

THE SERAPH

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December

December, with the shortening of the days, and the lengthening of the night reminds us of the darkness of sin. We are reminded of the longing of the world for the coming of the Redeemer. Steeped in the blindness of sin, mankind yearned for the coming of God.

When we celebrate the birth of Our Lord, we are past the winter solstice (the shortest day of the year); the days are growing longer, and the symbolism of the spiritual reality is very beautiful. The Light has entered the world and gradually illuminates it with greater and greater clarity.

What Christ has done for the world, He again does for each one of us. Christ begins to peel away the blindness of our sins and to show us the true ugliness and malice of sin. Simultaneously, the beauty, holiness, and goodness of God become ever clearer to us.

The Scriptures – especially the Gospels – show us God, but especially the life of Jesus Christ. The works of Christ in the world are wonderfully paralleled in each of our own lives. The Annunciation is one

of the first steps we must realize in our spiritual lives. The angels as well as the entire material world around us constantly announce God's desire to dwell within us. We must then respond with our own fiat, or unite our fiat with Mary's. We are not immaculate or anywhere near worthy enough to receive Him as Mary was, but He desires to come to us nonetheless. He will make our miserable souls clean and worthy, just as He made a dirty manger and stable worthy of Him in a little town of Bethlehem two-thousand and thirteen years ago. All that is wanting is the acceptance of our wills. If we welcome Him with Mary's words: "... be it done unto me according to Thy word," He will enter and begin the transformation.

This first coming of Jesus to us shows very little to the physical eyes, just as His conception did not at first show in the body of the Blessed Virgin Mary. But, gradually a transformation begins to take place in our souls that can no longer be hidden in our bodies. This growth and progression continue until at last Jesus is born. The hidden life of

Christ within us now breaks forth visibly into the material world. We now live and act like Christ – loving Him and keeping His word. We are visible members of the Mystical Body of Christ. The world notices that Christians are somehow different. The love of God has transformed them.

This light and this joy are never complete while we are on this earth – that blessing is reserved for eternity. With all this spiritual pleasure there are many pains and agonies, both physical and spiritual. In Christ's life on this earth He suffered much, so in His life in us He suffers much. We as His disciples must follow Him in this suffering. This sacrifice of ours is not just a onetime thing. The agony and death of our Lord on Calvary was the culmination of a lifetime of sacrifice. That is why He invites us to take up our **daily** cross and follow Him. In rejecting or turning away from our daily crosses we essentially reject and turn away from God.

The realization of our enormous debt of sin coupled with the understanding of the holiness of God, clearly illustrates to us the justness and necessity of suffering and sacrifice. Everyone in this life must suffer, but only those who love God are able

to make their suffering into a pleasing sacrifice to God. Crosses and suffering are great tools and aids to the spiritually minded. In this manner all things become good. Those who love God welcome the joys and sorrows and the pleasures and the pains of this life equally with grateful hearts.

Everyone understands being grateful for the joys and pleasures of this life, but only the spiritually minded can grasp that the sorrows and pains are equally good gifts from God – they may often be considered even better gifts than joys and pleasures, because they allow us to atone for sin and gain merit for Heaven.

It is our wish and prayer that we welcome God with Mary's fiat, and allow Him to be born into our hearts and souls. Then, that we find in the scriptures, as well as in all things, a constant reminder of the life of God within us. As we follow Him in our own personal lives – taking up our daily crosses – may we turn the pains and sufferings into grateful true joy. Our vision of the world will dramatically change as God begins to fill up our hearts and souls. As He is born into us, so will we be born into Him.

The Season of Peace

Bishop Bonaventure Strandt, OFM

For centuries Franciscan wisdom has confirmed and exemplified one its highest theological tenets: “Every true Christian is a mystery to the world”. The world runs today at a frenetic pace of discord, with sinfully disoriented souls grasping for the slightest bit of pleasure that might alleviate the cravings of long-empty hearts. These are the most trying times in the history of the Catholic Church, largely due to the nearly overwhelming influence of the prince of this world, also known as Lucifer. The lies, false ideals, and evil customs of the majority of our fellow countrymen threaten the God-fearing Christian with spiritual suffocation.

In spite of the daily struggles that we face to keep the light of hope alive in our suffering souls; we can nonetheless gather a glimpse into a heavenly tranquility that was enjoyed upon this earth for many centuries. This peace existed when Catholic religious lived up to a high ideal of discipline. It was embodied in Catholic kings and queens who assured the well-being of their lands by making the simplicity

of the Gospel every part of the daily norm throughout the kingdom. Even the staunchest pagans would readily concede that the well organized Catholic society, with Christ as King, has been the highest ideal in societal rule for many millennia. The key is, as it always has been, a willing fidelity to the truth of God’s word.

Throughout many centuries of Catholicism, the fullness of Scriptural truth was maintained with the utmost seriousness and severity. In today’s standard of Modernistic equivocation and doctrinal deviations, God’s own words are treated with the same crassness as the words of the civil law, with loopholes suddenly appearing at every moment. Rather than holding to the sacred traditions of the Canonically approved Holy Scriptures and the Deposit of Faith, our increasingly atheistic society tears at the very foundation of all societal peace: Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. With great sadness we watch as the very soul of this sacred Christmas season is left void of its true sanctity, in favor

of the plague and scourge that is rampant materialism.

The acquisition of more possessions seems to be the primary goal in the lives of so many millions of souls who no longer recognize true human dignity and honor. The words of the angels' song, the *Gloria in Excelsis*, have been carefully tailored so as not to disturb the delicate and warped consciences of the masses. One does need to use the full force of one's intelligence to grasp such a thing, though, and it is every Catholic duty to stand as a type of a watchman, guarding the Truth at all cost. The simple aberration is contained in the opening line, when the angels sang a beautiful truth in harmonious song: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will". Even in his great masterpiece **Messiah**, George Friederich Handel echoed the falsehood of his Lutheran beliefs in the incorrect and very faulty English translation: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good will towards men". Now, one could hardly argue that this latter statement is evil; but it is most certainly a deceptive corruption and a perversion of the exactitude of God's Divine Justice.

The mouthpieces of God, the angels, simply repeated, as they always do, the thoughts and words of Almighty God. What the Lord spoke to us through them was that no one can enjoy true peace without having a will disposed towards what is good. There is also now in our times the false concept of no real evil being attributed to anyone, by the sheer grace and mercy of God. But God will never be mocked, and His Justice will be brought forth to each and every individual in His time. It is a terrible act of tempting God to destroy the truths about iniquity, sin, death, hell, retribution, vengeance, and the very reason for the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only true source of peace, since all good things come from Him.

Let us not be deceived under the numbing umbrella of humanistic good works. There is much good that comes from our corporal works of mercy, such as feeding and sheltering the poor and destitute. We can accomplish so much more for the salvation of souls if we attempt to let some of the monastic beauty of centuries past into our own lives. This does not need to be some earth-shattering change or an impossible burden that

we lay upon ourselves. The deepening of one's spirituality can be as simple as a few acts of good will per day: reading the Holy Scripture for 15 minutes a day, making meaningful time for recollection and quiet meditation, attending daily Masses when possible, and holy devotions such as Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

In the simplest way possible, it is true to say that our degree of internal peace grows in direct proportion to how much love we invest with regards to our Creator. We are able, by the grace

of God, to stand firmly in times of temptation and tribulation. No one can avoid these crosses in life; but it is possible to carry our burdens with holy resignation to the will of God. The words of the Lord will always be a source of consolation and encouragement: **“Your Heavenly Father knows what you need before you ask Him”**. With confidence then, let us strengthen the Mystical Body of Christ with more selfless Catholic action. In the end, those who humble themselves in this life will be exalted by the Son of God.



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Franciscans and the Protestant Revolution In England

Francis Borgia Steck, O.F.M.

CHAPTER II

CALM BEFORE THE STORM

Early reign of Henry VIII — Religious conditions in England — Attitude toward papal supremacy — The king, a dutiful child of the Church — The reform, movement in St. Francis — Its bearing on the Province of England — The king well disposed toward the Franciscans.

Seldom were political and religious conditions more auspicious anywhere than in England when Henry VIII (1509-1547) ascended the throne. During the reign of his father, Henry VII, whose victory over Richard III at Bosworth put an end to the bloody War of the Roses, royal ascendancy gained a firm hold on the minds and hearts of the English. Though taxations had been heavy and frequent, the people at large submitted when they recalled the horrors of the recent war. And now that the first of the Tudors had died leaving the State treasury well filled, they

pinned their hopes for brighter days on his youthful successor.

Endowed with rare qualities of mind and body, the prince of eighteen summers fully vindicated their most sanguine hopes. Shortly after his accession, he espoused, with papal dispensation, Catherine of Aragon, the maiden widow of his brother Arthur. This only raised him in the esteem of the people; the popularity of the fair and pious princess was naturally extended to him. What further assured him of popular favor was the fact that he confirmed the general pardon granted by his predecessor, and, not only offered compensation to those who had been wronged during the preceding reign, but ordered the arrest and punishment of those who had been the chief abettors of the late king's rapacity.¹ His military success in France and Scotland likewise augured well for the future. In short, politically his reign promised to be an era of peace at home and of prestige abroad; and as far as religious

¹ Lingard, *History of England*, Vol. IV, p. 169.

conditions were concerned, no one ever fancied that within twenty-five years a dreadful upheaval would take place in the realm. The assertion often made by non-Catholic historians that on the eve of the Reformation religious life in England was at a very low ebb, conflicts with the latest researches; and to say that the religious revolution was but the inevitable outcome and culmination of Lollardism is utterly unwarranted.² Long before Henry's rupture with Rome, the heresy of Wyclif had sunk into the grave with the heretic himself. It is true that in the beginning of the sixteenth century there were serious evils in the Church of England that needed curing. Of these the most baneful was undoubtedly the worldly and mercenary spirit that prevailed among the nobility and the higher clergy. Generally speaking, however, historians to-day agree that the lower classes cherished and practiced their faith. Gasquet remarks that "religion on the eve of the Reformation was intimately bound up with the whole life of the people, animating it and penetrating it at every point." This refutes the

² See Gasquet, *The Eve of the Reformation*, pp. 184 seq.

oft-repeated charge that also the lower clergy, regular as well as secular, were wanting in virtue and zeal and that in consequence they had forfeited the respect and confidence of the people. It was Blessed Thomas More who argued that, if religious conditions among the laity were good, corruption among the clergy could not have been so general. Unshaken was also the belief of the English nation in the spiritual supremacy of the Pope. Of course, the full import of this doctrine was then not so clearly defined as it is today. Repeatedly, disputes arose between the Church and the State, especially regarding ecclesiastical immunities and exemptions. Although it was again principally among the upper classes that loyalty to the Holy See was not what it should have been, certain it is that the nation as such recognized only one supreme head in the Church, namely the Bishop of Rome. The theory of royal supremacy did not emanate from the convictions of the people, but from the pride and covetousness of the crown.³

As to the king himself, history assures us that during the

³ 1 Ibidem, pp. 70 seq.

first years of his reign he was singularly well disposed toward the Church and humbly submissive to her doctrine and discipline. It is thought that he had been destined for the sacred ministry, but that this plan had to be abandoned on the premature death of his elder brother Arthur. Be this as it may, Henry's thorough training not only in Christian humanism but also in theology under the direction of Cardinal Fisher made him a man of firm religious convictions. Although he was of a gay and chivalrous disposition, delighting in the sports and jousts and other popular amusements of the time, there is nothing on record that points to a base and corrupt heart. When on a hunt, he was wont daily to hear three holy Masses, and on other days often four or five. Every day he assisted at Vespers and Compline in the Queen's chapel. He seems to have fostered a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin, in whose honor, it is said, he told his beads every day. In 1505, and again in 1510, he made a pilgrimage to Our Lady's shrine at Walsingham. Spelman relates that he walked barefoot to this place from Baseham, a distance of three miles, that

he presented the shrine with a precious necklace, and that at his own expense he had new windows put in the chapel. It is known, too, that in 1522 he accompanied Emperor Charles V on a pilgrimage to Canterbury, where the two monarchs, having attended High Mass and received Holy Communion, knelt in prayer at the tomb of St. Thomas *a Becket*.⁴

During the political troubles between Pope Julius II and the King of France, Henry VIII faithfully upheld the rights of the Papacy and openly espoused the cause of the Holy League. When Martin Luther attacked the doctrine of the Church and rebelled against the authority of the Pope, the English king was among the first to raise his voice in solemn protest. In 1522, he wrote his famous *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum* in reply to Luther's heretical tenets. On being warned by Blessed Thomas More that in this work he had unduly emphasized the authority of the Pope as a temporal prince, Henry uttered the remarkable words: "We are so much bounded unto the see

⁴ Du Boys, *Catherine D'Aragon*, pp. 102, 106 ; Hope, *The First Divorce of Henry VIII*, p. 24 ; Timbs, *Abbeys .. of England and Wales*, Vol. I, p. 543.

of Rome that we cannot do too much honor unto it. Whatsoever impediment be to the contrary, we will set forth that authority to the uttermost, for we received from that see our crown imperial.”⁵ The book was presented to the Pope by the English ambassador in Rome, Dr. John Clarke. In grateful acknowledgement, Leo X issued a Bull in which he bestowed on Henry the honorable title of Defender of the Faith — a title which, strange to say, the English crown carries to the present day. On not less than three different occasions, the Vicar of Christ honored Henry with the golden rose as a mark of special esteem and gratitude for services rendered to the Church:⁶ So deep-rooted was his allegiance to the Holy See that even when about to usurp its spiritual supremacy he compelled Cranmer to take the usual oath of obedience to the See of Rome.⁷ In fine, whatever,

5 Thus Blessed Thomas More publicly testified at his trial on being accused of having induced Henry to maintain in his book the authority of the Pope so as thereby “to put a sword in the Pope’s hand to fight against” the king. See Roper, *Life of Sir Thomas More, Ent.*, p. 67.

6 Annually, on the fourth Sunday of Lent, the Holy Father solemnly blesses a golden rose, which he later presents to some person or place of distinction. See *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. VI, p. 630.

7 Dodd, *Church History of England*, Vol.

his private life may have been, certain it is that during the first years of his reign the Church and its supreme head had a firm hold on the affections of the king as well as of the English nation at large.

To enable the reader to understand and appreciate the heroic zeal of the English Franciscans for truth and morality during the subsequent religious upheaval, it will be necessary to insert a brief account of the Observant reform in the Order of St. Francis and of its bearing on the history of the English province. Soon after the death of St. Francis, diversities of opinion and practice arose in the Order regarding the observance of the vow of poverty. While a number of brethren, supported by influential men in and out of the Order, sought to mitigate the severity of the fourth chapter of the Franciscan Rule, others advocated and observed renunciation of corporate as well as private ownership of temporalities. During the fourteenth century, these differences became more pronounced. Those who following Blessed Paul de Trinci labored for the reform of the Order were called Observants;

I, p. 71.

while the others who with papal dispensations held property in common, went by the name of Conventuals.⁸ In the next century, the reform movement was greatly furthered by four saintly friars known as the pillars of Observantism; viz., St. Bernardine of Siena, St. John Capistran, St. James della Marca, and Bl. Albert of Sartiano. Through their untiring efforts, the reform spread rapidly over entire Europe, so that by the eve of the Reformation the Franciscans had returned in great numbers to the original observance of the Rule. In the various provinces of the Order, there were about 1,500 Observant houses, in which, to make a rough estimate, some 30,000 friars resided. A definite separation was finally made by Pope Leo X, in 1517, so that henceforth there existed two distinct branches of the Order, the Observants and the Conventuals.⁹

According to Parkinson, it is probable that this Observant movement reached the English province early in the fifteenth

⁸ Throughout the present narrative, we designate the former by the term Franciscans, the latter by the term Conventuals.

⁹ See Holzapfe, *Geschichte des Franziskanerordens*.

century, and it was gradually adopted by most of the friars.¹⁰ We know, for instance, that in 1454, St. John Capistran, then vicar general of the Franciscans, addressed a letter to Henry VI of England, thanking him among other things for his promise to have friaries erected for the brethren of the reform. At the chapters held in Palencia (1470) and at Bruges (1484) England was reckoned a province of the reform. The chapter held at Mechlin (1499) unanimously resolved "that the province of England having now a competent number of convents should hereafter have two votes in all general chapters, after the manner of other reformed provinces." Finally, it is known that already in 1502, the English Conventuals agreed to exchange their religious garb for the poorer and coarser habit of their reformed brethren.

Although the exact number of Franciscan friaries in England cannot be ascertained, we know that in 1481 Pope Sixtus IV gave certain English nobles a grant to erect such friaries. Later, Henry

¹⁰ Parkinson, *The Antiquities of the English, Franciscans*, pp. 203, 206, 207, 211, 213; *Annales Minorum*, Vol. V, p. 106; Vol. VI, pp. 112, 709; Vol. VII, pp. 176, 407.

VII built three convents for the Franciscans at Greenwich, Newark, and Richmond in Surrey, and caused the Conventuals to cede to them their houses at Canterbury, Newcastle, and Southampton. Parkinson thinks that after 1517, almost all the sons of St. Francis in England had accepted the reform, since after that year he finds no mention of Conventual chapters or provincials.¹¹ Apparently, the reform movement does not seem to have essentially marred the unity of the province. All the friars in England “were,” as Parkinson puts it, “in effect true observers of their Founder’s Rule, and made up one community. Furthermore, in 1498, the Franciscans held their chapter at the Grey Friars¹² in London, which was not reckoned one of their houses.¹³ And, as will be seen later, at the time of the general suppression of the province, about 1539, by far the greater number of its friaries were found to be strictly in keeping with the original severity of the Rule, depending for their daily subsistence on

¹¹ Parkinson, pp. 207, 216, 220.

¹² In England, the sons of St. Francis went by this name on account of the color of their habit.

¹³ Thaddeus, *The Franciscans in England*, p. 14.

the charity of the people. “The truth of the thing is,” Parkinson assures us, “that few of the Franciscan convents in England enjoyed any rents, and therefore it was easy enough for most of them to join in the reformation (of the Order); as in effect they did, though they continued in their own convents, by reason of the different degrees of their reformation and observance of the Rule of St. Francis.” This much then is certain, that on the eve of the religious troubles, the greater number of the English friars were true followers of St. Francis, and together with the Carthusians and Brigittines formed the most zealous and most popular body of religious in England.

It was but natural for Henry VIII, so sincerely devoted to the interest and welfare of the Church, to imitate his immediate predecessors in their friendly attitude toward the Franciscans. “At the beginning of his reign,” writes Stone, “he had shown them special favor, had written more than once to the Pope on their behalf, declaring that he had the most deep and devoted affection towards them, and that he found it quite impossible to describe their merits as they

deserved. They presented, he said, an ideal of Christian poverty, sincerity, and charity; their lives were devoted to fasting, watching, prayer; and they were occupied in hard toil, by night and day, to win sinners back to God.¹⁴ Their friary and church at Greenwich adjoined the royal palace, where Henry was born, and where he usually resided after his accession to the throne. Here with his saintly consort, Queen Catherine of Aragon, who was a Tertiary of St. Francis, he attended divine services. For another Tertiary, Bl. Thomas More, whose life was so intimately bound up with court affairs, he entertained the highest regard. For almost ten years, his confessor was Fr. Stephen Baron, who was provincial in 1520, and who wrote a book for the benefit of the king, entitled *On the Government of Princes*.¹⁵ When the Franciscans in Palestine, hard pressed by the Turkish hordes under Selim, were at last compelled to flee to Cyprus, Henry VIII personally wrote to them,¹⁶ assuring them

that since his tenderest years he had always revered the sons of St. Francis, and that henceforth he would send them an annual alms of 1,000 scudi for the maintenance of the Holy Places. Again it was a Franciscan, Fr. John Kynton, doctor of divinity at Oxford, whom the king, in 1521, engaged to write a defense of Catholic doctrine against Luther.¹⁷

17 Parkinson, p. 222 ; Dodd, Vol. I, p. 237.



14 Stone, *Faithful Unto Death*, p. 1, on the authority of Ellis's *Original Letters*.

15 Mason, *Certamen Seraphicum*, p. 292 ; Parkinson, p. 222.

16 For a copy of this letter, dated November 23, 1516, see *Annales Minorum*, Vol. III, p. 53.

Mental Divisions

Bishop Giles O.F.M

For the purpose of study we often break things down into parts. Sometimes the divisions are logical, and sometimes the divisions are arbitrary. This is necessary because it allows us to understand things better when they are served up to us in smaller portions. All of the sciences approach their respective subjects in this manner. For example, in the study of human Anatomy, we divide the body into many sub-sets or systems. One part of the study may focus only upon the brain and nervous system, another upon the skeletal system, the circulatory system, digestive system, etc. Dividing up the study in this manner makes it possible to see many details that would otherwise be lost sight of. Our minds are finite so we must impose limits as we study. This same method is used in the study of Philosophy and Theology.

In Philosophy we learn that man is a rational animal. He is composed of a body like all other animals, but in addition he has reason. The animal body for purposes of study is divided into body and soul – physical and spiritual. While this intellectual division is useful, we must never lose sight of the fact that we will never find in man a real separation of body and soul. Once the soul leaves the body we

no longer have a human being. We have a corpse, and a soul, but not a man. (The souls in heaven, though they are happy, still long for the resurrection of their bodies so that they will be men once again.) The bodies of the deceased are treated with dignity and respect because they were once temples of the Holy Ghost, and will one day rise from the dead and be eternally reunited to the soul.

The soul is the life of the body. It is not a physical thing but, rather it is spiritual. In our studies, we learn that the soul has three faculties: memory, intellect and will. Every soul has these faculties even though they are not all developed to the same degree or level. These faculties of the soul are distinct from the corresponding physical faculties of the body. One school of thought teaches that the will is superior to the other faculties, and another school of thought insists that the intellect is superior to the other faculties. (Franciscans hold that the will is primary, but that must be left for another time.) While this division of faculties is helpful in our study of the soul, we must remember that they are all necessary to the soul. There is never a real soul lacking in one or more of these faculties. The division is purely a mental one and

not a real one. A soul must always possess all three faculties, just as a man must always possess a body and a soul.

We can further consider mankind as a united body. Mankind is made up of male and female. When God created man (Adam) He immediately saw that he needed a helpmate. We see the completion of man with woman. The two make one flesh. Again, we find people who want to argue over which is superior – man or woman. It is not so much a matter of superiority as it is in complementing each other. Each fills up where the other is lacking, making a single complete being. Yes, we know that man is the head and the woman is the heart, but does that make one superior to the other? Where is a head without a heart? or a heart without a head? In either case, the body is dead, unless they are united as one. So while we can separate mankind into male and female, it is more of a theoretical exercise than a practical one. Men without women will die out, and women without men will die out. For mankind to live and prosper it must be complete with male and female. Each element does its own part for the whole.

In a similar manner, we can consider Jesus Christ. He is true God and true Man. Whenever we mention the name: “Jesus” we are speaking of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity Who became

Man. We can think of Jesus in His divinity, and we can think of Him in His humanity, but practically we cannot separate them. Many heretics have broken away from the Church simply because they failed or refused to understand this simple fact. There were some who maintained that Jesus is true God, but that He only appeared as a man and was therefore not really human (Docetism/Gnostics). There were others who maintained that Jesus was a good and holy man but was not really God (Arianism). There are even some others that taught that Jesus was a man that became God (Adoptionism).

From the moment of the Incarnation, Jesus is God made man. He is from that moment on forever true God and true Man. God is inseparably united to Man. The Sacred Scriptures concerning Christ are only properly understood when this fact is kept in mind. Sometimes we see the human side of Christ and sometimes we see His divinity. But, throughout it all Christ is one Person with two natures. We can study the humanity of Jesus, and we can study the divinity of Jesus but, we must always remember at the end of the day He is one Person with two natures. He is not two persons.

At this time of year (Christmas), we especially consider the birth of Jesus Christ. We come in spirit to the manger where He lay. We honor

His mother as the mother of God. We worship and adore Him as true God even as our eyes only behold a human Babe. He is the Word made Flesh living with us.

It is obvious how divisions are of benefits for purposes of study, but we must always remember that the divisions are tools or aids for our understanding and that all the parts must be together to make the whole. If one of these essential parts is taken away, the thing is no longer what it once was. A human body without a brain or nervous system is no longer a living human body; a man without a soul is a corpse and not a man; a soul without a will is not a soul; mankind without women is no longer mankind; Jesus without His divinity is not Jesus; etc.

There are some who maintain that this also applies to the Catholic Church and the papacy. They would have us believe that when there is no pope there is no longer a Catholic Church. They see this as an essential element. If this were the case then we would have seen the Church die with St. Peter. We do not deny papacy, but say that the Modernist Heretics that present themselves as popes are imposters and not true popes. To say that this or that particular man is not a pope in no way suggests that we deny the papacy. On the contrary, because we have such a love and devotion to the papacy we are forced to say

that these men are not true popes. We are loyal and obedient to all the true popes throughout history, but reject every anti-pope that history has recorded.

The essential elements of the Catholic Church are brought forward in our creeds, dogmas, and catechisms. The Catholic Church is: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. From this doctrine, we observe that there is no mention of papal. The papacy is included as part of the term Apostolic. By apostolic we understand that the bishops of today have a visible lineage going back to Christ through the Apostles. The pope is appointed as the visible head of this body of apostles. (We must always remember that Jesus Christ is the invisible and true Head of the Church.) The pope is the universal bishop and the bishop of Rome. He is the principle of unity, but he is not the entire apostolic college. Nor is he of such a necessary position that when he dies the entire body dies with him. Each true bishop is made a bishop by Jesus Christ and he teaches, governs, and sanctifies, the souls that God has made subject to him. A true pope would teach, govern, and sanctify all men, whereas bishops are limited, but both are guided by the Holy Ghost.

Understanding this, we must now consider the essential elements necessary for every member of the Mystical Body of Christ. A

Catholic must be baptized, and not have been cut off from the Body through heresy, schism, or excommunication. Heretics and schismatics are by definition outside the Mystical Body of Christ. They are cut off. It is therefore impossible and illogical that someone who is obviously a heretic for denying one or more doctrines, or espousing one or more heresies, could be the head of the very Body that he has severed himself from. If he is a heretic, he is not Catholic. He is not a member of the Mystical Body of Christ (much less its visible head). We cannot speak therefore of a “heretical pope.”

A person, even a pope, may from time to time speak incorrectly through distraction or inadvertence, and this does not constitute heresy. What constitutes heresy is obstinacy in maintaining the error. When a person with deliberate understanding of what he is saying speaks heresy, and refuses to correct himself then he is a heretic.

We maintain that the Modernist “popes” of recent times are heretics because of their many and varied teachings of error. From this point, we proceed to see that as heretics they are not Catholic, and are cut from the Mystical Body of Christ and no longer have the guidance of the Holy Ghost. The life blood of the grace of God that only flows through the Church and the sacraments no longer flows to

them. Severed from the Mystical Body it should be obvious that they in no way are the visible head of the Body. Hence they are not popes, but rather anti-popes.

Some have attempted a perverse division of popes. They claim that in some strange manner these men, because they are heretics and are sitting in the place of a pope, are material popes but not formally popes. They are trying to divide a man into unsustainable parts. It is like separating the soul and body from a man. A man without a soul is no longer a man but is a corpse. A physical (material) pope without a soul is no pope at all.

Material and formal are often made more confusing than is necessary. It is a simple concept and can be applied to many and various things. We have the matter and form of a sacrament. The matter is the physical substance that is used (water in baptism, oil in extreme unction, man and woman in marriage, etc.) the form is the words that are used to confect the sacrament.

In a slightly different manner, we can speak of material and formal sin. Material sin is the physical evil or wrong; for example the killing of someone. A formal sin is what makes the person culpable. If you accidentally kill someone you have materially killed, but you are not culpable because your sin was not

deliberate or formal. The formal sin is what will send the soul to hell. A man can sin formally but not materially as in the case of the man lusting after a woman in his heart. Our Lord says that such a man is already guilty of adultery. Or the man who harbors hatred in his heart is already guilty of murder. The physical or material part is not necessary for there to be culpability.

If we apply these terms to the pope in the way we do to men (body and soul) we see that a man without a soul is a corpse and is not a man; so a pope that is without form is not a pope. If we use these terms as we do for the sacraments we see that baptism without the words (form) is not valid, so a material pope without being formal is invalid, or is not a pope. If we apply them as we do for sin we see again the same thing, an evil is not a sin until it is formal, so a material pope is not a pope until he is formally the pope.

We can invent distinctions and variations without end, but in the end our reason and common sense point out to us that the physical separation of a being into parts invalidates or destroys it.

In the case with the Lefebvre sect, we run into another form of this division. Lefebvre was ordained a priest and consecrated a bishop by a man that was a Freemason. It is known that Freemasons are opposed

to the Church and are working to destroy Her. We question if this Freemason clearly ordained and consecrated Lefebvre.

In the confecting of the sacraments, we know that three things (parts) are necessary: matter, form and intention. The teaching and practice of the Church is that we assume that sacraments that have the visible matter and form (material and words) also contain the intention, unless there is something indicating the contrary. Because Freemasonry has the stated purpose and goal of the destruction of the Church and Lefebvre's ordaining bishop was a Freemason, we believe that there is something indicating a contrary intention. We do not believe, even if all the matter and form is correct, that the intention to destroy the church is compatible with a right intention to ordain a priest and thus promote and advance the Church. In the least there is probable doubt concerning the validity of Lefebvre's priesthood and episcopacy. Doubtful priests must be treated as non-priests for the protection of the sacraments and the Church.

Let us not fall into the temptation to turn logical distinctions into real distinctions. We must always remember in our studies and examinations that these are only parts of a whole. At the end of the day it must all be put back together again.

The Christmas Tree

(From *The Poverello's Round Table* by Sister M Aquina Barth OSF)

The Christmas tree is a Christian custom. Recent investigations prove that there is no vestige of anything pagan or Protestant about it; rather, it originated in Catholic Alsace. In fact, when it was first introduced, which was in the middle of the seventeenth century, it was strongly opposed by the Protestants. Nevertheless, it has come to be at home with both denominations and cannot be separated from the feast of Christmas. One is tempted to apply to it the words of Scripture: "The tree was great and strong, the sight thereof was even to the ends of all the earth" (Dan. 4:8). — Let us then take holy pleasure in the Christmas tree.

The Christmas tree is a custom full of meaning. Being a tree of the kind that does not wither, it is a figure of the tree of life in the midst of Paradise (Gen. 2:9). Its fruits were to give us eternal life, which sin prevented us from securing. But through the Babe lying in the crib we were again to partake of its fruits, for He is the Life, who has come that we may have life. The lights on the Christmas tree remind us of Him whom St. John calls the "true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world" (John 1:9). This Light is for the time being hidden in the stable in the form of a little child. — How well crib and Christmas tree fit together!

The Christmas tree is a consoling custom. Many beautiful as well as tasty things are hung on its branches, and Christmas gifts lie at its base. Why all this? In order to direct our thoughts to the many graces we receive through our redemption, from the Child lying in the crib, God's gift to us, without whom we should have been lost. — Thank Christ, as you stand before the Christmas tree, for all His love for mankind, and vow sincere counter love.

Franciscan Saints

DECEMBER 20

THE SERVANT OF GOD ELIZABETH OF AUSTRIA

Widow, Third Order

In 1554 there was born to the German Emperor Maximilian II a daughter who was named Elizabeth. Like her holy patron Elizabeth of Hungary, she was destined to be an honor to her house and to the Third Order. At an early age Elizabeth manifested tender sympathy for the needy, and such piety that she would sometimes arise at night and spend several hours on her knees absorbed in prayer.

When she was only fifteen years old, she was married to King Charles IX of France. But her spouse died within four years of their marriage. The nineteen-year-old widow now returned to Vienna. She resolved not to marry again, but to devote her life solely to the service of God and in godly deeds. She publicly entered the Third Order of St. Francis and provided the Tertiaries of Vienna a most edifying example. Dressed in the plainest garment, so as to escape all notice, she visited churches and took part in processions and other devotions. At home

she always spent much time in prayer, observed rigorous fasts, and avoided all public merriment.

She took much pleasure in serving the sick in the hospitals. She also visited the homes of the city in search of the poor sick and provided them with medicine and other supplies. To many of these people her charity and cordial service gave even greater comfort than the corporal aid she rendered them. Occasionally she invited poor people to dine at her home, where she herself sat down to table with them, especially on Thursdays, when she would prepare a plentiful table for poor people in honor of the Last Supper.

In the spirit of humility she often performed the lowliest duties in a convent of Poor Clares which she had founded, often cooking the meals for the poor there. She was also much interested in the upkeep of churches, but she was even more concerned to have worthy priests conducting the

services and attending to the care of souls. She loved to help talented young men who felt called to it, pursue their studies and get a good education for the service of the Church.

After accomplishing a great amount of good in the twenty years of her widowhood, she died in Vienna in 1592, to the great sorrow of the entire imperial city. The humble queen had chosen the following text from the office of the dead for her epitaph: "Since I sin daily and yet do not do penance, the fear of death disturbeth me. As in hell there is no redemption, have mercy on me, O God, and save me!" Several miracles occurred at her tomb.

ON SOLICITUDE FOR GOOD PRIESTS

1. Among the many good works undertaken by the servant of God Elizabeth, surely the noblest and the best was her solicitude for good priests. What a blessing a good priest is for a Christian community! "When a priest celebrateth," says Thomas a Kempis (4:5), "he honoreth God, he rejoiceth the angels, he edifieth the Church, he helpeth the living, he obtaineth rest for

the dead." And what an amount of good the priest does in his sacerdotal activities! He is the educator of youth, the counsellor of adults, the savior of sinners, the comfort of the sick and the dying. Those who provide the Church with a good priest are assured of sharing in all these blessings. — Have you given due thought to this opportunity?

2. Consider how we can provide for good priests. Parents can provide their sons with the education needed for the clerical state, and brothers and sisters can co-operate in this great charity. Of course, no parent may compel a son to embrace the priesthood, or cajole him into it with worldly prospects. Such a boy might easily prove a hireling or even a wolf to the flock of Christ, and then, woe to the one who led him into the state. But to consent that a son may follow the vocation, and to make sacrifices that he may achieve his goal, is a highly meritorious work. Perhaps we can contribute to the education of young men who wish to become priests. All of us can at least pray for good priests. The Ember Days have been especially instituted to obtain worthy priests from God by means of penance, fasting,

and prayer. What Holy Scripture says about the need of priests is applicable to our times as well: “The harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few” (Matth. 9:37). --- Have you done your duty in the past with regard to this matter?

3. Consider that our solicitude for good priests should manifest itself in a special way by supporting them in their activities. We should gladly follow their advice, cheerfully contribute to the good works they promote, and help establish their influence. It is only when well-minded persons give them this cooperation that priests can hope to labor with success. Do not criticize what they say, even

if it does not always suit you. They are ambassadors of Christ, God as it were, exhorting by them (2 Cor. 5:20). Beware of undermining their influence and of giving them a bad name. That would put you under dreadful responsibility. Often pray that God may keep the priests of His Church free from scandal and that He may bless their activities.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

(Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost)

Let Thy constant pity, O Lord, cleanse and defend Thy Church, and since without Thee she cannot abide in safety, may she ever be governed by Thy grace. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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DECEMBER 2013

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Our Catholic Culture and Heritage

Fr. Joseph Noonan, OFM

Part II

Author's Note: Due to reaction from the first part of this article printed in the November 2013 issue of *The Seraph* concerning the involvement of Cardinal Gibbons in promoting the heresy of Americanism, this writer would like to say the following: several articles on the issue were read covering both sides of this controversy and there seems, from those sources which were read, there is no real conclusion to the truth of the matter. It should be noted that the statement in question was not of an absolute nature, but one of conjecture or possibility. If the statement is historically incorrect, then I wish to retract it. The links / sources of both sides of the controversy are listed at the end of this article. (*Editor's note: The SERAPH has reprinted several of Cardinal Gibbons writings in the past and have always found him to be of impeccable orthodoxy.*)

It has been said that we are products of our environments. It seems in most cases this is quite true. The first and simplest example is that which takes place in the home.

When a child is raised in a home where Catholic parents teach him to pray, to love God, the Mass and Sacraments, how to be obedient and humble, one would expect the child to grow into a virtuous young

adult Catholic. The lessons learned at such a tender age generally stay with the person throughout their life.

Who among you remembers, at least in a general way, your First Holy Communion Day and the joyful celebration which took place among family members? Do you remember the day you were Confirmed? Did your parents take the time to teach some of the basic points of the catechism? How many families celebrated feasts days? How many were given the dates of their feast days so they would know when to celebrate them as adults? How many families said the Rosary each day, or at least once or twice a week? Did your parents (especially your Mother) teach the children (girls in particular) how and why they must be modestly dressed at all times? Were the modesty guidelines enforced by *both* parents?

These are some of the basic questions which determined the first Catholic Culture to which a child is exposed. I remember being told by other Catholics in the early 1970's that ours was a strict Catholic family. Time, knowledge and experience have provided a different perspective. What is so strict about it? These are duties which ALL Catholic parents should fulfill. The parents are the first

teachers. There should be nothing strict or unusual about these responsibilities. Do they fulfill their duties by creating the first Catholic Culture in the home or are they merely baptized pagans?

The school ought to be nothing less than an extension of the home, for strictly speaking, the teachers, whether lay or religious, instruct in the parent's place. To put it another way, the teacher instructs the child with the permission of the parent. The questions which were posed to the parents need to be posed to the teachers. It is quite amazing how teachers are able to instruct children in matters which the parents would clearly find objectionable, but the parents either are under the impression they have no authority to stop them or they are ignorant their children are being taught objectionable material because the teachers don't inform the parents what they are teaching.

The current problem of school shootings would seem to stem from three possible sources: the lack of discipline in the home or school; the legal drugging of children as a means to control bad behavior, or behavior which is considered to be unusual (the "hyperactive" child); and the lack of a "responsible" adult to work with the child to help him overcome his problems.

The result of these recent problems is a school environment where

armed adults patrol the hallways – and all this to indoctrinate the child in a godless, mindless, socialist agenda!

This is a good place to pause and step back for a moment. Many writers, particularly of Catholic backgrounds have always stressed the importance of family life and its significance in society. How many, though, are willing to ask this question, 'What influences the family in its daily life?'

The first influence of the Catholic family ought to be the Church and the Deposit of Faith. She is the guide in all matters of faith and morals regardless of time or place. She, indeed, is the rock which stands firm through tempest or peace. The informed Catholic today must make the distinction between the institution of the Church and its (Modernistic) hierarchy.

An unfortunate fact in the modern age is how the Church's enemies have been able to influence the family despite its teachings. They seem to understand better than most Catholics who can be quite naïve about such matters, how to go about changing the culture of Catholic life.

If one is able to 'apply pressure both from within and outside' of the Church at the same time, the person is left to wonder where the truth lies. It becomes increasingly difficult if the Catholic does NOT know their

Faith, i.e., the eternal truths which do NOT change despite age or circumstance. The result which has affected Catholics the world over has been tragically witnessed by the more astute member of the True Church. There are far too many ‘Catholics’ who know nothing of culture or heritage and are, therefore, mindlessly unaware of the revolution that has taken place within their own families and local parish churches.

Long before Vatican II, changes were taking place within the Church. The difficulty for the average lay person was the changes were either hidden or too subtle to cause any notable concern. By the time the laity began to take notice, it was too late to stop them.

One of the more important effects of the ‘changes’ could only be seen in hindsight. The culture of the Catholic in daily life was quickly undermined. Most Catholics did not see it coming because the clergy had focused so much on the Mass, the laity probably thought little of it.

Consider this for a moment through 50 years of hindsight; all that was a part of Catholic Culture (the Mass, Sacraments, doctrine, Mariology, music, art, architecture, philosophy, theology, spirituality, Catholic education, modesty in dress, celebration of feasts, the encouragement of virtue, etc.) has

been totally changed or significantly altered. That which remains is but a shell of its former self – and we’re supposed to believe that all is still Catholic and apparently fine!

This is why most Catholics are quite clueless about the revolution. We see how ignorant (the lack of proper education) they are of the Faith, the indifferentism which has pervaded most levels of doctrine and the apostasy which has left parochial life in shambles. The effect of this has produced a very basic tragedy – the Catholic mindset, or more correctly stated, the lack thereof.

How does one expect to have a Catholic culture when most are not able to think properly as good, practicing Catholics? Is this, dear friends, the Faith of the Saints, the Fathers and Doctors of the Church or the Martyrs who gave their life for Christ?

We have now seen two generations of Catholics grow up in an environment where for the most part the blind are attempting to lead the blind. Those who are old enough to be grandparents are ill-equipped to convey the Faith and Tradition to their grandchildren. Sadly, more and more grandchildren are not being baptized as infants, if at all.

The customs of once-Catholic families are basically gone. Who has a family celebration after a Baptism or First Holy Communion? Do you know of a family which prays the

Rosary together each day? How many families attend Mass and receive Holy Communion together on a *Sunday* morning ? When did you last know of Catholics parents who would not allow their under-age children to date non-Catholics? Do parents teach their teen-age children (both boys and girls) that premarital relations and artificial birth control is a mortal sin? How many parents enforce a “Sunday best” dress code instead of allowing the socialist blue jean parade? Worst yet, how many mothers allow their daughters to attend ‘Mass’ dressed immodestly?

These questions could go on for some time, but the point is made and ought to be obvious. The culture of the Catholic, i.e., that which *should* set a Catholic apart from others has disappeared. These matters are no longer taught. Who knows to teach them – who cares to teach them? Who believes that Catholics should be different? Who is willing to intentionally set themselves apart from others, not out of pride, but expressly for the purpose of wanting to live the Catholic Faith in a Judeo-Masonic environment in the United States?

The unfortunate, tragic conclusion to the Satanic efforts of the Jew and Freemason to destroy the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is obvious to those who have not been spiritually blinded.

There is but a remnant which remains. Furthermore, one should not assume who the remnant is, for far too many who assume, have been trapped themselves. Their self-righteous attitude will be that which condemns them, for it does not matter in which manner the Catholic culture is destroyed in the soul of the Catholic, but only that Satan destroys the One True Faith in the soul of the Roman Catholic.

To be Continued

Next issue: **The Effect of the Destruction of the Catholic Culture Upon Society**

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Our Best Friend

TRANSLATED BY BERNARD A. HAUSMANN, S.J.

FROM THE GERMAN BY CHRISTIAN PESCH, S.J.

CHAPTER VIII

A Powerful Friend

“All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me”

(Mt. 28:18)

The omnipotence of the love of Jesus. It is an article of faith that Christ as God is omnipotent, and that even as man He has all power in heaven and on earth. Consequently, in Jesus we have a Friend whose power is greater than that which any creature ever possessed or will possess. St. John the Evangelist, as we read in the Apocalypse, heard the angels and saints of heaven sing: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power. ... And every creature, that is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them; I heard all saying: ... to the Lamb . . . dominion for ever and ever” (Apoc. 5:12, 13). Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords, who rules with resistless power the destinies of individuals and nations (cf. Apoc. 19:15, 16).

It is not our purpose here to

consider the omnipotence of Jesus as a divine attribute calculated to fill us with wonder and terror. Nevertheless, we must not forget that our Saviour, however much He may be our Friend, always remains that Majesty before whose judgment seat we must all one day appear, and whose judgment no man can resist.

Let us consider, rather, that omnipotence which is so intimately connected with the devotion to the Sacred Heart, the omnipotence of the love of Jesus. That love is a titanic Force, we know not only from experience — as the sacrifices and heroic deeds prompted by a mother’s love or Christian parity testify — but also from Holy Writ, where we read: “Love is strong as death” (Cant. 8:6). Charity “bears with all things,” St. Paul tells us, and “never fails” (1 Cor. 13:7). It was St. Paul’s great love for the Corinthians which made him anxious to be sacrificed for their salvation, even though he should reap only ingratitude at their hands (cf. 2 Cor. 12:15).

When the fire of the love of God consumes a human heart as it did the hearts of the great saints, it neither knows limits nor weighs consequences, but becomes a divine madness. But it is madness only when considered in the cold light of reason alone, but not when considered before God, who is charity itself (cf. 1 Jn. 4:8) and who, for love of us, humbled: Himself even to the folly of the cross.

St. Augustine, who is frequently represented holding a heart in his hand as a symbol of his great love for God and his neighbor, was wont to repeat that only those understand the language of love who are themselves consumed with love. And as a matter of fact, when we read what he and other saints have to say of love, we can easily understand how such language must appear to be senseless babble to one who has not experienced what it means to love God. The soul that seeks God, says St. Augustine, “loves, is on fire, glows, treads under foot all sensible pleasures, and proceeds on her way. She meets with difficulties, fears, horrors, threats — down with them! She conquers and goes on. Oh, this loving, this progressing, this losing of oneself, oh, this going

to God! ‘For he that will save his life, shall lose it; and he that shall lose his life for My sake, shall find it.’ This is the weapon with which the lover of the Unseen Beauty must arm himself.”¹

St. John Chrysostom in his commentary on the words, “Paul, a prisoner of Christ,” remarks: “To be in chains for Christ is more glorious than to be an apostle, or a teacher, or an evangelist. He who truly loves Christ will understand my words. One who is beside himself for Christ, who is on fire with love for Christ, knows the value of fetters borne for His sake. He would rather be fettered for Christ than be in heaven. . . . And even if he were to receive no recompense for his pains, the mere suffering of hardships for the Object of his love would be a great reward and sufficient recompense. . . . All those that love understand my words.”² St. John Chrysostom was sincere when he wrote these words, for he suffered imprisonment for Christ and crowned the discomforts of captivity with heroic death.

What a Paul, a Chrysostom, an

1 St. Augustine, *Sermo* 159, n. 8.

2 St. John Chrysostom, *In Eph. hom.* 8, n. 1.

Augustine, had to say of the power of love, was not empty oratory; rather their words were but a feeble expression of their deeds. To know nothing and to esteem nothing but Christ, to live, work, suffer, and die for Christ; this is what they, and many thousands like them, have done through the power of love. The pyres of the martyrs are fiery meteors of the love of God, and the death of each saint is the consummation of a whole burnt offering on the altar of the love of God. Waters of tribulation have hurled themselves on this fire of love, but have been unable to extinguish it; streams of adversity have surged over it, but have succeeded only in raising it the more quickly heavenward. All things pass; love only remains, for it is stronger than death.

If the power of love in human hearts is so great, who can comprehend what it must be in the heart of our Saviour? All our standards here fail us, for it is a power that is immeasurable. Because the Heart of our Saviour is the noblest of Hearts, it can love as no other; but because it is the Heart of the Mediator between God and man, it must love as no other.

2. *The great capacity for love of our Saviour is a consequence of His mission as Mediator between God and man.* The primordial relation of friendship between God and man, when God walked with men and loved them, was ruptured by the sin of our first parents. A great gulf opened between God and man; where love once reigned, enmity now held sway. And this gulf was constantly widened by the countless sins which the descendants of Adam added to that first sin. This fallen and as yet unredeemed race was compared by St. Augustine to a slimy stream which became ever slimier as it flowed through filthy channels away from God toward hell.

Yet the mercy of God prevailed over the rigor of His, justice. God determined to make it again possible for men to love Him, and to do this in a most delicate manner, one which would not derogate from the dignity of man. He: gave men a Mediator through whom they would be able to atone for their infidelity and become once more friends of God. He might have pardoned sin without mediation, but that would have been a pure gift of grace to which men would have contributed nothing

to rehabilitate the primordial relation of friendship. Hence, God appointed a mediator between God and man so that men might atone for their sins through Him and so make amends for the past. This mediator is our Saviour, the God-man Jesus Christ. "One mediator between God and man, Himself man, Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 2:5). As God He shared the nature of the Father; as man He shares our human nature; hence, He is a mediator between God and man at enmity with God.

It is essential that a mediator occupy a position midway between both adversaries and seek to reconcile them. Hence God, as God, cannot be mediator, since He is the one whom sinful man has antagonized, and no one can mediate with himself; for this another is necessary, as St. Paul expressly tells us (cf. Gal. 3:20). This other is the man Christ Jesus, Christ according to His human nature.

He is a man of the race of Adam, but untouched by the sin of Adam: entirely pure, holy, and in no need of redemption. Hence, He was able to perform a work altogether pleasing to God for His brothers in the flesh as a satisfaction for their sins; and because He is at the same time

a divine person, this satisfaction was of infinite value in the sight of God and was sufficient to counterbalance and atone for the sins of the whole world.

What was this satisfactory act through which Christ obtained for us once more the grace and friendship of God? It was indeed His bitter Passion and Death together with all the other good works He performed during His life on earth. But the soul of all these works was His love of God which spurred Him on to do and to suffer all these things, because they were pleasing to God. "But . . . that the world may know that I love the Father: and that I do as the Father has commanded Me" (Jn. 14:31).

Never did man love God as the Sacred Heart of Jesus loved Him. And more, if we imagine the love of all the angels and saints and even of the Blessed Virgin Mary united into one great love of God, this would be but a tiny spark when compared with the love which burns in the Heart of Jesus. And the reason for this is that men have received each grace and virtue from the fullness of the Saviour, as St. John testifies (cf. Jn. 1:16); and that the angels, as St. Paul teaches, are, when compared with Christ, but unworthy

servants who must fall down before Him in adoration (cf. Heb. 1:6 ff.). Now, since love is the highest spiritual good (cf. 1 Cor. 13), the love of God which fills the heart of Christ must surpass that of all the angels in the same degree in which He surpasses them, that is infinitely.

Now, can the heavenly Father refuse even a single request to that heart which loves Him more than all other creatures love Him? Impossible! Christ addresses His heavenly Father in these words: "I knew that Thou always hearest me" (John 11:42). The prayer of Jesus Christ, the High Priest of the New Testament, is heard because of reverence (cf. Heb. 5:7), and because of His loving self-surrender to His heavenly Father. The love of Christ is all-powerful with God with Whom it intercedes.

The love of the Saviour is omnipotent also with respect to man for whom it intercedes. For us pilgrims on earth Christ is not yet a judge, but only a redeemer (cf. Jn. 12:47). Love is the power which dwells and operates in the heart of Jesus. When St. Paul says that God's love impels us (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14), he speaks only of a spark of that immense fire which burns in the

heart of Jesus. The Sacred Heart of Jesus, from the first moment of Its being, was consumed by a single desire — the desire to bestow His gifts on all men. Love for us is the potent force which continually compels our Saviour to shower His blessings upon us. Let us try to realize this fact: Our Saviour is mediator between God and man. Because of His love for God He obtains from Him whatever He wishes; because of His love for men He desires for them all that is good and salutary. Is not our Saviour, then, an omnipotent Friend in virtue of such love?

Recall how the Apostle boldly challenges the world and asks if it can prevail against such love. Who will condemn us? Christ Jesus died for us; for us He rose again from the dead; He is seated at the right hand of the Most High and intercedes for us. What can separate us from His love? (C Rom. 8:34, 35.) He has loved me and delivered Himself for me (cf. Gal. 2:20). In all justice our Saviour could address these words to St. Margaret Mary: "Behold this heart, which has loved men so much that it spared no pains, but exhaust and consumed itself to prove to men its love."

3. *What must we do in order to*

participate in the effect of this Omnipotent Love? We must be prepared to accept it. Graces are not forced upon us. Again and again our Saviour made it clear that our relation to Him depends on our own free will: "If thou wilt be My disciple," "if thou wilt follow Me," "if thou wilt enter the Kingdom of Heaven," "if thou wilt be perfect." The words He addressed to Jerusalem, He also addresses to all those who do not receive His graces: "I would, ... but you would not (cf. Mt. 23:37).

Indifference to the gifts of God incapacitates us for the reception. We must desire them earnestly, we must hunger and thirst for them. "He hath filled the hungry with good things" the Blessed Virgin sang in the Magnificat. "If any one thirst, let him come to Me and drink," said our Saviour (*Jn.* 7:37). And again: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst for justice: for they shall be satisfied" (Mt. 5:6). But over those who are sated with material goods and sensual gratifications, He pronounces the woe: "Woe to you who are filled: for you shall hunger" (Lk. 6:25). It is a just punishment for such base disdain of the heavenly banquet that none of those invited will be admitted to

the banquet of eternal bliss. In like manner those who carelessly say of the devotion to the Sacred Heart: "That is not for me, it does not suit me," rob themselves of a share of those wonderful graces which our Saviour has prepared for us in it.

By means of this devotion, our Saviour desires to exercise the omnipotence of His love for us, and to direct into our souls streams of grace from the infinite sea of the Godhead. But of what avail is this, if our heart is filled with earthly longings and desires? "You cannot serve two masters," says our Lord, "you cannot serve God and mammon, that is, earthly treasures. If your eye is fixed upon one master, then you neglect the other" (cf. Mt. 6:24). And St. James, the Apostle, writes: "The friendship of this world is enmity with God" (*Jas.* 4:4). We need not attempt to make the impossible possible, to be at one and the same time children of God and children of this world. If our divine Friend is to work miracles of His omnipotent love in us, we must firmly say with St. Paul: "The world is crucified to me" (*Gal.* 6:14); the world, God's adversary, is dead for me, rejected; I live only for Christ

that He may live in me.”

As to the objection: If this is a condition for the blessings of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, then it is a devotion for souls of the stature of a St. Paul, for souls that have already attained to a high degree of perfection. By no means! Our Saviour expressly declared that by means of this devotion He wished to convert sinners, and to lead the imperfect to perfection. What He does demand, however, is an earnest, honest desire for improvement; and what He condemns is intentional perseverance in sin and imperfection. Certainly this devotion will not transform us instantaneously from sinful, weak men into saints worthy of canonization; nevertheless,

if we persevere in the practice of this devotion, we shall make constant progress, and the omnipotent love of our Saviour will bring us to the degree of perfection and happiness which He has destined for us. Perhaps He will hide from us until the end of our lives the great things that He works in our souls through this devotion. For it is better for most men to remain ignorant of the degree of sanctity they may really have attained so that they may humbly consider themselves still beginners and strive to advance. As long as a person makes an effort to please our Saviour, he may confidently call on His love and He will answer: “Behold, here I am.”

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