

*The Sower and the Seed*



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“Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God” (Lk. 8:11).  
Imagine that you hear Jesus teaching His disciples the meaning  
of the parable of the seed.

Divine Master, grant me spiritual understanding of this parable  
as it applies to my soul.

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St. Gregory the Great rightly remarks that this parable of the seed needs no explanation, since Eternal Wisdom Himself has told us its meaning. The seed is the divine word. It may be received interiorly, as by an inspiration, or externally, through the sense of hearing, or through the sense of sight in reading. The sower is God and the earth is the soul. The seed falling upon the soil encounters varying degrees of receptivity. Hardness of heart is represented by the figure of the seed falling by the wayside and being eaten by the birds. The unreceptive hear the word of God without wishing to understand. The seed does not enter into their hearts. The divine seed, the grace of holiness, is received in vain by these indifferent and unreclected souls; and the devil hastens to assist its removal from their memory.

Other seed falls upon stony ground, yet it takes root and the grain begins to sprout; but soon, lacking moisture, it withers away in the heat of the sun. The stony ground is an image of those who receive the word of God with interest and even with joy. They immediately conceive good desires from which certain good works begin to appear; but a want of moral earnestness and the unwillingness to make sacrifices

*he is my brother and sister and mother."* In this answer Jesus did not disclaim the ties of kinship, but He solemnly affirmed by His words that His first duty was to the bond which united Him with the Father. Moreover, He defined as His relatives those who were united to the Father by the accomplishment of His will, which is to hear His word and put it into practice.

It is almost the same answer that He gave to Mary and Joseph when they found Him in the Temple; or as the reply He will later give to the woman in the crowd who proclaimed Mary blessed because of the natural bond that united her to her Son. Jesus wished to teach us that without the spiritual kinship that is achieved by faith and a holy life, the natural bond is of no consequence for salvation. How did Mary receive the answer of her Son? Certainly she was not at all taken aback by it. She understood perfectly the meaning of His response, for by reason of her perfect accomplishment of the will of God she was surely His nearest relative also in a spiritual sense. She rejoiced in her heart that we had been given a means of contracting with Jesus a relationship so intimate and of sharing her own honor and joy.

O Jesus, I thank You from the bottom of my heart for the great consolation of Your words in this incident. They reveal to me the deep love of Your Sacred Heart for the souls who give themselves entirely to God and faithfully do His will. Enable me to enter fully into this kinship with You and to remain in it.

soon obliterate the first impressions, as the sun in one day withers a plant which has no roots. Again, some of the seed falls among thorns which, springing up with the grain, choke its growth. This part of the parable represents the souls who are attached to earthly things, full of ill-regulated affections, encumbered with human preoccupations. One cannot serve two masters; the thorns choke the good grain. Passions are at work in every human heart, but with divine grace we can render them harmless. The last portion of the seed falls on good ground and produces a harvest. Here we recognize those who offer to the word of God the good earth of a good will. But, since the co-operation of the human will may vary in degree, the word of God yields in these souls a varying harvest: "*one thirty, another sixty, and another a hundredfold.*"

The rewards of the spiritual life, both in this world and in heaven, are no more easily won than the prizes of earth. After the seed of the word of God has been received into the upright heart, the harvest depends upon persevering effort, patience, and faithful co-operation with the graces that ever accompany the divine word. But since the recompense is so high and so excellent, we should expect its attainment to cost us more than anything which is below it in value.

*I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me; hear my word. Show your wondrous kindness, O savior of those who flee from their foes to refuge at your right hand. Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who use violence against me (Ps. 16:6-9).*

*The Word of God and the Eucharist*



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“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Lk. 8:8.)

The seed of the word of God develops gradually even in the best soil. The measure of its productivity is determined by the grace of God that accompanies it, together with the recipient's dispositions of mind and heart.

O Jesus, grant that I may hear Your word with an understanding mind and an efficacious will.

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“Tell me,” asks St. Caesarius of Arles, “which seems to you to have the higher dignity: the word or the Body of Jesus Christ? If you answer rightly, you will say that the word of Jesus Christ is no less worthy of honor than His Body. We should be as careful not to allow His word to fall from our hearts as we are to keep the Body of Jesus from falling to the ground when we receive Him.” The word of God and the Eucharist are both intended to reach our hearts, although by different means. They who, in approaching the altar, open only their bodily mouth and close to Jesus the mouth of their heart, eat and drink judgment to themselves, as St. Paul says. In the same way, one who hears the word of God with his bodily ears and allows the ear of his soul to remain shut also merits condemnation. To hear interiorly is to listen to the secret voice that speaks within us, as well as to what is heard or read by the aid of our bodily senses. This spiritual and interior discourse forms the true instruction, for without it, the words of men are useless. God alone is able to teach us truth; angels or men can merely point it

out to us. God alone is *the true light that enlightens every man who comes into the world.*

On the altar the word of the priest changes the gifts that are presented there into the Body of Christ, and so the word of God should transform us interiorly, that we may become living members of His Mystical Body. If Jesus Christ had not manifested Himself to men in these two forms; by the reality of His flesh and of His word, He would not be revealed to the whole world, although He wills to be the Savior of all. In the reality of His flesh He showed Himself in only one corner of the earth, in ancient Palestine; but through the reality of His word, as by the Eucharist, He is present everywhere in the world. And it is only by His word that He reveals Himself to our senses, as we await the happy day when we shall see Him in His glory.

But the grace of hearing the word of Jesus with reverent attention will not avail us unless we obey Him. We must prove by our conduct that the Savior is nourishing us with His words, just as our actions after receiving Holy Communion should make it evident that we have been fed with the Body and Blood of Christ. Fruitless desires or even lively but passing emotions are not enough. We shall prove that we have been interiorly taught by God only through our works, for our good Master alone can give us at once the knowledge of that which we should do and the grace to accomplish it.

O good Jesus, You have said, "*He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.*" Help me by Your grace to be not only faithful and attentive in listening to Your words, but resolute in obeying; so that by my works I may be known as a worthy disciple in Your school.

*The Wheat and the Weeds*



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“Another parable he set before them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men were asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away” (Mt. 13:24, 25).

This parable is a prophecy of the future of the Church; in the vast field of the Church militant, good grain and weeds are permitted by God to grow together until the harvesting at the last judgment.

Divine Savior, grant me resignation in suffering the evils of this life.

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The weeds in our Savior's parable represent the wicked, who in this world are mingled with the good and may even pass for the good, like the weed *zizanium*. This weed, a species of wild wheat common in Palestine, cannot be distinguished from the wheat until the ears of grain ripen. When God made the world, He *saw that it was good*, yet we see evil abounding in the world. In the Church He founded our Savior sowed the grain of truth, virtue, and the counsels of perfection, but even in the Church wickedness appeared; nor did it delay in manifesting itself, for crime and betrayal appeared among the Apostles themselves. Since God and our Savior sowed only good seed, whence came the weeds? The history of the world would be unintelligible if the work of the devil were not recognized. Where the Son of Man had sowed His seed openly and at the cost of hard toil, Satan sowed weeds hastily and during the night. And

once the weeds of evil are sowed, they often grow more luxuriantly and rapidly than the pure wheat of virtue. Moreover, we ourselves contribute to the disorder initiated by the devil whenever we commit sin.

The servants of the householder in the parable were surprised by the appearance of the weeds and wished to uproot them immediately. In this desire, however, they showed an unwise zeal, for to remove the undesirable growths could do more harm than good. Impatience with the presence of the wicked often arises from narrowness of outlook which regards only immediate advantages or personal interests. God views the matter otherwise. He does not look upon the weeds with complacency. He abominates them, but He does not straightway eradicate them; that is, He does not remove all the wicked, at one stroke, from the Church. The reasons for this are that God respects the liberty with which man has been endowed by Him and that, as long as life lasts, there is the possibility that the wicked will respond to grace and be converted. God spares the weeds, also, for the sake of the good grain. Association with the wicked makes it necessary for the good to keep a strict watch over themselves, and offers them opportunities of growing in patience, humility, and confidence in divine Providence.

The preservation and development of the good seed is the all-important matter in the divine economy and, in some mysterious way, the presence of the wicked contributes to this end. Finally, however, all wicked schemes will be seen to have only furthered God's designs; for the time will come when He will intervene. On the last day there will be a separation for all to see of the elect and the reprobate. At that great gleaning the angels will gather the wheat, figure of the elect, into the celestial granary; but the weeds, that is,

the damned, will be cast into the *furnace of fire*. This general sifting of mankind on the last day will be only a public ratification of the sentence pronounced at death upon each individual soul. As death finds us so we shall remain for all eternity. "Death changes nothing; it only immortalizes."

"In Thine infinite goodness we beseech Thee, O Lord, to watch over Thy household that even as it relies solely upon the hope of Thy heavenly grace, so it may ever be defended by Thy protection" (Roman Missal).

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*"Wilt Thou Have Us . . . Gather Them Up?"*



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"Wilt thou have us go and gather them up?" (Mt. 13:29)

Imagine that you hear Jesus teaching His disciples and us the meaning of the parable of the good seed and the weeds.

Divine Savior, make known to me by Your grace that root fault in me which is the source of my sins.

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As in the Church, so in our own souls the weeds grow up with the good grain. The paradise of innocence lasted only a short time, for evil very soon invades the soul of man. By vigilance we can prevent the wicked sower from carrying out his plans, but we sometimes invite his entrance into our souls by our own carelessness. It may be a book, a companion, a bad habit; then, suddenly, we awaken to find that the harm has been done, that something new and not good has come into existence within us.

When the servants in our Savior's parable asked the house-

holder's permission to pull up the weeds from among the wheat, he bade them wait until the time of harvest. Does this mean that we should allow the faults that have taken root in us to remain undisturbed? Assuredly not; but we are here instructed to be patient, to follow the advice of our spiritual director, and to exercise prudence, in order not to destroy the good with the bad, the virtue together with the vice. Yet, that our salvation ultimately depends upon removing the weeds of our vices is clear from the terrifying words of the householder, that is, the Son of Man: "*At harvest time I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the weeds, and bind them in bundles to burn.*" But in order that we may not uproot the good grain of virtue in our efforts to eradicate our faults, it is necessary for us to discover the predominant or root fault that germinates deep within our souls and chokes the growth of the divine life within us. No one can give us this knowledge except God who searches the hearts of men. Let us ask Him for His enlightening grace that we may be enabled to look into the depths of our souls and set about laying the ax to the root.

Our self-examination should begin with the threefold concupiscence inherent in our nature: pride, sensuality, and ambition; from one or other of these especially proceed all our sins and imperfections. Pride gives rise to doubts against faith, disobedience, indocility, desires for revenge, envy, jealousy, discourtesy, complaints, insolence, anger, vanity, affectation, moodiness, sensitiveness, hypocrisy, and lying. Sensuality causes inconstancy, timidity, laziness, and inordinate desires of seeing, hearing, tasting, feeling. Ambition leads to desires of possessing, especially places of preference and dignities. These passions are the weeds that grow among the pure wheat of grace. If we allow ourselves to sleep in relaxation

and tepidity, the shoots springing from these harmful seeds will soon be absorbing the nourishment that should be strengthening the good grain.

O my God, help me to be a vigilant guardian of my soul. Enable me to recognize evil in myself as soon as it appears, and to hate it as You do. With Your grace to enlighten me and give me courage, I shall be able to discover the principal source of my sins and imperfections and destroy its life in my soul.

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*Dedication of St. Mary of the Snow*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 833)

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*The Mustard Seed*



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"The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field. . . . The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and buried in three measures of flour, until all of it was leavened" (Mt. 13:31, 33).

The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven prophesy the coming and the spread of the kingdom of God, on earth; they

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\* If a meditation for the feast of the Transfiguration is preferred, see September 2, p. 601.

represent also the progress of grace in the faithful soul.  
Divine Savior, help me to die to myself that Your divine life  
may fructify within me.

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The parable of the mustard seed shows us in figure the gradual expansion and the unexpected progress of the Gospel. Mustard seeds, *the smallest of all the seeds*, are without color or odor, but they have great pungency when ground or eaten; and after they have germinated in the earth, they grow in the East into a tree several feet high, whose wide, spreading branches are very inviting to the smaller birds. What was the Church in her beginnings to human eyes but a band of Galilean fishermen grouped about a village carpenter? Yet the Church of Jesus Christ was to become a vast society in which men of all nations would find shelter, nourishment, and peace for their souls. This visible manifestation of the power of the Gospel was, however, only the exterior effect of an internal force that was illustrated by our Savior in the parable of the leaven, working with unseen but potent influence in a mass of flour or meal. The leaven, by a silent, uninterrupted development, transforms the whole mass in which it has been hidden.

In the same way the principle of spiritual transformation placed in the Church by Christ, that is, the Holy Spirit, the word of faith, grace, the sacraments, was to penetrate and transform the whole mass of mankind. A newness and holiness of thought and desire, and of their manner of living and acting were to make them into men worthy of their high spiritual destiny. In both parables the feature that is emphasized is the development of greatness and power out of weak and insignificant beginnings. As the tiny mustard seed contains in itself such force that it can expand into a

tree, so a morsel of leaven, by an internal transforming action, penetrates in a short time three measures of flour.

The parables also apply, and equally well, to progress in the spiritual life. The work of our salvation and perfection is founded upon humility and self-contempt. "Do you wish to be great? Begin by making yourself little," advises St. Augustine. Every work for God must rest on the firm foundation of humility, and every disciple must study industriously in the school of his humble Master. "Jesus Christ was the mustard seed in His incarnation," says St. John Chrysostom, "and being bruised by His passion, communicates His virtues to all our spiritual actions." Real conversion, like all true life, comes from within; but it will manifest itself externally. Through interior fervor the souls of the just make such progress in the life of faith and the love of God that they go *from strength to strength*, the outward manifestation being the result of the inward reality. This development is not sudden or abrupt, but, like the leaven, a peaceful and continuous progress. Faith and grace act upon the understanding, the understanding acts upon the will, and the action of the will extends to thoughts, words, actions, the whole activity of life, the entire person, until the disciple of Christ can say with St. Paul, "*I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me.*"

"We beseech Thee, O almighty God, that whereas our sins have angered Thee against us, our prayers and praise which Thou dost inspire may propitiate and please Thee. Thus, by Thy mercy, the vexations of the world will not cast down our soul nor hurtful delusion possess her; nor the darkness of unbelief surround her, but we shall shine with the light of Thy countenance, wherewith Thou hast signed us, and ever, by firmness in the true faith, walk in the brightness of the same" (Mozarabic Breviary).

## *The Storm on the Lake*



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“Then he arose and rebuked the wind and the sea, and there came a great calm” (Mt. 8:26).

It seems that late one evening our Savior directed the Apostles to set sail with Him for Decapolis, on the eastern shore of Lake Genesareth. During the voyage a great storm arose on the lake.

O Jesus, grant me the grace of quietness of heart that relies upon Your aid and waits for it patiently.

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The storm which overtook our Savior and the Apostles as they were crossing Lake Genesareth on this occasion was an extremely violent one. St. Matthew tells us that *the boat was covered by the waves*, and St. Mark adds that *the waves were beating into the boat, so that the boat was now filling*. Yet, during this time of real danger that their vessel would either sink or be dashed to pieces, our Savior remained in deep slumber in the stern of the boat where He had lain down to rest before the storm arose. This sleep of Jesus, although the result of fatigue, was nonetheless voluntary and mysterious. Since it was to be a brief slumber, He had not gone down to the sleeping quarters; hence His disciples were able to arouse Him more easily. Furthermore, despite the drowsiness of His senses, the soul of Jesus retained the full use of His infused knowledge and He continued to watch over His little band of followers.

The Apostles, naturally, did everything in their power to keep their bark afloat; but as the danger became more acute,

they lost courage and called out to Jesus in alarm, "*Lord, save us! We are perishing!*" The imperfection of their conduct was not in the fact that they were frightened nor that they thought they could not survive the storm by natural means, but in that they had persuaded themselves their Master needed to be awakened in order to help them. They were wanting in faith, as Jesus later pointed out to them. Moreover, in their words as recorded by St. Mark, "*Master, does it not concern thee that we are perishing?*" there is a hint of reproach and ill humor. Our Savior, for His part, upon being awakened by the Apostles, rebuked them, not for their fear, which was involuntary and reasonable, but for their lack of faith. "*Why are you fearful,*" He said to them, "*O you of little faith?*" Then, looking out at the raging storm and the swelling waves, our Savior said, "*Peace, be still!*" *And the wind fell and there came a great calm.*

It was not only for their own instruction that the Apostles were exposed to this danger, but also to reassure all who in the course of the centuries were to behold the tempests of persecution rising against the Church, or who would themselves be assailed by interior and exterior trials. For those who suffer with Christ and place their confidence in Him, all trials will end, like the tempest on the sea of Galilee, in *a great calm*. Why, then, should we be anxious over the outcome of trials which come to us or to those we love?

*O Lord, God of hosts, who is like you? Mighty are you, O Lord, and your faithfulness surrounds you. You rule over the surging of the sea; you still the swelling of its waves. You have crushed Rahab with a mortal blow; with your strong arm you have scattered your enemies. Yours are the heavens, and yours is the earth; the world and its fullness you have founded; north and south you created; Thabor and Hermon rejoice at your*

*name. Yours is a mighty arm; strong is your hand, exalted your right hand. Justice and judgment are the foundation of your throne; kindness and truth go before you (Ps. 88:9-15).*

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### *Peace in the Storms of This Life*



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“And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea” (Mt. 8:23). Represent to yourself Jesus asleep and the Apostles endeavoring to control their boat which was being covered by the waves. Divine Master, grant me the grace of an abiding interior peace.

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The Apostles, who were attacked by a storm even while Jesus was with them, represent all who are tried by temptation in crossing the sea of life, even though they are in the service of the Master, and are supported by His presence in their souls and in the Eucharist. Like the Church, which is represented by Peter's boat, each of us will encounter persecutions, and this for the same reason that the Church is assailed by them; namely, that the Christian life, and especially the life of a good religious, is in opposition to the world. It arouses the hatred of the world and of those who live according to its spirit. As long as our life lasts, we may never think of ourselves as already safe in the harbor. We must expect to see the storms rise, not only all about us, but even from within our own selves; for the highest sanctity does not destroy our passions, it only regulates them.

Nor is the devil prevented from tempting us because of our growth in holiness. On the contrary, the holier we are,

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the more vehement these attacks may become. Then it is that we must furl our sails, like alert and courageous mariners, that is to say, recollect ourselves interiorly, until the waves of temptation subside. In this way we shall close the entrance to the interior of our souls and prevent the waves from submerging our vessel, however violently they may wash over its surface; and in due time divine grace will bring the calm. In the center of the soul that loves God there is always a peace which external attacks can neither trouble nor surprise, for nothing exterior can touch our inward peace unless we so will.

Our individual victory is also to be won under the same conditions as it is won by the Church. First, the Savior must be with us, that is, we must be living in His grace and in obedience to His will. Then, we must do everything in our power to surmount the storm. Finally, our confidence must be firmly fixed in the Lord. Under these conditions, no storm, however violent, can harm us. As for the sleep of Jesus, we often provoke it ourselves by our negligence and distractedness. Or it may happen that divine Providence, wishing to test us, will seemingly abandon us for a time to aridity and languor of spirit. But whatever the cause of Jesus' slumber, we should hasten to Him in prayer, never losing our trust in Him who continues to watch over us even when He seems to be asleep.

Good Jesus, even though the prayer of Your Apostles was not what it should have been, You came to their assistance; for You know the weakness of our nature and You are infinitely good. In Your mercy and power help me to survive in safety the winds of temptation and the waves of my passions.

*The Exorcism in Gerasa*



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“And they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes; and as soon as he stepped out of the boat there met him from the tombs a man with an unclean spirit” (Mk. 5:1, 2).

Picture our Savior disembarking into a sort of ravine or defile formed by crags where caves had been hollowed out to serve as tombs.

Lord Jesus, keep me always conscious of my supreme need of You for resisting the power and malice of Satan.

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This is the first time in His public ministry that our Savior entered pagan territory and, therefore, in a more particular sense, into the realm of Satan, the prince of this world. St. Matthew speaks of two possessed men, but St. Mark and St. Luke mention only one, perhaps because one was more violent and notorious, and perhaps also, because only one of the demoniacs afterward expressed the desire to follow Jesus. *This man lived in the tombs*, St. Mark tells us, *and no one could any longer bind him, even with chains; for often he had been bound with fetters and chains, and he had rent the chains asunder and broken the fetters into pieces. And no one was able to control him. And constantly, night and day, he was in the tombs and on the mountains, howling and gashing himself with stones.* This demoniac ran to cast himself at the feet of Jesus, *crying out with a loud voice, “What have I to do with thee, Jesus, the Son of the most high God?”* The impotence of the demons before the power

of God is shown by the fact that far from preventing Jesus from passing that way, as St. Matthew tells us they did to others, they ran to Him and threw themselves at His feet, beseeching Him not to torment them, for He was saying, "*Go out of the man, thou unclean spirit.*" From this we can gather how anxious the devils are to roam the world like wild beasts "seeking whom they may devour."

Then Jesus asked the possessed man, "*What is thy name?*" And he said to him, "*My name is Legion, for we are many.*" And he entreated him earnestly not to drive them out of the country. Our Savior allowed these evil spirits to enter as they requested into a herd of swine that were feeding on the mountainside. Instantly the swine, numbering two thousand, threw themselves into the sea and were drowned. The malice as well as the power of the demons when they are permitted to act is made evident here. They are *evil* spirits; that is, they can do only harm. Since it was impossible for them to injure their human victim, they doubtless hoped that by destroying these animals they would turn the people of Gerasa against our Savior and so prevent Him from staying in that region.

Why did Jesus grant their request? In the first place, there is no question of injustice to the owner of the herd. Although He rarely made use of His power in this respect, the God-Man was sole Master of His creation; moreover, we are shown here that the salvation of one man is infinitely more important than the lives of thousands of animals. Perhaps also, our Savior wished to prove the reality of diabolical possession by His act and to make us realize by means of a concrete illustration that the malice of the devil is something to be feared and prayed against. It would seem, too, that the Gerasenes were in need of a salutary lesson

whereby they would be drawn away from an excessive pre-occupation with temporal goods and recalled to a concern for the spiritual and the supernatural.

O my Savior, I adore Your majesty and power as it is revealed in this mystery. Even the evil spirits recognize You as their Lord. And not merely one demon but thousands were mastered and dispersed at Your word. Hell itself is powerless to defend its empire, and in paying You the homage of flattery the devils bore witness to Your sovereign power. Shall my attachment to self and to creatures continue to resist the loving invitations to closer union from One whom even the fallen angels reverence and obey?

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### *The Reaction of the Gerasenes*



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“But the swineherds fled and reported it in the town and in the country; and people came out to see what had happened. And they came to Jesus, and saw the man who had been afflicted by the devil, sitting clothed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. . . . And they began to entreat him to depart from their district” (Mk. 5:14-17).

See the cured demoniac sitting quietly at the feet of Jesus.

Divine Savior, enlighten me that I may choose always Your way of supernatural virtue rather than the natural way of self-satisfaction.

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The panic-stricken custodians of the swine had hastened to spread the news of what had occurred. And now the Gerasenes gathered in throngs to view with their own eyes the wonders of which they had heard from the swineherds.

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Yet, convinced as they were by the evidence of their senses that a real miracle had been worked, they neither acknowledged their belief and welcomed the Savior, nor did they, on the other hand, openly declare themselves against Him. Their reaction was one of fear and, dreading a still greater temporal misfortune, they begged Jesus to leave their district. The fear which prompted them was neither filial nor servile, but the spirit of the world, which knows only how to appreciate temporal goods and which is made uneasy by the presence of the supernatural.

Upon their arrival at the scene the Gerasenes found the cured demoniac clothed and self-possessed at our Savior's feet, the Good Shepherd with the lost sheep whom He had brought back to the fold in His arms. And just as Jesus was about to step into the boat and take His departure, *the man who had been afflicted by the devil*, continues St. Mark, *began to entreat him that he might remain with him. And he did not allow him, but said to him, "Go home to thy relatives, and tell them all that the Lord has done for thee, and how he has had mercy on thee."* Jesus did not grant the cured demoniac's request that he might be permitted to follow Him, probably because there was question here of a Gentile, and the Messiah *was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. Furthermore, the Jews would have despised him, and his presence among the disciples of Jesus would have been regarded as a crime. But this man was charged by our Savior with the apostolate in the Decapolis. He was to publish everywhere the great wonders that God had wrought in his favor. This mission he faithfully carried out, as we read in St. Mark: *And he departed, and began to publish in the Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him. And all marveled.*

The first entrance of our Lord into Gentile territory since the flight into Egypt is full of instruction for us. Merely by His presence on this soil He revealed Himself as the Heir and Redeemer of all peoples, Gentile as well as Jew; this visit is the first blow struck at paganism. It is true that our Savior left the land of the Gerasenes, but He did not abandon it. From among these pagans He chose an apostle, and later He Himself returned to the region of the Decapolis; for it was here apparently that the cure of the deaf-mute occurred, which St. Mark records in the seventh chapter of his Gospel. O good Jesus, never let me decline the visits of Your grace to my poor soul. Perhaps I too, like the Gerasenes, have been afraid of the sanctity which You require of me in the religious state, because of the sacrifice such holiness demands. Let me not prefer my selfish satisfactions to You, as the Gerasenes preferred their herds of swine; but enable me to show my gratitude for Your numberless favors by my alacrity in corresponding with Your merciful designs for me and in working zealously for the salvation of souls.

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*The Woman Suffering From Hemorrhage*



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“Take courage, daughter; thy faith has saved thee” (Mt. 9:22). As our Savior was following Jairus, who had earnestly begged Him to come and lay His hands upon his little daughter, who was dying, He was surrounded by the swarming, pushing crowd. This circumstance permitted a woman afflicted for twelve years with a flow of blood to carry out her plan of

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touching His garment, in the hope that she might obtain a cure without attracting attention to herself.

Lord Jesus, grant me the grace of deep interior and exterior reverence whenever I am in Your sacramental presence.

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This woman's malady rendered her unclean in the eyes of the Law. Had the people about her suspected her condition she would have been driven away and bitterly reproached for exposing her fellow Israelites to defilement. She might not, therefore, ask openly for a cure; and so she had formed the plan of approaching Jesus secretly by hiding herself in the crowd and watching for an opportunity of touching only His garment; for she said to herself, "*If I touch but his cloak I shall be saved.*" Her strong faith and courage did the rest; as soon as she touched the tassel of His cloak she was restored to health. Our omniscient Lord knew of this woman and of her furtive approach and He was aware also of her excellent dispositions, which He had just rewarded with a cure. Nevertheless, He asked, "*Who touched me?*" Peter and the others were much puzzled by this question and they replied, "*Master, the crowds throng and press upon thee, and dost thou say, 'Who touched me?'*" But the Master insisted, "*Someone touched me; for I perceived that power had gone forth from me.*" Humanly speaking, our Savior had not seen the woman and, in accordance with the limitations of our human nature, which He had voluntarily assumed in the Incarnation, He followed the rule whereby all human beings acquire knowledge through the senses and the intelligence. The woman, seeing that she had been discovered, cast herself trembling at the feet of Jesus and confessed before all the reasons that had prompted her act and occasioned also her instantaneous cure.

In this miracle for the first time Jesus had recourse to an external object in performing a cure. He was to repeat this procedure on another occasion which is recorded by St. Matthew, namely, when the people of Genesar brought their sick to Him and all who touched the tassel of His cloak were cured. Yet, wishing this woman to understand that it was not her stealthy touch of the tassel of His cloak that had won her cure, but her faith, Jesus said to her, as St. Luke tells us, "*Daughter, thy faith has saved thee; go in peace.*" Moreover, by eliciting her acknowledgment of her cure and so revealing the miracle to the crowd, our Savior wished to enliven the faith of Jairus, which was not as strong as that of the woman who had just been cured. Jairus thought it was necessary for Jesus to come to the bedside of his daughter and lay His hands upon her. Again, by asking who had touched Him and by affirming that He felt the life-giving power go forth from Him, Jesus proved that He was clearly aware of the accomplishment of the miracle, and that it had come to pass as an effect of His power. This event constitutes, in fact, a new and glorious revelation of the divinity of the Savior.

How can it be, O my Jesus, that after so many contacts with Your adorable Body and Blood in the Eucharist, my spiritual infirmities are still so numerous and so deep-seated! In Your love and mercy, give me today when I come to Your holy table dispositions of soul like those of this woman whom You cured as a reward of her faith and confidence in You. Grant me also when I am in Your presence, when I am about to receive Your sacraments, a holy awe and reverence like that which prompted this afflicted woman to venture to touch only the tassel of Your cloak.

## *The Daughter of Jairus*



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“But he, taking her by the hand, cried out, saying, ‘Girl, arise!’ ”  
(Lk. 8:54)

Scarcely had the procession started on its way again after the cure of the woman afflicted with the flow of blood when word was brought that Jairus’ daughter had died.

Divine Savior, *give light to my eyes that I may not sleep in death.*

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Jairus had made no complaint upon seeing Jesus tarry so long by the roadside. In his charity he could not begrudge that poor suffering woman her cure. Indeed, his own faith had been greatly strengthened by the miracle; but now his hopes were suddenly dashed by the sad news of his daughter’s death. Jesus, aware of his deep distress, said to him with the greatest kindness, “*Do not be afraid; only have faith and she shall be saved.*” From the circumstances surrounding this episode, it would seem that our Savior was determined, so to speak, to work this miracle in spite of several adverse factors. In the first place, the faith of Jairus apparently needed to be strengthened by the cure wrought on the way to his house; perhaps desperation alone had brought him to Jesus. Furthermore, the messenger from his household who said, “*Thy daughter is dead; do not trouble him,*” probably expressed the conviction also of those who had sent him, namely, that while the Master had power to restore health to the sick, once death had occurred, there must be an end of the matter.

The family of Jairus, moreover, showed themselves very unsympathetically disposed toward our Savior, for they only mocked at His consoling words, "*Do not weep; she is asleep, not dead.*" But Jesus, on His part, showed the most delicate consideration for Jairus in not permitting the crowd to enter the house and in taking with Him of the Apostles only Peter, James, and John. On the other hand, He so disposed the circumstances that the authenticity of the miracle could not be denied. The three chief Apostles and the parents of the child were witnesses of it; and, by declaring upon entering the house that the girl was not dead but sleeping, our Savior evoked the protest and contradiction of the members of the household, proving beyond doubt that the girl was really dead. More than once, Jesus used the word "sleep" to signify death, especially when referring to those whom He willed to restore to life.

But although life was really extinct in the child, He awoke her as easily as one arouses a person who is sleeping. Going to the bed and taking the cold little hand, He said to the dead child in the Aramaic dialect which He ordinarily spoke, "*Talitha cumi,*" which is interpreted, "*Girl, I say to thee, arise.*" Instantly she arose and began to walk; then, to show that she had been restored not only to life but to health, our Savior directed that she be given something to eat. According to his custom, Jesus forbade the parents to publicize the miracle. Besides His habitual prudence in forestalling any demonstration of enthusiasm which might be turned to political ends, Jesus may here have had the additional motive of protecting this family from the hostility of the Pharisees. This hostility would have been all the more lively inasmuch as Jairus was head of the synagogue.

O divine Master, stretch forth Your all-powerful hand to touch

my soul, and awaken me to the fulness of life and health in unflagging fervor of spirit. Only in the strength of *your arm and your right hand and the light of your countenance* shall I be able to rise from my sins and my follies and walk in the way of perfection.

AUGUST 13

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### *The Two Blind Men*



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“Now as Jesus was passing on from there, two blind men followed him, crying out and saying, ‘Have pity on us, Son of David!’”  
(Mt. 9:27)

As Jesus was leaving the house of Jairus whose daughter He had just restored to life, two blind men followed Him, imploring Him with great faith to cure them.

Good Jesus, grant me the grace of final perseverance.

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The faith and confidence of these blind men of Capharnaum were revealed in their actions and in their words. They followed Jesus, crying out, “*Have pity on us, Son of David!*” Such words from an Israelite amounted to an acknowledgment that Jesus was the Messiah. With the exception of the Apostles, no other Jews had as yet so openly declared their faith. After the raising of the son of the widow of Naim from the dead, the people, seized with astonishment and fear, had said, “*A great prophet has arisen among us.*” Further than this they had not gone. But now these two *blind* men professed their faith in Jesus as the Messiah, simply, courageously, and without concern for the offense this title would certainly give the Pharisees and Scribes who on this

occasion as always were on the scene, watching and listening.

At first, our Savior seemed not to notice the supplicants. He allowed them to follow after Him imploring His mercy, without even turning in their direction. But they continued to follow and cry out to Him, repeating their request, until He *had reached the house*. There they came into His presence and begged for a cure. Still it was not enough. Our Savior asked them if they really believed that He could work the miracle they were asking of Him. Without hesitation and with deep reverence they answered, "*Yes, Lord.*" Our Savior's apparent indifference to their pleading before the arrival at the house and to their profession of faith in Him as the Messiah again shows His great prudence and reserve. He did not wish to arouse His enemies before the time, by openly accepting the glorious Messianic title, *Son of David*. Also, Jesus wished to prolong the test, so that these blind men might be the better prepared to receive the grace of a cure by the exercise of patience, resignation, humility, and perseverance.

When their faith had been sufficiently tested, our Savior touched their eyes, and they recovered their sight. Again, it was probably out of discretion that He forbade them to publicize the miracle; for He *strictly charged them, saying, "See that no one knows of this!"* It is difficult to see how anything so striking as the sudden cure of these blind men could be kept secret. Their affliction was common knowledge; besides, they had been seen entering the house blind and coming out with their sight restored. It may be that our Savior's injunction referred more particularly to their use of the Messianic title in making their plea. At all events, the blind men, in a surge of generous gratitude, forgot the prohibition and proclaimed their cure everywhere. In this occurrence we

find manifested again the habitual characteristics of the Savior: prudence, wisdom, goodness, and power; and from the blind men we learn that faith, confidence, and perseverance are always victorious. Let us ask our Savior that these qualities may be ours throughout our lives and that with their aid the blindness that now permits us to see Him only as *through a mirror in an obscure manner* may be one day healed in the everlasting Vision face to face.

“Jesus, whom I look at shrouded here below,  
I beseech Thee send me what I thirst for so,  
Some day to gaze on Thee face to face in light  
And be blest for ever with Thy glory’s sight.  
Jesus, Eternal Shepherd, hear our cry:  
Increase the faith of all whose souls on Thee rely.”

AUGUST 14

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### *The Death of Our Lady*



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“You are an enclosed garden, my sister, my bride, an enclosed garden, a fountain sealed. You are a park that puts forth pomegranates, with all choice fruits; nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all kinds of incense” (Cant. 4:12-14).

These words from the Canticle of Canticles symbolize Mary’s mortification, her prayer, and all her great virtues, especially her divine charity. And as the Blessed Virgin lived, so she died. The Fathers and Doctors of the Church, in general, say that Mary died of no other infirmity than pure love. “Either Mary ought not to die,” said St. Ildephonsus, “or die only of love.”

O Mary, obtain for me the grace of a holy death in your presence and in that of Jesus and St. Joseph.

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Death is for man a chastisement for sin, but of itself it is also the normal end of everything material. God, therefore, could permit that Mary, despite her utter sinlessness, should undergo death as well as other natural infirmities, like hunger, thirst, or weariness. Thus it had been for Christ, and thus, as the majority of Christian authors have taught, it should be also for Mary. "She bowed to the law laid down by Him to whom she gave birth," says St. John Damascene, "and as a child of the old Adam underwent the old judgment (for, indeed, her Son, too, who is the very Life, did not refuse it)." But the usual accompaniments of death were, according to the tradition, absent from Mary's last moments. For her there was no wasting of the body by sickness, no anxiety of soul, no final struggle against the powers of evil. Death came, probably, without shock or pain, from a natural diminution of her vital powers. Our Lady died with rapture in her soul and a final ardent aspiration of all her faculties toward her Son and her God. It was love for Him that had gradually consumed her life. If the soul which has come close to God only for a single instant is thereafter consumed by a torturing thirst for Him, what must have been the intensity of Mary's virginal and maternal thirst for God!

According to the legend concerning the circumstances of her death, the Apostles who were dispersed in various parts of the world were miraculously assembled at Mary's bedside, except, for some reason, St. Thomas. Their souls filled with holy sadness, they lovingly assisted at the death of the Mother of their Master, providing for her new heavenly consolations and new graces and merits by the prayers and

blessings of the Church. Then, after Mary's death, her virginal body was carried by the Apostles from Sion to Gethsemani, the scene of the Agony, which our Lady had so often revisited either in body or mind. It is not difficult to imagine the feelings of the Apostles as they laid the body of Mary in the tomb. Their dependence upon her had been a source of strength and comfort to them. But now the Church, the new fruit of Mary's maternity, had acquired the growth and vigor which it belonged to a mother to give, and the Apostles and disciples were no longer to enjoy the sweetness of her physical presence. We may imagine Peter joining his venerable hands and gazing intently for the last time at the glorious features of the Mother of the Savior — as if by his gaze of faith he would discern even beyond the shadows of death some rays of the glory wherewith Mary as Queen of Heaven was already shining. We may picture John, the adopted son, casting a last sorrowful look upon the Virgin's countenance, so calm and sweet; then the tomb was closed.

O most sweet Lady and my Mother, by the merits of your holy death, obtain for me perseverance in the divine friendship, that I may leave this life in God's grace. Assist me in that hour, my good Mother, that my death may be an act of adoration and submission, as perfect as it is possible for a creature to offer its Creator. Help me to accept fully all the conditions that God may decree for my death, with all the physical and mental suffering that He may have apportioned me. Everything that concerns my departure from this life I place in your hands, O Mary. I only beg the grace of uniting my last conscious moment with yours in an act of perfect love.

AUGUST 15

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*The Assumption of Our Lady Into Heaven*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 835)

AUGUST 16

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*The First Multiplication of the Loaves*



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“Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, distributed them to those reclining; and likewise the fishes, as much as they wished” (Jn. 6:11).

The first multiplication of the loaves is the only miracle recorded by all four Evangelists. It is of particular importance because it aroused greater enthusiasm among the people than any other miracle of our Savior, and because of its special relation to the Eucharist.

O Jesus, grant that today I may receive the Bread of life with perfect interior dispositions.

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Our Savior and the Apostles had crossed Lake Tiberias in the hope of finding a deserted spot where they might rest. “Come apart into a desert place,” Jesus had said to them, “and rest a while.” But when they came ashore, they were met by the crowd who had followed them by the land route. Touched with pity, Jesus first cured their sick and then, going up a little from the shore, He sat on the slope of a

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hill and spoke to the gathering until twilight on the kingdom of God. The audience had fasted since morning, but they gave no sign of weariness or impatience. The Apostles, however, observing that it was growing late, asked Jesus to send the crowd away, that they might buy food in the villages nearby. Sympathy and kindness prompted their suggestion, but the compassion of their Master was far more effective. His response to the need of these five thousand persons was to provide them Himself with the food they required. As host, He prepared the food for His guests. Moreover, His words, according to the text of St. Luke, foreshadowed the institution of the Eucharist, of which this miracle was a type and a preparation: *And he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, blessed them and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the crowd.* The Apostles are here associated effectively for the first time with a miracle of our Savior.

The effect produced by this marvel was naturally extraordinary, because of the scale and duration of the prodigy. Furthermore, since it occurred when the thoughts of all were on the coming feast of the Pasch, it inevitably recalled the miraculous manna with which Moses had nourished Israel in the desert. It is not surprising, therefore, that the crowd began to surmise that Jesus Himself was the great Prophet promised the Israelites by Moses, that is to say, the Messias. And so these Galileans, naturally given as they were to enthusiasm, formed the plan of proclaiming Jesus king of Israel. The project was certainly inspired by gratitude, admiration, and by the sincere conviction that Jesus was the Messias. In this conviction the people were right, but they were deceived in thinking that the kingdom of the Messias was to be an earthly one. Their design, then, contained ele-

ments of both good and evil, faith and unbelief, gratitude and personal interest. Our Savior read their thoughts and, in order to prevent the execution of the plan, He directed the Apostles to embark again and cross to the eastern bank of Lake Tiberias. In this way He could more easily disperse the crowd; they quickly scattered, in fact, when they saw that Jesus would not prolong His stay in that place. Our Savior Himself, however, retired alone to the mountain and spent the night in prayer.

O Jesus, so often in Your public life You reveal to us the goodness of Your sacred heart, that concerns Itself with the failing wine, with the want of bread, with the coin necessary to pay the tribute, with everything, in short, that concerns our human life. In this miracle of the loaves You fed five thousand people, and twelve baskets of fragments were left over. But this number and Your munificence here are as nothing compared to the number of hungry poor to whom You dispense the Bread of life, even putting it into our mouths by the ministry of Your priests.

AUGUST 17

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*Jesus Walks on the Water*



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“But after they had rowed some twenty-five or thirty stadia, they beheld Jesus walking upon the sea” (Jn. 6:19).

Represent to yourself the Apostles rowing against a strong wind and our Savior walking toward them upon the billowing waves of Lake Genesareth.

O Jesus, grant me an active belief and trust in Your knowledge in disposing of every event of my life.

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From evening until toward three o'clock in the morning the Apostles had not advanced more than twenty-five or thirty stadia, that is, about three miles, from the starting point. They were alone. Jesus was at prayer in the mountains, whither He had fled from the crowd who had wished to proclaim Him king after the miracle of the first multiplication of the loaves; but He was not unaware of His Apostles' toilsome and difficult plight. He saw them laboring to hold their course against the force of the wind and the waves and compassionately He came to them, walking upon the waves. The Apostles, believing that they were seeing a ghost, cried out in alarm, but Jesus reassured them with the words, "*It is I, do not be afraid.*" As soon as He entered the boat the storm subsided and *immediately the boat was at the land towards which they were going.*

Besides the immediate objective of comforting the Apostles by His presence and assisting them in their need, our Savior's intention in working this miracle was to increase their faith by a new and extraordinary proof of His divine power. The alarm of the Apostles and the demand of St. Peter, who was not entirely free from doubt when he said, "*Lord, if it is thou, bid me come to thee over the water,*" are sufficient evidence that their faith was still imperfect. They could still doubt the Savior's power, despite the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves which immediately preceded this incident. But it was necessary that they should now be possessed of strong faith in view of the new test which would soon confront them—the promise of the Holy Eucharist. In walking upon the water against the force of a strong wind and in calming the wind and the waves, Jesus appears to multiply His wonders in order to prepare the way for the acceptance of the mystery of the Eucharist, with which the

rest of this chapter of St. John is chiefly concerned. Thus, again, as in the case of the loaves, He manifested His power over nature and also His power, as it were, over His own body as a prelude to His transfiguration in the miracle of Thabor and to the glorified state of His sacred humanity after the Resurrection, as well as to His marvelous presence in the Sacrament of the Altar.

The revelation of the mystery of the Eucharist was of such great importance that our Savior took all preparatory measures to instill into His Apostles the proper dispositions for accepting it. And indeed, this miracle did elicit from the Apostles at least an incipient faith in the divinity of Jesus; for St. Matthew tells us that *they who were in the boat came and worshipped him, saying, "Truly thou art the Son of God."*

O divine Master, like the crowds that followed You in Galilee, I accept Your favors and Your wonders, but I am slow and reluctant in obeying Your laws; yet Your miracles were wrought only that men might believe in You, and obey You. And how often, dear Jesus, I do not recognize You and, like the Apostles, become alarmed when You appear to me in unexpected trials! Do not pass me by, but open my eyes to Your presence and calm the troubled waves of my passions.

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AUGUST 18

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*Peter Upheld by Jesus*



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"Then Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water to come to Jesus. But when he saw the strong wind, he was afraid; and as he began to sink he cried out, saying 'Lord, save me!' And Jesus at once stretched forth his hand and

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took hold of him, saying to him, 'O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?' " (Mt. 14:29-31)

The second portion of the mystery of our Savior's walking on the waves has a special importance for St. Peter as the future head of the Church.

Divine Savior, in all my trials let my first thought be to call upon You in faith and confidence.

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As proof that it was really He who was walking upon the Sea of Galilee, Peter asked our Savior to bid that he come to Him over the water. Jesus complied, and Peter actually walked with his Master upon the waves; but suddenly he lost confidence and began to sink. Jesus took him by the hand, chiding him for his lack of faith; then, both Jesus and Peter got into the boat. It is evident that while Peter's request showed his love and confidence in his divine Master, there was in it also a want of reflection and a quite unnecessary zeal. Whenever there was question of thinking, speaking, acting, Peter took the initiative; he was ever stepping into the foreground. And now, in order to teach a lesson through Peter, our Savior permitted him to suffer the ordinary consequences of indiscreet zeal, namely, faintheartedness and discouragement. Seeing the violence of the wind and the tossing waves, Peter began to fear—and to sink. But, regaining confidence even in his danger, Peter cried out and grasped the hand held out to him. Our Savior said, "*O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?*" And so the goodness of Jesus and Peter's cry of faith repaired the fault; but the instruction had been given.

Through this incident Peter and the others were also shown in advance and by figure the primacy of the Prince of the Apostles and in particular his infallibility. Peter was the

master of the ship. He alone had asked for a share in the miracle of his Master walking upon the lake, and he had obtained it. And when he began to sink, it was not his boat but his faith and the hand of Jesus that supported him. Jesus supports Peter by His power, Peter is attached to Jesus by faith and confidence. Together they enter the boat; together they assure the bark of the Church a secure and prosperous voyage.

The importance and the meaning of this incident concern the Church in general as well as each of her members in particular. We are admirably taught by it the wholly divine manner in which Jesus watches over His Church and protects her. If the vessel of the Church finds herself in dark waters, tossed about by the most violent storms, even if she seems left to herself, Jesus, her divine Master, is never unmindful of her. He is on the shore offering for her the prayer of the God-Man. To each of us, also, in due proportion, this event has a lesson to teach. First, there is the lesson of confidence always and in all things. Our God, our Savior, is here near us by His providence, and so we shall not give way to fear whatever may happen. Second, we learn from Peter to be on our guard against presumption, which soon turns to discouragement and faintheartedness. But if we should commit this fault, let us not lose hope, but call to Jesus for help. His hand is ever held out to us; let us grasp it by the prayer of faith.

“Raise us up, we beseech You, O Lord by the apostolic assistance of blessed Peter, Your Apostle, so that the weaker we are, the more mightily we may be helped by the power of his intercession; and that being perpetually defended by the same holy Apostle we may neither yield to any unquiet nor be overcome by any adversity” (*Raccolta*).

*The Promise of the Eucharist*



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“But Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life’” (Jn. 6:35).

The momentous discourse revealing the mystery of the Eucharist was delivered by our Savior near the time of the feast of the Passover in Capharnaum, one of the largest and most populous towns of Galilee. The audience was large both because of the place and the time of year, and also because of the miracle of the loaves, which had taken place the day before.

O Jesus, move my will to correspond with all Your graces, that I may receive also the light to understand Your words.

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It is probable that our Savior's audience on this occasion was made up chiefly of those who had witnessed the miracle of the loaves the day before. We know from St. John that when the people looked for Jesus the next day at the scene of the miracle and found Him gone, they came by boat to Capharnaum seeking Him. They were still full of excitement and enthusiasm, the more so, perhaps, because they may have suspected that a new miracle had been wrought. They had noticed that the disciples had left without Jesus in the only boat that was available at the time. But Jesus did not answer their query as to when He had crossed the lake from the place where the multiplication of the loaves had occurred. His response to their question, “*Rabbi, when didst thou come here?*” was a grave admonition: “*Amen, amen, I say to you, you seek me not because you have seen signs, but because you have eaten of the loaves and have been filled. Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for that which*

*endures unto life everlasting, which the Son of Man will give you.* His hearers understood that Jesus was promising them a Food much different from the miraculous loaves and that partaking of It involved meeting certain conditions; and so, thinking perhaps of certain works of piety, such as prayer, fasting, or almsgiving, they asked, *"What are we to do in order that we may perform the works of God?"* Jesus replied, *"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."* Our Savior's first requirement is faith in His divinity.

At this point, when Jesus was endeavoring to lift His hearers to spiritual conceptions, there was an abrupt change in their attitude. They were no longer as well disposed as they had seemed to be at first. He was asking for faith and they, who had witnessed the miracle of the loaves as recently as the day before, now requested that He prove His claim by a miracle, one of their own choosing, such as the manna falling from heaven. *"Amen, amen, I say to you,"* Jesus answered, *"Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."* The crowd's rejoinder, *"Lord, give us always this bread,"* seems an echo of the uncomprehending and somewhat ironical words of the Samaritan woman, *"Lord, give me of this water, that I may no longer thirst."* But the thought of the Savior continued to rise higher: *"I am the bread of life . . . I have come down from heaven."* Now there was murmuring in the crowd, encouraged, no doubt, by the Pharisees or their partisans; they spoke slightly of the birth and the family of Jesus. *"Is this not Jesus,"* they said, *"the son of Joseph whose father and mother we know? How, then, does he say, 'I have come down from*

heaven'?" Without entering upon any explanation with regard to the error about His birth, Jesus delicately but clearly indicated the reason for their want of faith; they had not that attraction, that special light, which only His heavenly Father could give. They had resisted the graces which had already been bestowed on them and which, had they not been received in vain, would now have resulted in spiritual enlightenment.

O Jesus, Your words are filled with profound mystery and they are full of difficulties for us; but it is not ours to resolve these difficulties. We have only to accept what You affirm, since You are who You are. Protect my soul and body from eternal death through Your Sacrament of life; and through my daily union with You in the Eucharist let me be transformed spiritually into You, living through You the divine life as You live the life of the Father by Your union with Him.

AUGUST 20

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### *The Test of Faith*



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"Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe and who it was who should betray him" (Jn. 6:65).

See the crowd and even many of the disciples of Jesus turning away and leaving His company after His discourse on the Eucharist.

Divine Savior, let my desire of growing in intimacy with You survive the test of the "hard sayings" that contradict my pride and self-will.

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As for the disciples of Jesus, the mystery of the Eucharist shocked them. Our Savior tried to reassure them. He spoke of His glorious ascension: *"What then if you should see the Son of Man ascending where he was before?"* He explained that all things were possible for Him, since He was divine; that His promise, while it was literally true, was not to be taken in a carnal, material sense: *"It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."* But still many of the disciples persisted in their opposition. Jesus saw the reason for their incredulity, like that of the crowd, in the lack of special light: *And he said, "This is why I have said to you, 'No one can come to me unless he is enabled to do so by my Father.'"* It is not that God hides His truths from us, but our pride prevents us from discerning the light which would reveal them to us. Many of the disciples, therefore, openly defected and followed Jesus no longer. What sorrow their apostasy must have caused Him!

Then, when the continuing desertion of His followers made it seem possible to fear that even the Apostles might be tempted to discouragement, our Savior judged it well to test their faith also. Turning lovingly to the Twelve, He asked, *"Do you also wish to go away?"* One feels in this question the full gravity of the situation, the sadness and grief of the Heart of Jesus. Peter, always full of faith and zeal, was the first to cry out in the name of all, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast words of everlasting life and we have come to believe and to know that thou art the Christ, the Son of God."* So courageous and explicit a confession of faith must have greatly consoled the Sacred Heart, but His joy was not complete. Peter had thought that in affirming his own faith he was speaking for all; but Jesus

said, "*Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil.*" He was speaking of Judas. Our Savior's words would seem to imply that Judas had lost his faith (perhaps on this occasion) and would now enter upon the woeful path leading to the betrayal and to suicide.

The day of the great discourse on the Eucharist in the synagogue of Capharnaum was a memorable and crucial one, both for our Savior and for the Church He had come to establish. At the time of the feast of the Passover a year from that time, the Sacrament of the Eucharist was to be instituted. And the three mysteries which formed the prelude, so to speak, to this Pasch, namely, the multiplication of the loaves, the walking upon the water, the promise of the Eucharist, were as a foreshadowing of the events of that last Pasch. Then our Savior would institute the Sacrament of the Altar, the imperishable food which endures unto life everlasting; then His Heart would be wounded by the faintheartedness and fear of Peter which again would follow a burst of indiscreet zeal. Finally, the defection of His own together with the hatred of His enemies, which on that day in Capharnaum was already crystallizing, would then nail Jesus to the cross. Even thus early these mournful events were being prepared; already there was a decisive change, a division which showed itself even among His disciples.

O Jesus, how many there are still who abandon You, because You do not will to be as their earthly desires would have You! But to whom will they go? You alone have the words of everlasting life. O heavenly Father, reveal to us Your Son, draw us to Him, give us to Him!

## *The Paralytic of Bethsaida*



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“Now there is at Jerusalem, by the Sheepgate, a pool called in Hebrew Bethsaida, having five porticoes. . . . Now a certain man was there who had been thirty-eight years under his infirmity. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew he had been in this state a long time, he said to him, ‘Dost thou want to get well?’” (Jn. 5:2-6)

Jesus had come to Jerusalem to celebrate a certain feast, probably the Passover. On a Sabbath day in the course of the festival He visited the sick lying under the porticoes bordering the sides of the pool of Bethsaida.

Divine Savior, teach me how to observe due discretion in my works of charity.

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Among the afflicted lying near the pool of Bethsaida on the occasion of this visit of our Savior was the truly pitiable case of a man who had suffered from his infirmity for thirty-eight years. He was placed quite near the pool where he must have lain innumerable times waiting for the *troubling of the water*. But always he had waited to no purpose, for no one came to help him, and always someone else entered the pool before him. Jesus, knowing all by His omniscience, was touched with compassion and He now came to relieve the misery of this afflicted and helpless man. Yet, there was a certain reserve in our Savior's manner of performing this miracle. He did not, as in other instances, exact faith from the sick man; He asked only, “*Dost thou want to get well?*” The paralytic did not know Jesus, and Jesus, for the present,

did not wish to make Himself known to him. But His kindly question had the effect of directing the sick man's attention to our Savior as a source of help and of arousing his confidence. Moreover, Jesus cured this man without touching him, without any of the outward signs which so often accompanied His miraculous cures. He merely said, "*Rise, take up thy pallet and walk.*" Then, after the cure, Jesus disappeared immediately into the crowd.

The cure was made public, however, by the fact that the former paralytic, either because he was distracted with joy or because he had so understood our Savior's order, carried his pallet, even, perhaps, through the streets of Jerusalem. The Pharisees stopped him and forbade him to carry his bed on the Sabbath. The answer of the paralytic, "*He who made me well said to me, 'Take up thy pallet and walk,'*" should have made it clear that He who is master of life and death is also master of the Sabbath. But the Pharisees, not wishing to hear more about the miracle, were anxious only to know who had permitted this man to carry his bed on the Sabbath; but he did not know the name of His Benefactor. Afterward, Jesus, quietly and inconspicuously, made Himself known to him in the Temple, where our Good Shepherd had gone for the purpose of curing the soul of the paralytic as well. We may reasonably suppose that his ill-health had resulted from a sinful life, since Jesus admonished him to sin no more lest a worse evil befall him.

Then the man went his way and, prompted either by a grateful desire to bear witness to the Savior or merely to answer the question which had been put to him, *told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.* This entire incident bears a special character of discretion and reserve in the conduct of our Savior, quite in contrast to His be-

havior at the first Pasch of His public life, when He drove the vendors from the temple. It seems evident that He did not wish to provoke His enemies unnecessarily. Yet the cure of the paralytic so scandalized and infuriated the Pharisees that they *kept persecuting Jesus and were seeking the more to put him to death*. This miracle, then, opens another and a deadly phase in the active hostility of the Pharisees against the Savior.

O Jesus, so compassionate, bountiful and good, come to my soul and, in Your mercy and power, heal its sluggishness and give it new life and vigor in Your service. Help me, also, good Jesus, to learn from You how to practice prudence and moderation in thought, word, and deed.

AUGUST 22

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*The Immaculate Heart of Mary*



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(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 838)

AUGUST 23

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*The Unity of Christ and the Father*



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"Jesus, however, answered them, 'My Father works even until now, and I work.' This, then, is why the Jews were seeking the more to put him to death; because he was not only

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breaking the Sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God" (Jn. 5:17, 18).

The open persecution of the Jews, whose ultimate objective was the death of Jesus, probably took the form at first of such disputes as they now held with Him in the Temple, in which they accused Him both of violating the Sabbath by curing the paralytic and of committing blasphemy by calling God His Father and thus making Himself equal to God.

O Jesus, grant me the assistance of Your Holy Spirit that I may hear Your words with understanding and docility of heart.

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Jesus had clearly and definitely asserted that His works were the works of the Father. They did not merely imitate the works of the Father; they *were* the works of the Father. God rested on the seventh day, and His repose, which was the figure and principle of the Sabbath rest, had been applied by the Scribes to the Sabbath observance in the sense of complete passivity; but wrongly so, for even after the creation of the world God continued to act in conserving it. His activity continued in both the natural and supernatural orders. And when the Father acts, the Son acts also in virtue of His unity of nature with the Father. The works of Jesus are truly the works of His heavenly Father, because the Father and He have the same nature, the same life, the same knowledge, the same will and action, with the sole difference that the Father possesses all these things without their being communicated to Him by another Person, while the Son has them by communication from the Father.

It is also to be noted that when He is speaking of Himself with reference to God, our Savior says *my Father*; and when speaking to His disciples of God, He says *your Father*. Jesus never used the expression *our Father* except when He was

teaching His disciples the prayer which *they* were to say. His divine Sonship is not on the same plane as theirs and ours; it is unique. The meaning of our Lord's answer did not escape His hearers; hatred had given them insight. They understood that Jesus was declaring that He was God. His miracles up to this time supported the truth of this claim. They should have cast themselves at His feet in adoration, but, on the contrary, from that time on *the Jews were seeking the more to put him to death; because he was not only breaking the Sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God.*

On the part of our Savior, this incident marks an important advance in His revelation of His Person and His mission. At the first Pasch He had spoken of His divinity in an obscure and passing way, when He said that the Jews were making the house of His Father a place of traffic. Now He openly declared His divinity, revealing that between the Father and Himself there was identity of essence, of life, and of action. In His instruction on this occasion Jesus summed up, so to speak, all the riches and profundity of His divinity, all the scope of His power, all His majesty as the Incarnate God; insofar as these mysteries are revealed to us in Scripture. And while He would appear to have taken care in healing the paralytic not to provoke the Pharisees, now that they had proposed the issue, He spoke plainly and unmistakably; and He did this at Jerusalem, in public and facing His enemies.

O divine Master, the Jews looked upon Your face, the face of the Incarnate Son of God; and they heard Your divine voice, but they only became more hardened in their unbelief, because Your word was not living and active in their souls. All the testimonies of the Scriptures of St. John the Baptist, of Your

own teaching and miracles, of the Father Himself were for them as though these divine testimonies had never been given. Let not my prejudices and my vanities keep me from receiving and embracing in their full import all Your teachings, especially those on the counsels, and those other doctrines of Yours that are so opposed to our corrupt tendencies: on abnegation, on the acceptance of the cross, on universal charity.

AUGUST 24

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### *The Canaanite Woman*



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“And going away from there, Jesus retired to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman came out of that territory and cried, saying to him, ‘Have pity on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is sorely beset by a devil’” (Mt. 15:21–23).

In order to avoid the growing hostility of the Pharisees, Jesus had withdrawn from Galilee to the borders of Phoenicia. He wished to keep His presence there secret, but this was impossible. *Immediately*, St. Mark tells us, *a woman . . . came in and fell down at his feet.*

Good Jesus, keep my faith and trust firm when, through no fault of my own, You withhold Your consolation.

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This Canaanite woman was a Syro-Phoenician, a pagan. She appears to have been a cultivated person of high rank. In great distress she implored our Savior to deliver her daughter from a devil who was cruelly tormenting her. Jesus gave her no answer and to the Apostles who interceded for her He said, “*I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the*

*house of Israel.*" Finally, however, yet only after another stern repulse, He heard the woman's prayer. Here we may contemplate three perfections in our Savior: His fidelity, integrity, and wisdom respecting His mission. Although the work of redemption undertaken by Christ covered the whole world, His immediate personal mission was limited to the Jewish people. This was the will of the Father; and what limits this will set to the ministry of Jesus!

Entirely obedient and faithful in word and action, Jesus scarcely left the territorial boundaries traced out for Him; and when He did, He exercised His ministry not officially but, as it were, in passing. It was not Jesus but the Apostles who would go to the Gentiles. And yet, what an unfaithful flock was Israel, of whom He had said through Isaias, *I have spread forth my hands all the day to an unbelieving people.* His Sacred Heart saw and loved among the Gentiles the sheep who were to be of His flock, but He willed to exercise prudence so as not to expose Himself unnecessarily to the reproaches of the Jews. It is probable that for this reason He did not heed the solicitations of His Apostles on behalf of this suppliant. Moreover, He was aware of her exceptional strength of soul, and perhaps He desired to give her the opportunity to show the full stature of her faith.

There is an important lesson for us in this seeming indifference of Jesus to the Canaanite woman. We observe that when she cried after Him on the road, He gave no sign that He had even heard her; neither by word nor glance did He respond to her entreaties. When she came to Him in the house, He told her severely that *it is not fair to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs.* These were surely stern, cold words from the lips of our good and loving Jesus, but He treated this pagan woman in this way for her

instruction and ours. There can be nothing more advantageous for the soul than to meet with occasions which demand its practicing perseverance, co-operating earnestly and seriously with grace, purifying its dispositions — occasions, in a word, which bring the soul into direct contact with trial and humiliation. Such exercise is the best preparation for grace. And so it was with the Canaanite woman. She survived the test, and the goodness and power of Jesus could no longer withstand such confidence, perseverance, and humility: "*O woman, great is thy faith! Let it be done to thee as thou wilt,*" said our Savior, and from a distance He worked the miracle. The possessed girl was immediately set free.

O my Savior, the faith of this Canaanite woman, like the faith of the Roman centurion, drew from Your divine lips a cry of admiration. These pagans gave You the humble, unquestioning faith that You sought for in vain among the Chosen People. What a salutary lesson there is in this for me! The fact that I am a religious, consecrated by vow to Your special service, does not of itself make me better than others who are living in the world. There may be very many in the world whose virtues are rewarded by far more choice graces than I in my pride and complacency will ever be disposed to receive. Help me, good Jesus, to be a religious after Your own heart!

AUGUST 25

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*Virtues of the Canaanite Woman*



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"But she came and worshipped him, saying, 'Lord, help me!' He said in answer, 'It is not fair to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs.' But she said, 'Yes, Lord; for even the

dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered and said to her, 'O woman, great is thy faith! Let it be done to thee as thou wilt' " (Mt. 15:26-28).

Picture the Canaanite woman before our Lord.

Good Jesus, grant to my prayer the graces of humility and perseverance which You gave the Canaanite woman.

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In the Canaanite woman we may study several beautiful virtues. First, there is her great and unselfish love for her child. She saw her daughter in the dread power of the devil, and like pagans in general she was at a loss how to deal with this terrible misfortune. She felt her child's misery as keenly as if it were her own. "*Lord, help me!*" she cried to Jesus. It was love that made her so ingenious, so firm and persevering. Second and chiefly, this woman showed a most extraordinary faith. She addressed our Savior as *Lord* and *Son of David*. These are significant appellations. This woman may have been among the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon who heard the Sermon on the Mount; in any event, the fame of our Savior's miracles had spread far and wide, and it is probable that she comprehended partly at least the significance of the titles she used in her petition. Moreover, it seems clear that she had shown herself worthy of graces of faith which had not been granted even to the Jews. As the prophet Elias had to go to Sidon, to the city of Sarepta, that is, among pagans, so it is likewise with our Savior.

The humility of the Canaanite woman is also particularly moving. No one else had been tried by Jesus so severely in this respect. He allowed her to beg and entreat on the public highway without deigning to give her even a look. The Apostles themselves were moved to pity, but Jesus reproved them for speaking in her behalf. Yet she, like the blind men

of Capharnaum, continued to follow Him even into the house and there she cast herself at His feet. Then it was that she received the most discouraging and humiliating refusal of all. But let us notice the response of this pagan, whom we may infer was wealthy, educated, and of high rank, to the unwonted severity of Jesus. She was conscious of her unworthiness; she acknowledged it, but she parried our Savior's stern words in a manner so apt and winning that He was disarmed. There was in her rejoinder a most charming ingenuity united with humble confidence.

What joy for our Savior to find such a heart! And He who wanted nothing more than to allow Himself to be overcome, said to her kindly and with admiration, "*Because of this answer, go thy way; the devil has gone out of thy daughter.*" Jesus Himself had been working within her, filling her soul with faith and love at the very moment when, by word and gesture, He was repulsing her. This was the reason for her marvelous faith; and so marvelous was it that our Savior Himself was in admiration of what He had brought to pass. He was captivated, as it were, by the beauty of His own work.

Impress deeply upon my mind, O good Jesus, the meaning of this mystery. Surely You wish to teach me in it, first of all, what prayer animated by faith, persevering prayer, prayer full of humility can do, even when it is God who resists. Second, You remind me in a striking manner that I must not try to avoid humiliations or accept them with a bad grace. I need both of these lessons, for I am inclined to pray with more insistence and impatience than perseverance; and if I do not run away from humiliations, I fear that I am not often graceful in the acceptance of them. Help me, dear Jesus, to bring joy and consolation to Your Sacred Heart by my practice of the virtues of the Canaanite woman.

## *The Deaf-Mute*



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"And they brought to him one deaf and dumb and entreated him to lay his hand upon him" (Mk. 7:32).

Jesus, returning from the district of Tyre by way of Sidon to the sea of Galilee, was passing through the region of the Decapolis; here a deaf-mute was brought to Him for a cure.

*"Lord, if thou wilt thou canst cure me."*

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Jesus was entreated by the friends of the deaf man, who was also suffering from an impediment in his speech, to lay His hands upon him. Their request showed their faith in our Savior's power; yet they appear to have been under the impression that the laying on of His hands possessed a special efficacy and was indispensable. But, as in the case of the daughter of Jairus, our Savior performed this cure in the manner that He Himself saw fit. Also, as in the raising of the daughter of Jairus, He did not permit the crowd to witness the cure; but, taking the man by himself and in the presence of the disciples only, He put His fingers into the deaf ears and touched the man's lips with spittle from His own mouth. Then, raising His eyes to heaven and sighing, He uttered the Syriac word, *Ephpheta*, which means, *Be thou opened*. How intimate and personal was the contact of the divine perfection of Jesus with the infirmity of this man!

Our Savior had put a legion of devils to flight with a word; He had cured the centurion's servant and the daughter of the Canaanite woman from a distance. Why, then, did

He perform this miracle, as it were, with effort? Perhaps His elaborate procedure was meant to arouse faith in the deaf and dumb man, but surely it was also intended for the instruction of the disciples who were eyewitnesses and for our instruction as well. Jesus wished to show the disciples and us that the Sacred Humanity served as an instrument of the Divinity, that it was the divine Person of the Word who healed; but that to work the marvels, the Word used the human nature that was united to Him. Life proceeding from the Divinity reached the bodies and souls of men through the Sacred Humanity.

Again, by His example on this occasion, Jesus implicitly approved the external ceremonies of the Church, especially in her administration of the sacraments. The ritual of Baptism, for example, offers a striking parallel to our Savior's manner of performing this cure. The priest touches with saliva the ears and nostrils of the person to be baptized and uses the same Syriac word which Jesus employed. The divine precedent for the ceremonies of the Church should make us always reverent in witnessing them, and by our prayerful attention to the outward signs, we should pass to the supernatural realities they represent. We are also led to infer from our Savior's actions in this mystery that it is not a simple matter to cure one who is deaf or mute with regard to spiritual things. He must go apart from the crowd and seek retreat and recollection. His ears must be filled with the teachings of Jesus by the operation of the Holy Spirit, *the finger of God's hand*. He must relish no longer the things of earth, but the things of God. He must look to heaven for assistance and with Jesus sigh to be heard. Finally, Jesus Himself must give the word of command and apply His merits to the soul.

Jesus, my Lord and Savior, this afflicted man gave evidence of his perfect cure by showing that he could hear and speak aright. So many times Your mercy and grace have touched my soul in the Sacrament of Penance and in Holy Communion, in spiritual reading, and in the words and example of others; but what change has taken place in me? I fear that too often I still speak the language of the world, of impatience and dislike, of criticism and gossip; nor am I quick to hear and heed Your inspirations. Good Jesus, let me not remain infirm under the very ministrations of Your sovereign power. Open my ears and loose my tongue, that from now on I may hear and speak *correctly*.

AUGUST 27

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### *The Second Multiplication of the Loaves*



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“In those days when again there was a great crowd, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples together and said to them, ‘I have compassion on the crowd, for behold, they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat; and if I send them away to their homes fasting, they will faint on the way, for some of them have come from a distance’” (Mk. 8:1-3).

Our Savior wished the Jews to see in Him a prophet not inferior to Moses, and so He worked twice and under similar circumstances the miracle that had been performed at the prayer of Moses in the desert. Besides, this miracle was a preparation for the institution of the Eucharist which the bread, like the manna that fell in the desert foreshadowed and prefigured.

Divine Savior, fill me with living faith and gratitude when I prepare to receive You in daily Communion.

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The common principle of the three miracles, the Eucharist, the multiplication of the loaves, and the manna, is the mercy and love of God. Israel without food in the *desert, vast and fearful wilderness* and the famished crowd in the lonely plain on the borders of Lake Genesareth, with their sick and infirm, their blind and paralytic, represent the Church and all humanity. *The food that perishes* is unable to satisfy the needs of the soul. If our Savior did not come to our aid with the Bread of life, we should *faint on the way*, for we come from afar and we all have a long road to travel. Furthermore, in both the miracle of the manna and that of the loaves, the bread was miraculously renewed. The manna, which Scripture also terms significantly *bread from heaven* and *bread of angels*, fell anew from heaven every day; and in the case of the four thousand, all partook of the same seven loaves distributed by the disciples; and this number of loaves was miraculously sufficient for all. But the Eucharist is far more wonderful. It is always the same Bread, not by multiplication, but by transubstantiation; It is the Body of Christ, who not only is present by a wondrous act of His divine power, but continues His Eucharistic presence by a succession of wonders; we all receive this Bread of life, but the supply is never exhausted.

Again, the effects of the loaves and the manna and those of the Eucharist are similar. Although the immediate result of the miracles of the manna and the loaves, prompted as they were by our Savior's tender concern for the body as well as the soul, was a temporal good, yet it was not unrelated to spiritual benefit. Jesus intended, by repeating the prodigy, to revive the spiritual life of His people, to awaken their faith, and draw them to Himself. And the Eucharist, while it is above all the food of the soul, it is also the seed

of immortality, the pledge and guarantee of the glorious transfiguration of the body. Moreover, all the Israelites were filled to satiety by the manna that fell in the desert; but, while some responded with gratitude, others scorned this food from heaven, saying, "*We are disgusted with this wretched food*"; they murmured and lost faith in the Lord God. What happened in the desert was repeated in the case of the throng fed by our Savior on the bank of Lake Genesareth; for they too later lost faith and abandoned Him. Perhaps our loyalty is not more enduring than that of the Jews of old when Jesus comes to us in Holy Communion. We hold out our hands for His gifts—greater strength of soul, a more ardent love—yet, how disloyal we often are when the test comes.

Divine Savior, grant that I may receive You today in Holy Communion with greater recollection and more fruitfully than ever before. Make my dispositions like those of the crowd who followed You for three days without thinking of any temporal interest in their eagerness to hear Your words and to be healed by You. Let me prepare for each day's Holy Communion by living in the constant desire of spiritual goods and in closest union with You.

AUGUST 28

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### *The Leaven of the Pharisees*



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"And he said to them, 'Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees'" (Mt. 16:6).

Our Savior and His Apostles were sailing across Lake Tiberias from Magadan or Dalmanutha, where the Sadducees and

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Pharisees had demanded that Jesus show them a sign from heaven.

Divine Master, help me to come to know You as You are.

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During the passage across the lake or upon arrival at their destination, our Savior said to His Apostles, "*Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.*" It would seem that this warning was prompted by His sad reflections upon the malice and corruption of the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were making common cause against Him and were even now actively scheming against His life. St. Mark records that just prior to leaving Magadan, following the insolent demand of the Pharisees and Sadducees for a sign from heaven, Jesus sighed deeply in spirit and said, "*Why does this generation demand a sign? Amen I say to you, a sign shall not be given to this generation.*" And so we may infer that during the voyage across the lake He was preoccupied with somber meditation upon the blindness of His enemies and the disasters into which they were leading His people. His warning to the Apostles is, as it were, a conclusion to these reflections, which He expressed aloud in order to put His followers on their guard against this deadly contagion.

The Twelve took our Savior's words in a literal sense. They concluded that Jesus was referring to their having forgotten to bring bread with them, and that he was forbidding them to eat the bread of the Pharisees. And so they became troubled and argued among themselves, each trying, perhaps, to shift the responsibility for the oversight from himself to the others. Possibly, too, they asked each other how they were to live from now on if they were forbidden to buy the bread used by the Pharisees and Sadducees, or how

they were to procure their food. *"We have brought no bread,"* they said. Jesus had only very recently fed the four thousand miraculously; yet here, in His very presence, the Twelve were showing lively anxiety over a matter of a little bread. Deservedly did our Savior rebuke them: *"You of little faith, why do you argue among yourselves that you have no bread? Do you not yet understand, nor remember the five loaves among five thousand men, and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves among four thousand, and how many large baskets you took up?"* Then Jesus corrected the error of the Apostles by explaining that He did not refer to the leaven used in the making of bread, but to the leaven which can enter the heart, that is, the spirit of the Pharisees which He had characterized on another occasion as the leaven of hypocrisy. The grave tone of our Savior's admonition shows how uneasiness over and preoccupation with temporal matters displeases Him, because such anxiety always arises from want of trust in Him.

Divine Savior, I marvel that Your Apostles, who lived so intimately with You, who were the happy witnesses of Your life and miracles, moved, as it were, in so different an atmosphere from Yours. Your thoughts were taken up with the things of the spirit; they were anxious about nourishment for their bodies. They had not forgotten the two miracles of the loaves, since, according to Your Evangelist, St. Mark, they immediately and accurately answered Your questions as to the number of baskets of fragments they had gathered up. Then why were they so slow of understanding? Perhaps their greatest fault lay in their not reflecting upon what they saw and heard, but in satisfying themselves merely with witnessing Your wonderful works. But if they were still in great need of Your instruction, my need is even greater. I too am inclined to allow my spiritual perceptions to become dulled with earthly pre-

occupations; consequently, I too often misunderstand Your action in my life and so become troubled and uneasy. Enlighten the darkness of my mind, good Jesus, so that all that happens to me will raise me up to You, instead of turning me back upon myself or my earthly cares.

AUGUST 29

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*The Blind Man of Bethsaida*



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“And they came to Bethsaida and they brought him a blind man and entreated him to touch him” (Mk. 8:22).

When our Savior disembarked at Bethsaida Julias on the eastern shore of Lake Tiberias, He was met by certain persons who were bringing a blind man to Him for a cure.

O Jesus, let not negligence on my part keep Your light from penetrating the darkness of my mind.

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St. Mark expressly observes that Jesus personally led the blind man outside the town before curing him. This may have been done to arouse the proper dispositions in this afflicted man by a special act of kindly interest and also, perhaps, to keep the miracle secret. Once outside the town, our Savior applied saliva to the eyes of the blind man, laid His hands upon him and asked, as if He did not know, whether he could see. The blind man answered that he saw men walking who looked to him like trees; that is to say, the images were still confused and indistinct. But when Jesus had laid His hands upon the man's eyes a second time he saw everything clearly. Why was this cure performed

only gradually? Perhaps the faith and confidence of the blind man were not sufficiently strong. He himself had not asked our Lord for a cure, but others had led him to Jesus and had interceded for him. As he partially recovered his sight, his faith increased, however, and he cried out with joy that he already saw men walking about; then, at last, his full power of vision was restored.

The cured man was then instructed to go to his home and, if he passed through the village, to tell no one of his cure. It was our Savior's wish to conceal this miracle from public knowledge. He was in pagan country and so the cure was a work of merciful compassion, not an act connected with His public mission. Besides, if popular enthusiasm were aroused by this miracle, it would call forth new and sharper hostility from His enemies, since He had only a short time before refused to give the Pharisees and Sadducees the sign from heaven for which they had asked. The cure was, in fact, almost hidden from the Apostles themselves, by reason of the blind man's gradual improvement and the use of saliva, whose natural properties were thought to be beneficial when applied to diseased eyes.

It is also worthy of note that St. Mark alone gives us an account of this cure. Of all the Evangelists, St. Mark draws attention most often to the Apostles' slowness of understanding. In describing the gradual healing of the blind man, he may have meant to suggest a parallel in the slowness with which the Master's lessons penetrated the minds of the Apostles. Gradual increase of light is a natural symbol of the mind's slowly increasing grasp of truth. The enlightenment of the Apostles would be achieved by many and repeated instructions; and so in this parablelike miracle we may discover certain qualities of our Savior's method of teach-

ing: His prudence and gentleness, the appropriateness, economy, and effectiveness of the means He used, His compassionate personal interest.

My good Master, like the blind man I am often wanting in faith and even in the awareness of my spiritual miseries. Perhaps the charity of others' prayers have many times drawn Your merciful glance to my poor soul. Help me to profit by each precious new light that I receive through Your great goodness. Let each advance in the knowledge and love of Your law prepare me for the next, until You have called me wholly out of darkness into Your marvelous light.

AUGUST 30

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### *Peter's Profession of Faith*



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"Now Jesus, having come into the district of Caesarea Philippi, began to ask his disciples, saying, 'Who do men say the Son of Man is?' But they said, 'Some say, John the Baptist; and others, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'" (Mt. 16:13-16).

After the cure of the blind man Jesus continued His journey northward to Caesarea Philippi. He does not seem to have entered the town, but upon approaching it, withdrew from His Apostles to be alone with His Father; then they rejoined Him in the environs of Caesarea Philippi.

Divine Master, bestow supernatural vigor upon my soul, and grant me a greater zeal to make You known and loved.

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It was quite late in His public life that our Savior questioned His Apostles as to who the people in general and they themselves in particular considered Him to be. Most of the prophecies concerning Him had been realized and the time of the passion was drawing near. The exceptional solemnity of the moment is further marked by St. Luke's observation that our Savior had previously been at prayer by Himself and also by the fact that only the Apostles were present at this interview. Our Savior first asked the Apostles what others thought of Him. This He did, not because He needed to be informed, but to prepare them for the question He was about to address to them. From their answer it is clear that among the people Jesus was not regarded as an ordinary man. Some took Him for Elias, others for John the Baptist, others again for Jeremias or one of the prophets. The common element in these diverse opinions is the conception of our Savior as a messenger or herald of the kingdom of the Messiah, an ambassador of God.

To the second question of Jesus, "*But who do you say that I am?*" Peter replied, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" This question, like the first, had been addressed to all, but Peter answered without even stopping to ascertain the opinion of the rest. "When Jesus asked them the opinion of the people, they all made answer," comments St. John Chrysostom. "When He asks them what they themselves think, Peter alone breaks in and forestalls the rest." True to his habit of taking the initiative, he spoke from his eager impulsive heart; but he was also conscious of an interior light which the others, perhaps, did not possess in the same degree.

This testimony given by Peter on behalf of his own personal conviction, although in the name of the others, is a most

thrilling and magnificent profession of faith. It is as a résumé of all that Christian revelation teaches concerning the God-Man. Peter professes his faith, first, in the Incarnation: "*Thou,*" Jesus of Nazareth, whom I behold before my eyes. He acknowledges the mission and functions of the sacred humanity of the Savior: "*Thou art the Christ,*" that is, the Anointed One, the Messiah, therefore Priest, Prophet, and King. In the opinion of many students of the Gospel he also bore witness on this occasion to the divinity of Jesus: "*Thou art . . . the Son of the living God.*" This is not the first time that Jesus had heard Himself hailed as *Son of God*; but, in general, those who had accorded Him this title previously had used it in the sense of someone favored by God, entrusted with His authority and power. Peter, however, made his ringing declaration with full and entire awareness of what he was asserting in such solemn tones and with heartfelt conviction of its truth.

O great St. Peter, I can almost see you before me, on fire with the Holy Spirit, coming forward in the name of the other Apostles as well as in your own name and giving your divine Master this glorious testimony of faith. Never has a Roman Pontiff pronounced a doctrinal decision in a manner more sublime. I long to imitate your wholehearted and spontaneous co-operation with grace. Obtain for my soul, good St. Peter, the vigor and boldness I so greatly need in order to proclaim by every word and deed the sovereign authority over me of Him who is your Master and mine.

*The Primacy of Peter Announced*



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“Then Jesus answered and said, ‘Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood has not revealed it to thee, but my Father in heaven. And I say to thee, thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven’” (Mt. 16:17-19).

Jesus, hailed by Peter as the Son of God, addressed Peter in turn, calling him by his full name to emphasize the importance of what He was about to say, thus immortalizing the name of Jona. Here also, for the first time in the Gospel, Jesus uses the term, *my Church*.

Divine Savior, grant me an unswerving faith and loyalty to Your holy Church and to her visible Head.

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Had He not been really the Son of God, Jesus would have shown a holy indignation at Peter's bold words; instead He confirmed Peter's testimony, attributing it not to human insight, but to a supernatural inspiration. It was not flesh and blood that had revealed these truths to Peter, but the heavenly Father Himself. “*Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona,*” said our Savior; blessed because of your faith, blessed in the fruits of this great profession of it, that is, in your intimate union with Me and My kingdom, which is to be expressed by the primacy; blessed in the sanctity that is to be yours, in the martyrdom that awaits you, in the glory you will have

in heaven. This is the only time it is recorded that Christ ever directly hailed as blessed a definite individual. Perhaps we may see herein the origin of the title given to the popes, *Beatissime Pater*.

*"And I say to thee, thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church"*: You have called me Christ, the Son of the living God, and now I speak to you as God when I call you Peter (*Kepha*) and make of you the rock (*Kepha*), the foundation of my Church, upon which it will be built. The essence of the primacy of Peter is in the fact that it underlies as a foundation the structure of the Church: her doctrine, sacraments, pastoral authority, the Church teaching and the Church taught. *"And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* The Church is impregnable to all attacks from without, whether from men or demons, whether in the form of heresy, schism, persecution, sin, or sacrilege. These strong foes are the *gates* (i.e., in the Semitic idiom, "the powers") of *hell*, but all their violence unleashed will not prevail against the foundation which supports the Church; nor, consequently, against the Church herself.

*"And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven."* Peter, the head of the earthly kingdom of Christ, receives the universal power of the keys, that is, all powers necessary for the well-being of the kingdom, just as every master of a house entrusts his keys to a faithful steward during his absence. And since the earthly kingdom is founded merely as a preparation for the heavenly kingdom, whatever measures Peter takes on earth will be ratified in heaven. If he "binds," the sentence holds good in heaven; if he "looses," pardon is granted in heaven. What value and importance this mystery should have for us, the children of the Church! The promise of Jesus on this occasion assured her of a supreme head in

Peter and made her one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Moreover, the words of our Savior showed more forcibly and concretely than ever that the Old Dispensation had been replaced by the New in the establishment of a new Church.

Yes, O Jesus, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

You speak the words of God and show the power of God.

I affirm this perhaps with even more assurance than St. Peter

at the moment of his great profession of faith, because I have

seen Your promises fulfilled. With certitude, with enthusiasm,

I proclaim my faith and I thank You, my God, for giving me

this faith in You, in Peter, and in Your Church.