

Wednesday after Sexagesima: The Respect and Attention we owe to the Word of God

Summary of the Morrow's Meditation

We shall resume tomorrow our meditations upon the word of God, and we shall consider: first, the respect, second, the attention we owe to the divine word. We will then make the resolution: first, to listen to and to read the word of God with the same respect as though God Himself were speaking to us, and not to criticise sermons; second, to seek in instructions not what amuses the mind, but what changes the heart, and also to make practical resolutions derived from it. Our spiritual nosegay shall be the words of St Augustine: "*To listen with a careless ear to the word of God is the same crime as to allow the sacred Host to fall to the ground through carelessness.*"

Meditation for the Morning

Let us render our accustomed homage to Jesus Christ, and let us listen to Him declaring that the good ground in which the grain brings forth a hundred fold is the good heart which respects His word—the very good heart which listens to it attentively, that it may put it in practice (Luke VIII:15). Let us thank Him for this lesson, and let us beg Him to make it enter deeply into our hearts.

THE RESPECT DUE TO THE WORD OF GOD

As soon as God, that infinitely great and elevated Being, deigns to abase Himself so low as to speak to man, a creature so base and so miserable, is it not evident that no respect is great enough for a word which descends from on high, no veneration profound enough, and that every word which emanates from so august a source ought to be received with the whole submission of the mind and all the obedience of the will? If we had heard upon Sinai God speaking to the children of Israel in the midst of thunder and lightning; or if living at the time of Jesus Christ, we had assisted at one of His discourses, we should have looked upon it as a great crime to have lent to the divine word nothing but an indifferent ear. But is, then, this word less worthy of respect if it be contained in the sacred pages of our divine books, or in the pulpit, where our ears listen to it? Man, who comments on it, may mingle with it his weakness and his ignorance, but it does not the less remain the word of God; and as the Word Incarnate was not less adorable in the poor swaddling-clothes of His infancy than in the splendour of the saints, so the word of God is not less venerable beneath the rags with which the ignorance of men envelop it than beneath the magnificent garments with which genius can clothe it. When an ambassador speaks we pay less attention to the more or less elegant style of his discourse than to the majesty of the prince in whose name he speaks. In the same way, in the minister of the divine word we ought to see only the ambassador of God, the lieutenant of Jesus Christ, who speaks to us by his mouth (II Cor. v:20; II:17). And looked at in this manner, the word of God has no less a claim upon our respect than the very body of Jesus Christ, as St Augustine says; we ought to gather up all the particles of it as religiously as the priest gathers up the particles of the holy Host upon the sacred paten; and the negligence

which allows them to be lost is not less culpable than that which would allow the body of the Saviour to fall to the ground. The reason is that Christ does not love truth less than He loves His own body; He seems to love it even more, since for it He sacrificed His body. He willed that it should be immortal upon earth, and His body He delivered to death. Is it thus that we respect the divine word? What reproaches have we not to address to ourselves on this subject! Let us humble and correct ourselves.

THE ATTENTION WITH WHICH WE OUGHT TO LISTEN TO THE WORD OF GOD

We listen to worldly matters, to frivolous stories, with a vivacity of attention which does not lose the smallest portion of them; we read letters from our relatives and friends with an interest which impresses them on our memory. Why, then, when the divine word gives us tidings of heaven, our country, and instructions on the manner of arriving there; why, when we have in hand the sacred books which are as so many letters which God sends us, do we become careless and inattentive? Wherefore have not these things the same attraction for us? Jesus says, *Listen to My word in the depths of your hearts* (Luke VIII:15). What does that mean? It means not only with the understanding, where the eyes see only the outward appearances, where the ears hear only the sound, the memory preserves nothing more than envelopes; but listen in that secret part of the heart which adores truth, appreciates and preserves it; listen, not in that portion of yourselves where periods are measured, but where morals are regulated; not in the place where beautiful thoughts are enjoyed, but in the place where good desires are produced; not in the place where opinions are formed, but in that where resolutions are taken; and if there be some place still more profound and more retired, where the council of the heart is held, where all its designs are decided, where the impetus is given to all its movements, it is there that we must withdraw and render ourselves attentive to the word of Jesus Christ (Luke XXI:14). It was thus that the Blessed Virgin listened (Luke II:19); it was thus that St Mary Magdalene listened at the feet of Jesus (Luke X:39); whilst we, we are far from observing the same religious attention to the divine word, whether when our eyes read it or our ears listen to it. Let us ask pardon for the past, and resolve to do better for the time to come.

Resolutions and spiritual nosegay as above.