has not yet become inveterate, nor grown to a habit. There you have a case in which the cure is effected at once by the first remedy that God applies, and that the sick person takes without delay. But the sinner who continues in vice year after year; the unchaste man who has been for a long time wallowing in the filth of his unholy passions; the unjust man who has been steadily enriching himself by usurious and unlawful practices; the drunkard of long standing, accustomed to cursing and swearing; these and such as these, who have often confessed their sins, but not amended

The ordinary means are generally of little avail with an inveterate sinner.

their lives, they have now to return to God by sincere repentance; they must give up forever their sensual pleasure and accustomed vices, and live chastely, justly, soberly, and holily. Oh, how troublesome and difficult they will find it! God may give them an inspiration, their good angel may speak to their hearts, all the preachers in the world may exhort them, but it is all to no purpose; their sin is inveterate; it is a disease that has for a long time been eating into their vitals; remedies have been prescribed and forced on them often enough already; but no cure has been effected, for they have lost their power on inveterate sinners, and if God does not, so to speak, work an evident miracle of grace in their behalf, there is no hope for them.

As we see
in the traitor
Judas.

When has the world ever seen a more experienced physician of souls than Our Lord Jesus Christ? How many great sinners there were who followed Him, how many whom He sought out Himself; and He cured them all! The first word of warning He spoke, cured James and John of their ambitious desire to have the two first places in His kingdom. The first call He gave Matthew, who was then a public sinner, cured him of injustice so effectually, that he left all he had and followed Christ. The incredulous Thomas was cured by the first touch. A single look of His was enough to make Peter weep bitterly for having denied Him; and the first inspiration and ray of light that Magdalene, a public sinner, received, cured her of the vice of impurity. But none of the remedies that He applied to Judas was successful; so that the latter died impenitent and despairing. Whence arose the difference? The malady of the former was either recently contracted, or else they at once took the prescribed remedies, and did penance; Judas, on the contrary, had indulged his avaricious desires too long, and his disease had become inveterate. For, long before he betrayed his Master into the hands of his enemies for thirty pieces of silver, he was, as the Evangelist says, "a thief,"¹ and therefore he murmured at the waste of the precious ointment which Magdalene poured over Our Lord's head and feet. And what excellent opportunities he had of correcting that vice! He was in daily intercourse with Christ, the Son of God, he heard His salutary instructions and exhortations, and saw in Him a model of perfect poverty; but nothing could induce him to amend his life. How lovingly and tenderly Christ spoke to him at the Last Supper, through a desire of making him enter into himself and repent! Our Lord

¹ Fur erat.—John xii. 6.

even washed and kissed his feet, fed him with His own flesh and blood, and said to him publicly, as a salutary warning, "one of you is about to betray Me."¹ The other apostles were very much troubled at this, and began to ask Him, "Is it I Lord?"² Am I the treacherous apostle who is to commit such a crime? Judas alone kept silent, nor was he in the least disturbed, until Our Lord at last plainly alluded to him. "He that dippeth his hand with Me in the dish," He said, "he shall betray Me. . . . but woe to that man by whom the Son of man shall be betrayed."³ Better would it have been for that man, if he had never been born! At last Judas asked Him: "Is it I Rabbi?" He saith to him: "Thou hast said it;"⁴ you are the man. And yet the wicked man thought it too soon to do penance. While he was actually accomplishing his treason in the garden of Gethsemani, Our Lord kissed him, called him friend and again warned him. "Friend, whereto art thou come?"⁵ He said. Who would not think that the most hardened heart would have been softened at these words? But no; they had no effect on the traitor. At last, when he saw that Jesus was really condemned to death, Judas wished to repent. "Then Judas . . . repenting himself, brought back the thirty pieces of silver, saying: 'I have sinned, in betraying innocent blood.'"⁶ But his repentance was too late to be sincere; "he went and hanged himself with an halter."⁷ "Useless, indeed," says St. John Chrysostom, "is the penance that is too long deferred!"

Now, O sinner, what has become of the hopes of salvation that you built on the future? Your soul is now dangerously ill. "Wilt thou be made whole?"⁸ I ask you, as Our Lord asked the infirm man in the Gospel. You have a salutary remedy at hand in the sacrament of Penance, and you have been often exhorted to have recourse to it, but your answer has always been: "No, I do not want that remedy yet; it is too severe; I find it too hard to free myself from my illness; there is still time; by-and-by I will take the remedy, and be cured." But wait till that by-and-by comes, and you will find that it will then be too late; for it will be far more difficult for you to do penance then, than now.

And in the end he will not do penance, at all.

¹ Unus vestrum me traditurus est.—Matt. xxvi. 21. ² Numquid ego sum, Domine?—Ibid. 22.

³ Qui intingit mecum manum in aproside, hic me tradet . . . vae autem homini illi per quem Filius hominis tradetur.—Ibid. 23, 24.

⁴ Numquid ego sum, Rabbi? Ait illi: tu dixisti.—Ibid. 25.

⁵ Amice, ad quid venisti?—Ibid. 50.

⁶ Poenitentia ductus retulit triginta argentes . . . dicens: peccavi, tradens sanguinem justum.—Matt. xxvii. 3, 4.

⁷ Abiens, laqueo se suspendit.—Ibid. 5.

⁸ Vis sanus fieri?—John v. 6.

And even if, like Judas, you had an inefficacious desire to do penance, the justice of God, who will be wearied with waiting for you so long, will withhold from you the grace and the opportunity of repenting, of which you have made yourself unworthy. "Woe to them that are with child, and that give suck in those days," says Our Lord Jesus Christ.¹ Woe to those who are always full of inefficacious desires to do good works, and who never try to carry those desires into effect! Their good intentions will all come to naught at last. And such will be the case with all those who defer repentance from year to year. The Prophet Job says of such people: "His heart shall be as hard as a stone."² He may in the end try to make his confession; but it will be a cold and dead confession, without true supernatural sorrow, without a firm resolution of amendment, and his heart will remain as hard as a stone that nothing can soften.

Shown by
figures from
Holy Scrip-
ture.

In the Book of Exodus God publishes the following law: If a Hebrew was sold as a slave, he should have his liberty at the end of six years; but if he was contented with his position, and did not wish to be set at liberty, he had to remain a slave all his life. "And if the servant shall say: 'I love my master and my wife and children, I will not go out free;' his master shall bring him to the gods, (that is, to the judges and chiefs of the people,) and he shall be set to the door and the posts, and he shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall be his servant forever."³ A strange, and, as it might seem, a useless law; for who would be so foolish as to choose slavery in preference to freedom? Do you know, O sinner, who is guilty of that folly? You are, and so are all those who, being in the state of sin, could be converted to God by doing penance, and defer doing it. By mortal sin you have sold yourself as a bond slave to the devil; how long are you now bearing that galling yoke? The good God offers you now, as He has often done before, the grace to free yourself from this slavery, and to regain the glorious freedom of His children. He says to you, in the words of St. Paul: "Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation;"⁴ return to Me; do penance, and amend your life! But you go on refusing the proffered grace; you put off the Almighty to some

¹ *Vae autem prægnantibus et nutrientibus in illis diebus.*—Matt. xxiv. 19.

² *Cor ejus indurabitur tanquam lapis.*—Job xli. 15.

³ *Quodsi dixerit servus: diligo dominum meum, et uxorem ac liberos; non egrediar liber; offeret eum dominus diis, et applicabitur ad ostium et postes, perforabitque aurem ejus subula; et erit ei servus in sæculum.*—Exod. xxi. 5, 6.

⁴ *Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile, ecce nunc dies salutis.*—11. Cor. vi. 2.

future time, which will perhaps never come for you. You are satisfied with your slavery; you think and say, "I love my master," I cannot give up that creature, and therefore I do not desire freedom. Oh, woe to you! what will become of you? By divine permission, your master, the devil, will pierce your ears as a sign of perpetual slavery; that is to say, he will make you deaf to all good inspirations and exhortations; God will withdraw His special graces from you, so that you shall not be able to do penance; for repentance will then become so difficult for you, that, humanly speaking, it will be an impossibility for you to be sincerely converted to God. And, indeed, this is only a just punishment for abusing the patience of the Almighty. You do not wish to be free? He will say: very well, then; remain in the slavery of the devil, and be his slave for all eternity! Such shall be the end of the presumptuous hope of eternal salvation that you have hitherto based on the future time, saying: "I wish to go to heaven, and therefore I will do penance and amend my life by-and-by."

But, you think, I hope it will not be so with me. There were many great sinners at all times in the world, and there are a great many still, who have done just as I am doing, and they were sincerely converted at last, were received again by a merciful God, and gained eternal happiness. David was guilty of adultery and murder, and had the guilt of those sins on his soul for some years, before he thought of repentance, and he is now in heaven. Manasses was converted after having spent forty-five years in idolatry, sacrilege, murder, and tyranny. Magdalene was converted after having led, almost from her youth, a luxurious, scandalous, and sinful life, and became a saint. Matthew became an apostle after having been a usurer. Zachaeus was received by Our Lord, after having been a public and notorious sinner, guilty of many acts of injustice; and there are countless examples of a similar kind. Why should I have less to hope than they had from the infinite mercy of God? At some future time I intend to imitate them and to save my soul. And do you again base your miserable hope on what happened to others? Have you forgotten what I said to you a few minutes ago? All the sinners you mention repented at once, as soon as they were enlightened by the grace of God, and had their eyes opened to their wickedness; they did not, like you, defer repentance to an indefinite period after having become sensible of the miserable state in which they were.

Useless to appeal to the example of other sinners who were converted at last.

For he knows not if he will act like them.

But supposing even that some great sinners like yourself were truly converted, and saved their souls after having deferred penance, (although you cannot be certain in any particular case, since you cannot see the hearts of the penitents, whether their sorrow is sincere and supernatural, or not; it is true that many sinners like you go to confession; they all do so during Paschal time, if they are Catholics; you have done so too, and perhaps more than once a year; but, God help us! what miserable confessions those are which are not followed by any amendment!) still, I say, granted that such sinners were truly converted, have you on that account any grounds for believing that the same thing will happen to you? Is there any one who can tell you that for certain?

Most people like him do not. Shown by an example.

Another thing, too, you must not forget; for one like you, who is converted and saves his soul, there are a hundred who never repent sincerely and who are lost forever, because, as they have rejected the lights that were bestowed on them, and neglected to avail themselves of the opportunities of grace given them, so, by a just judgment of God, they are afterwards deprived of those lights and opportunities. Henry Graun writes of a usurer who was often tortured by remorse of conscience on account of his wicked and un-Christian mode of life, and was repeatedly exhorted by others to give it up, but he used always to say, like you: "Certainly, I will give it up, and do penance, for I am not so foolish as to lose my soul for the sake of temporal things; I will amend, but not now; by-and-by, some other time, I shall have a better opportunity; there is no danger yet, etc." He fell sick; a zealous priest warned him of his state, and exhorted him to do penance and make restitution. But where was his "by-and-by" then? After remaining speechless for a long time, he at last cried out, in a loud voice: "O penance, where art thou? I cannot repent now, because, when I might have done so, I refused."¹ And having said these words, he breathed his last.

Confirmed by another example.

There is a well-known incident related in the "History of Treves" of a certain commandant, who heard in a dream, on three successive nights, the words: "you will die during the siege."² As he saw no sign whatever of a siege, he tried to put the matter out of his head; but in spite of himself he felt uneasy, so he resolved to make a general confession of his whole life, and he

¹ O poenitentia, ubi es? De caetero poenitere non valeo, quia dum facere poenitentiam potui, nolui.

² Morieris in obsidione.

actually wrote down his sins with the greatest exactness. When on his way to one of our houses, to make his confession to the then rector, Father Duræus, a certain woman of his acquaintance nodded to him from her window, and invited him in (alas! what snares the devil knows how to lay for souls). Not wishing to appear uncourteous, the officer accepted the invitation, and went into the house, thinking that he would have time enough afterwards to make his confession. He remained in the house for some hours, when suddenly an alarm was raised in the street that the enemy was attacking the town. He rushed out, and mounted his horse in order to prepare to defend the place, but as he was busily engaged on the ramparts, he was hit by a stray bullet and killed on the spot. Unhappy, eternally unhappy man! If you had kept out of that house a few hours before, and had made your confession as you intended, you would have saved your soul! But, alas, with that "by-and-by" of yours, short a time as it was in coming, you ruined yourself forever.

Sinner, what do you think of this? May not the penance that you intend to do "by-and-by," be frustrated in the same manner? what will it then avail you to indulge a foolish hope built on such a treacherous foundation, in a matter that concerns your eternal bliss, or eternal misery? It may be that many great sinners like yourself were afterwards converted and saved their souls; but what better will you be for that, if you are amongst the far greater number of those who were deluded by their presumptuous hopes, and are now burning in hell without hope of release? think well over this matter now, for it is one that deserves your most careful consideration. Say to yourself: "I am now in the state of sin, and if God were to demand my life from me, as He may do at any moment, I should certainly be lost forever; He now, in His goodness, offers me His grace and invites me to do sincere penance, to amend my life, and to make sure of my eternal salvation. What may happen "by-and-by" I know not, nor do I know whether there will be a "by-and-by" for me, or whether I shall then do penance, or not. I certainly do not wish to go to hell for all eternity; my great desire is to be happy with God in heaven; therefore I must not, I cannot, I will not wait any longer, but will at once make use of the means that Jesus Christ now offers me to regain entrance into the fold of His chosen sheep." And what is that? "My sheep hear My voice," says the good

Conclusion
and exhortation to do
penance at
once.

¹ Oves meæ vocem meam audiunt.—John x. 27.

Shepherd. But when do they hear it? At all times, as often as He calls. And now I hear Him crying out: "To-day, if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts."¹ To-day God is calling on me to be converted to Him and to abandon my wicked life; therefore this very day I will hearken to Him, I will repent of my sins, confess them candidly, and make a firm resolution never to commit them again. If I do this, I may have a sure and well-grounded hope that the angels in heaven will rejoice over me, and that I shall hereafter rejoice with them for all eternity. Sinners, say with me, with all your hearts, so shall it be. Amen.

On Deferring Repentance till the hour of death, see the following Fifth Part.

FIFTH SERMON.

ON THE DIFFICULTY THAT THE SINNER WILL HAVE IN CORRECTING HIS BAD HABITS, IF HE DEFERS REPENTANCE.

Subject.

The stone of sinful habits must be rolled away from the heart at once, for the longer one waits, the greater will be the difficulty of removing it, until it eventually becomes an impossibility.—*Preached on Easter Sunday.*

Text.

Quis revolvat nobis lapidem ab ostio monumenti?—Mark xvi. 3.

"Who shall roll us back the stone from the door of the sepulchre?"

Introduction.

The greater the desire of these holy women to behold and to anoint the dead body of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the greater was their anxiety lest they should not be able to carry out their intention, for the grave was covered with a huge stone; and therefore they asked each other, "who shall roll us back the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" We poor weak women have not the strength to do it. Nevertheless, they went on their way, determined to do their best. It is a difficulty of this kind, my dear brethren, that deters most sinners from doing sincere

¹ Hodie, si vocem ejus audieritis, nolite obdurare corda vestra.—Ps. xclv. 8.

penance, and being really reconciled to God. I say *sincere* penance, and being *really* reconciled to God; for in the ordinary confessions, especially at Easter, when every Catholic is bound to go, oh, what a lot of dissimulation there is! And how many there are who leave the confessional worse than they were when they entered it, because they have not a firm purpose of amendment! And that too, because they are shut up in a grave of sin by a huge stone that they are afraid to attempt to roll away. The inveterate habit of a certain vice, which they find it too difficult to give up all at once; an unlawful intimacy, which they imagine they cannot live without; the proximate occasion of sin, which they do not wish to abandon; this is the stone that lies on their hearts and that they think it impossible to remove. And therefore they often ask themselves, in their inefficacious desires, "who shall roll us back the stone?" who will free me at last from this occasion, this intimacy, this inveterate habit? To these I now say: Sinners! attack the stone at once, and courageously. God will help you with His grace to remove it now! But if you defer your repentance and amendment, it will be, humanly speaking, impossible for you to remove it, so that you will have little hope left of saving your souls, as I shall now prove.

Plan of Discourse.

The stone of sinful intimacy and bad habit must be at once removed from the heart, for the longer one waits, the greater will be the difficulty of removing it, until at length it becomes an impossibility. Such is the whole subject of my exhortation.

Those who have during this Paschal time been truly reconciled to God, will be strengthened, by what I am about to say, in their good resolution never to go back to their former bad habits and sinful intimacies. Almighty and merciful God! through the powerful intercession of Thy most Blessed Mother Mary and of the holy angels, we beg of Thee to give Thy precious grace to the just, that they may persevere in Thy friendship, and to sinners, that they may this day roll away the stone from their hearts and free themselves completely from the grave of sin.

I have undertaken to persuade you to do a very difficult thing, and when I consider the matter again, I am almost tempted to give it up as hopeless. For I am afraid it will be with me as it was with Lot, when he tried to persuade his two sons-in-law to leave the doomed city, Sodom. "Arise," he said

It is very hard to get rid of a bad habit.

to them, "get you out of this place, because the Lord will destroy this city. And he seemed to them to speak as it were in jest."¹ So hard, as the Glossa remarks, did they find it to leave the city in which they had been born and brought up. Ah! far more readily would I undertake to move a huge mass of stone, than to roll away the stone of sinful habit from the hearts of some sinners by preaching. "So tyrannical a thing is habit," says St. John Chrysostom;² so hard and difficult it is to leave all at once that which for a long time has occupied our hearts and affections! And what else can it be but a matter of the greatest difficulty for the proud man, who has hitherto been given to every worldly vanity, all at once to become lowly in his own eyes, modest, and humble? For the avaricious man, who has amassed wealth unjustly, to deprive himself of it by making the necessary restitution, and to close his heart and its desires to riches and temporal goods? For the unchaste man, who has hitherto given loose rein to his inordinate desires, or who has fostered an impure attachment for some creature, to resolve never to give way again wilfully to a sinful thought even, and to abandon forever the object of his sinful love? For him who is addicted to cursing and swearing, to cut off that bad habit at once? For him who wastes his time in drinking and gambling, and in the sins that are occasioned thereby, to live a temperate and sober life, and to spend his time in serving God with diligence? For one whose heart has hitherto been filled with hatred, enmity, and secret ill will, to change all at once, to be sincerely reconciled to his enemy, and to love him as himself? In a word, must it not be difficult for one whose thoughts were sunk in the depths of hell, to raise them all at once to the heights of heaven, and to begin to lead a Christian, holy, and heavenly life? There is no doubt that that is a most difficult task; it is one which requires great labor and great skill.

Shown from
Holy Scrip-
ture.

What reason had the Jews to weep and sigh for the flesh-pots of Egypt, as we read in the Book of Exodus: "And all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness," and said to them: "Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat over the flesh-pots, and ate bread to the full!"³ What

¹ Surgite, egredimini de loco isto, quia delebit Dominus civitatem hanc. Et visus est eis quasi ludens loqui.—Gen. xix. 14.

² Adeo tyrannica res consuetudo.

³ Et murmuravit omnis congregatio filiorum Israel contra Moysen et Aaron in solitudine; utinam mortui essemus per manum Domini in terra Ægypti, quando sedebamus super ollas carniū, et comedebamus panem in saturitate.—Exod. xvi. 2, 3.

reason, I ask, had they to give expression to such regrets, since their enjoyment of the flesh-pots of Egypt was earned only by hard labor under the merciless yoke of Pharaoh? And they sighed for the bread of slavery at the very time when God was leading them toward the promised land, and was feeding them miraculously with the heaven-sent manna! Were they not very foolish thus to long for the coarse food of slavery? St. John Chrysostom assigns a reason for this; "the Jews," he says, "longed for the garlic of Egypt, although they had the manna, on account of the influence of habit. Such a tyrannical thing is habit." So difficult is it to give up what one has become accustomed to. Is it then useless for me, O sinners, to speak to you of the bread of heaven, when you have been once accustomed to the flesh-pots of the world? For even the Prophet Jeremias despaired in this matter. "If the Ethiopian can change his skin, or the leopard his spots, you also may do well, when you have learned evil."² Alas! who will roll us back the stone? Who will remove that heavy weight from our hearts?

But what am I saying? I wish to persuade you to lay aside your sinful habits, and I represent to you in the very beginning, incautiously enough, that you will have an almost insurmountable difficulty in doing so! Instead of making your task easier by talking to you of the sweetness of repentance, I make it hard and bitter, and almost impossible! Is not that mode of proceeding likely to deprive you of all heart and courage for repentance, and to harden you still more in sin, by driving you to despair? No, O sinners! For the very fact of the difficulty of repentance, a fact that your own experience teaches you, must serve me as the only weapon that I intend using in order to conquer your understanding, and to convince you that you must at once, without delay, use every effort, and spare neither labor nor trouble, to roll away this stone, that is, to amend and abandon your sinful habits. For, tell me, do you intend to go to heaven or not? If the latter is the case, I have done with you, and there is no use in your hearing a sermon. But you say, God forbid! we certainly hope and desire to gain heaven, and to be eternally happy. Very good! But answer me this question: do you think you can save your souls, with that heavy stone on your heart, that shuts you up in the grave, in the state of sin?

Therefore
it ought to
be laid aside
at once.

¹ *Judæi manna habentes. quærebant allia Egypti, propter consuetudinem. Adeo tyrannica res consuetudo est.—S. Chysost. Hom. 7. in Ep. i. ad Cor.*

² *Si mutare potest Æthiops pellem suam, aut pardus varietates suas; et vos poteritis benefacere, cum didiceritis malum.—Jerem. xiii. 23.*

No, you say, we are not so ignorant as that; no one who is in the state of mortal sin can go to heaven; he must first be converted, do penance, and amend his life. Do you think, then, that you will one day repent and amend? Certainly; some day or other we will return what we have unjustly acquired, leave the proximate occasion of sin, make peace with our enemies, and give up vice. That is all I want for my purpose; now I have fast hold of you, provided only that you are willing to acknowledge the truth and to act accordingly.

Because it will be much more difficult to do so hereafter, as far as God is concerned.

Now, when do you intend to carry this resolution of yours into effect? Not yet, you say; it is too difficult now. And when then? Some other time, in a year, or a few months perhaps. And do you believe that it will be easier for you to abandon your sinful habit and do penance in a few years or months, than it is now? This is the fearful trap by which the crafty tempter ensnares most sinners to eternal destruction; they fondly imagine that it will be easier for them to repent at some future time, because they know very well that repentance is necessary to salvation. But you may be quite certain that it will be far more difficult for you afterwards, than it is now. True, it will never be absolutely impossible for you to repent; yet, the longer you wait, the more months, weeks, days, nay hours, you spend in sin, the more troublesome will repentance become, until at last it will be, humanly speaking, impossible. And in the first place, this must appear clear enough when we consider the Almighty God. You acknowledge, O sinner, that you cannot free yourself from sin by your own natural strength alone, and that you never would do so unless God impelled you thereto by His grace. If you did not know this before, learn it now; it is an article of faith, and there can be no doubt about it. It is true that the good God never refuses to any one in this life, who is capable of receiving it, the grace by which he may be enabled to be converted and do penance; but the grace that is called efficacious, that is, the grace that God foresees man will really co-operate with, He is not bound to give to any one, and He bestows it as a special act of goodness and beneficence on whomsoever and at whatsoever time He pleases. Such is the general teaching of theologians. Again, the more wicked a sinner is, the longer he continues in sin, and the deeper evil habits have become rooted in his heart, so also the greater and more powerful, and, so to speak, even miraculous, must be the grace which will enable him to be truly converted. Our Divine Lord, as St. Augustine

remarks, teaches us that in the three people whom He raised from the dead, when raising the daughter of Jairus, He merely said: "Damsel, arise."¹ It cost Him, as it were, more trouble to raise the young man of Naim, who was being carried to the grave: "He came near and touched the bier;"² and He commanded him: "Young man, I say to thee, arise."³ But what labor it cost Him to raise Lazarus, whose body had already begun to decay in the grave! "He groaned in the spirit and troubled Himself;"⁴ as St. John says in the Gospel. And Jesus wept.⁵ "Jesus, therefore, again groaning in Himself, cometh to the sepulchre."⁶ And when He had caused the stone to be taken away from the sepulchre, He immediately began to pray: "Jesus, lifting up His eyes, said: Father, I give Thee thanks that Thou hast heard Me."⁷ Finally, "He cried with a loud voice: Lazarus, come forth."⁸ What was the reason of the difference in Our Lord's mode of proceeding in those three cases, my dear brethren? Had the almighty power of the Son of God greater trouble in raising one than the other from the dead? That cannot be; for to will and to accomplish are one and the same thing to Him. Christ, says St. Augustine, wished to show thereby that it is far more difficult, and requires a much more powerful grace, to convert one who has been buried for a long time in the grace of evil habits, than one who has sinned only now and then, or who has remained in sin only occasionally for a month or two, even during the space of several years.

Tell me now, O man, do you imagine that this special, powerful, and extraordinary grace, that God is bound to give to no one, will be given to you, when in some years' time you wish to amend your evil ways? How do you know that? You have never heard of a grace of that kind having been promised to any one, much less to yourself. But you say, perhaps it will be given to you? And perhaps, indeed, in all probability, it will not. For, to look at the matter reasonably, do you think that your continuing to offend Him is a likely way to induce the Almighty to bestow on you a special mark of His power? Is it probable that you will obtain extraordinary graces from Him, when, by offering Him insult upon insult, you make Him more and more your

Who will not give special graces hereafter.

¹ Puella surge.—Mark v. 41.

² Accessit et tetigit loculum.—Luke vii. 14.

³ Adolescens, tibi dico, surge.—Ibid.

⁴ Infremuit spiritu et turbavit seipsum.—John xi. 33. ⁵ Et lacrymatus est Jesus.—Ibid. 35.

⁶ Rursum fremens in semetipso venit ad monumentum.—Ibid. 38.

⁷ Jesus autem elevatis sursum oculis dixit: Pater gratias ago tibi, quoniam audisti me.—Ibid. 41.

⁸ Voce magna clamavit: Lazare, veni foras.—Ibid. 43.

enemy? when you despise the grace He now offers you, and do not hesitate to say to His very face: No, O God, I do not want Thy grace now; some other time it will be more convenient for me to accept it; Thou canst help me in a few years, after I have caused Thee still more displeasure; then Thou canst give me grace, and still more powerful grace, too. Alas, poor mortal, who are you to dare so presumptuously to dictate to the Almighty God, and to prescribe a mode of action to His goodness? Do you think that God will wait upon you, as if He were your servant, and that He will do whatever you tell Him? Must he give you wonderful graces, that He denies to many a pious soul, and that, too, after you have continued still longer to insult Him?

But will
abandon the
sinner.

Be careful, I beg of you! It is not safe thus to insult and mock a great lord. God will allow you to go on for a time, and will bear with you most patiently, but instead of giving you a special grace, He (and how could it be otherwise?) will deliver you up to your evil inclinations, and will allow you to become more and more entangled in the meshes of your sinful habits. Hear the threat He utters by the prophet Isaias: "Woe to thee . . . that despisest, shalt not thyself also be despised? . . . when being wearied thou shalt cease to despise, thou shalt be despised."¹ "I called and you refused," He will say; "I stretched out My hand, and there was none that regarded."² I called you last year, or last month, and exhorted you to return to Me, but you would not; I stretched forth My hand to raise you up from the state of sin, but you did not deign even to look at Me; "I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock."³ Oh, what a terrible threat, says St. Augustine. Sin away then, if you are bent on doing so, but remember that "the time will come when the sinner will wish to repent, and will not be able, because, when he might have repented, he refused to do so."⁴ It is one thing for the sinner who falls through mere frailty, even a hundred times, and remains in the state of sin for a certain length of time, to find mercy from God; but a far different thing for him to find the same mercy, who makes a habit of sinning, and wilfully and obstinately perseveres in sin. The former occurs frequently; the latter very seldom. The same

¹ Væ qui spernis, nonne et ipse sperneris? Cum fatigatus desieris contemnere, contemneris.—Is. xxxiii. 1.

² Vocavi et renulistis; extendi manum meam, et non fuit qui aspiceret.—Prov. i. 24.

³ Ego quoque in interitu vestro ridebo, et subsannabo.—Ibid. 26.

⁴ Venit tempus quando peccator velit pœnitere, et non poterit, quia, quando potuit, noluit.—S. Aug. serm. 58. de temp.

