

Tuesday in the First Week: The Sacrament of Penance

Summary of the Morrow's Meditation

As human weakness is so exposed to yield to the temptations which besiege it, we will meditate tomorrow on the Sacrament of Penance which Our Lord has established to raise us again after our falls, and we shall see: first, the excellence of the sacrament; second, the importance of receiving it properly. We will then make the resolution: first, often to thank Our Lord by pious aspirations for this admirable institution; second, to prepare ourselves better for our confessions. We will retain as our spiritual nosegay the very words of the institution of the Sacrament of Penance: "*Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained*" (John XX:23).

Meditation for the Morning

Let us adore Our Lord under the beautiful and amiable title of the Physician of our souls (Clem. Alex., *Pædag.*, lib. I c. IX). It is He who, by the Sacrament of Penance, cures all our evils, making of His own blood a salutary bath, wherein He washes away our stains and gives us back the beauty of our primary innocence. Oh, how greatly He merits our gratitude for so great a grace! "What goodness to have made of His blood a remedy for our ills!" (St Augustine, *in Ps.* LVIII)

THE EXCELLENCE OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

First, there is in this sacrament wonderful power The Jews said: "*Who can forgive sins but God alone?*" (Luke v:21) And they were right, because God alone can dispose of His rights and remit the offence committed against Him. Yet, behold, by these words: "*I absolve thee,*" the priest exercises this superhuman power. By these few words he effaces all the sins of the soul, however enormous they may be; he chases away from it the devil; he reconciles it to God; he clothes it with the nuptial robe of charity; renders back to it the merits of its good works; re-establishes it in its rights to eternal life, and makes God enter once more into the heart whence sin had banished Him. God, having returned to the soul, fortifies it against backsliding, preserves it if it co-operates with grace, and often makes it enjoy delightful peace and consolation, so as to enable it to say: "*I shall be spotless with Him, and shall keep myself from my iniquity*" (Ps. XVII:24). Second, in the same proportion as there is power in this sacrament, there is also charity. Is it not indeed an ineffable miracle of charity that God, after having been offended by man, should have instituted in His Church a tribunal, not for the purpose of condemning and punishing, but for the purpose of pardoning; a wholly merciful tribunal, where no other accuser, no other witness is admitted save the guilty person himself; where repentance always obtains pardon, and a pardon accompanied by what we had lost through sin, the joy of a good conscience, rights to heaven reconquered, the title of a friend and servant of God? Is it not marvellous that Jesus Christ should have made of His precious blood a sacred bath, where the soul is purified and is clothed again with the beauty of innocence; an inexhaustible treasure of merits and graces which strengthen it in well doing, dispose it to the practice of virtue, and as sure it in heaven, if it perseveres, of a new weight of happiness and glory? Is it not marvellous, lastly, that confession, by the acts which accompany it, brings so much good

to the soul? Self-examination teaches it to know itself; contrition makes it renounce its past faults; a firm resolution makes it enter upon a better way; and absolution gives it grace to walk in this new path. Let us here enter into ourselves and see if we have loved and esteemed the Sacrament of Penance as we ought to do, and whether we have not approached it with a feeling of constraint and of repugnance, of annoyance and sadness, or through routine and habit.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RECEIVING THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION IN A PROPER MANNER

There is nothing more serious or more worthy of attention than the manner in which we confess; for it is a matter of life or of death, of heaven or of hell. A confession properly made is a source of grace; made through routine, without contrition for our faults, without a firm resolution to convert ourselves, is changed into sin, says St Bernard. What a misfortune that the remedy for sin should itself become another sin, that we draw death from the very source of life, and that the blood of Jesus Christ falls upon us, as upon the Jews, for our loss and reprobation! Nevertheless, oh, how sad it is to think of! so great a misfortune is not as rare as we might believe. It is the misfortune of all who familiarise themselves with this great sacrament; who, losing sight of the lofty ideas faith gives us of it, confess hastily, from custom, and by way of acquitting themselves of a duty, without any serious examination of their consciences, without sorrow and a firm resolution, without any emotion of grace and of repentance for the effeminacy of their manners, their lukewarmness and pusillanimity; who are always being reconciled and are never penitent; who, always reciting the same formula, never weep over their sins; who, always confessing what most weighs upon their conscience, never confess their self-will, their bad temper, vanity, self-love, tendency to indolence and idleness, seeking after their own ease and indulgence in sensuality, lastly, all the passions, which are the principle of their faults. Let us examine ourselves as to whether we attach to the manner of confessing the great importance which this action merits.

Resolutions and spiritual nosegay as above.