

the names of the others who may have rejected our Savior's invitation or who, perhaps, became disciples only temporarily; but it is probable that then as now a great many appeals were necessary to make one disciple. We should learn from this incident of the calling of Matthew that when divine grace encounters a responsive, docile soul, it can work a very rapid and profound transformation. No one while he lives is to be despaired of, for there is no condition of life nor state of soul that God cannot turn to account for His kingdom. Let us resolve, then, to pray with greater earnestness that sinners may have the grace of repentance, and that we ourselves may respond with eagerness and sincerity when Jesus invites us to a closer imitation and a more perfect union with Him.

Great St. Matthew, obtain for me a sincere and magnanimous heart. I also wish to accept the invitation of Jesus to a new life of greater humility, self-denial, and prayerfulness; help me to conquer my selfishness, so that, like you, I may follow Jesus with joy and as you did attract others also to His service.

JULY 1

The Precious Blood of Our Savior



(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 818)

JULY 2

The Visitation of Our Lady to St. Elizabeth



(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 820)

The Question of Fasting



"Now they said to him, 'Why do the disciples of John fast so often and make supplications and likewise those of the Pharisees, whereas thy disciples eat and drink?'" (Lk. 5:33)

The calling of St. Matthew marks the beginning of new difficulties for our Savior. The Pharisees, angered that Jesus should associate with publicans and even call one of them to the apostolate, now for the first time make an open attack on Him. The feast given by St. Matthew in Jesus' honor was, perhaps, the occasion of the complaint recorded by St. Luke. Good Jesus, help me to imitate Your gentleness and reasonableness in the face of ill will and opposition.

Our Savior is here reproached for not obliging His disciples to fast and pray as John the Baptist had done and as the Pharisees were demanding of their disciples. It is true that the recitation of prayers and the observance of fasts are important practices of the spiritual life. It is equally true, however, that along with a full exercise of prayer and fasting one can still be far removed from interior perfection, as the disciples of John and the Pharisees show in their complaint on this occasion. Jesus, far from condemning fasting in itself, will later give precepts on this subject, and His disciples will fast according to His example; but this was not the time, He said in effect on this occasion, to prescribe rules for fasting. "*Can you make the wedding guests fast,*" asked our Savior, "*as long as the bridegroom is with them?*"

Such was the case that moment. The Savior was the Messiah, who had come to espouse the Church and in her all mankind. His disciples were His companions, His attendants, as it were, called to share in the joy of the betrothal. It was becoming, then, that they should rejoice; to mourn would have implied that the Messiah, the bridegroom of Israel, had not yet come. The Pharisees might have found the key to our Savior's imagery in the words of Isaias referring to the union of Christ with the Church: *Thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt remember no more the reproach of thy widowhood.* The disciples of John might have recalled the same figure as used by their master: *"He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices exceedingly at the voice of the bridegroom. This my joy, therefore, is made full."*

In this same instruction, furthermore, Jesus showed by a parable that the spirit which commonly dictated observance of the Old Law would not suffice in the New Dispensation; one cannot safely patch an old garment with new cloth; new vessels must be prepared for the new wine, namely, His law and His spirit. Later, after the work of our Redemption had been completed, when the Apostles will be filled with the Holy Spirit and transformed by Him, then they will fast and with a higher motive than that which now prompted the fasting of the Pharisees. We should observe also how kindly Jesus made excuse for those who had come to Him with the complaint, especially for the disciples of John. They did not understand the Gospel, they found it strange, our Savior tactfully implied, because they were accustomed to the Old Law: "And no man after drinking the old wine immediately desires new; for he says, 'The old is better.'"

Thus gently did Jesus admonish the partisans of the Old Dispensation to guard against attachment to habit and not to condemn as bad all that was new.

Lord Jesus, I adore the perfections You manifested on this occasion: Your calm and patient gentleness before an indelicate and offensive complaint, Your moderation and reasonableness in dealing with Your own followers as well as with Your enemies, Your readiness to make allowance for those who opposed You.

JULY 4

The Sabbath: The Ears of Grain



“Now it came to pass on the second first Sabbath, that he was going through standing grain, and his disciples were plucking and eating the ears of grain, rubbing them with their hands. But some of the Pharisees said to them, ‘Why are you doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’” (Lk. 6:1, 2)

One Sabbath day, during His early ministry in Galilee, as Jesus and His disciples were following a path which bordered or cut across a cornfield, the disciples, to allay their hunger, plucked some ears of grain and shelled them in their hands. For this they were blamed by the Pharisees.

Divine Savior, teach me how to apply right principles with due regard for circumstances, times, and persons.

It does not seem that our Savior shared His disciples' little repast, but with sweetness and condescension, He permitted them this small gratification. The simplicity and

poverty of Jesus and His little band of followers is clearly reflected in this incident. The road is dusty, the sun hot. There are no shady trees or cool streams, nothing but the fields of grain ripe for the harvest. Our Savior and His disciples do not carry with them even necessary supplies of food, but the disciples are content. They do not wish to fare better than their Master. Beautiful example of frugality and apostolic simplicity! But the quite innocent manner in which the disciples appeased their hunger drew upon our Savior the reproaches of the Pharisees. Their conduct on this occasion was reprehensible in all respects. They evidently kept a continual and sly watch upon Jesus with the intention of finding matter for accusation; perhaps they had received a directive to this effect from Jerusalem. In any case, they here charged Him again with a violation of the Sabbath in that He had allowed the disciples to pluck and shell the ears of corn.

Jesus did not enter into controversy with them over the validity of their interpretation, but He raised the matter to a higher level by showing that the Sabbath precept was ordained not only for the worship of God, but for man's benefit as well; consequently, it could not be the cause of detriment to man either in soul or body without ceasing to bind. What our Lord wishes to teach us is that in a human emergency and in the service of God it was permissible to deviate from the Sabbath law; and the more so in this instance, since the Apostles, journeying in company with the Savior and employed in His service, were engaged in a ministry far holier than that of the temple. "But I tell you," said Jesus to the Pharisees, "that one greater than the temple is here." And because their accusation was prompted by spite and was contrary to the spirit of the Law, that is,

against charity and mercy, Jesus quoted to them the reproach and the admonition of the prophet Osee, "*I desire mercy and not sacrifice.*"

In this episode, an instance of the Sabbath controversy, we see our divine Savior magnificently revealed as Lord and Lawgiver with an authority wholly divine, and manifesting again the benevolence of His Sacred Heart, which makes due allowance for circumstances, times, and persons in the application of His precepts. We find Him once more fearlessly confronting His adversaries and clearly defining the issue between Himself and them by invoking His supreme authority over the Temple, the Law, and the entire Old Testament.

Lord Jesus, help me to know when it is right to be fearless and outspoken. Let me not make concessions detrimental to truth and justice for fear of giving offense; nor through timidity and false prudence seek to please in order to avoid conflict. Teach me how to be, like You, reserved and discreet or courageous and firm at the right time.

JULY 5

The Man With the Withered Hand



"And it came to pass on another Sabbath that he entered the synagogue and taught. And a man was there and his right hand was withered" (Lk. 6:6).

Represent to yourself Jesus in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Before Him is a man with a withered hand; surrounding them

are the Pharisees sharply watching to see whether Jesus will perform a cure.
Lord Jesus, help me to learn from You not to forget mercy even in just anger.

Perhaps the Pharisees, knowing well that Jesus would take pity on him, had artfully maneuvered this afflicted man into a position directly in front of Jesus, so that he would attract our Savior's attention. Still more craftily they challenged Jesus, asking whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. They proposed this question publicly in the crowded synagogue. Their purpose was entirely malicious in that they hoped to secure evidence against Jesus, even, as the sequel showed, for a capital charge. Their procedure also was unfair in that they kept an obstinate silence when Jesus in His turn interrogated them, saying, "*I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good, or to do evil? to save a life, or to destroy it?*" It may be that by these last words our Savior wished to let the Pharisees know that He was well aware of the plot they were forming against His life. He would here remind them that if, as their behavior toward Him seemed to imply they believed, one might not even do good to others on the Sabbath, still less was it permitted to plan another's destruction.

The Pharisees refused also to answer our Savior's further question as to whether a man was permitted to draw his one sheep out of the pit if it should fall in on the Sabbath day — an act which was allowed even by the casuists of the Pharisee sect. Then, as they maintained their stubborn silence, Jesus, *looking round upon them*, St. Mark says, *with anger*, that is, with sorrowful indignation at their spiritual blindness, said to the afflicted man, "*Stretch forth thy hand.*"

He did so and it was restored, as sound as the other. The triumph of Jesus in this controversy and their own humiliation before so large an audience, as well as the striking miracle, thoroughly exasperated the Pharisees. *But they were filled with fury*, St. Luke tells us, *and began to discuss among themselves what they should do to Jesus*. Their hatred even drove them to ally themselves with the Herodians, their own enemies and enemies of their nation, in conspiring against Jesus.

As for our Savior Himself, this increased hostility prompted Him to retire with His disciples to Lake Tiberias whither a large crowd followed Him, bringing their sick and possessed. *He healed many*, records St. Mark, *so that as many as had ailments were pressing upon him to touch him. And the unclean spirits, whenever they beheld him, fell down before him and cried out, saying, "Thou art the Son of God." And he charged them strictly not to make him known*. Again, it would appear that our Savior takes care not to provoke His adversaries unnecessarily. We are rightly repelled by the perfidious conduct of the Pharisees in this incident, but we also see even more clearly revealed the goodness and the mildness of the Heart of Jesus. Even in His indignation He did not forget His mercy. Always He deigns to answer and to instruct; and the miracle He worked on this occasion was not meant to excite antagonism. On the contrary, He withdrew after this cure of the man with the withered hand to spare His foes the sight of any further cures, and so prevent them from incurring an even more severe judgment than that which already awaited them. Divine Savior, truly did Isaias say of You, *The bruised reed he shall not break, and smoking flax he shall not quench; he shall bring forth judgment unto truth*. This is true of You,

good Jesus, in Your treatment not only of afflicted and repentant sinners, but also of Your enemies. You do not dispute violently with them nor overwhelm and destroy them by Your power; but with divine patience and long-suffering You withdraw from them, that they may have time for reflection and repentance, or at least may not add to their guilt. Help me, Lord Jesus, to be more like You.

JULY 6

Sermon on the Mount: The Eight Beatitudes



“And seeing the crowds, he went up the mountain. And when he was seated, his disciples came to him. And opening his mouth he taught them” (Mt. 5:1).

See the great crowds surrounding Jesus and listening in rapt silence as He delivers His great Sermon on the Mount.

Divine Savior, impart to me Your wisdom, that in thought, word, and deed I may obey the law of grace rather than the law of nature.

The crowd arranged themselves in a grassy plain about Jesus who was seated, as a master instructing his pupils. Then, looking upon His disciples, since it was for them especially that He would speak, Jesus delivered one of the greatest discourses ever uttered by human lips. The Sermon on the Mount forms a complement to the Law promulgated on another mountain, Mount Sinai. There God spoke amid thunder and lightning and to only one privileged member of His people. Here, familiarly seated among His own in a

JULY 6 / 475

woodland setting of peace and calm, our Savior revealed to His listeners and through them to the world the central truths regarding the Christian spirit, the very heart of the Gospel. Instead of the dread voice commanding, "*Thou shalt*," as on Mount Sinai, our Lawgiver now repeats again and again, "*Blessed*," that is, "Happy," *are you, if . . .*" Already the sweetness of the New Law of grace and love was replacing the spirit of severity and fear which prevailed under the Old.

The eight beatitudes are general maxims of Christian morality and perfection, the basic principles of the kingdom of Jesus Christ as opposed to the kingdom of this world; and also to the ideas and hopes which the Chosen People had conceived regarding the kingdom of the Messiah. As embodying Christian moral doctrine, the beatitudes show us both the goal of life, which is eternal happiness, and the various virtues whereby we advance toward the goal. They do not in themselves constitute perfect happiness, but they guide us toward it and give us, as it were, a foretaste of eternal bliss. It may also be said that the eight beatitudes comprise a summary of the entire Sermon on the Mount, for the discourse which follows the proclamation of them only develops their implications.

The beatitudes concern the acts of the principal virtues whereby in the life of every day we prepare our eternal happiness; yet they are possessed of such perfection that they seem to flow from the Gifts rather than from the virtues. This preparation which we daily make for eternity is both negative, that is, concerned with the removal of obstacles, and positive, that is, concerned with the performance of works which will lead us to perfection. The first three beatitudes, on poverty, meekness, and mourning, speak of

The first law of our Savior's kingdom does not apply to the state of poverty as opposed to the state of riches. The

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:3).
 Poverty of spirit means detachment of the heart from earthly goods as well as actual poverty embraced by choice or supported in a Christian spirit from supernatural motives.
 Lord Jesus, deign to make known to me the earthly attachments which prevent me from belonging to the number of the *poor in spirit* who are called blessed by You.

The Poor in Spirit

JULY 7

the negative preparation, because they regulate our natural inclinations toward earthly goods, anger, and pleasure. The remainder of the beatitudes envisage the goal positively, showing us how to attain blessedness or happiness relatively to our neighbor (mercy and peace) and to ourselves (hunger and thirst for justice, purity of heart, and love of the cross). My Jesus, help me to judge good and evil according to Your standards. Grant me the light of Your grace, that I may consistently view the incidents of my life on earth under the aspect of eternity, considering as good only that which brings me closer to You and regarding as evil only that which would separate us. Enable me to understand that my true happiness, my beatitude, does not lie where the tendencies of my human nature would place it, and that from Your point of view many things which I may consider good and desirable are, in reality, injurious.

blessedness it promises is offered to the poor in spirit, and therefore it is available to all, the richest as well as the poorest in this world's goods. The man who has little needs to submit to the requirements of the beatitude as truly as the man who has much. The goal to be achieved is the attitude of interior independence, a freedom of the heart from the desire of possession. Our nature has so lost its balance through the Fall that we tend to view earthly things, not as transparencies through which we see and desire God alone, but as things desirable in themselves. It is only by faith and prayer, by struggle and vigilance over ourselves that we recover our equilibrium and gain that insight into reality, whereby we use all created things only as aids in our ascent to the Creator. What our Savior demands, then, above all, is a wise and true estimate of sensible and earthly goods, which makes us independent of these goods whether we possess them or not. If they are wanting, we should neither become unhappy nor make inordinate efforts to acquire them. If they are in our possession, the heart must be kept in a state of detachment and no inordinate measures should be taken to preserve or increase them. On the contrary, if circumstances should require even an heroic observance of our vow of poverty, we should willingly and gladly embrace this degree of poverty.

To the poor in spirit our Savior promises heaven as a reward under the title *kingdom*, that is to say, an incomparable good, more magnificent and lasting than all the external goods that could be renounced. And the possession of this kingdom is certain; the divine word is its guarantee. To renounce the possession of the good things of this earth and all attachment to them, for supernatural motives, is, then, to strike a bargain with God for heaven, to which

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the earth" (Mt. 5:4).
Meekness is the virtue which regulates those inordinate move-



The Meek

JULY 8

we may lay claim by right of justice. Here on earth poverty of spirit is a foretaste of heaven, because it frees the soul from temporal cares, because it imparts to the soul facility and delight in intercourse with God in prayer, and because it secures for the soul a holy liberty in the pursuit of the only true good. We struggle to overcome our natural desires to possess, not merely that we may attain liberty of heart, but that we may gain something better, a deeper and more lasting happiness. We cannot keep both our attachment to earthly comfort and the love of God and desire of heaven. We must choose between expanding our hearts for receiving the infinite love of God or contracting them to the narrow limits of self-gratification.

O divine Savior, what gratitude we owe You for this sublime teaching! How many poor have been consoled by it and induced to embrace poverty with love; how many rich have won through it the scepter and crown of the kingdom of heaven! If I wish to have Your spirit, dear Jesus, this beatitude teaches me what I must do. Here is Your fundamental law, Your first counsel, the first step toward salvation and perfection; just as the world seeks first of all wealth and material possessions, for without these it can do nothing. Help me to keep my vow of poverty in the full meaning and spirit of Your first beatitude.

ments of anger and vengeance which represent our inclination to claim our rights by force and exact requital for injustice committed against us.

Divine Savior, help me to understand the meaning of Christian meekness.

Meekness, like poverty of spirit, implies conflict; indeed, it is in the effort to gain poverty of spirit that meekness is born. This virtue is not synonymous with want of energy, passiveness, lack of spirit or character; it is not a negative quality. The meekness that we think of with contempt is not meekness at all, but a caricature of it, a counterfeit, deriving from natural weakness and want of character or conviction. Some of the external traits of weakness and meekness are, or seem to be, identical; but the sources from which they respectively derive are as far apart as heaven and earth. One springs from divinely infused virtue, the other from the uncultivated earth of man's fallen nature. Insofar as we are weak we shall never acquire the virtue of meekness, for if we have not the strength to resist outward pressure, we shall not be able to withstand the pressure from within.

They alone who have been made strong by faith and prayer and the grace of the sacraments can acquire that self-control which yields the beautiful flower of meekness. The battle we must wage to gain this virtue is with the self-assertive, aggressive forces within our own selves; and just as our conflict will be in proportion to the strength of these powers of our nature, so also will be the brightness and beauty of the virtue that will result from our victory. Independence, determination, strength of will, anger, the sense of responsibility are all necessary equipment for the Christian, but these powers are given us to fight for God and

against our corrupt nature. The virtue of meekness represents the control of these strong forces, so that they may be directed exclusively against our one real enemy in the one battle worth waging.

Christian meekness has for recompense the earth, that is, the kingdom of the Messiah in the Church on earth and, after this life, in heaven. Only they who practice the virtue of mildness shall gain heaven for themselves and for others; because our Savior did not will to found and establish His kingdom on exterior power or military force, but upon humble and patient persistence in the path of virtue and right. Such is the character of Jesus Himself and of His Church, and such also is the way of sharing in His kingdom and of belonging to Him. Moreover, nothing so wins the esteem and love of our fellow men and the friendship of God as the practice of Christian meekness. There is in it a great dignity, a true intellectual superiority, an extraordinary mastery over the will; and it offers a manifest proof of the presence of patience, submissiveness, and humility. This is why it wins for us not only the hearts of men, but the Heart of God Himself. In this sense, also, the meek possess the earth, or the land of promise; for they are at once the favorites and the masters of earth and heaven.

Lord Jesus, when I consider the meekness of Your Sacred Heart, I think with shame and sorrow of my own heart, so unlike Yours. The least word or deed that thwarts me arouses trouble and disquiet within me. Help me to acquire Your spirit and forever to remove sinful anger and petty vengeance from my thoughts and conduct. In all contradictions help me to imitate Your own unchanging meekness.

Such is the eternal end toward which we strive, that possession of it compensates for all possible sacrifices and

St. Luke, "*Woe to you who laugh now! for you shall mourn and weep.*"

our Lord says in the Sermon on the Mount as recorded by the making of these gratifications one's chief aim. And so in fact, directly opposed to the quest of the joys and satisfactions of this world for their own sake and especially to pleasures and comforts of this world. The third beatitude is, a certain spirit of energy and sobriety which foregoes the itself an act of virtue. The sadness of the beatitude is rather Jewish nation under the Roman yoke. None of these is of humiliation of Jerusalem, nor the groaning of the entire and hypocritical sadness of the Pharisees, bewailing the loss of some temporal good. It is surely not the fanatical is it natural grief or merely the sorrow that affects us at melancholy or sentimentality or boredom or dejection; nor The mourning which makes us blessed or happy is not

Lord Jesus, help me to understand the meaning of holy sadness.

of earthly pleasures.

and reflective spirit, able to evaluate properly the sorrows of this life and guided by temperance and reserve in the use of this beatitude speaks of the sadness that derives from a serious

5:5).
 "Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Mt.

✠

They Who Mourn

renunciations, and brings to man's entire nature full and perfect blessedness. Our Savior's own words give us the assurance of this: "*they shall be comforted,*" He promised, that is, in body and soul, according to the measure of their mourning here below. God will be made known to them as the Comforter of those who suffer, a knowledge that is gained only upon the condition of suffering. They who have never wept will never know what it is for God to wipe away all tears from their eyes. "*Blessed are you who weep now,*" said our Savior, "*for you shall laugh*"; that is, "your joys shall never end."

The great benefits of this holy sadness are that it establishes our hearts in God and directs their aspirations toward eternal goods; that it shields us from the vanity of this world; that it increases our merits for heaven and assures us even here below of solid consolation. The practice of this beatitude opens our eyes to the perils and evils with which this life abounds both for us and for our neighbor; and it inspires in us the charitable impulse to go to the aid of our brethren who suffer precisely because of the disastrous effects of the joy that is in opposition to the third beatitude. Indulgence in this world's pleasures easily leads to dissipation of spirit, to indifference toward the things of eternity and the supernatural, even to forgetfulness of God and then, as a consequence, to all the evils which accompany these disorders. But the sadness to which Jesus refers in the third beatitude has the latent power of bringing to those who understand it and apply it, not meaningless pain, but blessedness, that is, happiness in time and eternity.

O Jesus, preserve me from that vain joy which dissipates the mind and rebels against due restraint and which causes me to lose in a short time the fruit of long effort. Help me to

remain recollected in the midst of my duties and detached from the world when I am dealing with it. To this end, with the help of Your grace which I beg our Mother of Sorrows to obtain for me, I am resolved to apply myself more earnestly to the practice of silence and prayer.

JULY 10

The Seekers of Perfection



“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied” (Mt. 5:6).

The blessed of this beatitude are they who hunger and thirst for holiness.

Divine Master, make me understand that I can be really happy only insofar as I love virtue and hunger to practice it.

If the first three beatitudes, basing our life upon the spirit of poverty and upon meekness and mourning, were taken alone as the foundation of the spiritual life, we should have too negative an idea of our Christian vocation. The test of the rightness of our observance of these beatitudes, however, is the fourth beatitude. If the soul who practices poverty, meekness, and mourning has kept, throughout, a wholesome appetite for spiritual things, it is in a healthy condition and ready for further development under the laws of the other beatitudes. The hunger and thirst of the fourth beatitude, then, are to be interpreted as a lively aspiration toward virtue, toward perfection, by the use of the means which our faith places at our disposal. *“Not by bread alone does man*

Higher than *live*," was our Savior's answer to the tempter. Higher than the needs of the flesh are the hunger and thirst of the soul. Sometimes it is far better to starve our bodily nature than to feed it by disobeying any word *that comes forth from the mouth of God*. To be strict with ourselves, to make the lowest serve the highest, is true mercy. Moreover, as our lower nature is constantly refused the food it demands exclusively for itself and made to yield to a higher hunger and thirst, the less insistent its demands will become and the less ravenous its appetites.

We should be encouraged to make ever more intense efforts toward sanctity by the thought, first, that the kingdom of Jesus Christ on earth, or the Church, is above all the kingdom of justice and supernatural holiness. Its goal is heaven; its institutions, its powers, the effects they produce, are solely designed to free us from sin and make the life of virtue and the accumulation of supernatural merits easy for us. Second, there is the compelling truth that Christian perfection, the virtues, holiness, are the only goods that can be really possessed by us, the only goods whose possession is permanently assured, by the grace of God. This is the meaning of our Savior's promise, "*they shall be satisfied*." Nothing is more pleasing to God than our sincere aspirations toward holiness, nothing will draw down upon us more readily the abundance of His grace. Ardent desire, indeed, is one of the indispensable means of arriving at sanctity. Its sweetness facilitates our efforts, for when one is hungry, all food suits the taste. That this desire should be lively, active, absorbing, is shown by the imagery of hunger and thirst under which our Savior presents the beatitude. It should motivate our whole life and inspire our thoughts, words, and actions. And for us religious who are bound

by our profession to seek after holiness, this quest for sanctity should become the exclusive aim of our entire life, not only as pursuing our true good, but also as fulfilling an obligation.

My good Jesus, deign to make clear to me my real dispositions at this moment. I fear that, because I have been in Your service for many years, I am inclined to think I may occasionally seek my ease and be less submissive, less docile and mortified, less observant of silence and recollection than in the earlier years of my religious life. Increase my desire to become holy. Grant me a renewed spirit of fervor, so that the nearer I approach the end of my life and the judgment, the more zealously I may apply myself to the work of my sanctification.

JULY 11

The Merciful



“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt. 5:7). This beatitude regulates our dealings with the world of men, that we may do well to them and they to us.

O Jesus, fill my heart with supernatural pity for the sufferings of my fellow men in soul or body.

The fourth beatitude left us gazing toward heaven; the fifth brings us back to earth. Gazing toward heaven even with longing will not ensure our entrance there; for hungering and thirsting for God necessarily imply working for Him. We do not come to the knowledge of God and to

union with Him through prayer alone. The fulfillment of the duties and obligations of life is also necessary, since we have not been created pure spirits like the angels, but human beings with bodies as well as souls, and in need of dwelling in close association with other human beings. Toward these, our fellow men, we have manifold duties which may not be neglected without endangering our appetite for the things of God. For how, asks St. John, can *he who does not love his brother, whom he sees, love God, whom he does not see?* The ties that bind us to one another are close and strong. Toward all whom we meet we have a duty not only to pity and relieve their misfortunes when we can, but to practice the virtue of mercy in such a way that we draw out the best that is in others and lead them to see that goodness is both stronger and more attractive than badness.

Like the love of neighbor, of which it is a part, mercy is exercised by thoughts, feelings, words, and actions. The world is filled with distresses of all sorts; in our own immediate environment opportunities are never wanting to our zeal for relieving the spiritual and corporal necessities of others. Christian mercy, furthermore, has in it no weakness nor softness. It does not excuse what is definitely wrong and so condone sin out of compassion for the sinner. Such apparent mercy will end not in blessedness but in its opposite. True mercy is a blend of tenderness and strength which is not blind to the reality and gravity of evil, but which maintains an unalterable tenderness toward the evildoer. Nor is mercy a merely natural pity; it is supernatural and universal, that is, shown to all without exception; for one who is pitiless toward even a single person has not the virtue of mercy. And why should we refuse mercy to others when we our-

selves are constantly receiving it both from God and even from our fellow men?

The blessing promised for showing mercy is that we shall obtain it. Above all, we shall find in God an indulgent Judge, for He is Himself the *Father of mercies*, whose ways are *mercy and truth*. The merciful He will visit with His consolations, He will hear their prayers and strengthen them in the performance of good works. This gracious protection He Himself promises through the prophet Isaias: *When thou shalt pour out thy soul to the hungry and shalt satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light rise up in darkness and thy darkness shall be as the noonday. And the Lord will give thee rest continually and will fill thy soul with brightness, and deliver thy bones, and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a fountain of water whose waters shall not fail.*

O my God, I thank You for Your great mercies to my soul. You are the Good Shepherd who leaves the flock in the desert to seek the lost sheep. You are the woman who diligently searches for her lost drachma. You are the Father overjoyed at the recovery of an erring but well-loved son. Let the memory of all Your mercies and the thought of Your present goodness lead me to love and serve You alone and my neighbor for Your sake. Let the kindness and mercy I show to others be as so many acts of gratitude to You.

The Clean of Heart



“Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God” (Mt. 5:8). This cleanness of heart signifies both the purifying of the heart as a prelude to the vision of God and that cleanness of mind which is a kind of complement to the sight of God and the result of the Gift of understanding.

Divine Savior, make me worthy of that knowledge of You which is granted to the pure of heart.

Purity means not only freedom from the sins of the flesh, but that purity of the senses, of the heart, of thought and intention, that simplicity and uprightness, which seeks God directly and solely. Its attainment involves suppressing self-love more and more in order to turn the energies of our whole being toward God; for it is by union with God that this purity receives its luster, just as crystal shines in its full clarity when it is penetrated by the rays of the sun. Negatively, then, purity consists in freedom from all sin; positively considered, it means union with God. The motive for trying to acquire the purity of the sixth beatitude is given us in the promise of the Savior, “*they shall see God.*” These words signify primarily the direct vision of God in eternity where the pure of heart shall see Him face to face. The necessary condition for seeing God is to be clean with a purity of which not even the greatest saints can form an adequate idea.

The whole of Christian perfection is comprised in the purity of the sixth beatitude, for its observance requires a

heart that is free from all affection that is unrelated to the love of God. It is His will that we unite all our diverse loves in one, single, undivided love of Him, so that His love purifies and sanctifies all other affection. As long as there remains in the soul any admixture of self-love, it cannot be raised to the Beatific Vision. Even if we die in the state of grace, we must still pass through the ordeal of purgatory and be to some extent deprived of our Supreme Good, until we are entirely cleansed of all impurity and are entirely spotless in His eyes. Only if our hearts are truly pure will we be admitted at death with no delay to the vision of God.

How important it is for us, then, to acquire while we are still on earth not only the purity represented by sanctifying grace, but also that in which divine love is unstained by even the shadow of self-seeking! One result of our perfect observance of the first commandment would be our readiness to enter into eternal union with God at the very moment He calls us to Himself. Every disposition in us which would cause even the slightest delay means imperfect obedience to the first and greatest commandment. Mortification of the heart, which seems so difficult to practice, opens the gate of heaven to us and leads us directly to eternal joy. We shall see God only when our heart is purified, and our vision of Him will be perfect in proportion as our heart is pure. Even on earth pure hearts have a foretaste of eternal happiness, because God communicates to them more abundantly the treasures of His knowledge, love, and joy. He is drawn to the pure by love, for in the mirror of a pure heart He contemplates His own purity and His own beauty. And so, on earth the clean of heart are the favorites and the well-beloved of God; and in heaven they will behold Him as He is.

O God, grant me a great esteem and desire for perfect purity in Your sight. Strengthen me in the practice of mortification, temperance, and detachment. Dear Mary and Joseph, let your holy names be on my lips and in my heart when I arise in the morning and when I retire at night, so that under your protection I may serve God as you did in perfect virginal purity of heart, soul, and body.

JULY 13

The Peacemakers



“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God” (Mt. 5:9).

The perfection of this beatitude is the establishing of peace in the heart of our neighbor, whether between him and God or with his fellow men.

O Jesus, make me worthy of being the messenger of Your peace.

This beatitude is not for the beginner in the spiritual life. Only if we have learned the lessons of the preceding six beatitudes shall we succeed in this one. Our previous training should have taught us three things: that God must ever be first in our thoughts as our true End and the End of all created things; that in order to live our true life we must practice inner self-control; that we must blend compassion and justice in our dealings with our fellow men, while, at the same time, cleanness of heart keeps ever before us the standards and aims befitting the ideal of the Beatific Vision. Moreover, our efforts must first be directed to the establish-

JULY 13 / 491

ing of our own peace, both with ourselves and with others. Our interior and exterior peace is the fruit of charity; by the former we love God above all things, submitting and referring all our endeavors and aspirations to His will; by the latter, we love our neighbor as ourselves and, consequently, his will as our own. Thus, we bring our will into accord with that of our neighbor where this harmony has in it nothing contrary to the divine will. The efforts to preserve our own interior and exterior peace constitute the peacemaking spirit, the specific perfection of which consists in striving to bring about peace between God and our fellow men or in the relations of our fellow creatures with one another.

But this beatitude is not uttered for those who would do anything or surrender anything merely for the sake of peace. The peacemaker of the beatitude knows that he can make no terms with sin or with anything that is false or untrue; on this point there can be no surrender, even if the whole world were to be gained by it. If we are to lead others to God, it must be by helping them to rise to the truth and not by altering or softening truths that may seem unpalatable; for such compromises cannot be the foundation of lasting peace. But the peacemaker must know men as well as God. He must have mastered the beatitude of the merciful as well as that of the pure in heart. Patience, and large-minded sympathy should be traits of his character. He must know how to give due consideration to differences in circumstances, temperament, education. In the true peacemaker there is a blend of firmness and gentleness, an entire faithfulness to God, combined with that knowledge of men which is to be gained only by love. This spirit of peacemaking imparts to us a likeness with the divine.

By establishing His reign within us, it makes us true children of our Father, whom St. Paul calls *the God of peace*; it makes us true brethren of Jesus who is the Prince of peace and worthy members of the Church, which is the kingdom of the peace of God.

O Jesus, grant me that ineffable peace of which You are the Source. Help me to live habitually in the spirit of Your peace with myself and my neighbor, and to be also Your faithful instrument in bringing to others that lasting peace and tranquillity which You alone can impart to me.

JULY 14

The Persecuted



“Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 5:10).

This beatitude assures all Christians who endure persecution in God’s cause the possession of the kingdom of heaven, if they suffer with humility, love, and constancy.

Lord Jesus, grant me to attain to the perfection of Your eighth beatitude.

By persecution our Savior means all manifestations of hostility, whether of sentiments, words, or actions. This He Himself indicates in the words recorded by St. Luke: “*Blessed shall you be when men hate you, and when they shut you out, and reproach you, and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.*” And in St. Matthew we read, “*Blessed are you when men reproach you, and persecute you and,*

JULY 14 / 493

speaking falsely, say all manner of evil against you, for my sake." This hostility, however, will be undeserved on the part of the servants of Jesus Christ and unjustified on the part of their persecutors. Also, before it can be truly called such, the persecution must be directed against the followers of Christ in a cause involving acts of justice, of Christian virtue, or of faith, that are being performed or defended for His sake. A natural motive does not entitle one to the promise of this beatitude, much less the commission of a fault that would provoke or justify the opposition.

Although there is no need of seeking after persecution or of exposing oneself to it, when it does come to us it should be accepted and not evaded. Moreover, it should be endured with patience, in a spirit of faith and humility, without hatred, without the desire of taking vengeance upon one's persecutors, and without rebellion against God who permits it. We should even make a strong effort to receive persecution with joy and eagerness, as a great privilege. Our Savior Himself tells us to regard it as a great good, a blessing, for He says to those who live under the law of the eighth beatitude, *"Rejoice and exult, because your reward is great in heaven."* While we may not be asked to give the testimony of our blood, the words of St. Paul, *All who want to live piously in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*, show that persecution is ever active and that it results inevitably from the fact that one is living in opposition to the spirit of the world.

There is a close connection between this last beatitude and the first. The reward in both cases is the same: *"theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* The subject matter of both is also the same, namely, our external circumstances and surroundings. But while the first beatitude implies a struggle against

Anger Under the New Law

"You have heard that it was said to the ancients, 'Thou shalt not kill'; and that whoever shall murder shall be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; and whoever says to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be liable to the Sanhedrin; and whoever says, 'Thou fool' shall be liable to the fire of Gehenna" (Mt. 5:21, 22). Having just declared that He came not to destroy but to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, Jesus mentions particular points of the Old Law to show how they are to be perfected under the New.

Good Jesus, help me to cleanse my heart of all uncharitableness.

The Law punished only the actual commission of homicide; the Gospel, Jesus declares, for the desire merely, to injure another. And not only physical violence, but even such external offenses as hostile words would have their penalty. Our Savior's rigorous condemnation of these sins is reflected in the chastisements He appoints for them. Jewish law brought a man who was guilty of murder before the local tribunal, which was empowered to hand down the death sentence. Jesus, the Master and Author of the Law, would punish anger, which is the first step toward murder and which, even though it lies hidden in the heart, may bring death to the soul and so incur capital punishment in the spiritual order. The anger referred to here is not the just and holy wrath inspired by zeal for God's interests or

the attraction of external goods, the last contemplates a very different kind of contest. It is not against the attraction of creatures that the battle must here be waged, but the reverse. The things we once loved so much and strove against victoriously have now, so to speak, risen against us. Failing to win us, they now would wound us. This last and final test by the fire of persecution is a confirmation of all the beatitudes. One whose training in the other beatitudes has done its work can now stand alone, with all the world against him, and be happy. This is not because he is indifferent to human appreciation and affection, but because he has turned to God his Comforter and has learned to see the true value and proportion of things in Him. The light of heaven is about him and he fights in the sweet companionship of One who will never forsake him, One who discloses to him the joys and the endless vistas of the larger and nobler life in the kingdom of heaven.

Help me to understand, good Jesus, that persecution received and endured in the spirit of Your last beatitude is precious, especially because of the kingdom of heaven. In the brightness of this promised reward all the shadows of the struggle on earth fade away into nothingness. O divine Savior, grant me, together with Your Apostles and Your Church, a share in Your sufferings, even to death if this be Your will, that I may share also Your everlasting triumph.

for our neighbor's amendment, but the anger referred to by St. John in the words, *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer*. If anger finds expression in insulting language, the offense becomes so serious that it is a case, not for the ordinary court, but for the highest council of the nation, the Sanhedrin. And if anger vent itself further in injurious language, the penalty is Gehenna, which term seems here directly to signify hell.

The great importance which our Savior attaches to His precept on fraternal charity is revealed not so much by the chastisement reserved for the guilty, as by the relation that is established between the offenses He enumerates and the actual murder forbidden by the Old Law. These offenses can lead to murder; from anger within, unresisted and even willfully harbored, one passes to words and actions. The perfect law should deal with causes and occasions of grave sins as well as with their actual commission; it ought to regulate the whole man, interiorly, within his heart, and also externally, in his actions. Such was to be the perfection of the law of the Gospel. Amiability, resentment, bitterness, and kindness are of such great importance that without them the holiest practices of religion cannot be pleasing to God. Our Savior tells us that if we are harboring anger or spite against our brother, it were better to leave our offering and try to re-establish concord with him. This duty is so important that it is the indispensable condition for the favorable reception of our offering. And as a means of avoiding the punishment reserved for transgressors, Jesus bids us be reconciled with our brother while we are *with him on the way*, that is, while we are still on this earth. How the soul breathes and soars in following the Savior! It is holiness of

soul that He requires. He enters into the most secret recesses of our being to cleanse and purify. All wicked thoughts, evil desires, lies, covering themselves with formulas of justification, all the rottenness with which the whited sepulcher of the pharisaical soul is filled, Jesus rejects and banishes from our souls.

“O almighty and merciful Lord, favorably consider our prayers and deliver our hearts from the temptation of evil thoughts, that we may deserve to become worthy dwelling places of the Holy Spirit” (Roman Missal).

JULY 16

Our Lady of Mount Carmel



(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 823)

JULY 17

Love of Neighbor



“You have heard that it was said, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and shalt hate thy enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies” (Mt. 5:43, 44).

Love of neighbor is a commandment of the Old as well as of the New Law. In the Sermon on the Mount our Savior indicated certain particulars wherein this precept is perfected under the New Dispensation.

Divine Master, lead me by Your grace to a full supernatural observance of Your second great commandment.

For the pagans and even for the people of Israel, "neighbor" meant "relative," "friend," or, in its broadest significance, "fellow countryman"; but not "foreigner," and certainly not "enemy." Our Savior removed these boundary lines. He opened to us the whole world and said to us, as it were, "Your neighbor is every human being. Every man is your neighbor and your brother, because you are all children of the same heavenly Father." If this motive of the common Fatherhood of God were annulled, every man would no longer be our brother. Fraternal charity which does not rest ultimately upon the paternity of God is an illusion. True love of our neighbor is impossible if it is not inspired by the remembrance and the love of God. The precept of the New Law on fraternal charity forbids us to bear hatred in our hearts against anyone, even our enemies, or to wish others ill, or to refuse them the ordinary evidences of civility. As for showing special signs of charity to those who have offended us or who are hostile to us, this is not a matter of precept, but a counsel of perfection which we may find abundantly exemplified in the lives of the saints. God Himself, who makes the sun to shine on the evil as well as the good and the rain to fall equally on the fields of the just and of sinners, is proposed by our Savior as a model: "You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect." Our charity will be like that of our heavenly Father if we can "love our enemies, do good to those who hate us and pray for those who persecute us." "Do not judge that you may not be judged." Legitimate legal judgment is not forbidden by these words of Jesus,

nor a private judgment that is validly motivated and bears upon what is evident and manifest. The forbidden judgments are those private judgments that are unjust and to which we are moved by a want of charity and an exaggerated esteem of ourselves. The exceptional force with which the sin of rash judgment is denounced by our Savior's next words should certainly deter us from committing it. He adds: "*For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you measure, it shall be measured to you.*" Moreover, we are not in a position to make a just judgment of others; we have neither sufficient light nor the necessary holiness for this. Indeed, a rash judgment is at the very least as culpable as the fault for which we condemn our neighbor, and very likely it is more culpable, as the comparison of the beam and the mote recorded by St. Matthew would imply.

As an essentially positive command regarding the love of neighbor, our Savior established the general principle that we should do to others as we desire them to do to us. We should treat others as we desire to be treated: "*Therefore all things, whatever you would that men should do to you, even so do you also to them.*" The liberality with which we should interpret this precept is indicated by our Savior's counsel that we should give our brother not only what he asks but, more generously, more than he asks, that is to say, *good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over.*

Jesus, my Redeemer, how truly royal and divine is Your law! To what sublime heights it would elevate my soul! Enable me by Your grace to practice habitually forgetfulness of self and generosity in word and deed toward my neighbor, whether friend or enemy. To live so on this earth, elevating and transforming thus the less noble instincts of my nature, would surely be to

greater good fortune.
 more desirable natural gifts, we should wish them even
 than we in spiritual or temporal goods, or that they possess
 advantages; but when we see that others are more blessed
Charity does not envy: we must not be jealous of others'

able, obliging, civil.
 have nothing to suffer from us. We should be always reason-
 short, suffer all things from others, but take care that others
 of others, suppress all impulses toward revenges; and, in
 tells us; that is, we should bear with the faults and defects
 as it is described by St. Paul. Charity is patient, is kind, he
 we must pay particular attention to the practice of this virtue
 To follow the precept of Jesus Christ on fraternal charity

my neighbor in You and for Your sake.

O God, grant that I may love You daily more and more in loving
 all men, in God and for God.
 in which He loves Himself, and to love our neighbor, that is,
 us to love God above all things for His own sake, in the way
 charity is the greatest of the three theological virtues. It disposes
 Although it does not exist here below without faith and hope,
 greatest of these is charity" (1 Cor. 13:13).

"So there abide faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the



Fraternal Charity

Charity . . . is not pretentious: as pride and vainglory most readily bring about the destruction of community spirit, so humility is the basis of all fraternal generosity. When all the members of a house are humble, there are likely to be few sins against charity. And where charity is not violated, a religious house is as a forecourt of heaven.

Charity is not puffed up: that is, not arrogant or contemptuous of others. Where charity reigns, talents are used for the glory of God and others' benefit, not for personal honor or fame.

is not ambitious: manifestations of preference or positions of authority should not be desired. We must not expect extra consideration nor make known that we receive it when it is given us.

is not self-seeking: our neighbor should be served with truly Christian affection, sincere attachment, unselfish zeal, and with no wish for a return of service.

is not provoked: charity does not give way to anger nor a desire for revenge because of injuries received. We should be willing to admonish others or explain ourselves when this is necessary, but always without passion.

thinks no evil: the best possible interpretation is to be given to our neighbor's actions. We should never be distrustful nor suspicious, never form aversions or rash judgments. We are not permitted to approve of what is wrong, but we should be slow to believe there is anything wrong.

does not rejoice over wickedness, but rejoices with the truth: we should be sorry when we see others do wrong or when they are blamed and humiliated; but we should thank God when good is done and receives a just reward.

Charity . . . bears with all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things: good intentions must be readily

"Beware of false prophets" (Mt. 7:16).
 Near the close of His great discourse on the Mount of the Beatitudes, Jesus warned His hearers to be on their guard against false teachers, because they could endanger their salvation, which, at best, can be achieved only with difficulty.
 Divine Savior, show me wherein especially I should amend my life, so that I may become competent and worthy to assist others.

✠
False Prophets

JULY 19

trusted and whatever tends to the justification of our neighbor should be received with eagerness and simplicity. When we cannot prudently trust another or find justification for his actions, we should pray for him and hope that he will soon amend.

In the interest of both charity and humility, everyone should look on others as superior to himself and give them the respect and honor due their station. Each one should see in his neighbor the image of God and honor the guardian angel attending him.

O God, grant that I may grow daily in the practice of fraternal charity. Fill me with thoughts and feelings favorable to my brethren and permit not that I should ever look upon them except with the eyes of faith, as the work of Your hands, made in Your image and likeness. Show them to me in the Sacred Heart of Your Son, cleansed by His blood, fed with His sacred body, and destined one day to participate in the unspeakable and everlasting happiness of the Beatific Vision.

The prime qualification, the infallible mark, which guarantees the right to teach others, Jesus tells us in this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, is conformity to the will of God. The degree of this conformity in one's life and works reveals one's true personality. Our words and actions have their roots deep in our thoughts; so that, if the former are to be in harmony with the divine good pleasure, we must always in our thoughts consult the will of God in preference to our own. Then Jesus developed His theme by the comparison of the tree. It is by its fruits that we distinguish a good tree from a bad one. Thorns and thistles cannot produce grapes and figs. Consequently, if our lives are to be conformed to the will of God as it is revealed in the Gospel, they must carry the impress of the teachings of the Gospel, adhered to from deep interior conviction and with seriousness of purpose.

The real gravity and seriousness of this life had just been alluded to by our Savior in the words preceding His warning against false teachers: "*Enter by the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there are who enter that way. How narrow the gate and close the way that leads to life! And few there are who find it.*" To restrain and discipline the liberty of the flesh and the senses is one of the characteristics of the Christian religion, whose laws in no way favor the tendencies of corrupt nature. To be convinced of this, one needs only to recall the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount. Self-renunciation and the serious disciplining of all unruly tendencies are with good reason the marks by which we recognize the true Christian. Our irregular appetites and our self-love which urge us to seek the gratification of our natural inclinations by avoiding humiliations and crosses may seem to us "harm-

"But he who does the will of my Father in heaven shall enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 7:21).
 See Jesus on the Mount of the Beatitudes speaking to the crowds and listen to His words.

✠
Self-Deception

JULY 20

There may be also, exteriorly, companions who by example or advice lead us to live less strictly or to take less account of those who have authority over us. It is difficult to detect the snares in the cravings of self-love and in the suggestions of such companions, for they entice us into evil under the appearance of good. We are persuaded, for example, to seek notice and applause, so that we may work more efficiently for the good of our neighbor; or to allow ourselves unnecessary relaxations of the Rule, so that our health and strength may not be impaired; or to neglect our spiritual duties under the pretext of the demands of our work. It is only by the light of faith and by prayer and the study of the Gospel that we shall be able to unmask these deceits so flattering to self-love; and only with the help of grace shall we resist them victoriously. Let us ask our good Master to give us light to know His will and strength to accomplish it.

"O God, whose providence in the ordering of all things never fails, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all harmful things and give us those things which are profitable to us" (Roman Missal).

O Jesus, grant me the grace of performing my actions in the way that will merit a recompense from You.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,'" our Savior warns us, *"shall enter the kingdom of heaven."* It is not enough, then, to sigh after heaven, not enough even to recognize in Jesus Christ our Lord and Master and to ask for His grace. We must also respond to grace and put a strong hand to the work of doing the will of God as He makes it known to us. Fruitless desires, idle prayers, will not open to us the gates of heaven; works also are necessary. But let us not deceive ourselves with regard to these works. Many which appear estimable to us and to human eyes are valueless in the eyes of God. And even assuming that they are really good works, they must also be rightly performed; that is, in the love of God, according to His will, and for His sake.

In the love of God: that is, in the state of grace. A passion that is nourished in the heart, a secret impurity, unresisted feelings of hatred or aversion, jealousy of one's neighbor, serious scandal, calumny, or any grave injury that has not been repaired—a single mortal sin which has not been atoned for and effaced can annul all the good that we do. And if we present ourselves to Jesus, offering Him the good works done in this state, He tells us in this instruction the response we may expect to hear from Him: *"Depart from me, you workers of iniquity."* In these words, first uttered in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus revealed Himself for the first time as Sovereign Judge.

According to His will: Works most holy in themselves, most laborious, most brilliant, that are performed not in accordance with the duties of our state, against obedience, or

without authority, are useless for heaven and even positively evil. On the other hand, they who confine themselves strictly within the limits of the divine will for them, according to their Rule on obedience, even if solely to works the most common and inconspicuous to the eyes of men, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven and shall receive a full reward. How instructive and consoling is this truth!

For His sake: "Many will say to me in that day," said our Savior, "'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in thy name and cast out devils in thy name and work many miracles in thy name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you.'" Works of benevolence, the conversion of sinners, miracles even, will be wasted effort as regards a heavenly recompense if these actions are done through vanity, self-interest, or ambition. And if we appear before Him so, Jesus will declare that He does not know us. Those whom He recognizes as His own are they who have no other purpose except to do His will in doing their duty, to make Him known and loved, and so promote His glory. Let us ask our Lord to purify us from all defilement in word or deed and say to Him with the prophet Daniel:

And now we follow You with all our heart and we fear You and seek Your face. Put us not to confusion, but deal with us according to Your wonderful works and give glory to Your name, O Lord.

The Centurion's Servant

"Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed" (Mt. 8:8).

The calling of the Gentiles, of which the Magi were the first fruits, is again offered to our consideration in the faith and humility of the centurion of Capharnaum.

Lord Jesus, perfect my dispositions of faith, humility, and trust.

The centurion's request, like that of the leper whose cure immediately precedes this incident in St. Matthew's Gospel, is made with humble deference: "*Lord, my servant is lying sick in the house, paralyzed, and is grievously afflicted.*" Moreover, he did not even venture to come and present his request in person, but *he sent to him elders of the Jews, beseeching him to come and save his servant.* These Jews in their zeal went further, perhaps, than the centurion wished, in entreating our Savior to come with them, for the centurion had not intended that Jesus should trouble Himself to come to his house. But Jesus replied to the envoys of the centurion with spontaneous and compassionate charity, "*I will come and cure him.*" These words would seem to be deliberately designed to elicit from the centurion his sublime act of faith: "*Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.*" So confident was this man in the power of Jesus that he was convinced His presence was not necessary for the cure of his servant and that a word

or an act of His will would suffice. This conviction the centurion expressed in his soldier's language: "If I who am only a man can give orders that are obeyed," he said to Jesus in effect, "how much more can You, whose will no creature can resist, utter the powerful and efficacious word!" We may contrast the perfect confidence of this centurion with the imperfect faith of the royal official of Capharnaum of whom St. John tells us. His confidence in Jesus was strong enough to take him from the sickroom of his son to ask the Savior's help, but he insisted that Jesus go to his house. "He wishes to hurry Christ along with him," remarks St. John Chrysostom, "as if our Lord could not raise his son after death." The faith of the centurion, however, so filled our divine Savior with admiring approval that He gave expression to His joy even before He pronounced the healing words. This Roman soldier and many like him, Jesus told the crowd who was following Him, would be reputed as the true sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while they who were the sons of the patriarchs according to the flesh, would be cast out of the feasting chamber *into the darkness outside*. The Church places the words of the centurion upon the lips of all the faithful when they are about to receive Holy Communion; for these words express the dispositions which are necessary to receive the Sacrament worthily, namely, humility of heart, deep faith, unwavering trust.

"Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof; but only say the word and my soul shall be healed."

The Widow of Naim



“And as he drew near the gate of the town, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother and she was a widow; and a large gathering from the town was with her” (Lk. 7:12).

After curing the servant of the Roman centurion, our Savior left Capharnaum and journeying inland by a southwest course came to the town of Naim.

Divine Savior, grant me a continual increase of Your divine life, for without You I can do nothing.

Our Savior approached Naim accompanied by His disciples and a large crowd. Near the gate of the town He met a funeral procession. The mourners were at the head with the flute and cymbal players; then, immediately before the plain uncovered coffin borne by four men, walked the widowed mother of the deceased, weeping inconsolably. The dead youth, her only son, lay on the bier enveloped in his shroud, which left only his face uncovered. Finally, there was the cortege of friends and neighbors. Our Savior had been the silent witness of many a funeral, but what now moved His sacred heart was the sad figure of the bereaved and sorrowing mother. Perhaps He thought of His own Mother; perhaps, He thought of the day when Mary would accompany Him to His tomb. *And the Lord seeing her, writes St. Luke, had compassion on her and said, “Do not weep.”* These words had doubtless been repeated to this woman many times, but now that they were spoken by

Jesus, they had that efficacy which belongs to His words alone. He approached the bier and touched it, the bearers halted, and He said to the corpse, "*Young man, I say to thee, arise.*" At this simple word from the Lord of life and death, the young man sat up and began to speak.

There had been and there were to be others who restored the dead to life, such as Elias, Eliseus, St. Peter, and St. Paul; but with what a difference in the manner of accomplishment! These men of God prayed and implored and laid their own body over that of the corpse. Jesus spoke only a word of command: "*I say to thee, arise*"; easily, calmly, as though raising the dead were the most ordinary of actions. And what great tenderness there is in our all-powerful Savior! He had a right to this life which He had just restored, but He did not claim His right. He gave the young man to his mother. We can readily picture the joy and gratitude of this woman upon receiving so precious a gift. What love for the Savior must have filled the hearts of both mother and son from this time on!

Twice in the course of her year the Church proposes this Gospel for our meditation. She would remind us in this way that we are to see in the sorrowing widow of Naim a figure of the Church grieving over those of her children who are dead in sin, so that we may pray with her for their restoration to life. We should pray also that the supernatural life which is in the Church may continue to flow abundantly to us all and produce its fruits; namely, the works of the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul admonishes the Galatians: *If we live in the spirit, let us also walk in the spirit.* The works of the Spirit which St. Paul especially recommends in this Epistle are prudent distrust of ourselves and charity toward our neighbor, particularly those who are of the household of the faith.

"Let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church, we beseech Thee, O Lord; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thee, govern it evermore by Thy help" (Roman Missal)

JULY 23

Death in the Lord



"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth. Yes, says the Spirit, let them rest from their labors, for their works follow them" (Apoc. 14:13).

Represent to yourself a religious on her deathbed.
Lord Jesus, grant that I may die the death of the just.

There is no bitterness in the death of a good religious; for her last hours are made happy both by the memory of the past and the anticipation of the future. Such a religious soul herself could best tell us of the consolations that are hers at the end of her life. If she were to express her thoughts and feelings at this supreme moment, what would she say to us? Would she not speak somewhat as follows? How thankful I am now that I have served my Lord faithfully throughout my religious life and that I have loved His law above all else! At last I see that the way of the cross is the royal road, and what I have sowed in tears I reap now with joy. What sweetness there is in the remembrance of the penance and humiliations that accompanied the observance of my vows and my Rule! But of whatever vain joys I permitted myself, of the shadow of honor and reputation with which I fed my vanity, nothing remains now but regret.

Upon entering religion this soul made a sincere and complete oblation of herself. She realized that as a Christian and still more as a follower of Jesus in the way of the counsels, she could be pleasing to her divine Master only by imitating Him in the life of self-abnegation that He led while on earth. And so from the time of her novitiate and especially after her profession, she sought the way of mortification and self-denial for the love of God. Now, in her last hour, while she is not unmindful of the words of Ecclesiastes: *Man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred, her soul is filled with happy expectation. The ground of her confidence is not her own works and merits, but the mercy of Him whose loving kindness she knows through the graces she has received from Him. Yet she finds also a sweet consolation in the echo of the years of her good religious life, which says to her, as it were, "Claim, O virtuous soul, the palm merited by your victories, since your conscience testifies that you have fought the good fight."*

During her life the fervent religious thinks with apprehension of her eternal salvation, but at the moment of death her fears are succeeded by a sweet confidence. God reveals Himself to her not as a Judge but as a good and merciful Father. He grants her a foretaste of the ineffable joys which are to be her portion. She contemplates in advance the splendors of the eternal city. She hears the words of her Spouse: *"Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* Her bodily members have been anointed with the holy oils, God is in her heart, the crucifix which she holds in her hands reminds her of the divine mercies. Like the aged Simeon she may raise her eyes to heaven and say, "Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy

word in peace." The moment which has so long been the object of her ardent desire has arrived. The last prayers and blessings are pronounced, the soul at last bursts its bonds, and with her last breath this fervent religious begins her new life in a glorious eternity.

"O Jesus, while I adore Your dying breath, I beseech You to receive mine. Being uncertain whether I shall have command of my senses when I depart from this world, I offer You now my last agony and all the sorrows of my passing. Since You are my Father and my Savior, I give back my soul into Your hands. Grant that the last beat of my heart may be an act of pure love toward You" (*Raccolta*).

JULY 24

The Baptist in Prison



"But when John had heard in prison of the works of Christ" (Mt. 11:2).

The details of the Precursor's arrest are not recorded in the Gospel, but we may suppose that he gave himself up freely and with dignity, although, doubtless, he could have protected himself by appealing to the people.

O St. John the Baptist, obtain for me the grace of suffering meritoriously.

He who had been so powerful in word and work now had his voice muffled by the walls of a prison. The hands which had baptized thousands, and even the Messiah Himself, were now fettered. St. John the Baptist's glorious ministry had

What stronger evidence could there be of the value of suffering and the esteem God has for it than the manner in which He allowed His adorable Son to be treated during His passion? Surely we shall not look for a different way to heaven for ourselves, or try to win souls to Christ by some other means than that He Himself chose for our redemption. Our Savior did not bring the lost sheep back to the fold by His miracles, but by His bitter passion and

in weakness.

All the saints have found glory and happiness in suffering for Jesus. The Apostles left the presence of the Sanhedrin *rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus*. St. Andrew embraced the cross and in dangers and humiliations. St. Ignatius of Antioch invited the beasts to grind him between their teeth that he might be made the bread of Christ. Should not we, then, at least endure with patience the little that we are asked to suffer? Surely it is an honor to be permitted to imitate our Savior and His saints. Moreover, suffering tests and proves the soul. All our courage, spiritual energy, and magnanimity are called forth by it. Virtue never appears so truly admirable as when it is put to the proof by adversity. This is why St. Paul says that *strength is made perfect*

manifesting the Messias. even from his prison he managed to carry out his mission of must increase and that he himself must decrease? Moreover, happy to endure captivity, for had he not said that Jesus lost none of its nobility and inflexible firmness. He was conditions of his imprisonment, the spirit of St. John had whim of a most shameful passion. Yet, under the harsh lasted scarcely a year before it was forcibly checked by the

death. "It was not," says St. Augustine, "when He commanded nature, when He calmed the tempest, or cured diseases, or raised the dead that He touched the heart of the thief, but when He hung on the cross in anguish." The means used by our Savior and the saints are daily offered to us. Does it become us who aspire to walk in their footsteps to refuse the burden of the cross? Let us cast off all thought of self-pity and habits of self-indulgence that we may learn to live the religious life in the spirit of the cross. O my Savior; help me really to understand that it is necessary to fight in order to be crowned, that I must carry my cross daily, that I must do violence to myself and renounce myself and so fill up *what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ.*

JULY 25

Messengers From the Baptist



"Go and report to John what you have heard and seen" (Mt. 11:4). The report of our Savior's miracles having reached John even in prison, he sent two of his disciples to ask Him if He were the One who was to come or whether they should look for another. Divine Savior, heal the maladies of my soul as You cured the bodies of the sick in Palestine.

St. John the Baptist's intention in sending his disciples to Jesus was not to ascertain whether He was really the Messiah. Previously and more than once, the Precursor had given testimony of his faith in Jesus. The request that He reveal His identity was to be made for the benefit of the messengers

themselves, whom doubt and stubbornness were still keeping aloof from the Savior. Or perhaps St. John intended that the crowd, hearing Jesus give testimony in His own behalf, should thus be brought to believe in the divinity of His mission. He would, as it were, force Jesus to speak. St. John the Baptist burned with the desire of seeing the Savior recognized and acknowledged by all Israel, and it seemed to him that the moment for this had now come. This may have been why he asked in his own name, in his capacity as Precursor of the Messias, and not in the name of his disciples.

When John's messengers arrived and presented their question, Jesus, it would seem, first performed many miracles in their very presence, healing the sick and the lame, giving sight to the blind, and delivering the possessed. Then He merely pointed to those whom He had just cured and said by way of answer, "Go and report to John what you have heard and seen: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise, the poor have the gospel preached to them." This answer was both adequate and official. These works and miracles, which had been predicted of the Messias by Isaias, clearly revealed Him as the One who was to come. They were also the symbols of the spiritual and corporal redemption that the Messias was to bring to all humanity.

"Today," Jesus said in effect to the disciples of John, "you see the literal fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaias: 'Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart and the tongue of the dumb shall be free.'" Unique and unheard of marvel! The weak, the poor, the abandoned are seated with the rich at the banquet of the doctrine and the

sacraments of Jesus Christ. Our Savior's answer was also prudent. He did not consider that the moment had come as yet for declaring expressly and in public that He was the Messiah. Jesus did not precipitate events. Each advance in His revelation of Himself was to have its own time; meanwhile, He left to men of good will the task of seeking and finding Him.

You are He who is to come, O Jesus! We look for no other. We were blind and You gave us sight; we were lame, You made us walk; the leprosy of sin disfigured us, You made us clean; we were deaf, You opened our ears to Your words; we were poor and had none to care for us and You came to us with Your divine aid and consolation. May these benefits continue more and more fully to be the blessings of Your coming to our souls, O merciful Jesus!

JULY 26

St. Anne, Mother of Our Lady



(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 828)

JULY 27

Jesus, a Stone of Stumbling



"And blessed is he who is not scandalized in me" (Mt. 11:6).
From His response to the disciples of John, Jesus Himself draws

"And blessed is he," added our Savior, after His paraphrase of Isaiah's prophecy of Him, "who is not scandalized in me," that is, by My poverty, My lowliness, and the contradictions that attend Me. Jesus is in fact the ruin of those who let themselves be turned aside from Him by the difficulty of walking in His footsteps or by the austerity of His doctrine and example. Holy Simeon had said, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be contradicted." The pagans as well as the Jews, however, were scandalized by the teaching and

One who was to come.
 all to preach the Gospel to the poor, was in very truth the that He Himself, who came to heal and console, and above Jesus. He wished them to learn from our Savior's own lips St. John the Baptist had sent two of his disciples to interrogate false idea of the Messias in the minds of his followers that to them an occasion of scandal. It was partly to destroy this not the One promised by the prophets, and thus He became self-abnegation. The Jews concluded, therefore, that He was disdain for human glory and continually taught and practiced Himself with armed might and the purple, He showed only world. But when the Messias came, far from surrounding would free them from the Roman yoke and conquer the Messias who would be a powerful king, and whose armies prophecies and by their too natural desires, waited for a The Jews, deceived by their literal interpretation of the

an inference which applies to them, to the Pharisees, to the people, to all alike.
 Divine Redeemer, make me understand better the mystery of Your voluntary humiliations and grant me the grace to endure my own with resignation and even with love.

the humiliations of the Redeemer. They regarded His cross and His gospel as folly and, after the Resurrection, they persecuted Him in His Apostles and martyrs. Isaiah also had foretold that He would be as a stone of stumbling . . . against which many of them shall stumble and fall and shall be broken in pieces; and David spoke of Him as the *stone which the builders rejected*.

So often it is earthly happiness and earthly victories that men ask of God and wait to receive from Him. They are scandalized by a God who gives only virtue and supernatural strength and who promises a kingdom, but only later and for heaven. How many there are today, even in the Church, even among religious, who are in reality inwardly shocked by the lowly poverty, the self-denial, and the universal charity of the Gospel! Let us be on our guard that the persistent pressure of the world in which we live and work may not dim our spiritual vision and cause us to lose a just appreciation of eternal values. Our own self-love also blurs our insight into spiritual realities, by prompting us to try to fix with our regard other things along with God.

Whence comes it, O my God, that You permit Your adorable Son to have even today so many enemies and gainsayers and so few true servants? Is it in this way, perhaps, that we shall appreciate better the grace given us to remain faithful to Your teachings? Oh, make my faith more living, my hope firmer, my charity more ardent, my gratitude more generous, and my zeal more active in serving and following You, that I may atone for the ingratitude of so many souls.

Our Savior's Eulogy of the Baptist



"Amen I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Mt. 11:11).

After the departure of John's disciples, our Savior gave a magnificent public eulogy of His Precursor. Under the circumstances a eulogy of the Baptist was peculiarly suitable, since the crowd, hearing the question put to Jesus by John's disciples concerning His identity, might easily have misunderstood it as implying a weakening of the Baptist's faith.

O Jesus, teach me to be wholehearted and generous in recognizing the good done by others.

In His eulogy of St. John our Savior especially praised his austerity, which He contrasted with the luxury and effeminacy of John's royal persecutor: "But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold, those who wear soft garments are in the houses of kings." Jesus alluded also to his firmness of character and his unshakable constancy. He called attention to John's mission and declared its superiority over that of the prophets, for John was the immediate Precursor, the Elias of the first coming of the Messias, charged with preparing His way. John himself, indeed, had been the subject of prophecy, for Isaiah had foretold him as the voice of one crying in the desert: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the wilderness the paths of our God." Malachias had said of him, Behold I

send my angel, and he shall prepare the way before my face.

Finally, Jesus summed up the whole excellence of John by declaring that among those born of women, no one was greater either in his mission or in his sanctity. Other prophets of the Old Testament may have been equal to St. John the Baptist, but none was his superior. In the New Testament, however, no such comparison can be made. Although the ordinary Christian may be inferior in holiness to the just of the Old Dispensation, he is superior to them in dignity, because by Baptism, which incorporates him into Christ, he is made another Christ. From this point of view, the least member of the Mystical Body of Christ becomes greater than John.

In rendering this testimony to His Precursor, Jesus proposed to honor him and reward him for his zeal and for the selflessness with which he had borne witness to the Messiah. In addition, He intended to confirm in this way the teachings of John and bring the people to accept them. We should observe also the delicacy with which Jesus refrained from praising John in the presence of his disciples. Our Savior will not praise indiscreetly even when the praise is well merited.

O Jesus, how admirable and instructive are Your relations with Your holy Precursor and his with You! He sent to You, the Lamb of God, Your first disciples. He thought of himself as only a *voice of one crying in the desert* and declared that he should decrease, but You should increase. He devoted all his energies toward bringing his disciples to a better knowledge of You. And You, in Your turn, gave to him magnificent public praise. You canonized him, as it were, while he was still living on earth, with Your own divine lips. What a contrast there is here with the disputes and rivalries in which we, the servants of the same God, sometimes allow ourselves to indulge!

The world regards the service of God as painful and His yoke as a heavy burden; and so it fears to accept the invitation of our Savior. Yet could anything be truer than that the service of God is full of sweetness, and that all our happiness lies only there? Our Savior was not claiming, however, that the natural man would find His yoke easy and His burden light. Pride and self-love cannot find sweetness in the yoke of Jesus Christ, since it is with the object of destroying these passions that He lays it upon us. But bearing the yoke of the Savior brings the gift of His help. It costs us dear to overcome ourselves, but the conquest won by the aid of His grace yields unspeakable joy and every fresh victory in this warfare is a new delight. It is sweet to become master of one's senses, mind, and will and to use our liberty in a manner pleasing to God, conformed to reason, and satisfying to conscience. The yoke of Christ borne faithfully will inevitably secure for us this mastery. But when the love of ease takes possession of us, there is a visible departure of greatness of soul, generosity of heart, love of zeal, and courage in self-sacrifice! O happy self-denial, which begets the peace and liberty of the children of God!

"My yoke is easy, and my burden light" (Mt. 11:30).
 After His eulogy of St. John the Baptist, Jesus invited His hearers to devote themselves to His service.
 O my Savior, perfect me in divine love and enlarge my heart that I may run in the way of Your commandments.

✠

The Sweetness of Serving Jesus Christ

(*Imitation of Christ*).

Happy those who understand the spirit of self-denial! For them obedience becomes easy and subjection to Rule and Superiors sweet and light!

What service could be compared with the service of Jesus? He is the best of masters, whether we consider His own infinite perfection or His infinite goodness toward us. Countless martyrs preferred to suffer the most cruel death rather than forfeit the happiness of contemplating His beauty, "ever ancient and ever new," which will eternally enrapture the angels and saints. Furthermore, Jesus commands nothing difficult. It is true that He Himself calls His service a yoke and a burden, but He assures us that the yoke is easy and the burden light. In what does the service of Jesus consist? Chiefly in loving Him and in loving our neighbor for His sake. What is easier to love than infinite Beauty and Goodness and for His sake to love creatures made in His image? There is no yoke sweeter nor any burden lighter than the yoke and burden of love. "As soon as we love," says St. Augustine, "there is no more pain, or we love pain, if pain there be." And St. Teresa of Avila exclaimed, "Your thorns, O my God, are roses!"

"O my God, my Love . . . enlarge me in love, that I may learn to taste with the interior mouth of the heart how sweet it is to love. . . . Let me be possessed by love, mounting above myself through excess of love. Let me sing the canticle of love, let me follow You, my Beloved, let my soul quite lose herself in Your praises, jubilant in Your love. Let me love You more than myself, and myself only for You, and all others in You . . . as the law of love commands, which shines forth from You"

A Penitent Woman



"Now one of the Pharisees asked him to dine with him. . . .

And behold, a woman in the town who was a sinner, upon learning that he was at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment; and standing behind him at his feet, she began to bathe his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with ointment" (Lk. 7:36-38).

One of the Pharisees of Capharnaum or a neighboring village, less hostile to our Savior than other members of his sect, invited Him to dine at his house. What his motives were it is difficult to say, in view of the reserve and coldness with which Jesus was received by him.

Divine Savior, grant me the grace of advancing continually in Your love.

During the repast at the Pharisee's house, a woman suddenly entered the banquet hall. Judging by the alabaster vase of ointment which she carried, she was a woman of wealth. In any case, she was a person of noble character, possessing as much decisiveness and energy for good as for evil. Full of faith in Jesus and without regard for the many witnesses of her open acknowledgment of guilt, she cast herself at His feet and began to bathe them with her tears and wipe them with her hair, which she had unbound. This was a further and notable gesture of humility, for Jewish women considered it a disgrace to appear in public with their hair in disorder. Yet, more striking and precious in

this conversion than either faith or humility was love, as our Savior Himself was pleased to remark.

The guests were disconcerted by this incident and the Pharisee host was scandalized. Further, he was now convinced that our Savior was not a prophet but an ordinary man; otherwise He would have been able to recognize this woman as a sinner. The Pharisee did not see her humility, contrition, and love, but only that she was a sinner. Secure in the consciousness of his own virtue, this Pharisee viewed the scene with scorn, both for our Savior and for the woman at His feet. Jesus knew his thoughts and the hard lesson he deserved was immediately forthcoming. With dignity and severity, yet gently, our Savior obliged the Pharisee to condemn himself by answering a simple question based on a parable of transparently clear application, This poor woman, the parable teaches, is surely very guilty; as for the Pharisee, his debt is less great. But the sinner has just given our Savior proof of a sincere and active love, while the Pharisee had treated Him with scant respect. Because of the greatness of her love, the sins of this woman had been forgiven, and spiritually she is now far superior to the Pharisee, whose guilt is less, but who lacks faith and love. Thus, in a most striking manner, Jesus justified this sinful woman. In moving and beautiful words He spoke of her love and its role in her justification; and not only once, but twice, He assured her that her sins were forgiven.

In this incident we may observe the progress of Christian justification. Faith is its preparation — faith that is not merely intellectual assent to truths about God, but a turning of the whole man: mind, will and affections, toward Him. Then, love, contrition, and confession on the part of the soul, and mercy on the part of God, complete the work of justification.

But love is a preliminary condition for pardon, and pardon is itself the starting point of a new and greater love. A sinful past life, repented and atoned for, could never be an obstacle, therefore, to intimate union with God.

Jesus, You give me both consolation and warning in this incident. A sinful life atoned for by generous and fervent repentance, is more agreeable to You than a sinless life which is passed in self-complacency and spiritual indolence. Help me, Jesus, never to yield to feelings of complacency, or allow myself to rest in a false security.

JULY 31

The True Kinsmen of Christ



"For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother" (Mt. 12:50).

Represent to yourself the Mother of our Savior and His kinsmen outside the house in Capharnaum where Jesus was teaching; they were probably prevented from reaching Him by the large crowds which had gathered to listen to a dispute between Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees.

Divine Master, grant me the grace of transforming my human views and feelings into Your supernatural ones.

If we are to identify as the relatives of Jesus those who, as St. Mark tells us, came to lay hold of him, for they said (meaning probably, "they heard people saying"), "He has gone mad," then the words of St. John, *not even his brethren believed in him*, may be applied to them. Despite so many

JULY 31 / 527

miracles, their earlier connections with Jesus and the obscurity in which it had pleased Him to veil His divinity were still sources of scandal to His brethren. Faith is indeed a gift! But perhaps their step was prompted by the desire to hide our Savior and themselves with Him from the hostility of the Scribes and Pharisees, who seem never to have let Jesus out of their sight; for St. Mark tells us that on this occasion the Scribes had come down from Jerusalem. It is possible that the Pharisees had even threatened our Savior's relatives, if they made no attempt to dissuade Him from continuing His apostolate. In any case their views and sentiments, however kindly meant, were inspired by worldly considerations and were most unenlightened. Mary had perhaps been prevailed upon to accompany them without understanding their true purpose. Or, even though she did not share their sentiments, our Lady may have come of her own accord simply to be near her Son.

Because the crowd pressed closely upon our Savior, His relatives could not approach Him personally. Therefore, *standing outside, they sent to him, calling him*. Those who brought the message to Jesus probably thought that He would be overjoyed at the news. But He appears to have paid no attention to the first summons. It would seem that He continued His discourse and that the crowd around about Him reminded Him that His Mother and brethren were waiting. The response of Jesus was given in a manner infinitely sublime, moving, and significant. "*Who is my mother and who are my brethren?*" He said. Then, turning His gaze toward His disciples He set the example of complete detachment in the interests of the Father which He had enjoined on His followers. "*Behold my mother and my brethren!*" He continued, "*For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven,*

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.

The Sower and the Seed



"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.

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