

THANKS BE TO GOD

By Rev. Daniel Considine, S.J.

WHAT is a point of view which will put everything into its proper perspective, and is fitted for every sight, weak as well as strong? *Thankfulness*, in all places, in all circumstances, always. God is ever with us, we are ever with Him, we cannot help forming some opinion of Him: we must have some theory about Him if He ever enters our thoughts. What is it to be?

A good opinion, a sense of how much we owe Him. Even if we feel that we do very little for Him, and, indeed, are of very little account ourselves, we can at least thank Him for His kindness, we need not be ashamed to acknowledge it. Good manners teach us to say “thank you” for a service rendered. And God is at our service, tends us, provides for us all day, all night long. We can surely say so much in our hearts without any loss of dignity on our part.

We may kiss the Hand that feeds us. We need undertake no new obligations, we need make no promise, we only meet a gift, a never-ending succession of gifts, with an expression of gratitude. We do not refuse His presents, we cannot refuse His presents if we are to retain our being; we give Him in return simply our thanks. A beggar would do no less and we need do no more.

Of course, He does not require a repetition of acts, but a disposition, a temper of thanksgiving. We can have His mercies for the asking, or unasked, if only we will acknowledge them. On what easy terms does the Eternal God open to us His stores! It needs no long practice of austerity or high contemplation to tell him that we are grateful for what we have received. All His gifts are not equally pleasant, but they are all from His Hand, and we know that they are bestowed for our good, although we do not see how.

If we ran our course with eyes always open to God’s favours showered upon us and with grateful hearts, we should not have run in vain and should receive the prize.

Thankfulness ripens into love and love is the fulfilling of the law. How fond Jesus Christ was of publishing His thanks to His heavenly Father! How deeply He felt the slights put upon Him by Simon the Pharisee and, on the other hand, the atonement made for them by Magdalen’s love!

“Thou gavest Me no water for My Feet, but she with tears hath washed My Feet, and with her hairs hath wiped them.” Paradise was His thank-offering to the Good Thief for his defence of Him on Calvary. It will also be the sure reward of all whom no contradictions, no perplexities, can hinder from always praising, always thanking God.

Pure Gold for God

WHEN we look back upon the huge pile of our past works, may we not fitly borrow the imagery of St Paul and ask ourselves how much of it is likely to abide the trial of fire, how much of it was “wood” and “hay” and “stubble”—trifles, vanity, or worse, and how much “gold, silver, and precious stones”? St Philip Neri used to say pleasantly with regard to spiritual reading that he liked the works, that is, the books of people whose names began with S, that is, of *Saints*. Suppose we were to take S as signifying not *Saints* but *Self*, to how many bundles of our past labours should we not have to attach the label S, *Selfish*, done for ourselves, for our own comfort, our own glorification, our own advantage. And, I much fear, how quickly and how brightly they would burn. How many of our witty but unkind sayings, how much of our uncharitableness, how much of our conceit, would crackle there! We may hope indeed that the fire would spare us something, would respect at least a few objects in that vast collection.

What are the “gold” and “silver” and “precious stones” of life? Here and there after the conflagration we pick up some articles over which the flames have no power, in some instances slightly blackened perhaps, because our motives have not been quite pure, but yet substantially intact and unharmed. What are these jewels? Sorrows patiently borne, injuries not resented, humble, gentle, kindly thoughts and words and deeds—above all the pure gold, which no fire can tarnish, of deeds done wholly for the love of God.

The Child Jesus

THE Child Jesus was the flowering of the Root of Jesse; in Him the Godhead dwelt corporeally; to Him, therefore, there could be wanting nothing of life's opening loveliness, and fragrance, and grace.

He came to make Himself known to men, and He chose His own method of doing so. He would introduce Himself to us at His own time and in His own fashion; and every circumstance should serve to tell us more about Him, to make it clearer to us how He wishes us to think of Him, and in what way to treat Him.

A child does not love ceremony; in fact, it does not understand it. It knows nothing of the distinctions of wealth and class; it welcomes all because it believes all to be its friends. *There* is one lifting of the veil, one Divine intimation, one hint, if we may so call it, how God desires to be regarded. He has bowed the heavens and come down to earth, not in search of pomp and parade—the courtiers He summoned were shepherds keeping the night watches over their flocks; the entrance of the cave was open to all corners as to the midnight air.

What are the qualities of a child? First of all, love for its parents, affection, *affectionateness*.

It is worth while dwelling a little on this *affectionateness*, this disposition to love, this quick response to affection shown Him by others, which was a characteristic of the Child Jesus. If it truly be a mark of Him as He is, and as He wishes us to know Him, it ought to have an important bearing upon our service of Him.

If *affectionateness* is the first sign of a good child, perhaps we may rank *docility* as the second. *Docility*, as we know, simply signifies *teachableness*, readiness to be taught, a willingness to learn.

Indocility, unteachableness, is a hindrance to human knowledge. How much more to Divine! The difficulty is not that God is not willing to teach us, but that we are not willing to learn. We do not know ourselves, our own weakness, our own pressing needs, our own greatest dangers; we live, as far as our souls are concerned, in a sort of fool's paradise, and how can we expect to know the Infinite God? He Himself alone can manifest Himself to us, for He is above our human searching out; and yet He cannot allow His Divine Light to stream into our souls because we are too proud to be taught. Our self-caused darkness is so thick that we do not feel the need of, we do not crave for, light. It will be some kind of preparation for docility in the things of God, after the pattern of the Divine Child, if we strive to gain more docility in the affairs of our daily life. More deference to others, less insistence on our own opinions, a more real effort to enter into others' minds, to understand why they view things so differently from ourselves; such a training in humility, charity, and fellow-feeling will bring us very near to the Divine Child who was so loving to all, and who, though Infinitely Wise, did not disdain to go to school to His own imperfect creatures on earth.

Too Little Sentiment

A SUFFICIENT answer to persons who bid us to check all feeling in our dealings with God is surely found in the example of our Divine Master Himself when He walked this earth and “went in and out” among His Apostles and disciples. He thought it no shame to weep passionate tears over Jerusalem on the day of what seemed His triumph, but which, as He knew, only precluded His doom.

His grief at the death of Lazarus made even His enemies cry out in wonder “behold how He loved him”. He invited John to lay his head on His bosom at the Last Supper, and inspired him to put the favour on record for all time, as well as his title of “the disciple whom Jesus loved”. He would not have little children scolded when they flocked around Him with the sure attraction of childhood to One who understood and loved them, “because of such are the Kingdom of Heaven”.

If Jesus showed such feelings during His mortal life, and made a triple declaration of love by Peter his amends for his triple denial on that Thursday night, it would indeed be a strange conclusion to infer that Our Lord wishes us to-day to be as ice or marble in our converse with Him, never to move even the lips of our heart, but to hang our heads in His sacred Presence, terrified and abashed.

Has He, who while on earth was the most accessible of men, who put everyone at his ease, after whom, in the phrase of His enemies, “the whole world had gone out”, suddenly changed His ways and nature, and forgotten what manner of Man He was at Nazareth, on Calvary, by the shores of the Lake of Galilee? It is not the excess of feeling, but the lack of it,

which is the danger of the religious world of today.

Delight In the Lord

THERE is such a thing as breaking with the world on many points and yet not getting possession of God; I do not mean of course not getting possession of God's grace, but not finding that peace and happiness in His service, which is more real and more precious than earth's keenest joys.

What is the matter with us if such is our state? Very possibly we are taking the pleasures of a fervent life too sadly. Stiffness, coldness, exaggerated awe, do not kill indeed the Presence of the Blessed Trinity in the soul, but shut out Its sensible effects of light and warmth.

When God invites us to be glad in the recollection of His love for us, of all He has done for us and wishes to do for us both now and hereafter, we turn our eyes away to fix them on our unsatisfactory past, or perhaps our unsatisfactory present, and murmur to ourselves: "How can God love such a 'slacker' as myself? He really can't mean it." When God draws nearer to us we draw back in fear as though we ought to keep our distance lest we be guilty of irreverence. What a parody this is of that happy, childlike living with God—the intercourse of a Father with His children--which was granted to our First Parents in the beginning, when they were allowed to hear the voice of the Lord God walking in Paradise at the afternoon air! We are now in many ways more blest than they; the *felix Adae culpa*, the happy fault of Adam, as the Church is not afraid to call it in the morning service of Holy Saturday, deserved to have the Redeemer with whom our union in His Sacrament is immeasurably closer than the strolling of God with His creatures on the lawns of Paradise when the early evening breezes had begun to temper the heat of the sun.

God is Light, and Love, and Inexhaustible Joy; His Conversation hath no bitterness nor His Company any tediousness (Wisdom viii. 16): what wonder if His servants are happy in His service. He is glad in our gladness; He would have us joyful rather than sad; He grudges us no holiday if only we will take Him everywhere along with us. The world is wrong believing that it can be happy without Him, but it is sometimes right in suspecting that not all His servants value Him as they ought. Do not let us at least deserve this reproach in our own instance.

The Heavenly Vision

LET us examine our own experience of God's dealings with us in the past. We find bad habits of temper or uncharitableness or worse things installed within us. Turn back upon them the lamp of memory steadily, widely, so as to bring into view all attendant circumstances and light up God's admonitions and inspirations as well as our own perversity. Try to recollect how often the voice of conscience has striven to make itself heard, in gentle whispers first of all and then in loud remonstrance or remorse, until quelled at last it has seemed to die in sobs or in murmurs far away. How many fires of noble purpose have been lit in our souls by stirring words or great examples, or suddenly, in the strangest fashion in most unexpected places or at most unlikely times by the Holy Spirit, who alone can touch the inmost heart, and afterwards have burnt low and then to ashes because you would take no pains to feed them!

St Paul says he was not "disobedient to the heavenly vision". We indeed have no claim to such a wonder as wrought his conversion, but I believe that glimpses of the Unseen, and high impulses and yearnings for better things, not the work of imagination but of the God "in whom we live and move and have our being," are not so uncommon as is often fancied in these days of ours, perhaps because there are so many lying spirits abroad just now trying to deceive us. The Lord is not a hard man, but in the words of the prophet Joel, "gracious and merciful, patient and rich in mercy, and ready to repent of the evil". Believe Him to be gentle, kind, generous, and compassionate beyond the tenderness of the most devoted mother, and you will find your anticipations fall infinitely short of the truth. The one thing that He cannot bear is that you should mistrust His love.

My Day's Journey

IN what thoughts can I find inspiration and comfort at the beginning of each day? In *God with us* and therefore *we with*

God. My day's march has been carefully mapped out for me, "before Abraham was made", in the Divine counsels, its windings allowed for, the ambushes of my enemies forestalled.

I may be quite assured against surprises or superior force, if only I leave myself unhesitatingly in the hands of God. And then what a fine thing it is, enough to stir one's pulses at a suitable time and place, but true even when one is not in an enthusiastic mood, to know that the feeblest of us *has* a bit to do, a work to accomplish, under a commission, not signed by earthly emperor or king, but from the Sovereign of Heaven itself! Further, every weary pace I count, if it so be that the way is long or tedious, is taken under the eyes of Him for whose sake I have begun the march and who will at its end give me a rich reward.

I can make for myself a Friend who will accompany me through my day, step by step, who can and will, if I do not fail Him, always guide me, always uphold me, in whom I can trust unreservedly, and who is so generous that while He has no need of me and I have every need of Him, He actually regards my leaning upon Him as a favour done by me to Him and is most anxious to reward me for obeying what is not only my duty but the dictates of my own interest and advantage.

To halt for a few seconds or minutes clear the head. Why should not the thoughts during my day's work is only to rest and of God, His goodness, our need of His assistance, or our fervent wishes for the welfare of those dear to us, and therefore our supplications for them to the throne of grace, be suitable at such times? No painful effort, no strain would be needed or desirable. If after a little practice we were to find the attempt a strain, would not this alone prove to us how much we have yet to learn about the proper method of intercourse with God—how stiff and formal, inelastic and cold our own way is, so unlike the conversation of a child with his Father and therefore so unlike the model of prayer taught us by Our Lord Himself. God is always at our elbow, God is always in our heart, God encompasses us on every side. He reads all our thoughts, He intimately knows every aspiration, every fear, every hope of our soul—He understands us without any need of our explanation, He can supply the answer to the problems which perplex ourselves. Why do we not consult Him more, open our hearts to His love, lean on Him in our weakness, implore His succour in our wants? He has not shrunk from abasing Himself to earth in order to share my human toils and troubles and trials; and shall I refuse His Company, as far as I can, and deny my confidences and reject His Friendship? If He loves to be with me, my answer must be, that I, above all, desire to love to be with Him.

Misjudging God

If I place myself between the source of light and what I want to see, I *stand in my own light*. In the same way I unwittingly interpose myself between God's light (vouchsafed to me in prayer or at other times) and God Himself, and I mistake my own shadow for the Divine Beauty.

I am unfortunately selfish and mean and unforgiving and dreadfully suspicious, and I cannot believe that the qualities which exist in myself are not also to be found in God. I am judging God by myself; I am reading my own petty thoughts into the Divine Mind. A moment's reflection will show us how terrible a mistake this is, how fatal to all worthy conceptions of God and therefore to any noble enthusiasm in His service. I verily believe that this error has done more than any other of our day to chill fervent spirits and to sicken loyal hearts that would otherwise have beaten high with the love of the Master.

We have unconsciously dragged our God down to our own level, made Him in our imagination as petty and as unlovable as we are ourselves, and have then been surprised that we do not feel it easy to burn with devotion to our Father whom we have misunderstood.

If the turn of the phrase be not too familiar, I would lay down that God's good opinion of us chiefly depends on our good opinion of Him. I do not mean that God is open to flattery or that it can matter to Him in itself what we choose to think of our Creator, but that our behaviour towards Him is founded on our thoughts of Him, and noble thoughts beget noble deeds. Intimate thoughts lead to intimacy, and confiding thoughts of God to trustfulness and hope in Him.

Trusting God

GOD never constrains us, He allures us, but He always leaves us free, indeed He wishes to enlarge our freedom as far as possible, because the more willing is our obedience the more honourable it is to Him and to us: “God loves a cheerful giver,” St Paul says.

There are two persons concerned in our sanctification: God and ourselves, and they must work together. If they do not, or do not work harmoniously, no great result can be achieved. There can never be any fault on God’s side: if things go amiss we are always to blame. For instance, God has a plan by which I am in course of time to be fitted to play an important part in the walk of life in which His Providence has placed me. But if I refuse to fall in with this design and am bent instead on a little scheme of my own, no real good comes of either, for neither can succeed. God will not overbear my opposition, and, naturally, I cannot overcome His.

Our Father in Heaven loves us most tenderly and desires to do us all manner of good. All that God wants of us, all that He asks of us and that He must ask from the very nature of the case, is that we will not thwart Him, that we will let Him do His own work in His own way.

But what do we really know about the Eternal God? How can we gauge His feelings? How can we make conjectures about His Mind? We are afraid to leave ourselves in the hands of the Heavenly Titan if only because He is so great, infinitely greater than we. Not only does He tower to the clouds, and, if we are to speak of Him in material terms, immeasurably beyond. We handle a butterfly carefully lest we bruise its wings. How can God touch us ever so slightly, ever so delicately, and not grind us to powder? That is why He stoops so low to our feebleness and takes us up so tenderly for fear of crushing us, and speaks to us not with His voice of thunder (Apoc. vi. x) lest He deafen us, but as it were of a gentle wind. But, do as we will, our poor restless hearts flutter when we think Him near, and we can understand how the Israelites could have said to Moses: “Speak thou to us and we will hear: let not the Lord speak to us lest we die.” We look out with our human eyes, which cannot see very far or very clear, into the counsel of God, and is it strange that our image of it is imperfect and distorted, belittled down to our own littleness, narrowed down to our own narrowness of soul?

We are not blameworthy in this, we cannot raise ourselves above ourselves, nor does God require us to do so. Our help is not in ourselves, but in God. His complaint against us is that we will not accept His proffered aid. He will lift us up from the dunghill and place us with princes, if we do not obstinately plant our feet on the earth and refuse to move; He will strengthen our eyes to see if we do not keep them firmly closed; if we will open our mouths He will gladly fill them. We shall know by experience that “the Lord our God is gracious and merciful, patient and rich in mercy, and ready to repent of the evil”, if only we give Him a trial. In truth the decision lies not with Him but with us.

In our spiritual concerns even more than in our worldly ones “nothing venture” means “nothing have”. God has done so much for us—can we do nothing for Him?

Can we not trust His word, and abandon ourselves to God’s guidance? Shall we not be safe in His Everlasting Arms, and are we not to hope in the shadow of His wings? (Ps. lvi. 2).

The Morning Mass

BEFORE convincing yourself that you are out of favour with God and that He is punishing you by darkness, why not make some obvious experiments to find out whether it is not you yourself who are standing in your own light?

You complain that your soul is out of sorts. Perhaps your body, your mind, is out of sorts as well, and it is the soul which is suffering from its contact with the body, and not the other way round. You have passed a bad night from whatever cause and have hurried some distance to attend your daily Mass; you arrive hot and tired, and cannot fix your mind on the sacred rite; you go up almost mechanically to the altar rails after the *Domine, non sum dignus*, and do not make a cold Thanksgiving simply because you do not make a Thanksgiving at all. You are in a dream, or only half-awake. When you return to your home and throw your mind back upon the morning, your time in church seems to have been one long distraction. This surely spells tepidity, if tepidity there be.

Not a bit of it! It spells bodily discomfort, and bodily weakness, either passing or constitutional. It has nothing to do

with the will, the set purpose of the soul to which God alone attends. If that purpose holds firm, our thoughts may wander where they list, they cannot withdraw us from God; the wind may blow about our hair or necktie or coat, but we shall reach our journey's end in spite of it if we keep on our way. And we do keep on our way if from beginning to end we have in view one aim only—to please God, to benefit our soul. Fits of inattention, which indeed are hardly conscious and are not wholly wilful, which amidst the stir and movement of a body of people are almost inevitable, do not seriously interfere with our master-thought. We have come to pay homage to our God at the cost of no little inconvenience to ourselves, and He gladly welcomes us, not as seraphs, but as poor human creatures, men and women with bodies of clay, with no wings of our own to lift us above the earth whence we have sprung and whither we shall return. Is it likely, is it conceivable, that at such moments as these our Father who is in Heaven, but also in every part of the earth, should be prying to discover whether and how far our imaginations may have strayed from Him, although He knows that He possesses our hearts?

God in the centre of your heart knows that you want to serve Him, your distractions do not distract Him, He is nearer to you than they, and He understands that they are no part of your real self. They are the offspring of that mortal body which by His own permission weighs down the soul. He is content with your goodwill, and if He is satisfied why are not you?

“Our Father”

WHAT is the pattern set before us in the Lord's Prayer? We are bidden to ask that His Name should be hallowed, that His Kingdom should come, that His Will should be done on earth as well as in heaven— not, observe, in any particular country or parish, but the wide world over. Every one of us, however miserable, however sinful, has these words put into his mouth.

There follows indeed, as is right and proper, a supplication for our own individual needs.

But we have first been taught in what the essence of prayer resides, what prayer really means, the entrance, that is, into the Presence-Chamber of the Eternal God, to whom all things are subject, whose Eyes survey the whole earth.

With Him all things are possible. When we speak to Him who holds in His Hands the threads of all creation, who is All-Wise and All-Powerful, whose Will no one can withstand, it is ridiculous to talk of difficulties except those of our own making.

We can ask for too little, we cannot ask for too much. We can pray for a single conversion; He who died for all would like us to beg His mercy upon all whom He has redeemed. A man may be known by his prayers, I do not mean by their length but by their character, as it were by their tone. Our prayers are an expression of ourselves: if they are large and hopeful and buoyant, they reflect an intimacy with God and a trust in His goodness to which nothing can be refused. We cannot think too well of God; we cannot overrate His liberality.

Confidence in Prayer

WHEN we, who are by nature mere dust and ashes, venture even by His express command to raise our eyes and our voice to our Maker, our first difficulty will naturally be, if we are not merely repeating prayers by rote, to accustom ourselves, as it were, to the novelty of the position and to overcome the feeling of awe which it would naturally produce. It seems hardly credible that the Highest could stoop to interest Himself in our trivial affairs, and the mere thought of His doing so at first fills us with more fear than consolation. We find it hard to take quite literally His gracious words inviting us to beg of Him any favour whatsoever: and in our confusion we experience almost a feeling of relief in putting in reservations and restrictions of our own, to make, as it were, His generosity more suitable to our littleness, shading with our hands the light of His goodness that our weak eyes may be able to bear it.

To pray, to put ourselves in communication with God, is to enter into another world with which we are totally unacquainted, utterly unlike our own, having immense spaces, as it seems, in which we may lose ourselves and wander on aimlessly, fruitlessly, without any end. It is making an excursion, while we still remain in the flesh, into the land of the

spirit, of infinity, of eternity, of reality—although we conceive of it as of shadows—dwelt in by God, and penetrated with His Presence a thousand times more intimately than the earth on which we stand. What wonder that as soon as in prayer we cross the frontiers of this universe, when we strive to “raise our minds and hearts to God”, we are apt to take with us the fetters of the prison-house which we have just quitted!

What we need is more simplicity in our relations with God. It is quite true that He is raised above us higher than the heavens above the earth, that He is and must always remain infinitely beyond our understanding, simply because He is Infinite and Eternal, whereas we are dust and creatures of time. Be it so; let us leave it so. We shall one day understand all that is possible to be understood about the Incomprehensible Deity. Meanwhile we shall only bewilder our poor minds by becoming “searchers of majesty and be overwhelmed by glory” (Prov. xxv. 2), and shall strain our eyes to no purpose in peering into the light inaccessible wherein God dwells, but which to our sight is as thickest darkness.

We put little heart into our prayers because we have little real hope that they will be granted. It is here that our lack of simplicity comes in. We cannot understand, we cannot even imagine, how what we pray for can be brought about in existing circumstances— how some blow we dread can be turned aside, or how our will can ever be steered to follow the right; and we forget that circumstances exist only by God’s permission, and can be changed by Him in a moment if He wills.

There is a deep lesson for us all in Our Lord’s frequent practice as we read it in the Gospels, of questioning those who begged His help whether they truly believed He could perform what they required. We are told that He wrought not many miracles in His own country because of the unbelief of its inhabitants. They could not take away His infinite power, but they could and did extinguish His desire to exercise it on their behalf.

The less we speculate upon God’s hidden counsels the more fervently we shall implore His mercy. We pray because He bids us pray, He does not bid us inquire into “the times and moments which the Father hath put in His own power”.

St Joseph

IT is good for us to be at Nazareth in spirit for a while, to watch for a little, standing or on our knees, in front of the carpenter’s shed, Joseph drawing his saw, Jesus planing some piece of wood, Mary engaged in sewing or weaving. What are they thinking of? How do they manage to lighten the monotony of their life?

If we could have speech of them, they would surely answer that they needed not our pity and found no monotony in their life. On the contrary, every sun gave them only a fresh occasion of blessing God and a new opportunity of spending themselves in His service.

If the great St Joseph could teach us not by example only but by word, would he not counsel us to fill our days with some solemn purpose which should give a meaning and unity to our life and a heavenly tincture to its meanest details under the eyes of God?

The grating of the carpenter’s saw, the clicks of his hammer, did not sound harshly in the realms above for the Lord’s foster-father, and the Lord Himself wrought for God’s glory not with His Hands only but with His Heart. There can be no real monotony in a life lived for God, and its smallest actions are as the dust of gold.

The Way to Holiness

HELL-FIRE is a terrible reality and never to be forgotten, but it should not form the staple of our thoughts. It is very useful as a check, as a deterrent, but it alone never made a saint. The *Dies Irae* rolling through the arches of some great cathedral fills, subdues, transpierces the soul; but it is a lament, a plea for mercy, a deprecation of wrath. The true battle-cry, leading forward the hosts of the Lord, is the Hymn of Love, the *O Deus, ego amo Te* of St Francis Xavier; to its strain, not loud but deep, heard only by God’s ears and our own, we gird on our armour and for His sake quit ourselves like men as long as our heart-beats last. Aim high always, always widen the horizon of your hopes, let each day find you more keen, more energetic, more confident of success. Look not backward, let the dead bury its dead; forget past failures; set your face steadily to the future, as did your Lord and Master, to the heavenly Jerusalem.

Away with despondency; do not parley with doubts; your own strength is as that of a reed, but you are upheld and carried forward by the power of God. Take yourself by what is glorious in you, not by what is base; by what is eternal, your predilection by God, your destiny, not by what is temporal, your body of clay and its lower passions. Cultivate, reinforce, draw out the diviner elements in you, since you are made after the image and likeness of God; weaken, keep under what only relates you to the brute. The soul is like the human voice, it can be trained throughout all its range; it can be strengthened where it is weak, and softened where it is harsh, and grow indefinitely in fineness, delicacy, and expression.

God can, if He wishes, freeze the soul with terror, shake it with the thunder of His wrath; but He prefers to strike the chords of love, to win us, not to frighten us, into His arms. It is our part to prepare ourselves for His gracious visitations, and to accustom ourselves to recognise and to welcome the faintest breathing of His Spirit.

Our Lord's Compassion for Us

WE are all in God's sight, if we are repentant, only naughty boys or naughty girls. It is precisely because of our childishness, our want of foresight, our want of thought, our waywardness, our lack of self-control, that God is so patient with our faults.

We are weaker and blinder even than we know. We are not always fair judges of the full amount of deliberation, and therefore of malice, in the sins we commit. Our Lord could not tell or insinuate a falsehood and yet He could offer up His prayer to the Eternal Truth: Father forgive them *for they know not what they do*. It is then certain that God may find excuses for us when we can find none for ourselves. We shall never in this life—or indeed in the next—understand altogether the mystery of God's mercy, but one clue to it must be God's infinite knowledge of our all but infinite littleness in comparison with Him.

It is our helplessness, our want of sense, our inability to guide ourselves, which seem most of all to appeal to His supreme wisdom, His magnificent strength, His most tender love—He had compassion on the multitude because they were like sheep without a shepherd. A mother is not irritated but touched by the first clumsy attempts of her child to walk; she raises it more carefully and embraces it more lovingly after every fall. We cannot be mistaken if we imitate towards ourselves the methods of our Heavenly Father, the Author of our nature. He does not threaten us, unless we harden our hearts; He does not storm, He does not knit His brow. He treats with reverence all that He has made; He disposeth all things sweetly, not by terrorism, not by brute force.

When things are not going well with us in the struggles of life, when we have to bear defeat and disappointment, it is the last moment in which to upbraid or even belittle ourselves. We need encouragement; we need restoratives; the soul will respond to motives of confidence and hope. Now is the time to pour in oil and wine, as did the good Samaritan, only we must do it for ourselves: "Soul," we may say, "take courage, faint not; God will not forsake thee; it is no new thing which has happened to thee; many times before thou hast stumbled and fallen, but God has raised thee up, and will do so again; thou art no angel but fashioned of flesh and blood and prone to evil from thy birth; thy Lord is merciful and understanding; He knows that thy frailty rather than thy will consents. His help will be with thee in the future even mightier than in the past."

Brother, sister, do not think that you are helping God's cause by disheartening yourself; on the contrary, as your spirits rise you mount higher heavenward and you spurn the earth. Hope will give you wings, and you will find easy what you once thought impossible. A victory believed in is a victory assured.

Reconciliation

GOD seems to make it a rule that we shall not be in perfect peace with Him if we exclude even one person from our affection. You remember His words about being reconciled to our brother before bringing our gift to the altar; if we won't do that, He won't admit us to His close friendship.

Is there anyone in the world towards whom you feel bitterness? Don't let the sun go down on your anger. You will get

nearer to God, and many troubles will disappear. “Love your enemies—do good to those who hate you.” How much it would teach us about Our Blessed Lord to put this into practice!

It is a saying of His, not in the Gospels, but handed down by tradition: “When you have done these things you will understand them.”
