

## V. Spiritual Life

### D. Other Issues of Persons

#### a. Personal Prayer

202.

Sermon, Book 1, No. 14

#### Prayer

(incomplete)

The petition of the disciples, "Lord, save us, we perish," is a lively example of the earnestness with which we ought to pray. With the wind and waves roaring about them, and death imminent, they could do nothing else but pray, and this they did with the vehemence that love of life could prompt. Now our souls, floating on the sea of time, are in danger of being lost. The clouds that low around us arise from the false maxims and evil examples of the world. The wind and waves are our own wild passions and untamed desires. And none but God can keep them from driving from us the light of faith and burying us in the abyss of guilt. Every day we need what the Church commands us to pray for: Faith to enlighten us, Hope to strengthen us, Charity to purify us, Grace to shield us from temptation and deliver us from evil, mercy for our frailty, forgiveness for our sins. Every moment we move on towards our home in eternity, held up by the power of God from falling into sin. Every moment therefore we need to acknowledge our dependence on Him in prayer. Every moment too, God is infinitely great, merciful, good. Therefore every moment we should praise Him and bless Him and give thanks to Him for His great glory. So the Holy Ghost tells us to pray without ceasing, to have our intention so directed that whether we eat or drink or sleep, or study or work in every thing we glorify God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now there are two states of mind in which correctness in prayer is impossible. One is where one persuades himself that God does not hear our prayers, or modify His treatment of us according to our appeals to Him. And the other is where one becomes satisfied with himself and with what he has already and so does not care to ask for anything more.

Persons in the first state of mind generally consider themselves very philosophical, and wise beyond the ordinary measure of wisdom. God knows your needs, they say, without your telling Him of them. From all eternity He has known them. How idle then to waste your breath in reciting them as if you were unfolding a tale to one who does not know!

Again, God governs the world by immutable laws. But when you pray you seek to melt His heart by the story of your wants, your sorrows and your penitence, as if you could alter His decrees by your expostulation and entreaties, and seem to suppose Him not only mutable but capricious. Now He has already decreed to give you what you

want or not to give it. If to give it to you, you will get it without praying; if not, you will not get it no matter how much you pray.

The short answer to this is that what we do in prayer is not for God's benefit but for our own. God governs the world by immutable laws. Creatures without intelligence or free will He drives home to the purpose of their existence with resistless power. The forces that move material nature, light, heat, attraction, can act in but one way. Creatures with intelligence and free will He governs irresistibly and immutably but by laws which leave play to understanding and choice.

In launching a soul into its existence that knows no limit He does not say, "By that line shall thou travel and at that point end," but, "Here before thee is a wide field with two roads and two endings. On the one side is fire, on the other water. On the one side obedience and salvation, on the other rebellion and ruin. If you choose the side of fire, by the immutable law of justice, fire will be our portion. If you choose water, the stream, bright and sparkling, will bear you on to the region which fire can never reach." God does know our wants before we make them known to Him in prayer. And He knows more. He knows that if we do make known to Him, in the proper spirit, He will relieve them, and if we do not He will leave us to perish in them. For such is the immutable law. He has determined from all eternity to give us what we ask for or deny it to us, and He has determined more. He has determined that if we ask for what we need as we ought He will give it to us and if we do not ask He will deny it.

Prayer supposes change in the creature and not in the Creator, weakness in the one who prays, not in Him to Whom the prayer is offered. Such is the law. [That] God is infinitely great we are bound to acknowledge by faith, hope, love. He is our owner and benefactor. We must confess it in praise and thanksgiving for what is past, in petition for what is to come. He is our judge. We must confess it in sorrow for our sins, in supplications against our weakness.

Christ gave us the form of prayer and taught us by word and example to pray. Before Him the patriarchs and prophets, after Him the Apostles and confessors, were inspired and directed to pray at all times.

Prayer is not a duty because God's knowledge is imperfect or His decrees changeable, but because His knowledge of what we need is infinite and his law for us to pray is immutable.

If you ask me why did He command us to tell Him what He knows already and to beg for what He has foreordained to give on the asking, I answer, "Put the question to Him." It is enough for me to know that He is done it. It is not for me to fathom Him but to adore Him.

But in the second place, without presuming that we have all the reason for the law of prayer, may we not say, "Spiritual gifts cannot be bestowed unless received."

The second state is of those who can say with the psalmist, "My heart is wasting and my flesh," for I have forgotten to eat my food. Moral truth--the greatness of God, death, judgment, heaven, hell, the beauty of virtue, the deformity of sin--is the food of the soul. And prayer, that is meditation, penitence, love, faith, hope, petition, is the act by which the food is taken. There is this antithesis noted by St. Gregory between the food of the body and the soul. Bodily food produces satis; when we abstain from bodily food we hunger, when we eat we surfeit. On the contrary, when we abstain from spiritual food we lose the desire of [it], and when we partake of it we hunger after it. So wisdom says of herself in holy writ. "They that eat me shall yet hunger." St. Ignatius used to spend four hours in meditation every day, and regretted that he had no more time to devote to it. St. Phillip Neri, when not prevented by business, was in the habit of spending sometimes five hours in the prayers and offering of Mass.

On the other hand, nearly all live in forgetfulness of spiritual works simply because they have no spiritual conceptions. They knew once that they were to live forever, that they were to give account to God for all their actions in the judgment, that sin was the great evil of life. Now they have forgotten all about it. Take away from them their thoughts about what they shall eat and what they shall drink and wherewithal they shall be clothed and the universe is a blank. They know such words as death, judgment, God, heaven, hell; but those words awaken no thought within them, kindle no emotion. The fear of God cannot pierce their flesh. Because they have forgotten to eat their food, their heart has withered within them. Yet you have no fervor in your prayers, your mind wanders, you feel a distaste for them. Why? Because by neglecting to think you have lost your appreciation of spiritual goods. Taken up with the things of sense, with appetite, business, news, you do not care for the things belonging to your salvation; and when you try to pray your soul wanders around among eternal truths, not looking for what its needs but for what will give it present gratification, like a swine rooting for garbage among the pearls. You go at your prayers as you were playing a play, not as if you were in downright earnest standing before God to greet Him with praise and thanksgiving and supplication. You do not beg like a beggar, but like a tragedian, because you do not care about receiving what you ask for, but only want to recite your piece. Reversing the condition of our first parents, you are spiritually naked and not ashamed. You are poor and you feel rich; blind and you think you see everything, miserable and you think every body is enjoying you. You stand before God in the sight of the angels sus[pended] between heaven that you cannot reach and hell you cannot escape without the grace you must get by prayer. Stained with sins that need expiation and pardon; beset by cruel spiritual enemies against whom you have no power to defend yourself; buffeted by your own emotions, and wild desires, blinded by ignorance, enslaved by concupiscence. Yet you cannot pray!

The reason why we do not apprehend [? or perhaps appreciate] our wants is not

because we do not know them, but because we do not let the truths of faith make their due impression on us. We say O yes, to them and pass on thinking no more of them, to attend to our fancies and appetites. By not acting as if they were true we make them unreal to us even while we believe them. Let me illustrate what I mean by adducing one or two special truths.

Take for instance the truth, "God is present." We believe that God our master, father, judge, is not away off riding in the clouds, or in light inaccessible beyond the stars, only, but with us, seeing us, listening to us, touching us, even in the most hidden recesses of our soul, wherever we are. Yet when we read of His conversing with Adam and Eve, of His appearing to the patriarchs and to the saints, we think of them as having been nearer to God than we. We are freer in our secret thoughts than in our uttered ones, as if both were not equally bare to Him; we are anxious to explain our motives and defend our conduct as if He did not already [end of sentence missing] Even without wishing to offend Him we comport ourselves with far more freedom and boldness than we would if His presence were to us a real thing. I have not seen any one of you disrespectful today in church, but suppose that on yonder altar there should suddenly appear standing the majestic figure of Jesus Christ, as he stood before the three disciples on Mt. Thabor. Suppose you could see the broad forehead, the brown eyes, the long hair and flowing beard, the shining robe, the whole form beautiful before all the children of men, see the arms outstretched, the lips open. What a silence as of death would fall upon us all! How eagerly would each one listen to see did He speak! How narrowly would each one watch to see if the eye fell upon him! There would be no lounging attitudes, no wandering thoughts. Yet visible to the senses He would not be more really present than He is. The visible presence would check the current of our blood, which the invisible presence does not stir, because we let senses rule, and treat what cannot be touched as if it were not.

Take another instance: the Sacrifice of the Mass is the same as the sacrifice of the cross: the highest [remainder blank]

**203.**

Editorial, *The Catholic Columbian*, April 1, 1876

### **The Duty of Prayer**

The stupid "what is to be, will be" of unbelievers is not the only obstacle to prayer. Many Christians, who have sense enough to know that "what will be" will be *according as it is asked for*, have not the true conception of the duty of praying. Self-love is very cunning and easily insinuates itself into our best works. There are many who pray rather to soothe their feelings, than to honor God and get from Him what they need. The world is governed by an active and intelligent God, as a household is

governed by the father. He knows, of course, what He is going to give us; that is, He knows how much and how earnestly we are going to pray. For on that depends what we shall receive. One of the things we ought to pray earnestly for is the conversion of sinners and of those alien to the Church, through heresy and unbelief. This we should do particularly for our non-Catholic friends and neighbors. We need not worry them with controversy. That annoys and mortifies them, because it exposes their ignorance; but we can show our friendship for them by commending them fervently to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the intercession of Mary Immaculate. Now, when the torrent of corruption is pouring over the land, and high places as well as low seem nearly submerged, it may be that God is preparing a great work of conversion among Americans. We ought not to leave it undone through any fault of ours. It is no great task to add three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys to our night and morning prayers, for the conversion of America.

**204.**

Preface to *The Help of Christians*

*The book to which this is the preface is a manual of devotions compiled by the Sisters of Mercy of Cincinnati and published in 1864. [Reprinted in The Catholic Columbian, April 10, 1925]*

**[Forms of Prayer.]**

Grace does not do away with nature, but is superadded to it. So devotion, which springs from grace, and is nourished by prayer, has as many forms as there are different dispositions, grades of spiritual knowledge and frames of minds in men. Sometimes it is vehement, though never rash, as in St. Paul and St. Bernard, sometimes it is timid and shrinking, though never cowardly, as in Mary, the Mother of God. Now it comes in a sunburst of light that reveals the whole economy of God's ways toward men, as in St. Ignatius at Manresa; and again it is but a feeble day of holy thought, as in the penitent thief on the Cross. With one, it is gleeful, though never thoughtless; with another, sedate, though never harsh. Here, it grows in the sunlight of joy, there it draws life from the moisture of sorrowful tears. As on a summer morning, each flower and leaf and grass blade holds and shapes the drop of shining dew God gave it in the night, so when God visits us in mercy, the soul's desires and inclinations give form and measure to the devotion He stirs within us. Hence it is well to multiply books of devotion, in order that no class of persons, or state of mind, or heat of disposition, may be without the means of nourishing the thoughts and aspirations which lead to God.

+ S. H. Rosecrans,  
Bp. Pomp. and Coadj. of Cin.

205.

Editorial, *The Catholic Columbian*, January 23, 1875

### **Devotion to the Sacred Heart.**

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is often spoken of and practiced, too, amongst us. Its object is to revive in the hearts of Catholics a personal relationship with our Redeemer. He is the true light that enlighteneth every man coming into this world. He is not only the author of our faith, revealing to us, through the Church, what we need to know of the nature and will of God, but He is the "finisher" of it. Catholics by baptism and by general wish to be what we promise in baptism, we can not fulfill our vows without a personal acquaintance and sympathy with Him who for our sakes "endured the cross." St. Jerome tells of St. John the beloved disciple, that when asked why in his old age he had no other sermon for the people but, "Little children, love one another," he answered, "Because it is the command of the Lord." That saying is the keynote of the Christian life. We believe because He reveals. We practice because He commands. "It is the wish of the Lord." But where can we learn His wishes, unless by meditating on His Sacred Heart, and identifying ours with His? He came to overthrow the world, its pride and its passions, its power, its science and literature. He came to found an order in which time would be subordinate to eternity, matter to mind, fashion to truth. He came to establish liberty of soul from the bondage of human respect, avarice, ambition, lust and pleasure; and we must understand and love these ends to belong to Him. We must learn of Him to be meek and humble of heart. And so our meditation must be on Him day and night.

206.

Lecture, *The Catholic Telegraph and Advocate*, April 1, 1863

Lectures in St. Peter's Cathedral, No. 7.

### **Saint and Image Worship**

To worship, in the broadest sense of the word, is to acknowledge superior excellence in another. In the old English not only God was worshiped, but kings and magistrates also. Nay, lawyers addressing juries and orators, [in] public assemblies, were wont to call them "worshipful sirs."

Before the new doctrines of the sixteenth century had confused the minds of men, and even yet among the Christians of Southern Europe and the East, where those doctrines were steadfastly rejected, the word worship was used indiscriminately for respect and reverence of every kind. In those days Catholic theologians were accustomed to distinguish the grades or kinds of worship as follows:

Supreme worship, due to God alone, was called *latria*. Inferior worship of the

highest order, due to the Virgin Mother of God, was called *hyperdulia*. Still inferior worship, due to the saints and angels, pictures and relics, was called *dulia*.

The respect paid to rulers and magistrates was named civil worship.

As in Catholic times no one ever dreamed of confounding these different orders of beings, so no one ever dreamed that the worship of the one interfered with that of the other. People said, "Hail full of grace," to the Virgin, and, "pray for us," to the Saints, with no more thought of giving to any one else the honor which belongs to God, than they had of idolatry when they knelt to the king or uncovered their heads before a magistrate. But the reformers of Germany and England raised the charge of idolatry in this wise:

There was scarcely a church or chapel in any city or village of those countries without its altar to Mary and to some saint, around which the votive offerings of four centuries had been accumulating. Catholics in great distress, in imminent peril, were and are still accustomed to vow to make some present to a particular chapel or altar, a chalice, a picture, a set of vestments, some silver or gold ornament, if God will relieve their distress and rescue them from danger. The Holy House at Loreto is covered with treasures thus offered; and the altar of the Virgin in the church of St. Augustine, in Rome, has the pillars and walls of the recess in which it is built literally hidden by all manner of offerings, such as silver hearts, cases of jewelry, and even crutches and canes of those who have recovered from lameness. In the rude ages, from the eleventh to the sixteenth century, these offerings were considered sacred even by the lawless, and consequently had accumulated immensely.

Now the kings and rulers of those times, of whom you can get a pretty fair idea by imagining a crown on the head of one of our trading politicians, were not afraid of the sacrilege of plundering these shrines to pay their followers and feed their debaucheries, but they did fear public indignation and revolt. Therefore they set their tools, the vicious monks and corrupted priests who had become preachers of the revolt against Christ, to preach down in the mind of the people the veneration which guarded the shrines of Mary and the Saints.

Under such inspiration the preachers soon discovered that God is a jealous God--jealous not only against rivals, as the Church always taught, but against inferiors also: that not only will He brook none to be called His equal, but will not allow even the creatures He loves to be treated with respect. So the princes stole the treasure, the mob destroyed the images, and the preachers said, when they obliterated all traces of art and all monuments of civilized piety in their country, "We have put an end to idolatry."

The later reformers have made much of reason. The earlier reformers, Luther among them, repudiated it. A little reflection on the new doctrine concerning the worship of saints and angels will show that in rejecting reason Luther acted in the interest of the Reformation. For how can any sane man, not blinded by religious

prejudice, fail to see that the veneration of Mary, of the angels and saints, is lawful and commendable? The Mother of God is better than we are. The angels about His throne are nearer to God than we. The saints now free from every stain of sin and every possibility of sinning are worthier than we and is it not right for us, by acknowledging such to be the fact, to worship them? It cannot be idolatry, for it is common sense. It would be idolatry if we paid them supreme worship; but the most unlettered Catholic alive never thought of them as self-existent or having power in themselves.

But, said the fanatics, who were the art-destroyers of the sixteenth century, "We will have no mediator but Christ. No creature shall stand between us and God." The poor rabble did not see that the very leaders who were teaching them to break and destroy in the name of religion were standing between them and God. Their mob-elected judges and magistrates stood between them and God.

This is one of the great fallacies of the so-called Reformation--to confound the independence of the soul in God's judgment of its merits, with entire and absolute independence, in the means of obtaining pardon and acquiring merit. In the majesty of its innocence and the shame of its guilt, every soul stands face to face with God; but in acquiring the one and avoiding the other, Christ's passion, the intercession of the saints, the Sacrifice of the Mass, the Sacraments of the Church, the observance of the commandments, intervene between the two. How little stress the Reformers laid on their principle that there is nothing between God and the soul, appears from the fact that Quakerism, the logical consequence of that principle, met no favor among them, but persecution to the death.

"The angels and saints are but creatures like myself," exclaimed the iconoclast and saint-reviler; "therefore, I will do them no reverence." If Carlstadt and John Knox had allowed the saints half the reverence they claimed for themselves, the shrines of Germany would be yet unplundered, and the cathedrals and abbeys of Scotland would still be adorned with statuary and paintings.

Did those men who say the saints are men like them, as an excuse for disinterring their bones and scattering their ashes to the winds, really mean that whatever is like them is entitled to no respect? What they say may be true of themselves, but it is not true of the saints. Or do they seriously mean that nothing can be better than them which is not God? that there is no intermediate point between sinful man and the infinite, self-existent, all-holy God? Is not every man who has suffered more for justice' sake than we have, better than we are? Is not every soul departed from this earth in a state of grace, and now incapable of sin, nearer to God than those who may yet sin, die in sin and be forever lost? Are not the angels, ministering spirits to our wants, nearer to God than those to whom they are sent? Is not MARY, that "House of Gold" in which He dwelt, who nursed Him, reared Him, commanded Him, chided Him, nearer to God than we are?



Immeasurable stupidity of human pride that darkens the understanding and confounds all distinctions; that thinks the head, six feet removed from earth, must needs reach the heavens, and that because the soul is not matter it must be God!

The angels and saints are but creatures, it is true. But God can make creatures the channels of His graces and special gifts, as He does of the ordinary gifts of nature. Health and bodily comeliness reach us through those whose blood we inherit; vigorous growth from climate and nurture; knowledge from masters, influence from social position, fortune from friends. Why may we not get the spiritual health of innocence, the comeliness of virtue, growth in holiness, knowledge of divine things, influence among the elect, the treasure of manifold merits, by the intermediate agency of the intercession of those who are dear to God?

"But God knows our wants without the saints telling Him, and He is tender and loving to relieve them without waiting to be moved by intercession." That is the infidel's argument against all prayer, as well as against the intercessory prayer of the saints. And God does not desire the Saints to intervene between us and Him because He has need to be informed by them or because He must be stirred to compassion by them, but to establish order and subordination among the things He has made, and bind all intelligences together in the golden bond of charity.

So in the material world He knows that we need bodily sustenance, and as far as kindness goes, would be quite willing to furnish it to us without any intermediate agency.

Yet for the support of the human body a whole world of activity and beauty is put in motion and displayed. The seasons come and go, the ocean yields its water to the air, and the clouds bear it away over the valleys and the fields, the soil is fertilized, the seed sown, the heat, light and moisture are nicely attuned to almost countless stages of vegetable growth, from the shooting of the seed to the ripening of the grain, and the labor of man is yet required even after the harvest is ripened with such care. God could rain bread from heaven, leaving the earth a desert, and man idle, but He desires for His own good pleasure to have life minister unto life, and has written the law of order and dependence upon every atom of matter in the vast creation.

So in the spiritual world must spirit minister unto spirit. Not because He cannot, in person, attend to the government of all does He make the angels and saints the bearers of our petitions to Him and of His graces to us, but because He desires to establish among all intelligences order and dependence. Each spirit He has made of man or angel, with its majestic power, immortal existence, is, as our Redeemer calls it, a pearl of great price. But the Almighty after creating them did not fling them from Him to sparkle in isolated beauty through the universe. He bound them together with golden threads of charity; He made of them a vast net-work of beauty and glory about His throne. Harmony and order are too good to be confined to the mere material

world. They belong, also, to the world of mind. Spirits have their spheres, their orbits and mutual actions, and rank some higher, some lower, not like rows of pins on a paper hung up in a show window, but connected with each other by those laws of dependence and subordination, which belong to understanding and free will. The inhabitants of heaven do not sit, each gazing from his own place, at the inaccessible light, each selfishly wrapped up in his own happiness, and shouting forth his own delight; but their thoughts go wherever God's go, and their affections cling to whatever excites His interest. Where they see excellence superior to theirs, they reverence; and where they see weakness and sorrow, they pity and help. God who commands them to love, gives them the power to show their love, and sends His blessings to us through them, not because He could not do so without them, but because so doing makes them happy, while it blesses us.

The law of justice commanding us to render to every one what belongs to him--tribute to whom tribute, honor to whom honor, custom to whom custom--requires of us to reverence them, praise them, thank them, and beg them to help us, according to their excellence and power.

Mary is nearest to God of all His creatures. The Holy Ghost descended upon her, and the power of the Most High overshadowed her, and she gave being to the body which subsisted in the Person of the Eternal, and so became literally and truly the Mother of God. The Almighty, therefore, could not create a higher dignity or a greater excellence than Mary's. The other inhabitants of heaven are partakers of His councils, but are merely His servants; but she is His Mother and queen of all. Hence, the honor we pay to her is higher than that which we pay to all the rest. This is why the Archangel saluted her with so much respect, when he appeared to her at Nazareth and said, "Hail full of grace, the Lord is with thee." This is why her cousin St. Elizabeth, inspired by the Holy Ghost, called her blessed among women. This is why Jesus hastened the time for the beginning of His miracles, changing the water into wine, by her request, at the nuptial feast in Cana. This is why, when he was dying on the cross, our Lord told St. John, and in him all Christians, to regard her as his Mother, why she was most prominent among the disciples, awaiting in prayer and supplication, the descent of the Holy Ghost on Whit-Sunday, and why, according to her own prophecy, all generations have called her blessed.

In the various litanies and hymns of the Blessed Virgin, allowed in the Church, there are epithets which non-Catholics call extravagant in their praise.

But there is not one stronger than that given her by a general council of the Church, assembled at Ephesus in 431, viz: Truly Mother of God. "House of Gold" she is called, because the Divinity dwelt within her; but to be Mother of God is more [than] Morning Star, because she shines upon the gloom of the ages, herald of the Sun of Justice. But more than mere herald is the Mother of God, who not only heralds but

brings in the glorious day.

God could appoint one of their own number to rule the angels and saints, but He could not make one of them His Mother. Hence, to be Mother of God is to be more than queen of angels, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins, and all the saints.

So in His mercy Almighty God could, through the merits of Christ's passion, take the curse of Adam from any one of his descendants; but Mary alone is the Mother of the Lord. Therefore, to be Mother of God is greater than to be conceived without sin.

And we honor the Virgin Mother without any fear of offending her Son. It is [of] faith that he had all human affection, except those which arise from guilt and, therefore, human love for His Mother.

Is any one of us, my friends, so unfilial as not to feel pleasure in hearing others praise his mother? or having gifts at his disposal will not thrill with joy, when the mother comes to him and says, "I have a list of good friends whom I want you to benefit," knowing, as well he does, that if they are her friends they must be his?

Jesus Christ, faultless Son of a peerless Mother, loves to hear our praises of Mary. He loves the sound of the *Angelus* bell that morning, noon and night, starts the "Hail full of grace" from so many hundred thousand lips, the chorus of young and old voices, in churches, confraternities, and families joining in the rosary. He loves to see her altars decked with all that is beautiful in nature and costly in art, to see her children clustering around her May Altar and singing,

"To love thee, O Mary,

Is our only joy"--

to see her pictures, her medals, her scapulars, kept and worn with reverence and care.

And so, as the experience of ages has demonstrated, beginning with the marriage feast of Galilee, does He accede to her requests and freely grant her all she asks.

No one that ever fled to her protection, had recourse to her prayers was forsaken. That is the testimony of every age, and the experience of every earnest Catholic soul. To honor Mary is to honor Jesus, and to master the treasury of heaven.

Next to Mary we honor the holy angels, of whom nine distinct grades are mentioned in Holy Scripture. It will be one of the delights of heaven to know, dearly beloved, how these choirs are distinguished from one another, and what is the office of each. But we know that the lowest of them is very far exalted above us in understanding and in power. The Church teaches that each one of us has one of them for his guardian. An archangel bore the message of salvation from God to Mary. An angel appeared in the garden of Gethsemani, comforting Jesus after His bitter agony.

We honor them for their dignity, and beg them to help us--to watch over us when we are sleeping, to think of us when we are heedless, to shield us when we are tempted,

to ask mercy for us when we have sinned, to lead us by the hand through this world, through death unto life.

In like manner do we honor the army of the saints. The natural heart cannot withhold its tribute of respect from true virtue and heroism. When their heroes die pagans invoke them as gods; unbelievers cover their remains with stately monuments, and fill books with their praises; Catholics enshrine their relics, and beg their prayers. The sentiment of veneration is the same in all three; faith makes the difference of manner in which the sentiment is shown.

The Pagan, whose notions of the unseen world are indistinct and full of error, transforms him into a god.

The unbeliever, to whose mind death is the end of all man, clings to his memory as of one who will return no more.

The Catholic, to whom death is the mere separation of the soul from the body, the end of toils, the beginning of true life, regards him as a true friend simply gone from sight, but still living with all his chaste affections, generous impulses, and self-sacrificing charity, neither dead nor sleeping.

And while their love to us has not diminished, their power to benefit us has increased. And, as when they were with us, we often sought their advice and aid, so now we rejoice in their happiness, and beg them to succor us with respect and confidence.

## **b. Free Will**

207.

Sermon, Book 2, No. 10

### **Free Will**

Human pride recoils from a sense of guilt. There is a melancholy satisfaction in recalling losses and misfortunes, because self-complacency is soothed by the thought of what we would have been but for inevitable drawbacks. But a sense of guilt, the consciousness of having wantonly and willfully done a vile thing, crushes pride and makes us loathe ourselves too much to be endurable.

"The woman thou gavest me tempted me," said Adam, seeking to avoid the shame of his guilt before the face of God. And Eve following his example said, "The serpent tempted me and I did eat."

In this feeling of the heart, innumerable theories about the origin of evil have been engendered. Men seeking afar off for what was near at hand have buried themselves in perplexity and endless speculation.

Four thousand years ago one so-called philosopher threw the blame of evil upon an evil deity, declaring the visible world to be a scene of conflict between two equal

powers, and all that transpires therein to be the work of the good or the operation of the malignant power. Later yet the Fatalists maintained that whatever transpires is the inevitable effect of Destiny, at whose door all the obliquities of the physical and moral world are to be laid.

In Christianity, Luther was the first to deny openly and formally the existence of free will, and to blame Satan for all his sins. Luther, when a young monk, was very ambitious to be perfect. All his failures and little weaknesses stung him to the quick. Instead of rising quietly and sweetly when he had fallen, instead of turning humbly to God, and saying, "What better could be expected of me, miserable work that I am?" and then beginning anew, he grew impatient and angry with himself for not being suddenly equal to the saints. Gradually he persuaded himself that his faults were unavoidable while he still clung to the persuasion that he was in the way of salvation. Hence he concluded men are saved not by being without sin, but by not having sin imputed to them. And thus the doctrine of justification by faith arose from the denial of free will and proclaiming the irresistible power of concupiscence.

Calvin softened down the grossness of this doctrine by calling the power to which the human will is subject not concupiscence but the unalterable decree of God. According to him, God is the physical cause of all that happens in the world, and therefore the cause of sin. Hence whoever is good is good because God preordains him to be good and whoever is wicked is wicked because God willed him to be wicked.

Later than Calvin, the Jansenists were cut off from the Church because they denied free will.

In our own times it is fashionable for unbelievers to deny free will without any particular ground. Men given over to their appetites try to persuade themselves in the commission of sin to stifle remorse by saying they cannot help it.

Now, the Catholic Church holds that all evil which is such relatively to the creature and not to the Creator had its origin in free will, that God did not will it but only permitted it, and that the free will of the creature is alone responsible for its existence.

But what is free will?

Free will may be defined: the power of choosing between actions to be performed. Let us consider the definition and deduce inferences.

To be free an action must be from our own activity. If it comes from a decree of God as Calvin said, or the fiat of destiny as the pagans declared, or from concupiscence, it may be free in him with whom it originated, but it cannot be free in him whose faculties were but a blind and helpless instrument in its performance. The man with the hatchet may be free to strike or not; but the hatchet itself must go where his force drives it.

But many actions originate in our own activity that are not free. Thus to frown

when we are angry, to smile when we are pleased, to groan when we are in pain, to shudder at the sight of danger, and a hundred similar are acts done without thought and without advertence and therefore without freedom.

So also thoughts and imaginations forbidden by the commandments of God, wanderings and distractions in our prayers, are very often quite contrary to our will when we reflect on what we are doing.

In like manner vague and barren sentiments of good or dreams of heroic self-sacrifice are not from our will and therefore are void of merit.

We must not only be the cause of the action but we must be knowingly the cause of it. We must know what we are doing, or we cannot be said to will it. To commit sin we must know that what we are doing is wrong; to gain merit we must know what we are doing to be right.

Human law does not excuse any one from the penalty because he does not know the law; but the law of God recognizes no guilt and inflicts no penalty on those who have no malice.

If you administer poison to a patient thinking it to be medicine, you are no murderer even though death be the consequence; and should you administer medicine thinking it to be poison, you are a murderer, although your potion heals.

If you eat flesh on a day of abstinence thinking it to be a free day, you commit no sin; but if you eat flesh on a free day thinking it to be a day of abstinence, you commit sin. Both sin and merit are in the will.

It is not enough however to constitute freedom to know what we do; but in doing it we must be free not to do it if we choose, free from all internal and external pressure, so that the sole physical cause of the action shall be our own choice. The choice is what makes the action ours. You must distinguish carefully between the cause and the occasion of an action. The temptation was not the cause of Eve's sinning but only the occasion of it. She might have resisted the temptation and bid the tempter begone, but she chose to sin. Even the motive we have for doing any thing is not the cause but only the occasion of it. Thus I avoid sin for fear of Hell, for desire of Heaven, out of gratitude to God, or of love for His infinite excellence. But my choice is free; for notwithstanding all these motives I could act otherwise.

"I have set before thee," says the Holy Ghost in the Sacred Scriptures, "fire and water--to whichsoever thou please stretch forth thy right hand." Therefore every man can not only know what he does but is free to do the contrary. The Redeemer plainly sets forth this power of choice in the woes threatened against Chorazaim and Bethsaida. "Woe unto thee Chorazaim, woe unto the Bethsaida! For if the mighty works that have been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon they would long ago have repented in sackcloth and ashes," that is, with the same motives and helps to do right one may do right or not, as he pleases.

St. Thomas illustrates free will by supposing a case as follows. A man is halting between doing and not doing an act. Examining motives he finds them about equally balanced for acting and not acting. He can choose as he pleases. Nay, suppose the motives to be uneven on both sides. He can choose the side for which fewer motives urge him, by the power of his freedom. From what has been said it is easy to understand the philosophical classification of human action.

All acts proceeding from man's powers are classed as spontaneous.

Those spontaneous acts which are done knowingly are voluntary.

Those voluntary acts in which the will is free to choose are free acts.

Man is responsible before God for free acts alone. He is not accountable for those actions he does without thought or for those he does with thought but without the power of doing otherwise; but only for those in which he knows what he is doing, and feels himself free to do or not do it, as he pleases.

You must note here with care the difference between an act of will and the execution of that act. Your own experience has taught you the wide difference between resolving to be good and being good. You resolve to rise early and assist at Mass. Perhaps the body will not obey your will, and with the resolution unchanged you sleep beyond the time. You resolve to make a meditation; perhaps the mind will not obey your will, but will wander off to worldly and useless matters. You have the merit of the act. In like manner one may will to sin, yet be deterred by outside pressure from putting his will into execution. Yet the guilt of the sin is already incurred. The outward act only adds to the merit or demerit in two ways, by testing the sincerity of the resolution and by the example it affords to others.

In living a life of chastity, in observing fasts, in mortifications, in works of charity, in martyrdom itself the merit is in the will and not in the outward act. The outward act only proves the sincerity of the will and edifies our neighbors.

So of sin: the guilt of it lies in the recesses of the soul. Idolatry, blasphemy, infidelity, murder, adultery, theft, gluttony are committed in the heart, by willful desire. Many a hand is unstained where the heart is red with blood, many a body is chaste that hides a soul defiled with lust, many a head bowed to the altar of the true God is filled with idols to which the soul is doing homage. Merit and guilt are both in the free choice. Merit lies in saying, "I know that I have the power of serving either God or mammon. I choose for God for the portion of my inheritance and my chalice forever." Sin lies in saying, "I know that I ought to obey my Creator and turn indignantly from the thought of deserting His commandments; but I will not serve him, I will serve my own lusts and concupiscences instead. I feel myself free to stretch forth my hand to the water or the fire. I will grasp the fire."

That free will, in this sense, exists in man is a fact of every one's consciousness which only perversity can deny. That man is not living who does not feel in himself the

power of choosing, at every moment of the day. Who has not felt self-complacency? Who has not stopped to contemplate some action and felt that what swelled his heart with pleasure was the assurance, "I did that"? Who has not been stung with remorse? has not shrunk back from the remembrance of a deed that repelled him because he felt it to have been his own work? Praise and blame, reward and punishment, persuasion, and reproof, are without meaning or sense if man is not free to choose, if he is not the author of his own works. Men hardened in sinful habits sometimes perversely urge that they cannot help. "I feel the degradation of my sin," the drunkard will sometimes say, "I see it in my heartbroken wife and my ragged and vicious children; but I cannot help it."

"I feel my iniquities overwhelming me with disease and guilt," says the one given to impurity, "but my habits are fastened on me and I cannot help it." But this only means that they cannot help it, and enjoy the satisfactions they are not willing to forego. They cannot help it without coming before the world, their acquaintances, and themselves in a new character. They cannot help it without inconvenience and perhaps shame. They cannot help it because they do not want to.

To the last moment of life the soul is master of its own destiny in the face of every opposition from man and angels. Even God himself will not interfere with this sublime prerogative; and to the last its sins are all its own. Each soul carries its own burthen before the Judgment seat of Christ, every good deed every uncanceled crime. When the bundle is opened out the deeds will range themselves before us, and the Judge will say this is what you have done, for they are ours only by free will.

Free will is the Catholic solution of the origin of all evil, moral and physical. God did not make any evil. He made spirits that were free to serve him and be happy; free also to rebel against him and be miserable. They could not be happy without merit. They could not merit without being free to sin. He made the physical world full of beauty and perfection. No storms or earthquakes, no venomous reptiles, no ravenous wild beasts, no wars, no plagues, no sickness, no starvation or death. These are all the work of sin, the revolt of nature against him who had rebelled against God. God foresaw sin undoubtedly. Why did He not prevent it? Rather ask, why should He prevent it? He gave to the creature the power to do right, and showed him every motive to urge him to do right! What more could He have done? To make him impeccable were to make him incapable of merit and of happiness. Man He made "a little less than the angels and surrounded with glory and honor"; and man, "when he was in honor, did not understand but became like a beast of burthen." The fault is his, not God's. Nor is creation a failure because the reprobate are lost. It is a failure indeed for the lost souls who cry eternally "We have erred," but it is not a failure for God whose plans embraced the contingency of their final impenitence, and made them show forth His justice as the elect declare his mercy.



God does not rejoice in the destruction of the living, not even of the wicked; but he does rejoice in the fulfillment of justice and in the triumph of right. He rejoices in showing the oppressor and calumniator, the unbeliever and the blasphemer, the murderer, the seducer, the lewd, the lying, the dishonest, the treacherous, the hypocritical, that "there is one who seeketh and judgeth."

That even this solution leaves a mystery about the origin of evil, I do not deny! God alone can know why some of His creatures go away into everlasting punishment. But there is no other solution offered which is not manifestly false or absurd, besides leaving the mystery still unsolved.

God alone can know.

208.

Sermon, Book 2, No. 14

### **The Sense of Accountability, its Existence and Use**

Every one, no matter what his prejudices or inclinations, has a knowledge more or less distinct of his dependence on God. The first voice of the soul awakening to consciousness, and feeling its own helplessness, is a voice of prayer; its first action a stretching forth of its arms to grasp for support one mightier than itself; its first reasoning, "I made not myself but He Who made me and must support me is Almighty;" its first instinct is to adore and love. It was in his heart that the fool said, "There is no God," not in his mind, because he wished it and not because he reasoned it. Neither nature nor reason is atheist; but only crime. In the midst of abundance, of health, and satisfied desire, the heart sometimes forgets its dependence for a little while; but when the abundance is scattered, the health shaken, the craving renewed, it soon regains its sense of dependence. The very names of hope and fear, emotions common to all men, show that the consciousness of dependence is not a prejudice of education, but an irresistible impulse of the rational soul. For fear is the chill of the soul under the shadow of calamity coming as irresistibly as a thunder cloud in the sky; and hope is a vision of far off brightness to which the breeze may waft our life-barque and may not. Were we masters of our own destiny, we could neither hope nor fear.

The ancient idolaters whom we condemn as superstitious were not mistaken in believing that the Deity presides in groves, plains, cities, in rivers and ocean, by the hearth stone and on the battlefield, in sickness and health, at birth and death, at seed time and harvest. They were mistaken only in supposing that to be Deity which was not, in changing the glory of the incorruptible God and worshipping the creature instead of the Creator. The Deity presides, rules, directs, controls every work of His hands in each act it performs and each moment of its existence from first to last.

But the dependence of free will, though just as absolute, is of a different kind

from the dependence of the other powers. We live and move, breathe, think, by God's immediate action and concurrence, and according to His decree; but we will with a power of our own. In every act there is a twofold respect, physical and moral. Physically considered it is but the exercise of so much strength; morally it is good or bad. Thus, that stroke with the knife was under one respect such an amount of muscular exertion, under another it was murder. God gave the muscular power and made it a stroke; the human will gave it its direction and made it a murder. The physical act God controlled by direct interposition and concurrence; the moral act he controls by accountability. The will is free, indeed, to commit sin, but not free to commit sin with impunity. It ranges as it lists, but not beyond its tether; and just as it seems to have escaped the dominion of God in its malice, it feels His hand heavy upon it in judgment. So what is in our minds a sense of dependence, physically, is morally a conviction of accountability, an invisible impression that there is one who seeketh and judgeth.

I have said that this sense of accountability is natural to the soul, and none can be without it. I do not say that every man, civilized or savage, has a theory of a judgment that is to overtake other men besides himself, but every one, civilized or savage, has a feeling that he is not his own, that he may not do what he lists with his wit, his strength, his time, and what else seems to be his, but must be guided by another's will.

The proof of this is not farfetched, but at hand in what you all daily see and know.

The fear that all men have of death comes from a belief, more or less defined, in the judgment to come. True, the imagination recoils from the darkness of the grave, from the picture of one's own flesh, rotting and worm-infested; but is not the darkness, the corruption, or the worm that are the real terror of death. Were there nothing else, how many racked with pain, dishonored in life, would carry their blighted hopes, their [de-]grading remorse, and dark despair with one single rush into the sepulchre. Yet will man give all that he has, and want life in exchange; and unappalled by the darkness of the tomb, will shrink back trembling from what lies blacker still beyond it, the shadow of the judgment.

Again, the desire of fame and the fear of infamy are universal. Next to life, good report is dearest to the human heart, and evil report hateful. Yet good report adds not a cubit to our stature, and evil report glances harmless, and natural love of one and fear of the other demonstrates our consciousness that we do not stand or fall to ourselves but to a master. And our fear of a censure that can neither help nor harm us shows our deep-seated belief that there is some judgment which can both hurt and save.

Ambition is idolatry, transfer of worship from the Creator to his creature, perverting the natural and good desire to meet the approbation of God into a vehement and idolatrous coveting of the praise of men. But the universal desire of praise is the

voice of nature waiting for the Judgment.

Again, another proof that all men expect judgment is the importance that all attach to the difference between right and wrong, and their intimate conviction that right and truth will ultimately triumph.

For if there is to be no Judgment, why should one care for right and wrong? The distinction between eating and starving, between living and dying, between success and failure, we can understand because we can feel it: but not that between right and wrong. Is it said the intrinsic beauty of virtue should win our hearts to it? But if its innate beauty will not win God's heart to note it, to reward those who love it and punish those who despise it, why would we regard [it] in ourselves or others?

How can truth and justice triumph but by a judgment? They do not triumph in the world. In the turmoil of life, far from triumphing they have to struggle for base existence. True it is that justice sometimes overtakes the guilty in this life even after a long career of crime. But much oftener justice never overtakes him and when it does, it never repairs the evils his crimes have wrought. In this justice there is vengeance but no healing. Can progress secure the triumph of truth and right? Admit the dream of the wildest enthusiast about the perfection that society is going to attain--what then? Truth and right are supreme at last, but that is no more than what should have been long ago. Are the crimes of the ages past to go unavenged, and the sufferings to go unrewarded? Are the oppressed and the oppressor, the murderer and his victim, the seducer and his dupe, the calumniator and the calumniated, to sleep side by side forever in unknown graves equally forgotten by the just, all-seeing God?

No. The triumph of justice must include the past as well as the present and future. The graves must give up their dead, and those who lived together in the mist and the cloud must confront each other in the clear light.

The hypocrite must be unmasked before the community he imposed upon, the slanderer must be forced to own his falsehood before those whom he deceived. The oppressor must crouch and cower at the feet of those upon whom he once set his heel. The betrayer of innocence must kneel for mercy before those he wronged. The treacherous and selfish leader of the people must appear stripped of power to be reproached by those he deluded. The hoarder of dishonest wealth must be shown needy and destitute in the presence of those before whom he once paraded his abundance. The hidden things of darkness must be brought to light, and the innocent be made to feel that not without cause did they justify their souls, and were spotless all the day, and the wicked to acknowledge that there is One that seeketh and judgeth.

The faith of men in right and justice is therefore a form of belief in the coming judgment, which is imprinted in every heart by the hand of nature. The teachings of Christ and doctrine of the Church only confirm and define the doctrine. He shall come again to judge the living and the dead. He will gather the tribes of the earth together in

the Valley of Judgment. He will sit upon his throne. He will disclose every one's conscience, sin by sin and virtue by virtue. He will hear every plea and every excuse, He will pronounce and execute sentence upon both good and evil, sending these into everlasting punishment, taking those into life eternal. That is the manner in which accountability is to become a fact, and the explanation which the Church adds to the universal belief in the future judgment.

Those who have not studied their own hearts or understood the power of passion may ask in incredulity, "If the belief in judgment is universal, how is it that iniquity so abounds?" If men believe they must render an account, how is it that they keep no account of what they do with their time, their talents and opportunities? If they think they are to stand or fall before an all-searching, inexorable Judge, how is it that they learn to fear the world, to be anxious only about its opinion and quite reckless of what they may do in secret. Above all how is it, if men look forward to certain retribution, that not only these things are done but that [they] are taught in theory, and it is corrected wisdom to disregard all sense of responsibility in practical affairs? Go into the commercial world, and interrupt the conversation about markets and money and stocks by suggesting some anxiety about the day of final retribution, and how strange and impertinent your words will seem! Stand among your place hunters and statesmen and talk of justice, temperance, chastity, truth, and they will bid you go away and leave the management of the world to shrewder men than you!

Do these men believe in Judgment sure, swift, inevitable? The men who run in riot of pleasure, of ambition, of what is called business, do they believe that they must account to God for every thought, every word, every deed of their hurrying lives? The men who speak before they think, praise or censure without caring to understand, who take up with every doctrine that is popular, do they believe that they must account to God for their use of the gifts of reason and speech?

The Catholic who has been baptized, confirmed, fed with the Bread of Life, does he believe that he must answer to God how the spots came on his baptismal robe, what became of the strength that once made him a soldier of Christ, where he lost the unspeakable grace, which Jesus with his own hands showered upon his soul?

Yes, Beloved Friends, they all believe it. They believe that they are servants-- though they act as if they were masters; they believe that they are to be judged though they act as if God were no searcher. But the conviction is in the soul, and the senses rule. The law of numbers holds them in subjection, so that they see what is wise but do it not. It is the story of human folly as old as Adam's sin. To know and not to think; to wish and never will; to feel the cravings of the soul and to try to satisfy the body; to grope at the foot of the stairway that leads us upward, till the night comes on and we sleep at its base; to feel that we were made for heaven, yet to be tied to earth by bonds of our own making; to be ever aspiring yet ever baffled and deluded by trifles so silly

that their vanity will make us gnash our teeth at the recollection. In youth proud, dreamy, purposeless, in manhood urged on by emulation, ambition, necessity; in old age querulous, self-seeking, and dying with, "therefore I have erred" upon our lips.

What has been, is; and what is, will be to the end. Except only the Saints of God, and among all those who took the world for their portion, life was a failure not from destiny but through choice.

Ask this question of your own heart, my friend who are scandalized at the assertion that men believe in the Judgment who do not prepare for it: do you always follow the convictions of your higher nature, and do what reason pronounces prudent to be done? Did you, when reason first suggested to you that your first care should be your soul, set to work at once to settle how it was to be saved? Do you, every time that passion proposes what conscience forbids, follow conscience and crush passion? Do you today think more of truth and justice than you do of money and credit? Believe me, you are no better than the rest of them unless by the grace of Christ, and without that grace your life will be a failure like theirs.

If you would keep that grace, remember judgment. Remember it not once a year but every moment you work or play, when you rise up and when you sit down, when you speak and when you are silent, when you eat and when you fast. Remember it not vaguely and dreamily as an event to happen in the far future to other men, but definitely as what must be done to yourself--you yourself must stand then, Christ before you, your Guardian Angel on your right and the accuser on your left; Hell roaring beneath you, Heaven smiling above you; and arrange in your own mind what will be the charges and what the answers. Remember it as you remember the things you love to think on; as you remember your hopes and fears, your business and pastimes.

**209.**

Editorial, *The Catholic Telegraph and Advocate*, November 26, 1859

### **"Natural Rights."**

The N. Y. *Freeman's Journal* makes an excellent point, in connection with the late letter of Dr. Forbes to the N. Y. *Herald*, which we noticed two or three weeks ago. Beating about to find a reason for doing as he pleases, Dr. Forbes says that as a Catholic priest he found his natural rights abridged. Whereupon a writer rejoins that he never became Catholic, or a priest, to keep his natural rights, but to save his soul.

The *Freeman's Journal* rightly takes exception to this seeming concession of the abridgement of natural rights by the Church, and denies that submission to the Church, and to God, can have any effect but to *preserve* and *protect every* natural right. In this the *Journal* is undoubtedly correct. The first and fundamental natural right of man, is the

## 209 - Natural Rights

right to save his soul. And although, in the present order of providence he has not the strict right before God even to this, yet it has pleased the Almighty, through the merits of the Redeemer, to concede the privilege. This--privilege before God--right before men, is the basis of all other natural rights. Because a man cannot save his soul without knowing and believing the truth, therefore every one has the right to adhere to the doctrines of the Catholic Church. Because good works are necessary to salvation, therefore every one has a right to chastise his body and bring it into subjection, to be just, mild, irreproachable, in his state of life.

In like manner a man has a right to all those indulgences which are not incompatible with the salvation of his soul. Where no positive obligation binds him, he is free, and the Church secures his freedom by the most solemn sanctions. A man may take obligations on himself by the act of his free will; and when the Church recognizes and enforces such obligations, she does not curtail his liberty, but refuses to allow passion to bear down conscience.

The Church denies only the freedom to believe falsehood and to do evil; in all rights really such, she not only allows, but defends her children in their full and free exercise.