

WHAT DOTHT IT PROFIT?

By Robert Nash, S.J.

A reason which accounts in large measure for the difference between Our Lord's point of view and our own is that He sees our souls and we do not see them. In His eyes the human soul is far and away the most precious thing on this earth. It is like a glorious sun sending out in all directions rays of a light before which all other beauty pales into insignificance. It is the solid, indestructible palace, not with hands, built by God Himself upon a rock to last for eternity, while all the other beautiful and valuable things in the world are for time only. The soul, were it faithful to the plan God has mapped out for it would walk through this earth as a sovereign amongst his vassals, for God has set the soul on a plane raised immeasurably above all other creatures of this world. These latter He has made only that they might bend down and serve the interests of the soul.

This priceless treasure God has entrusted to our frail keeping. While we know and believe that each of us has indeed such a soul, we are conscious too that there is nothing easier in the world than to forget all about it. It is a hidden treasure. Jesus sees it; we do not. But round about us on all sides there are plenty of good things which we can see, which we can handle, taste, listen to. These are the things which give us natural pleasure and there is nothing more natural to us than to reach out our hands for them and enjoy them. Why? Simply because we like them. Because they entertain us or amuse us.

A moment's reflection, however, will show us that pleasure cannot be an end in itself. The whole question is (from what we have said about Our Lord's point of view), whether this pleasure is going to help or to injure the interests of the soul. But it is hard to keep this criterion always before our eyes and harder still to regulate our choices by it. We do not give ourselves time to think of what the true order demands. We plunge into pleasure just as opportunity offers. To subject the soul's interests to those of pleasure is sin, varying in degree of heinousness but ultimately reducible to this,—that a man seeks wealth or amusement or power or the esteem of his fellows or some other object which he regards as good and worth acquiring,—these he seeks for their own sake; merely for the satisfaction he finds in them. True order demands that these be sought only in so far as they help the soul in the task appointed her and abandoned without delay when they are discovered to hinder the soul. But man can close his eyes to this true order and indeed he is very much inclined to do so. The man with the worldly point of view lives by the gospel: Eat, drink, and be merry. Have a good time. Make sure to enjoy yourself at all costs for tomorrow we die.

But the soul is not satisfied, cannot be satisfied. Still does it reach out longingly for the possession of God. "No heart can be satisfied with less than God." God sees life from the viewpoint of the soul's true purpose, the attainment of God Himself. Man, until enlightened by grace, regards life as a chance of laying eager hands upon what satisfies the desires of the moment. So the prophet affirms: My thoughts are not your thoughts nor My ways your ways. For, as far as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so far are My thoughts from your thoughts and My ways from your ways.

Our Lord's point of view may thus be summed up in that momentous question of His which has revolutionised so many lives: "What doth it profit a man that he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" It will be a fitting commentary on this question to try to unfold before our eyes the work done in the soul by each Person of the Blessed Trinity.

Theologians find a special appositeness in assigning to God the Father the work of creation, to the Son the work of redemption, and to the Holy Ghost the work of sanctification. So we may think of the Father as creating the human soul, of the Son as its Redeemer, and of the Third Person as engaging in the sacred task of sanctifying it. Such a consideration should throw much light on Our Lord's point of view; it should go a long way towards helping a man to estimate the value and the dignity of the soul as it appears in the sight of the Most Holy Trinity.

What then has the Father done for the soul? For my soul? Time was and I had no existence. Twenty, forty, seventy years ago nobody even thought about me; nobody except my Father God. His thought for me was from eternity. There never was a period when I was not present in the mind of that heavenly Father. He had determined (as we would say) that the being would come into existence whom I now know myself to be. At a certain day and hour I was to enter upon a life which would expand and increase, which would one day break the barriers of time and stretch itself unendingly out into the limitless spaces of eternity. That is the first chapter in the history of my soul. My Father

planned from all eternity to create it thus. He has fulfilled His plan. My soul at this moment is an actual fact, a living spirit, with the glorious destiny ahead of it to be gathered at death back into the mansions of its Father's Home.

But the plan of the Father was thwarted. Man refused to give the love and the service due from a son towards such a Father. He flung a most grievous insult into his Father's face, and God because He is infinitely just, could not fittingly overlook the sin. Satisfaction must be made or my soul would never secure the happiness His love had prepared for it. But who could make adequate satisfaction to God except One Who was Himself God? Infinite dignity had been offended; reparation could be offered only by One of infinite dignity too. And who could fittingly atone for man's sin except One Who was a real Man? Hence in the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation Divinity united in one Person with humanity. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us." He crept into His world in the stillness of night amidst the poverty of Bethlehem. He lived as the Son of a poor artisan in despised Nazareth for thirty years. He moved in and out amongst men and women and told them about the value and destiny of their souls, about the Father's love for them, about his own mission as Redeemer. Above all else did He impress upon them that life's supreme and all-important task was to make sure that the soul go back again to the Father from Whose creative hand it had come forth.

Some men hated Him, for His transparent sincerity was a reproach to their hypocrisy. They were losing their hold on the crowds since this Man had appeared on the scene so they made up their minds to remove Him. A mock trial was held, false witnesses were suborned, and His enemies managed to extract a sentence against Him from a judge who declared Him innocent. They nailed Him to a Cross. He died and offered His life and death in satisfaction to His Father's offended majesty. That is what my soul owes to the Son,—at least it is an infinitesimally small portion of the debt,—the chance of being able to get back again to my Father in spite of the thwarting of His plan by sin.

But although I have this chance I shall not make use of it if I am left to myself. It is very easy, as we have said, to try to satisfy my craving for happiness with the good things around me; to seek my well-being outside of God. To prevent this disaster happening, the Third Person offers to help me. He comes into my soul with the marvellous design of setting up in it His permanent abode. His coming is symbolised with special aptness by tongues of fire. For fire gives light and the Holy Spirit enters into the soul in a blaze of light,—we call it divine grace,—and it instantly shrivels up the darkness of sin. When He came like that to the Apostles on the first Pentecost He showed them clearly just what He longs to show me,—the value and dignity of a soul.

And fire gives warmth to the frozen heart. As soon as a man begins to realise the interest taken in him by each Person of the Blessed Trinity his heart instinctively leaps out towards God in a great act of love. God is so lovable, He so completely absorbs all the power of love contained in the heart of man that there is no longer any time or inclination left to cling to the trifles which were heretofore treasured so highly. Not that that man loves men and things less, but, that now his love for them is purified because now it first passes through the cleansing filter of His love. Love of others becomes an overflow of the love poured by the Holy Spirit into the soul.

So the Third Person is a fire giving light and heat to the soul,—light to understand and heat which inflames love. He is also a tongue of fire for a man caught up in this fire of divine love must of necessity speak of it to others. "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

A gardener loves to bring you through his garden and tell you about his flowers and shrubs and fruit and vegetables, to dilate on what he has produced last year and what he intends to sow in the year ahead. An author will button-hole you and read his manuscript at you until a late hour at night unless you are tactful. The farmer wants to tell you about the crops and the fairs, and the salesman likes to discuss the state of the market. In the same way the man who is on fire with the love of God very much wants to talk about God and divine things. He is impelled to do so because in the light he sees very clearly that nothing else in life is one-half as important as making people understand their position in the sight of God. He burns with the desire that all men should be gripped by the bigness of the truth that they each possess an immortal soul. So he speaks with a conviction in His voice which shames cynicism into respect, with a burning sincerity which is often the most effective argument against sophistry.

2. A SOUL IN GRACE

It will be in place now briefly to set forth some of the wonderful effects which the Holy Ghost produces in the soul.

The first of these is an unalterable sense of happiness and peace. "In a heart united to God," wrote the Curé of Ars, "it is always springtime." The man who understands and appreciates the dignity of his own soul as being the dwelling-place of God cannot be morose or gloomy. He can never suffer much from loneliness for when alone all he has to do is to turn his eyes in upon his own soul and there, at all sorts of times and in all sorts of places, he finds this divine Guest Who has deigned, thus wondrously, to take up His abode within him.

Assuredly in this vale of tears he will have to accept his share of the cross. He may be stretched on a bed of sickness and racked with pain. He may lose his position and all his worldly prospects. Grinding poverty may sit on his doorstep and his heart may be ripped open with sorrow by the sight of the wan faces of his wife and little children. Death may enter his home and snatch from him somebody whom he loves as his own soul. But all these things, even though they cause him most poignant grief, can still only graze the surface of his soul. Deep down in his heart, where no creature can enter, he knows that he holds a treasure which no earthly misfortune can wrest from his grasp. There he possesses the source of a joy and an abiding peace which this world can neither give nor take away.

When the Holy Spirit dwells like this in a soul He gives quite a new value to everything done by that soul. It is not the man merely who speaks or writes or works or eats or drinks or recreates himself. When grace abides in the soul all these very commonplace actions are "supernaturalized." Everything, unless of its nature it be opposed to God's Will, (that is, unless it be sin), is accumulating treasure in heaven. "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever else you do, do all to the glory of God."

Let me suppose that two men give an alms,—the same amount, to the same poor man, and moved by the same motive of natural compassion. The first man has the grace of God in his soul; the second is in mortal sin. If you were looking at these two handing a sixpence to the beggar at the corner, you would say that they had done the very same act. In point of fact there is as much difference between their two acts as there is between earth and heaven. The moment the first man gives his alms his act is entered on the right side of his ledger for heaven. He forgets all about his trivial charity when he has turned the corner and met a friend. But God does not forget. Only let that man persevere and die in the state of grace and he rediscovers that little kindly turn which he had long since forgotten. On the shore of eternity God stands waiting for him with the reward of his good and faithful service. And to his amazement he finds that his small act of kindness has been treasured up and remembered for him and that it actually has increased the measure of his recompense.

Thus when a man is in the state of grace all his life is shot through with the supernatural. Everything he touches is changed into gold for eternity. The more actual he makes his intention of pleasing God in doing this or that the greater will be his merit in eternity. But even without a thought of God if he be *in* the state of grace he merits enormously still, for the act is done not merely by one person but by two together, God and the man share in everything. God's share enhances beyond the power of words to express the merit of what is done. That is why the Apostleship of Prayer, that world-wide association of thirty-five million souls, lays such stress upon the Morning Offering. It teaches us to unite all our thoughts, words and actions, all our joys and our sufferings, with the Sacred Heart and to offer them, thus united to God. The more we train ourselves to act *consciously* throughout the day in the spirit of this Apostleship the more supernatural will our lives become.

Moreover sanctifying grace makes me a child of God. Every soul sealed in this way is adopted into God's great family. God is really his Father, Jesus Christ his elder Brother and Mary Immaculate becomes his Mother. And this divine sonship is a foreshadowing of the work of glory hereafter when the adoption into the family is to be irrevocably confirmed and approved. "We are now the sons of God and it has not yet appeared what we shall be."

The fact that the soul is thus part of God's family gives rise to yet another marvel, even in this life. It is natural to expect a family resemblance between a father and his son. Now because we are God's children by grace there is impressed upon our souls a family likeness between Him and us. When God looks down into a soul possessed of this gift it is something like as if He were to look into a mirror in which He sees the reflection of Himself. "God, made man to His own image and likeness, to the image of God He created him." The more faithfully man corresponds to the workings of divine grace in his soul the more perfect will the likeness grow.

And this is what it means to be a saint. A saint dethrones selfishness or at least keeps trying consistently to do so. In the measure in which selfishness is driven out, in the same will grace extend its sway over the soul. Little by little

the soul becomes more and more docile—until finally there is only one rule of conduct,—unreserved and unqualified submission to and acceptance of all that God ordains. Where the Holy Spirit is given a free hand like this He will work on that soul in much the same way as the sculptor works on his block of marble. Little by little God will produce the wonderful design. His love has planned; little by little the soul will grow more and more like God Himself. But the soul is not merely a block of marble. The all-important point is that it must co-operate with grace. It must consistently wage war on the life of selfishness. It must take up the sword of self-denial. On this condition God's reign will extend within the soul. Inch by inch He will advance and claim the territory thus vacated.

It may be said that all this doctrine finds little favour with modern ideas about progress and success. Visible results are the great desideratum of the day. There was very little to show for the hidden uneventful life of Mary of Nazareth. People regarded her as a very ordinary village maiden. But when God looked into her immaculate soul He saw there that there was selflessness and sinlessness, and, as a necessary consequence, there was the kingdom of grace firmly established. It is not so much -what a man does that matters in God's eyes as what the man becomes. Under the transforming influence of divine grace a radical change is to be effected in the soul. The kingdom of sin and self is to be undermined and the kingdom of grace to be built up. From God's point of view nothing else matters very much except that this kingdom within the soul continue to grow.

3. SPREADING THE GOOD NEWS

In view of all this can we be surprised that the saints were such misers where the grace of God was concerned? The saints are those men and women who climb up to a point of vantage; they live near the source of divine light and they see with a clarity that they cannot express that one single degree of grace is not to be compared for a moment with all the gold of this world. They din that into our ears but we are slow to hear. Still they refuse to be silent. They are so gripped by the importance of the message they have to impart that discouragement becomes impossible. Often they are not able to make men hear and realise. The lure of the world is strong. Men do not see their souls.

But no amount of failure can dull the zeal of the apostle. He knows that even Our Lord did not always succeed. There were in His day too, men hard of heart who stopped their ears. Still Jesus went on with His message and was grateful with even a little response.

This attitude of Our Lord is symbolised by His conduct in the working of many of His miracles. It is well worthy of note that He willingly makes use of whatever His friends are able to offer Him. Thus, at His first public miracle at Cana of Galilee He ordered that the jars be filled with water and then He changed the water into wine. He might just as easily have created the wine out of nothing but He preferred to make use of what they were able to bring Him. Similarly when He fed the multitudes in the desert place, He first asked: "How many loaves have you?" And they told Him: "Five, and a few little fishes." These again Our Lord took and blessed and multiplied and gave to His disciples to distribute to the hungry crowds around Him. It would have been quite as easy for Him to create this abundance of food but once more He preferred to use what they were able to provide. In the most stupendous miracle of all Jesus used and continues to use, bread and wine to change into His Body and Blood. He might have done it in some other way but His way is to take what men can bring to Him and use what they have for Him, for the accomplishment of His miracles.

Now when a man begins to discover the beauty and the value of a soul a great longing seizes upon him to communicate his newly-found knowledge to others. He cannot rest in peace when he understands what the bulk of men are missing. He knows that ours is an age when, perhaps more than ever before, Catholics need to be apostolically minded. We cannot afford to be dog-in-the-manger Catholics thinking exclusively about our own soul's welfare and our own soul's salvation. Other souls are perishing. Materialism is sapping the roots of the supernatural life. Catholics there are, and many of them, who serve God in a spirit of routine, with no personal love of Christ in their hearts. For these religion has resolved itself into a mechanical hearing of Mass on Sundays, a mumbling of a few prayers night and morning, an occasional reception of the Sacraments. And after that? After that their gospel would seem to be as much pleasure and thrill or as much toil for money as can be compressed into the twenty-four hours. They have no interest in their faith. They are blind to the beauty and value of a human soul. The burning love of Christ's Sacred Heart is for them a kind of fairy-tale. Eternity is a thought to be kept away from, to be forgotten if possible.

When you begin to think of this and much more of the same kind is it much to be wondered at that his understanding of true values drives the apostle to work his fingers off for souls? What is the apostolically-minded Catholic going to do about the state of blindness he finds round about him? ? He must have his own heart inflamed with zeal. He must be keen above all else on the welfare of those souls so dazed that they do not see their own importance. He must realise that he has it in his power, through the mercy of God, to arouse men from their lethargy, to change their hearts, to stun them into sharing the sense of values that has come to him, to galvanise them into action for the salvation of the souls of others.

This is an age when there is need of men and women with the spirit of a Francis Xavier, a Frederick Ozanam, or a Curé of Ars. This is an age for the indomitable courage of a Catherine of Siena. This is an age to issue challenge to the deeds of Joan of Arc. Catholic men and women who take their faith seriously cannot remain indifferent to the attacks of materialism and to the consequent weakening of the spirit of faith and to the coldness in men's hearts in love for Jesus and Mary. Yes. Great zeal is wanted. Great personal love and enthusiasm are a crying need. Such a love and such an enthusiasm are engendered by prayer. When a man sets himself to pray seriously he wakens up to the value of a soul, to the love Jesus has for a soul, to the appalling disaster of eternal loss for a soul. How can anything else matter very much? What doth it profit? He sees and understands and must bend all his energies to the task of making others see and understand too.

But side by side with this zeal the apostle needs also, an infinite fund of patience. He must not look for too much visible result from his apostolic efforts. He must learn that the business of winning souls to Our Lord's point of view is an affair to be accomplished with a rod and a hook rather than with a net. True, when his heart begins to glow in prayer he would like to make others experience this burning love too. When he begins to understand the infinite love of the Sacred Heart for souls he would wish to send out an invitation to the ends of the earth and call all men together and try to find words that would win them to Christ. When he sees how most of us are consuming our lives chasing after phantoms and he knows the solid joy that has grown up in his life since he discovered Christ's love, is it much to be surprised at that he longs to disillusion us too? When he looks out over the world and sees the havoc wrought by sin, the base ingratitude of sin, its insolence, the trail of miseries that follows in its wake,—when the apostle begins to understand these things, not from his reading, not from what other people tell him, but from what Our Lord Himself teaches him in prayer, then indeed is his heart fired with anxiety that the scales should fall from the eyes of the world and all men be taught to read and to learn and be gripped by the lessons taught to himself.

But that flare of zeal will not endure unless the apostle learns to temper it with patience. He will often be a failure,—apparently. He will often spend himself and have no visible result to show. He will often be inclined to believe that all his dreams and ideals are foolish, that he should abandon all this effort to bring God to souls and souls to God. He will tell himself that he should settle down and acquiesce in the state of things as he finds them around him. Others see and do not bother; why should he distress himself? Others adopt armchair methods and talk wisely about caution and moderation and prudence. They talk and are listened to and are applauded. Why should he trouble himself trying to *do* when all he receives for his pains is cynicism or positive hostility? Why work himself to death and watch others having quite a fun time?

Suppose he stands up to his temptation. He conquers the tendency to discouragement and goes ahead and for many years proves himself a successful reaper in the Lord's vineyard. For his pains he may be rewarded with a patronizing smile or a stony silence from those who, you would say, should encourage and co-operate. At the end of this long spell of toil and sacrifice let him now some day make a mistake, only one mistake. At once the silence bursts into eloquence. He is warned, reproved, blamed. He is, perhaps, even sneered at by those who have stood all the day idle. Yes. The apostle needs patience.

Our Lord took from men what they were able to give Him. If the apostle cannot get done all the good he wants to do, let him learn patience. If he tries to win a sinner and meets with insult let him remember that his effort is highly meritorious in God's sight. There is no such thing as failure when he is working sincerely for God's glory.

No effort is lost. A grace he sees rejected here may be accepted by *a* soul at the antipodes. Not until he goes to heaven will he understand how his work has borne fruit, not perhaps in the place or at the time that he most wanted but in a place and at a time about which he knew nothing at all. One solid truth there is that will always stand him in

good stead,—nothing is ever lost that is done for God. That most generous Benefactor never allows Himself to be outdone in generosity.

Hence, like Our Lord, let the apostle take what he can get. You cannot get your man to join the Sodality but he promises faithfully to do his Easter Duty and to go to Mass. Of course you would like ever so much more, and rightly. But have patience. You have penetrated a certain distance, and more, please God, will come later. Our Lord took what He could get. You want that girl who is at Mass every morning to become a daily communicant. She has some absurd reasons for not going. All right. Give her a chance. You are not going to gain her by noise and irritation. She will get over her scruples in time if you pray for her and add a little penance to your prayer.

Our Lord took what people could give Him. “Good,” says Newman, “is never done except at the cost of those who do it.” You want to start an organisation. It is such an obvious opening for a Boys’ Club, or a Sodality, or a daily Mass Crusade, or a Praesidium of the Legion of Mary, or a Conference of the St. Vincent de Paul. Try to make a beginning and at once there are difficulties raised. Perhaps they come most noisily from the very people on whom you rightly depended to encourage and help you. For goodness sake do not give up your idea at the first sign of difficulty. God’s work thrives on opposition. Have a little patience. Humour those, if you can honestly do so, who throw cold water on your enterprise. Take a snub with a smile and pocket your pride. It is well worth the price if your scheme is going to help even one soul. Refuse to say harsh things about those who oppose you. By such means did the saints draw down abundant blessings on the manifold works they undertook for God and for souls. The apostle needs zeal, enterprise, enthusiasm, and plenty of it. But zeal will develop into restlessness unless it be tempered by patience. Enterprise will degenerate into a foolish desire for personal success if it be not preceded by patience, accompanied by patience and followed by patience. Enthusiasm will soon die down unless it be built up on a strong personal love of Our Lord; and that love will not be solid unless it be sealed with the hallmark of infinite patience.

Nothing is ever lost that is done for God. Boundless zeal and infinite patience are the two weapons with which the apostle must gird himself. Let him do good wherever he finds opportunity. Drop a word in a bus or a railway carriage,—your chance companion may be a non-Catholic hungering for the truth that is yours to give him. Or he may be a lax Catholic who will listen to you when he would scowl at a priest. Spread good literature,—leave it quietly behind you after dinner in the hotel, send it to the patients in the hospital or County Home, post some of it to a hardened sinner whom you know, or drop it on the seat of a tram or a railway carriage or a bench in the park. There is a very good chance that somebody will pick it up and with what advantage to his soul who can estimate?

“Love,” writes Saint Teresa, “is always showing itself in a thousand different ways.” Love is the need of our day,—personal love of Jesus and Mary to stand up to this sickly pale thing, this routine religion; love that will not be put down by human respect but is proud to let itself be seen and to walk openly in the daylight for the eyes of all men to gaze upon. Let such a love seize upon a man’s heart and it will drive him forward to avail of every opportunity,—in his office or shop, with friends or strangers, with sinners and with saints,—to fire others with a love like that which is ablaze in his own heart. He must be a Catholic always, that is, his religion must be part of himself and he must push the eternal interests of souls everywhere and with everybody. There is no such thing as being a Catholic in Church and a mere businessman or professional man outside of Church. Take a page from the enemies of the Church. Are communists revolutionising the world by sponsoring communism as a mere part time job? Far from it. They are red-hot. And the result? A handful of them can turn the world upside down and drive men wild with enthusiasm for the cause.

But when all this is said let not the apostle allow discouragement to press in upon *him* if others remain indifferent, cynical, or even positively hostile. Our Lord took what men gave Him. Let the apostle indeed be fired with zeal, but let him learn too the art of practising infinite patience in his dealings with souls.

A man lay by the pool of Bethsaida for thirty-eight years. So many years wasted! But one day Jesus passed by the pool and in a flash he cured him completely. In a single moment He did more for the poor cripple than he himself had been able to do unaided in thirty-eight years. Many a soul languishes thus. “There are souls which spend whole years, sometimes even a whole lifetime, bargaining with God.” No matter. Have patience with them,—and with yourself. Do not slacken in your efforts merely because you see no visible results. Jesus cured the man at Bethsaida in a single moment. Perhaps there is a mighty grace coming for your sinner too,—contingent, it may well be, on your persevering

effort for his soul.

4. CONCERNING ETERNITY

“What doth it profit”? There are three thoughts which evolve themselves from this text of Our Lord and they are an added stimulus to a zeal for souls that is enduring in spite of difficulties. The first of the three is this: I am made for eternity. With that thought in your mind stand some evening at a street corner and watch the crowds. As you stand there you see them queuing up for the pictures, or rushing off to a dance, or walking into occasions of sin, or gossiping and exchanging tittle-tattle conversation, sitting in trains or buses and reading the evening paper, or discussing the market, sport, the latest “thriller,” their holidays, everything or anything except the subject that so profoundly engrosses the greatest Thinker of all, Jesus of Nazareth.

What blindness this is, even when men are living tolerably good lives. How much time and thought they consume on trifles, and how little they think or want to think, about the eternity that very soon is going to open up for them. Then they must leave their money, their grand homes, their cricket and tennis and football and greyhound racing and swimming gala and dancing and picnic,—all that they must leave. Do they know that? Do they believe it? Of course if you hold them up they will tell you that they do. But just look and see if, judging by their thoughts and their words and their interests, judge if they have the dimmest realisation of this truth that ought to be such a dynamic influence in their lives.

Those who live thus in the whirlpool of the world pity those who shape their lives consistently with the principles of Our Lord. They imagine that they must be unhappy because they deliberately cut off many of the sources of natural pleasure which worldlings allow themselves. There never was a greater fallacy than to think that the world rewards its votaries, even in this world more generously than God rewards those who strive earnestly to be wholehearted in His service. So much stress is laid and quite rightly, on the need of abnegation in the following of Christ, that sometimes we lose sight of the intense joyousness of soul that the Lord promises. It is a mistake to look at only half the picture. The full programme presented by Our Lord ensures a peace and happiness of soul that more than fully recompenses, even in this life, for what we suffer in embracing the cross.

What doth it profit? Our second thought in connection with Our Lord’s text is that each one of us is standing on the very brink of that eternity. We are like men waiting at the railway platform for the train to come. All that we know is that we are at the station and that the train is absolutely certain to come. But when? and for what destination? Certainly our destination is eternity but that station does not appear on the pages of your Red Guide. The train will surely come,—perhaps before I finish reading this page, or perhaps in sixty or seventy years’ time. No wonder then that Our Lord tells us to be ready for at what hour we think not the Son of Man will come. If we have to wait even a hundred years for the train to arrive, a poor hundred years compared with the eternity ahead of us is far less than a drop of water compared with the vast expanse of ocean. For between a single drop and the whole ocean there is at least some proportion; you can say that the ocean is made up of a certain number of drops. But eternity and time are on different planes; they have no middle term; they are utterly incommensurable.

Now what would you think of a man who would bring all his luggage on to the platform and unpack it there,—spreading armchairs and carpets everywhere in generous profusion, merely because he wanted to make himself comfortable while he was waiting for the train? You would certainly tell me that he is mad. The train is due any moment and see how he employs himself! is that man much saner who knows that he is on the brink of eternity and still plays with sin or the toys of selfishness or the empty ambitions of worldly-minded men and women? “*Quid hoc ad aeternitatem*”? was the motto of St. Aloysius. “What bearing has this thing which I am now doing on my eternity? How is it going to effect my eternity”? That after all is only common sense when you sit back and look at it. It drives one forward with giant strides in the way of bringing souls to God and God to souls.

There is a third truth yet to be unfolded from Our Lord’s momentous question: I am the shaper or the fashioner of my own eternity. Every day I am determining what I shall be throughout the endless ages of eternity. All the omnipotence of God will not save my soul unless I give Him my free co-operation. All the hatred of the devil and his angels cannot entangle us in the meshes of mortal sin unless we freely walk into the danger with open eyes. More than this. It is in our power to attain to high holiness, to become intimate friends, even in this life, of Jesus and Mary. But

that friendship will never be forced upon us. It was a sublime honour for Mary to be chosen to be God's Mother. But God waited for her "fiat." When she freely gave that, then, but not until then, the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.

What a difference one saint makes in the world! A saint is full of concern to bring other souls to God. He is not satisfied with "safety first" methods. He must be an instrument for the salvation and the sanctification of others too. Count up the legions of souls that have been gathered into heaven because St. Francis Xavier or St. Jean Vianney consented freely to do what God wanted them to do. Reckon up the innumerable hosts of men and women who have been saved, and add on the thousands who have striven to become saints because St. Thérèse of Lisieux gave them the lead. Suppose she had refused to be a Carmelite nun, or that, having become a nun she contented herself with being a second-rate or third-rate nun, what would have become of those vast numbers of souls? "If there is anything that will cause you regret on your deathbed," the late Father Fegan, S.J., was heard to say, "it is the thought that you have ever spared yourself in the service of so good a God."

I am the shaper of my own eternity. You have one opportunity, one only, of ever doing anything for souls, one opportunity, one only, of ever rendering free service to God. That we all know and believe but more is needed. It is time we began to wake up and realise the truth for our chances are slipping out of our hands. Yesterday brought me an opportunity of helping a soul, of offering a sacrifice for a soul. Never again will that opportunity come my way. I have availed of it or lost it, for eternity. Today and tomorrow other chances will come my way. They come once only. I am continually losing or gaining and my loss or my gain is eternal. I am the shaper or the fashioner of my own eternity.

There is work for me to do in my own soul which nobody else can do for me. There are other souls on the road and they are to be helped and encouraged by me, and the help they require nobody can give to them except myself alone. There are souls in danger of falling into mortal sin and of being eternally lost, but if I correspond freely with the graces God is willingly offering to me these sins will be prevented and these souls will be saved. It is part of His Providence,—explain it how I will,—that He has thus made me my brother's keeper.

All this I shall see in eternity. Others whom I knew well in life and who have passed into eternity see and realise now as they never could have done in this life. With what forceful eloquence they would speak to me now if they were permitted! How they would grip me with their earnestness as they would speak to me and tell me of the utter nothingness of all the trifles that I love and esteem! How, they would persuade me to stand always ready and while waiting for the train to take good care to accumulate on the platform those goods only that are "duty free."

"What doth it profit"? All that we have been saying reduces really to one principle,—that nothing matters except God's Will. All this light, flippant, frivolous existence, all this preoccupation with sin or mere enjoying oneself, when looked at through the eyes of Jesus is seen in its true perspective. For what is a superficial life of this sort leading to? Let the worldling go back in imagination a year or two. What does it matter *now* that then you had "a great time"? What use to you *now* are those hours you squandered in that cinema or dancehall, or that you poured out so lavishly over that sentimental novel? What gain is it to you *now* that a year ago you consumed hours in gossip or uncharitable vindictive criticism of your neighbour? That you dressed elegantly and were admired or that you were down at the heels and in rags? Ask your friends what you wore that night at that dance last year. Can they remember? It has simply ceased to matter.

On the other hand what does it matter now that a year ago you made a sacrifice and, when the urge came to you to plunge into sin or worldliness you refused and held yourself in check,—as an act of love for the Sacred Heart? That you curbed that uncharitable tongue of yours when it was itching to criticise harshly,—for the same reason? That instead of reading that foolish book you flung it aside and went over to the Church and made a Holy Hour? That, when you were longing to go and see that picture you forced yourself instead to make the Way of the Cross and after that called and spent half an hour with that poor old invalid cripple? That you gave that half-crown to a deserving poor man or to the St. Vincent de Paul, and went as a result without cigarettes or lipstick? That you got up and went to Mass and Holy Communion when you would have loved to lie on in bed?

What does it matter? Let us try to discover the answer. The sacrifice involved on that occasion,—the part you found difficult,—that is passed forever. You will never again have to face up to that precise hard thing. But a generous God does not allow Himself to be outdone in generosity. He does not forget the widow's mite or the cup of cold water.

But even in this life I think you will tell me that the reward comes. No sooner do you try to be generous and make a sacrifice for Him than He floods the soul with a joy not of this earth. That is the unvarying experience of the saints. The more generous they try to be the more lavish is He in rewarding, even in this life. Try it.

It need hardly be said that the world sneers at all this talk about the value and the destiny of a soul and at this appeal for generosity in the work of saving and sanctifying souls. For the spirit of the world is diametrically opposed to the spirit of Christ. "Wonder not if the world hate you. If you had been of the world the world would love its own. But because you are not of the world but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." And at the Supper table Our Lord deliberately excluded the world from His prayer,— "I pray not for the world but for those whom Thou hast given Me out of the world."

So you will find in the man who has Christ's point of view a healthy contempt for what the world has to say about him or his conduct. He has no time for human respect. If he sees that a course of action is right, is calculated to help souls, that course of action he will adopt albeit the world calls him an oddity or a prig or a goody-goody. There is such an entire disproportion between the opinion or the praise or blame of the worldly-minded and the good to be done for a soul, that the friend of Christ simply refuses to stop to consider the sentiments the worldling is at pains to express. The opinion of the world is fickle and shallow. If the saints were to be continually stopping and considering what the world would say or think where would have been the time or the opportunity of accomplishing the colossal work they did for souls? Singleness of purpose characterises the man who sees life from Our Lord's point of view.

It is notorious that the world is steeped in insincerity. The man with Our Lord's point of view is the embodiment of sincerity. The reason of this is that in every human being he recognises an immortal soul. His friends are not the great ones merely, nor those from whom he expects benefits, nor those who are naturally attractive and congenial. His love is like the love of his Master; it is world-wide. "Come to Me *all* you that labour." Rich and poor, sinners and saints, old men and little children,—for all he has a great love because all are brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ and children of our Father Who is in heaven. Every single person who crosses his path is dear to him because he is ever mindful that that person has a soul for which Jesus bled on Calvary. With that idea habitual to him is it not easy to account for his thoughtfulness, for his readiness to upset his own arrangements, for his positive anxiety to reach out a helping hand to anybody and on any occasion? "As long as you did it to one of these . . . you did it to Me."

Our supply of paper is nearly used. Throughout we have stressed one idea,—the value and the destiny of a soul, and the principles that will help in the work of saving and sanctifying souls. Be it said in conclusion that there is nothing original in these pages. What is needed for the apostle of souls is not new ideas and new plans. He needs to make the old principles fresh. He needs to realise what he already merely believes. Suppose a friend of yours is living in a foreign distant country .

For twenty years you have not met and tomorrow you receive a letter telling you that he is coming home. You are jubilant. You eagerly consult your calendar to find out how many days or weeks must elapse before he arrives. You know he is coming. You believe what he says in the letter. But what a difference when you stand at the wharf and watch the boat draw near and he comes up on deck. Now you see. And the ecstasy when the boat has anchored and he, your friend, comes on shore at long last! You knew he was to come. You counted on his arrival. You were certain that the letter was written by him. All along you believed but now as you clasp him to your breast your hopes and longings are a realisation.

In just some such way the thoughts scattered through these few pages will, it is our fervent hope, help you to realise the things that are of lasting importance and value. What doth it profit? You have read nothing here which you did not know before. "It is not the abundance of matter that satisfies the soul" writes St. Ignatius, "but to feel and relish the thing interiorly." When men "feel and relish" the weighty implications in the question of Our Lord they no longer believe merely. They begin to realise. And realisation, conviction, is the basis of action. If I understand indeed that Our Lord's point of view is the only one worth having and acting upon, what more natural than that I begin to act? What more to be expected than that I use the one single opportunity that is in my hands? Eternity is looming large on the horizon already. Souls are in dire need on every side. It is my privilege and my glory that I have the power to help them.

What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What am I going to do for Jesus Christ and for souls?

De Licentia Sup. Ordin:—
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