

Sunday in the Third Week: The Sin of Relapse

At that time Jesus was casting out a devil, and the same was dumb; and when He had cast out the devil, the dumb spoke, and the multitude were in admiration at it; but some of them said: He casteth out devils by Beelzebub the prince of devils. And others tempting asked of Him a sign from heaven. But He, seeing their thoughts, said to them: *Every kingdom divided against itself shall be brought to desolation, and house upon house shall fall; and if Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? Because you say, that through Beelzebub I cast out devils. Now if I cast out devils by Beelzebub, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore, they shall be your judges. But if I by the finger of God cast out devils, doubtless the finger of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his court, those things are in peace which he possesseth; but if a stronger than he come upon him and overcome him, he will take away all his armour wherein he trusted, and will distribute his spoils. He that is not with Me, is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me, scattereth. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through places without water, seeking rest; and not finding, he saith: I will return into my house whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then he goeth and taketh with him seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and entering in they dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first.* And it came to pass, as He spoke these things, a certain woman from the crowd, lifting up her voice, said to Him: Blessed is the womb that bore Thee, and the paps that gave Thee suck. But He said: *Yea rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it.*

The Gospel according to St Luke, XI:14–28.

Summary of the Morrow's Meditation

As the gospel of tomorrow speaks to us of the sin of backsliding, we will consecrate our next meditation to the consideration of this sin being: first, injurious to God; second, terrible for man. We will then make the resolution: first, every day, after our examination of conscience, to fix upon the fault which it is the most necessary for us to correct, in order to avoid above all in regard to these faults the sin of backsliding; second, to urge ourselves to lead a better life during the day before us than we did during the one which preceded it. Our spiritual nosegay shall be the words of the gospel: "*The last state of that man is made worse than the first*" (Matt XII:45).

Meditation for the Morning

Let us adore Our Lord teaching us in the gospel of today the gravity of the sin of backsliding. The state, He says, of him who, after having been delivered from the devil, returns and places himself again under his rule, becomes worse than the first. Let us thank Him for so important a warning and ask of Him grace thoroughly to profit by it.

HOW INJURIOUS TO GOD IS THE SIN OF BACKSLIDING

First, it is horrible ingratitude; God had pardoned us our preceding falls, and this pardon gave Him a right to our greatest gratitude. Ought we not indeed to be abundantly thankful for His generosity which forgot our sins, for His grace which effaced them, for the blood of Jesus Christ which merited this grace for us, for the recovery of our rights to Paradise and the eternal possession of God, lastly for the gratuitousness of so great a favour, since not only had we not merited it, but we had become supremely unworthy of it through sin! And yet, instead of thanking Him and of blessing Him for so much love, we recommence our offences; we care so little for the loss of His grace, or, if our fault is only venial, for the diminution of that same grace! What shameful and guilty ingratitude! O Christian soul, how this backsliding degrades and lowers thee! (Jer. II:36) Second, it is an unworthy abuse of the goodness and patience of God. Because God is good, we do not trouble ourselves about not committing sin. He has pardoned me this sin, we seem to say, He will pardon me again if I commit it a second and a third time. And we fall again. O man! exclaims St Paul, how canst thou thus despise the riches of the goodness of God, of His patience, and of His longanimity? (Rom. II:4) Dost thou not understand that the great goodness of God is a reason for serving Him better, and that to make of it a motive for offending Him is to amass treasures of anger upon thy head? (Rom. II:4-5) Third, it is shameful perfidy. Each time that we approach the Holy Tribunal or the Holy Table, we protest that we will not fall again; the blood of Jesus, which is applied to us by absolution or given to us in communion seals our protestations; and yet at the least opportunity which presents itself of pleasing ourselves or others, we violate these sacred promises! Is it not shameful perfidy? O my God, pardon, mercy! (Ps. L:3)

HOW TERRIBLE THE SIN OF BACKSLIDING IS FOR MAN

First, this kind of sin weakens us. By familiarising us with evil, it diminishes the horror of it, consequently, it diminishes the will to resist it; by making us fall, it injures our strength in proportion to the height whence we have fallen and the depth to which it has abased us. How, before our fall, we were raised so high! We were the friends of God; and through our backsliding we have descended so low, even as low as hell if the sin be mortal, and as low as purgatory if it be venial. Oh, how such backsliding bruises and weakens us! Second, each backsliding increases the difficulty of rising again. "*It is impossible,*" says St Paul, "*for those who were illuminated . . . and are fallen away to be renewed again to penance*" (Heb. VI:4, 6). Doubtless this impossibility is not to be understood literally; as long as man breathes salvation is possible to him; but at least it indicates a serious difficulty which ought to make us tremble. Backslidings, in fact, attach the will to evil, and engender the habit which soon becomes a second nature, in such a manner that we will no longer either take means for rising again, or put away the obstacles which hinder our return, or combat our bad inclinations. The small effect which certain efforts have produced disgusts us from making fresh ones, and makes us believe that it is impossible for us to correct ourselves. Lastly, the shame of having made so many attempts without success keeps us back, and we remain always in the same state. Such is the kind of impossibility with which St Paul threatens the sinner who backslides. Is there not matter here for making us tremble and inspiring us with a firm will not any more to commit the sin of backsliding?

Resolutions and spiritual nosegay as above.