

Saturday after Ash Wednesday: Holiness of the Season of Lent

Summary of the Morrow's Meditation

We will meditate tomorrow: first, on the holiness of the season of Lent; second, on the means for sanctifying the season. We will then make the resolution: first, to guard our heart and our senses more carefully against sin and dissipation; second, to attach ourselves during this season to the reformation of the defect which it is the most important for us to correct. Our spiritual nosegay shall be the words of St Paul: "*Behold now is the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation*" (II Cor. VI:2).

Meditation for the Morning

Let us transport ourselves in spirit to the desert where Jesus spent forty days and forty nights. Let us contemplate Him, prostrate in presence of the majesty of God, His Father, kneeling down often with His face to the earth; pouring forth His soul, sometimes in adoration, praise, thanksgiving, sometimes in supplications to obtain from His Father mercy in favour of poor sinners; and joining with His prayers, uttered with tears in His eyes, an incomparable mortification, since during these forty days He neither eats nor drinks, nor has any other bed than the rocks and the bare ground; no other shelter than the vault of heaven. Let us render to Him, in this state, our homage of adoration, of admiration, of gratitude, and of love.

HOLINESS OF THE SEASON OF LENT

First of all, Our Lord teaches it to us by His example. Although His life was always eminently holy, He gives to it, during these forty days, a special exterior character of holiness. First, He passes these forty days in retreat, in order to show us that we ought on our side to pass them in a holy recollection, that being the necessary condition to listen to God in the bottom of our heart, to study Him and to know Him, to love Him and to enjoy Him; and at the same time in a spirit of reflection, which is a no less necessary condition whereby to know and reform ourselves. Second, He spends it in prayer, to show us that we ought to be more faithful during this season to our exercises of piety, to pray more and with greater fervour. Third, He subjects Himself during this time to the most severe mortification, in order to show us that we must, during Lent, grant less to sensuality, to tastes, to pleasures, to accept the privation imposed by the Church and to perform true penance. It is thus that Our Saviour, by His example, teaches us the holiness of the season of Lent; and this teaching of the Saviour is confirmed by that of the Church. For why these more frequent sermons, this multiplication of religious exercises; why the privations which are imposed upon us, if it be not to tell us that this season must be sanctified by penance? Oh, blessed be the Church for this teaching! In the course of our lives we so frequently forget penance; we are in such great need that we should be reminded of it every year; for penance is indispensable to us, whether it be for the expiation of our past faults or to prevent the backslidings which our weaknesses would infallibly cause us.

To all these lessons on the obligation of passing the holy season of Lent in a holy manner is to be added a powerful reason, drawn from the great mysteries of the Passion and of the resurrection of Our Lord, for which Lent serves as a preparation. For the fruit of these mysteries ought to be death to ourselves, and a new

life all in God and all for God; now these mysteries produce fruit in us only in proportion to our having passed Lent in a really holy manner. We shall receive the plenitude of graces attached to their celebration if we reach the end of Lent in good dispositions; but the contrary will take place if we incur the misfortune of passing such holy days in dissipation and want of reflection, in pusillanimity and tepidity. Let us rightly understand therefore the holiness of this season and the necessity of passing it in a better manner than the ordinary seasons of the year.

MEANS FOR SANCTIFYING LENT

First, we must apply ourselves to the performing of our ordinary actions in a perfect manner, for therein lies all their holiness; that is to say, we must during this holy season pray and perform our spiritual exercises better, employ our time better, watch better over our words, give to each of our actions a higher degree of perfection and offer them to God in union with the penance of Jesus in the desert, in expiation for our sins and the sins of the whole world. Second, we must be faithful to the fasting and abstinence prescribed by the Church, and if we cannot do it, or if we are dispensed from it, we must supply for it by interior mortification. Making our will fast by a spirit of obedience and condescension, our temper by always preserving meekness, our tongue by silence or discretion in our words, our mouth by the privation of certain indulgences which are not really necessary, our eyes by not letting them wander, our whole body by the modesty of its deportment and manners, lastly, our whole interior by retrenching useless thoughts, vain imaginations and the infinite desires which the heart allows itself to indulge in if we do not take care; these mortifications do no harm either to the head or to the breast, and they do great good to the soul. Third, we must cheerfully accept the crosses that God sends us, such as infirmities, bearing with the tempers of others, their defects, and their wills which are contrary to ours. Fourth, lastly, we must fix upon a special defect, of which we must pursue the reformation during the whole of Lent. That, says St Chrysostom, is the best of all fasts, because its effects are durable, not only during the whole year but throughout eternity. Are we resolved to embrace these different kinds of mortification? Let us have courage to do so.

Resolutions and spiritual nosegay as above.