

First. Sunday in Advent; Romans 13:11-14

And second Sunday in Advent; Romans 15:4-13

AN EXHORTATION TO GOOD WORKS.

1. This epistle lesson treats not of faith, but of its fruits, or works. It teaches how a Christian should conduct himself outwardly in his relations to other men upon earth. But how we should walk in the Spirit before God, comes under the head of faith. Of faith Paul treats comprehensively and in apostolic manner in the chapters preceding this text. A close consideration of our passage shows it to be not didactic; rather it is meant to incite, to exhort, urge and arouse souls already aware of their duty. Paul in Romans 12, 7-8 devotes the office of the ministry to two things, doctrine and exhortation. The doctrinal part consists in preaching truths not generally known; in instructing and enlightening the people. Exhortation is inciting and urging to duties already well understood. Necessarily both obligations claim the attention of the minister, and hence Paul takes up both.

2. For the sake of effect and emphasis the apostle in his admonition employs pleasing figures and makes an eloquent appeal. He introduces certain words – "Armor," "work," "sleep," "awake," "darkness," "light," "day," "night" – which are purely figurative, intended to convey other than a literal and native meaning. He has no reference here to the things they ordinarily stand for. The words are employed as similes, to help us grasp the spiritual thought. The meaning is: Since for sake of temporal gain men rise from sleep, put aside the things of darkness and take up the day's work when night has given place to morning, how much greater the necessity for us to awake from our spiritual sleep, to cast off the things of darkness and enter upon the works of light, since our night has passed and our day breaks.

3. "*Sleep*" here stands for the works of wickedness and unbelief. For sleep is properly incident to the night time; and then, too, the explanation is given in the added words: "*Let us cast off the works of darkness.*" Similarly in the thought of awakening and rising are suggested the works of faith and piety. Rising from sleep is naturally an event of the morning. Relative to the same conception are Paul's words in First Thessalonians 5, 4-10: "*But ye, brethren, are not in darkness . . . ye are all sons of light, and sons of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that are drunken are*

drunken in the night. But let us, since we are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God appointed us not unto wrath, but unto the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him."

4. Paul, of course, is here not enjoining against physical sleep. His contrasting figures of sleep and wakefulness are used as illustrations of spiritual lethargy and activity – the godly and the ungodly life. In short, his conception here of rising out of sleep is the same as that expressed in his declaration (Tit 2, 11-13): "For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." That which in the passage just quoted is called "*denying ungodliness and worldly lusts,*" is here in our text described as a rising from sleep; and the "sober, righteous, godly life" is the waking and the putting on the armor of light; while the appearing of grace is the day and the light, as we shall hear.

5. Now, note the analogy between natural and spiritual sleep. The sleeper sees nothing about him; he is not sensitive to any of earth's realities. In the midst of them he lies as one dead, useless; as without power or purpose. Though having life in himself he is practically dead to all outside. Moreover, his mind is occupied, not with realities, but with dreams, wherein he beholds mere images; vain forms, of the real; and he is foolish enough to think them true. But when he wakes, these illusions or dreams vanish. Then he begins to occupy himself with realities; phantoms are discarded.

6. So it is in the spiritual life. The ungodly individual sleeps. He is in a sense dead in the sight of God. He does not recognize – is not sensitive to – the real spiritual blessings extended him through the Gospel; he regards them as valueless. For these blessings are only to be recognized by the believing heart; they are concealed from the natural man. The ungodly individual is occupied with temporal, transitory things, such as luxury and honor, which are to eternal life and joy as dream images are to flesh-and-blood creatures. When the unbeliever awakes to faith, the transitory things of earth will pass from his contemplation, and their futility will appear. In relation to this subject Psalm 76, 5, reads: "The stouthearted are made a spoil, they have slept their sleep; and none of the men of might have found their hands." And Psalm 73, 20: "As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou wilt despise their image." Also Isaiah 29, 8: "*And it shall be as when a hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite: so shall the multitude of all the nations be, that fight against mount Zion.*" But is it not showing altogether too much contempt for worldly power, wealth, pleasure and honor to compare them to dreams – to dream images? Who has courage to declare kings and princes, wealth, pleasure and

power but creations of a dream, in the face of the mad rage of earth after such things? The reason for such conduct is failure to rise from sleep and by faith behold the light.

"For now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed."

7. What do these words imply? Did we believe before, or have we now ceased to believe? Right here we must know that, as Paul in Romans 1, 2-3 says, God through his prophets promised in the holy Scriptures the Gospel of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom all the world was to be saved. The word to Abraham reads: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Gen 22, 18. The blessing here promised to the patriarch, in his seed, is simply that grace and salvation in Christ which the Gospel presents to the whole world, as Paul declares in the fourth chapter of Romans and the fourth of Galatians. For Christ is the seed of Abraham, his own flesh and blood, and in Christ all believing inquirers will be blessed.

8. This promise to the patriarch was later more minutely set forth and more widely circulated by the prophets. All of them wrote of the advent of Christ, and his grace and Gospel, as Peter in Acts 3, 18-24 says: The divine promise was believed by the saints prior to the birth of Christ; thus, through the coming Messiah they were preserved and saved by faith. Christ himself (Luk 16, 22) pictures the promise under the figure of Abraham's bosom, into which all saints, from the time of Abraham to Christ's time, were gathered. Thus is explained Paul's declaration, *"Now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed."* He means practically: *"The promise of God to Abraham is not a thing for future fulfilment; it is already fulfilled. Christ is come. The Gospel has been revealed and the blessing distributed throughout the world. All that we waited for in the promise, believing, is here."* The sentence has reference to the spiritual day Paul later speaks of – the rising light of the Gospel; as we shall hear.

9. But faith is not abolished in the fulfilment of the promise; rather it is established. As they of former time believed in the future fulfilment, we believe now in the completed fulfilment. Faith, in the two instances, is essentially the same, but one belief succeeds the other as fulfilment succeeds promise. For in both cases faith is based on the seed of Abraham; that is, on Christ. In one instance it precedes his advent and in the other follows. He who would now, like the Jews, believe in a Christ yet to come, as if the promise were still unfulfilled, would be condemned. For he would make God a liar in holding that his word is unredeemed, contrary to fact. Were the promise not fulfilled, our salvation would still be far off; we would have to wait its future accomplishment.

10. Having in mind faith under these two conditions, Paul asserts in Romans 1, 17: "In the Gospel is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith." What is meant by the phrase "from faith unto faith"? Simply that we must now believe not only in the promise but in its past fulfilment. For though the faith of the fathers is one with our faith, they trusting in a Christ to come and we in a Christ revealed, yet the Gospel leads from

the former faith to the latter. It is now necessary to believe not only the promise, but also its fulfilment. Abraham and the ancients were not called upon to believe in accomplished fulfilment, though they had the same Christ with us. There is one faith, one spirit, one Christ, one community of saints; but they preceded, while we come after, Christ.

11. Thus we – the fathers and ourselves – have had and still have a common faith in the one Christ, but under different conditions. Because of this common faith in the Messiah, we speak of their act of faith as our own, notwithstanding we were not alive in their day. And similarly, when they make mention of hearing, seeing and believing Christ, the reference is to ourselves, in whose day they live not. David says (Ps 8, 3): "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers," that is, the apostles. Yet David did not live to see their day. And (Ps 9, 2): "I will be glad and exult in thee; I will sing praise to thy name, O Thou Most High." And there are many similar passages where one individual speaks in the person of another in consequence of a common faith whereby believers unite in Christ as one body.

12. Paul's statement "Now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed" cannot be understood to refer to nearness of possession. For the fathers had the same faith and the same Christ with us, and Christ was equally near to them. Hebrews 13, 8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever." That is, Christ exists from the beginning of the world to all time, and through him and in him all are preserved. To him of strongest faith Christ is nearest; and from him who least believes, is salvation farthest, so far as personal possession of it goes. Paul's reference here is to nearness of the revelation of salvation. When Christ came the promise was fulfilled. The Gospel was revealed to the world. Through Christ's coming it was publicly preached to all men. In recognition of these things, the apostle says: "Salvation is nearer to us" than when unrevealed and unfulfilled in the promise. In Titus 2, 11, it is said: "For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation." In other words, God's grace is revealed and publicly proclaimed; though the saints who lived prior to its manifestation nevertheless possessed it.

13. So the Scriptures teach the coming of Christ, notwithstanding he was already present to the fathers. However, he was not publicly proclaimed to mankind until after his resurrection from the dead. It is of this coming in the Gospel the Scriptures for the most part teach. Incident to this revelation he came in human form. The taking upon himself of humanity would have profited no one had it not meant the proclamation of the Gospel. The Gospel was to present him to the whole world, revealing the fact that he became man for the sake of imparting the blessing to all who, accepting the Gospel, should believe in him. Paul tells us (Rom 1, 2) the Gospel was promised of God; from which we may infer God placed more emphasis upon the Gospel, the public revelation of Christ through the Word, than upon his physical birth, his advent in human form. God's purpose was concerning the Gospel and our faith, and he permitted his Son to assume humanity for the

sake of making possible the preaching of the Gospel of Christ; that through the revealed Word salvation in Christ might be brought near- might come – to all the world.

14. Some have presented four different forms of Christ's advent, adapted to the four Sundays in Advent. But the most vital form of his coming, that upon which all efficacy depends, the coming to which Paul here refers, they have failed to recognize. They know not what constitutes the Gospel, nor for what purpose it was given. Despite their much talk about the advent of Christ, they thrust him from us farther than heaven is from earth. How can Christ profit us unless he be embraced by faith? But how can he be embraced by faith where the Gospel is not preached?

THE DAY OF GRACE.

"The night is far spent, and the day is at hand."

15. This is equivalent to saying "salvation is near to us." By the word "day" Paul means the Gospel; the Gospel is like day in that it enlightens the heart or soul. Now, day having broken, salvation is near to us. In other words, Christ and his grace, promised to Abraham, are now revealed; they are preached in all the world, enlightening mankind, awakening us from sleep and making manifest the true, eternal blessings, that we may occupy ourselves with the Gospel of Christ and walk honorably in the day. By the word "*night*" we are to understand all doctrines apart from the Gospel. For there is no other saving doctrine; all else is night and darkness.

16. Notice carefully Paul's words. He designates the most beautiful and vivifying time of the day—the delightful, joyous dawn, the hour of sunrise. Then the night has passed and the day broken. In response to the morning dawn, birds sing, beasts arouse themselves and all humanity arises. At daybreak, when the sky is red in the east, the world is apparently new and all things reanimated, In many places in the Scriptures, the comforting, vivifying preaching of the Gospel is compared to the morning dawn, to the rising of the sun; sometimes the figure is implied and sometimes plainly expressed, as here where Paul styles the Gospel the breaking day. Again, Psalm 110, 3: "Thy people offer themselves willingly in the day of thy power, in holy array: out of the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy youth." Here the Gospel is plainly denominated the womb of the morning, the day of Christ's power, wherein, as the dew is born of the morning, we are conceived and born children of Christ; and by no work of man, but from heaven and through the Holy Spirit's grace.

17. This Gospel day is produced by the glorious Sun Jesus Christ. Hence Malachi calls him the Sun of Righteousness, saying, "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in its wings." Mal. 4, 2. All believers in Christ receive the light of his grace, and righteousness, and shall rejoice in the shelter of his wings. Again in Psalm 118, 24, we read: "*This is the day which Jehovah hath made; we will*

rejoice and be glad in it." The meaning is: The natural sun makes the natural day, but the Lord himself is the author of the spiritual day. Christ is the Sun, the source of the Gospel day. From him the Gospel brightness shines throughout the world. John 9, 5 reads: *"I am the light of the world."*

18. Psalm 19, 1 beautifully describes Christ the Sun, and the Gospel day: "The heavens declare the glory of God." As the natural heavens bring the sun and the day, and the sun is in the heavens, so the apostles in their preaching possess and bring to us the real Sun, Christ. The Psalm continues: "In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strongman to run his course. His going forth is from the end of the heavens, and his circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." It all refers to the beautiful daybreak of the Gospel. Scripture sublimely exalts the Gospel day, for it is the source of life, joy, pleasure and energy, and brings all good. Hence the name "Gospel" - joyful news.

19. Who can enumerate the things revealed to us by this day – by the Gospel? It teaches us everything – the nature of God, of ourselves, and what has been and is to be in regard to heaven, hell and earth, to angels and devils. It enables us to know how to conduct ourselves in relation to these – whence we are and whither we go. But, being deceived by the devil, we forsake the light of day and seek to find truth among philosophers and heathen totally ignorant of such matters. In permitting ourselves to be blinded by human doctrines, we return to the night. Whatsoever is not the Gospel day surely cannot be light. Otherwise Paul, and in fact all Scripture, would not urge that day upon us and pronounce everything else night.

20. Our disposition to run counter to the perfectly plain teachings of Scripture and seek inferior light, when the Lord declares himself the Light and Sun of the world, must result from our having incurred the displeasure of Providence. Had we no other evidence that the high schools of the Pope are the devil's abominable fostering-places of harlots and knaves, the fact is amply plain in the way they shamelessly introduce and extol Aristotle, the inferior light, exercising themselves in him more than in Christ; rather they exercise themselves wholly in Aristotle and not at all in Christ.

"Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light."

21. As Christ is the Sun and the Gospel is the day, so faith is the light, or the seeing and watching on that day. We are not profited by the shining of the sun, and the day it produces, if our eyes fail to perceive its light. Similarly, though the Gospel is revealed, and proclaims Christ to the world, it enlightens none but those who receive it, who have risen from sleep through the agency of the light of faith. They who sleep are not affected by the sun and the day; they receive no light therefrom, and see as little as if there were neither sun nor day. It is to our day Paul refers when he says: "Dear brethren, knowing the season, that already it is time for you to awake out of sleep, etc." Though the hour is one of spiritual opportunity, it has been revealed in secular time, and is daily being revealed. In the light of our spiritual knowledge we are to rise from sleep and lay aside

the works of darkness. Thus it is plain Paul is not addressing unbelievers. As before said, he is not here teaching the doctrine of faith, but its works and fruits. He tells the Romans they know the time is at hand, that the night is past and the day has broken.

22. Do you ask, Why this passage to believers? As already stated, preaching is twofold in character: it may teach or it may incite and exhort. No one ever gets to the point of knowledge where it is not necessary to admonish him – continually to urge him – to new reflections upon what he already knows; for there is danger of his untiring enemies the devil, the world and the flesh – wearying him and causing him to become negligent, and ultimately lulling him to sleep. Peter says (1 Pet 5, 8): "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." In consequence of this fact, he says: "Be sober, be watchful." Similarly Paul's thought here is that since the devil, the world and the flesh cease not to assail us, there should be continuous exhorting and impelling to vigilance and activity. Hence the Holy Spirit is called the Paraclete, the Comforter or Helper, who incites and urges to good.

23. Hence Paul's appropriate choice of words. Not the works of darkness but the works of light he terms "armor." And why "armor" rather than "works"? Doubtless to teach that only at the cost of conflicts, pain, labor and danger will the truly watchful and godly life be maintained; for these three powerful enemies, the devil, the world and the flesh, unceasingly oppose us day and night. Hence Job (ch 7, 1) regards the life of man on earth as a life of trial and warfare.

Now, it is no easy thing to stand always in battle array during the whole of life. Good trumpets and bugles are necessary preaching and exhortation of the sort to enable us valiantly to maintain our position in battle. Good works are armor: evil works are not; unless, indeed, we submit and give them control over us. Then they likewise become armor. Paul says, "Neither present your members unto sin as instruments of unrighteousness" (Rom 6, 13), meaning: Let not the works of darkness get such control of you as to render your members weapons of unrighteousness.

24. Now, as already made plain, the word "light" here carries the thought of "faith." The light of faith, in the Gospel day, shines from Christ the Sun into our hearts. The armor of light, then, is simply the works of faith. On the other hand, "darkness" is unbelief; it reigns in the absence of the Gospel and of Christ, through the instrumentality of the doctrines of men-of human reason-instigated by the devil. The "works of darkness" are, therefore, the "works of unbelief." As Christ is Lord and Ruler in the realm of that illuminating faith, so, as Paul says (Eph 6, 12), the devil is ruler of this darkness; that is, over unbelievers. For he says again (2 Cor 4, 3-4): "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled in them that perish: in whom the god of this world [that is, the devil] hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ . . . should not dawn upon them." The character of the two kinds of works, however, will be discussed later.

"Let us walk, becomingly (honestly), as in the day."

25. Works of darkness are not wrought in the day. Fear of being shamed before men makes one conduct himself honorably. The proverbial expression "shameless night" is a true one. Works we are ashamed to perform in the day are wrought in the night. The day, being shamefaced, constrains us to walk honorably. A Christian should so live that he need never be ashamed of the character of his works, though they be revealed to all the world. He whose life and conduct are such as to make him unwilling his deeds should be manifest to everyone, certainly does not live in a Christian manner. In this connection Christ says: "For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reprov'd. But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God, 1 Jn 3, 20-21.

26. So you see the urgent necessity for inciting and exhorting to be vigilant and to put on the armor of light. How many Christians now could endure the revelation of all their works to the light of day? What kind of Christian life do we hypocrites lead if we cannot endure the exposure of our conduct before men, when it is now exposed to God, his angels and creatures, and on the last day shall be revealed to all? A Christian ought to live as he would be found in the last day before all men. *"Walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." Eph 5, 9. "Take thought for things honorable,"* not only in the sight of God, but also *"in the sight of all men."* **Rom 12, 17.** *"For our glorying is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom . . . we behaved ourselves in the world." 2 Cor 1, 12.*

27. But such a life certainly cannot be maintained in the absence of faith, when faith itself – vigilant, active, valiant faith – has enough to do to remain constant, sleepless and unwearied. Essential as it is that doctrine be preached to the illiterate, it is just as essential to exhort the learned not to fall from their incipient right living, under the assaults of raging flesh, subtle world and treacherous devil.

"Not in revelling and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and jealousy."

28. Here Paul enumerates certain works of darkness. In the beginning of the discourse he alludes to one as "sleep." In First Thessalonians 5, 6, it is written: "Let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober." Not that the apostle warns against physical sleep; he means spiritual sleep – unbelief, productive of the works of darkness. Yet physical sleep may likewise be an evil work when indulged in from lust and revelling, through indolence and excessive inebriety, to the obstruction of light and the weakening of the armor of light. These six works of darkness include all others, such as are enumerated in Galatians 5, 19-21, and Colossians 3, 5 and 8. We will divide them into two general classes, the right hand class and the left hand class. Upon the right are arrayed these four

– revelling, drunkenness, chambering and wantonness; on the left, strife and jealousy. For scripturally, the left side signifies adversity and its attendant evils – wrath, jealousy, and so on. The right side stands for prosperity and its results rioting, drunkenness, lust, indolence, and the like.

29. Plainly, then, Paul means to include under the two mentioned works of darkness – strife and jealousy – all of similar character. For instance, the things enumerated in Ephesians 4, 31, which says: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and railing, be put away from you, with all malice"; and again in Galatians 5, 19-21, reading: "Now the works of the flesh are . . . enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties, envyings, drunkenness, revellings and such like." In short, "strife and jealousy" here stand for innumerable evils resulting from wrath, be it in word or deed.

30. Likewise under the four vices – revelling, drunkenness, indolence and lewdness – the apostle includes all the vices of unchastity in word or deed, things none would wish to enumerate. The six works mentioned suffice to teach that he who lives in the darkness of unbelief does not keep himself pure in his neighbor's sight, but is immoderate in all his conduct, toward himself and toward his fellow-man. Further comment on these words is unnecessary. Everyone knows the meaning of "revelling and drunkenness" – excessive eating and drinking, more for the gratification of appetite than for nourishment of the body. Again, it is not hard to understand the reference to idleness in bed-chambers, to lewdness and unchastity. The apostle's words stand for the indulgence of the lusts and appetites of the flesh: excessive sleeping and indolence; every form of unchastity and sensuality practiced by the satiated, indolent and stupid, in daytime or nighttime, in retirement or elsewhere, privately or publicly-vices that seek material darkness and secret places. These vices Paul terms "chambering and wantonness." And the meaning of "strife" and of "jealousy" is generally understood.

PUT ON CHRIST, THE ARMOR OF LIGHT.

"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."

31. In this admonition to put on Christ, Paul briefly prescribes all the armor of light. Christ is "put on" in two ways. First, we may clothe ourselves with his virtues. This is effected through the faith that relies on the fact of Christ having in his death accomplished all for us. For not our righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ, reconciled us to God and redeemed us from sin. This manner of putting on Christ is treated of in the doctrine concerning faith; it gives Christ *to us as a gift and a pledge*. *Relative to this topic more will be said in the epistle for New Year's day, Galatians 3, 27:*

"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ."

32. Secondly, Christ being our example and pattern, whom we are to follow and copy, clothing ourselves in the virtuous garment of his walk, Paul fittingly says we should "put on" Christ. As expressed in First Corinthians 15, 49: *"As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly."* And again (Eph 4, 22-24): *"That ye put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, that waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit; and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth."*

33. Now, in Christ we behold only the true armor of light. No gormandizing or drunkenness is here; nothing but fasting, moderation, and restraint of the flesh, incident to labor, exertion, preaching, praying and doing good to mankind. No indolence, apathy or unchastity exists, but true discipline, purity, vigilance, early rising. The fields are couch for him who has neither house, chamber nor bed. With him is no wrath, strife or envying; rather utter goodness, love, mercy, patience. Paul presents Christ the example in a few words where he says (Col 3, 12- 15): "Put on therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any, even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye: and above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness, and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to the which also ye were called in one body; and be ye thankful." Again, in Philippians 2, 5-8, after commanding his flock to love and serve one another, he presents as an example the same Christ who became servant unto us. He says: *"Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man."*

34. Now, the armor of light is, briefly, the good works opposed to gluttony, drunkenness, licentiousness; to indolence, strife and envying: such as fasting, watchfulness, prayer, labor, chastity, modesty, temperance, goodness, endurance of hunger and thirst, of cold and heat. Not to employ my own words, let us hear Paul's enumeration of good works in Galatians 5, 22- 23: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control." But he makes a still more comprehensive count in Second Corinthians 6, 1-10: "We entreat also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain (for he saith, At an acceptable time I hearkened unto thee, and in a day of salvation did I succor thee: behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation) [in other words, For now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed, and now is the time to awake out of sleep]: giving no occasion of stumbling in anything, that our ministration be not blamed; but in everything commending ourselves, as ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings; in pureness, in knowledge, in longsuffering, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in love unfeigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and

on the left, by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." What a rich stream of eloquence flows from Paul's lips! He makes plain enough in what consists the armor of light on the left hand and on the right. To practice these good works is truly putting on Jesus Christ.

35. It is a very beautiful feature in this passage that it presents the very highest example, the Lord himself, when it says, *"Put ye on the Lord."* Here is a strong incentive. For the individual who can see his master fasting, laboring, watching, enduring hunger and fatigue, while he himself feasts, idles, sleeps, and lives in luxury, must be a scoundrel. What master could tolerate such conduct in a servant? Or what servant would dare attempt such things? We can but blush with shame when we behold our unlikeness to Christ.

36. Who can influence to action him who refuses to be warmed and aroused by the example of Christ himself? What is to be accomplished by the rustling of leaves and the sound of words when the thunder-clap of Christ's example fails to move us? Paul was particular to add the word "Lord," saying, *"Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."* As if to say: *"Ye servants, think not yourselves great and exalted. Look upon your Lord, who, though under no obligation, denied himself."*

"And make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."

37. Paul here briefly notices two different provisions for the flesh. One is supplying its natural wants-furnishing the body with food and raiment necessary to sustain life and vigor; guarding against enfeebling it and unfitting it for labor by too much restraint.

38. The other provision is a sinful one, the gratification of the lusts and inordinate appetites. This Paul here forbids. It is conducive to works of darkness. The flesh must be restrained and made subservient to the spirit. It must not dismount its master, but carry him if necessary. Sirach (ch 33, 24) says: "Fodder, a wand, and burdens are for the ass; and bread, correction, and work for a servant." He does not say the animal is to be mistreated or maimed; nor does he say the servant is to be abused or imprisoned. Thus to the body pertains subjection, labor and whatever is essential to its proper welfare. Paul says of himself: "I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage [subjection]." 1 Cor 9, 27. He does not say he brings his body to illness or death, but makes it serve in submission to the spirit.

39. Paul adds this last admonition for the sake of two classes of people. One class is represented by them who make natural necessity an excuse to indulge their lusts and gratify their desires. Because of humanity's proneness to such error, many saints, deploring the sin, have often in the attempt to resist it, unduly restrained their bodies. So

subtle and deceptive is nature in the matter of its demands and its lusts, no man can wholly handle it; he must live this life in insecurity and concern. The other class is represented by the blind saints who imagine the kingdom of God and his righteousness are dependent upon the particular meat and drink, clothing and couch, of their own choice. They look no farther than at their individual work in this respect, and fancy that in fasting until the brain is disordered, the stomach deranged or the body emaciated, they have done well. Upon this subject Paul says (I Cor 8, 8): "Food will not commend us to God; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse; nor, if we eat, are we the better." Again (Col 2, 18-23): "*Let no man rob you of your prize by a voluntary humility and worshipping of the angels . . . which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and severity to the body; but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh.*"

40. Gerson commended the Carthusians for not eating meat, even though debility made meat a necessity. He would deny it even at the cost of life. Thus was the great man deceived by this superstitious, angelic spirituality. What if God judges its votaries as murderers of themselves? Indeed, no orders, statutes or vows contrary to the command of God can rightfully be made; and if made they would profit no more than would a vow to break one's marriage contract. Certainly God has here in the words of Paul forbidden such destruction of our own bodies. It is our duty to allow the body all necessary food, whether wine, meat, eggs or anything else; whether the time be Friday, Sunday, in Lent or after the feast of Easter; regardless of all orders, traditions and vows, and of the Pope. No prohibition contrary to God's command can avail, though made by the angels even.

41. This wretched folly of vows has its rise in darkness and blindness; the looking upon mere works and trusting to be saved by the number and magnitude of them. Paul would make of works "armor of light," and employ them to overcome the works of darkness. Thus far, then, and no farther, should fasting, vigilance and exertion be practiced. Before God it matters not at all whether you eat fish or meat, drink water or wine, wear red or green, do this or that. All foods are good creations of God and to be used. Only take heed to be temperate in appropriating them and to abstain when it is necessary to the conquest of the works of darkness. It is impossible to lay down a common rule of abstinence, for all bodies are not constituted alike. One needs more, another less. Everyone must judge for himself, and must care for his body according to the advice of Paul: "*Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.*" Had there been any other rule for us, Paul would not have omitted it here.

42. Hence, you see, the ecclesiastical traditions that flatly forbid the eating of meat are contrary to the Gospel. Paul predicts their appearance in First Timothy 4, 1-3, where he says: "But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron; forbidding to

marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God created to be received with thanksgiving." That these words have reference to ecclesiastical orders and those of the entire Papacy, no one can deny. They are plain. Hence the nature of papistical works is manifest.

43. Also you will note here Paul does not sanction the fanatical devotion of certain effeminate saints who set apart to themselves particular days for fasting, as a special service to God, one for this saint, another for that. These are all blind paths, leading us to base our blessings on works. Without distinction of days and meats, our lives should be temperate and sober throughout. If good works are to be our armor of light, and if the entire life is to be pure and chaste, we must never lay off the arms of defense, but always be found sober, temperate, vigilant, energetic. These fanatical saints, however, fast one day on bread and water and then eat and drink to excess every day for one-fourth of the year. Again, some fast from food in the evening but drink immoderately. And who can mention all the folly and works of darkness originating from regarding works for the sake of the efforts themselves and not for the purpose they serve. Men convert the armor of good works into a mirror, fasting without knowing the reason for abstinence. They are like those who bear a sword merely to look at, and when assailed do not use it. This is enough on today's epistle lesson.



First Page



Second Sunday in Advent

Romans 15:4-13

EXHORTATION TO BEAR WITH THE WEAK

1. It is quite probable the individual who arranged this epistle text knew little about Paul. He includes in the selection more than pertains to the theme. The beginning – "Whatsoever things were written," etc. – relates to what goes before. The text should have begun with the words, "Now the God of patience." It is necessary to a clear and methodical understanding of the passage that we remember this: the Romans to whom the apostle writes were converts to Christianity from both Jews and gentiles. At that time there were many Jews living in all countries, and especially were they found in Rome, as we learn from the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. Having properly inculcated the doctrines of faith and of good works all through the epistle, the apostle in conclusion introduces several exhortations to the Romans to preserve harmony in faith and in good works, removing what might be productive of discord and subversive to unity of the Spirit. There are two difficulties which today as in all times strongly militate against the unity of the Spirit, against faith and good works. They must here be carefully noted and described.

2. The first difficulty was this: Some Jewish converts feared that deviating from former customs would be committing sin. Notwithstanding they had been taught the New Testament freedom regarding meats, days, clothing, vessels, persons, conditions, customs; that only faith renders us righteous in God's sight; and that the restrictions of the Law concerning the eating of flesh and fish, concerning holidays, places, vessels, were entirely abolished; yet so completely fettered by old customs were their weak consciences and imperfect faith, they could not exercise such liberties. Again, both Jews and gentiles, in consequence of this same disordered idea, could not venture to eat of bread and meat offered to idols by unbelievers, though sold in the public market. They imagined that to eat thereof was to honor the idols and deny Christ, when in fact the act had no significance. For all kinds of food are clean, and good creatures of God, whether in the hands of heathen or Christians, whether offered to God or to the devil.

3. The second difficulty was this: They of better understanding and stronger faith had not sufficient regard for the weak, but exercised their liberty indiscreetly, offending the weak by eating and drinking without discrimination whatever was set before them. Not that there was any wrong in the act so far as the food was concerned; the wrong consisted in their indiscretion in causing the weak to err through the act. For the latter, beholding, could neither agree with them nor dissent from them. Had they thought to consent, their weak consciences would have interposed, protesting, *"It is sinful; do it not."* Had they thought to dissent, conscience again would have interposed, objecting, *"You are not Christians for you do not as other Christians do; your faith must be false."* Thus they could neither do one thing nor the other without opposing conscience. Now, to violate conscience is equivalent to violating faith, and is a grievous sin.

4. Paul here teaches us to have patience and bear with the weak, and not to conduct ourselves carelessly before them; rather to agree with them – become weak with them – until they grow stronger in the faith and recognize their liberty. We are to guard against creating discord in faith over the subject of meats and drinks or any other temporal thing. The apostle, however, discriminates upon this point, for in general his teaching recognizes two classes of individuals to be considered in the matter. One consists of those weak in the faith, of whom we have already spoken. It is to this class alone Paul here refers. They are good, pious, common people, willingly doing better when they have the knowledge or power. They are not tenacious of their opinions; the trouble lies altogether in weakness of conscience and lack of faith. They are unable to extricate themselves from prevailing doctrines and customs. The other class are obstinate. Not satisfied to enjoy liberty of conduct for themselves, they must enforce it upon others, constraining them to their own practices. They claim that because certain liberty is permissible, it must be enjoined. They will not listen to real truth in the matter of Christian liberty, but strive against it. They are to blame for the weakness of the first class. For their doctrine disregards the weak consciences and misleads them into the belief that certain conduct is essential. This domineering class delight in bringing simple consciences into subjection to their demands. Paul does not here refer to that manner of people; no, but he elsewhere teaches us to faithfully oppose them and always do the opposite. Titus 1.

5. The best rule to follow in such matters is the rule of love. You should hold the same attitude toward these two classes that you would toward a wolf and a sheep. Suppose a wolf were to wound almost fatally a sheep, and you were to proceed with rage against the sheep, declaring it to be wrong in being wounded, that it should be sound; and you were violently to compel it to follow the other sheep to the pasture and to the fold, giving it no special care; would not all men declare you inconsiderate? The sheep might well say: "Certainly it is wrong for me to be wounded, and unquestionably I ought to be sound; but direct your anger toward the inflicter of my wounds, and assist in my recovery." So should these Romans have done and have faithfully repelled the wolf-like teachers. At the same time, the consciences weakened and discouraged by false doctrines should have

received consideration. The Church at Rome ought not to have denounced nor ignored them, but rather to have carefully healed their spiritual disorder and ultimately eradicated the wrong doctrines, in patience bearing with their weak brethren lest they should cause them to err.

6. Now, the circumstance Paul here speaks of has long since passed, and the law of Moses concerning meats, drinks, apparel, place, and so on, is no longer pertinent; yet another has been introduced in its stead, causing even greater trouble, and Paul's doctrine an this point is more necessary now than then. There is today established by the Pope and the clergy a world-wide system of human devices in regard to meats and drinks, apparel and place, days and seasons, persons and orders, customs and performances, so elaborate that one can scarce eat a morsel, drink a drop, or open his eyes even, but there is a law concerning the act. Thus is our liberty usurped. Particularly is it true in convents and cloisters, where it is unanimously contended that we must be clothed and shorn in a certain way, must conduct ourselves by certain rules, and must not eat this meat, drink that drink, and so on, lest we sin by disobedience. There obedience to human doctrines has been exalted to the point of highest esteem. The monks and nuns regard it the foundation, the corner-stone, of their religion, and base upon it their souls' salvation.

7. No one will open his eyes to the fact that mere human devices and doctrines are ensnaring souls, weakening consciences, dissipating Christian liberty and faith, and replenishing hell. Wolves! wolves! How abominably, awfully, murderous, how harassing and destructive, are these things the world over! This matter of obedience to human doctrine has never been agitated sufficiently to discover weak consciences. No one has opposed in word or act the teachings harmful to them. Whosoever has deviated from the doctrines has been condemned, and denounced as an apostate, a roving monk, an abandoned Christian. Thus forcibly have the sheep not only been enfeebled, but driven into the jaws of the wolf. Oh, the wrath, the indignation, the displeasure, of the Divine Majesty!

8. If now, by the mercy of God, these papistical doctrines should be recognized as merely human, as false and assumed, things God has not commanded; and if some were to have courage enough to depart from custom in the matter of masses, prayers, garb, meats, and to maintain their Christian liberty according to the Gospel, the two classes referred to would take offense. The first, the Papists, would rant and rage, making loud outcry: "Our teachings must be observed! He who disregards them is a heretic, a heathen, a Jew, and disobedient to the Church." They would continue to cry "Obedience to the Church!" solely for the sake of retaining in fetters and spiritual death the consciences which, as they have been taught to do, regard their obedience as unto the Church, when in reality it is unto mere papistical knavery and satanic devices, things whereby many saints, even, have been misled and deceived; St. Francis, for instance, and others.

The second class – the weak – in the face of the others' outcry and of their own established custom, would err, being puzzled as to whose doctrine to accept, though sincerely desirous to follow the right. But whatever course they might take, conscience would oppose them. Should they essay to accept our Christian liberty, their own established custom and the outcry of the Papists would deter them. Their consciences bound by these two restraints, they would not dare deviate from the old way lest they oppose God. On the other hand, should they not accept our Christian liberty, they would again fear they were opposing the God we proclaim. Whither, then, shall flee the poor, weak conscience over whom Christ and the devil contend?

9. To this situation Paul's teaching appropriately applies. The doctrine of the devil and his Papists is wholly destitute of compassion. In violent rage it compels immediate retraction from our doctrine of liberty. It excommunicates and curses the offender, casting him down four thousand miles below hell, if he does not recant in the twinkling of an eye and renounce every letter and tittle of his belief. From the fact of the rage manifested, as well as from the fruit of papistical doctrine, we perceive who is its author. The teaching of Christ, however, does not so. It calls not for summary rejection of the individual who fails to quickly retract and readily desist when found to err in faith; notwithstanding there is more reason it should than in the case of papal teaching. Recognizing the weak and wounded condition of the offender, Christ's doctrine comes in a friendly way, teaching the real truth about human laws—that of Christian liberty. It is patient, bearing with him who does not immediately abandon his erroneous ways, and giving him time to learn to forsake them. It allows him to do the best he can, according to what he has been used to, until he is made whole and clearly perceives the truth.

10. Therefore, the Christian must on this point discriminate between the two classes mentioned. The weak should receive his kindly and patient instruction, but the roving, ranting kind are to meet with his earnest opposition. Let him teach and perform everything calculated to annoy and oppose the latter, and quietly omit whatever is pleasing to them, and let him honor their ban with a great easel-box. This is the consistent course of Christian love. It is the treatment every man desires for himself. Were any one of us misled by a weak conscience, he would desire a little time to retrieve instead of being precipitately cut off from the Church. He would like to be kindly instructed, to be borne with for a while and to be delivered from the wolves. Such is Christ's conduct toward us, and such does he desire our conduct toward one another to be.

11. The second cause of discord Paul also removes. There is, and always will be, among Christ's followers a class who are weak and sickly in good works, just as the first were defective in faith. We have, then, two kinds of invalid Christians – those affected inwardly, in faith and conscience; and those outwardly unsound, in works and deportment. Christ desires none of them to be rejected, but would have all received. He would give Christian love abundant opportunity to exercise itself, to heal its neighbors, to do them good and to bear with them, in matters inward and outward – in faith and

conduct. The weak in conduct are they who sometimes fall into open sin; or again they who are called in German "wunderliche Koepfe und Seltsame," people easily irritated or with other shortcomings which make it difficult to get along with them. Especially have we instances among husbands and wives, masters and servants, rulers and subjects.

12. Now, where Paul's Christian doctrine does not obtain, naturally each individual forgets the beam in his own eye and perceives only the mote in his neighbor's. One will not bear with the faults of the other; each requires perfection of his fellow. Hence they reflect upon each other's conduct. One resorts to this subterfuge, the other to that, to evade the harassing censure and displeasure of his neighbor. He who can, cuts the other's acquaintance, drops him, and then justifies himself with the excuse that his motive was love of righteousness; that he did not want to associate with wicked persons, but desired the company of only the good and godly like himself.

13. This evil holds sway chiefly in individuals ranking more or less high in the estimation of their fellows, who lead respectable lives and are particularly favored. These puff themselves up and put on airs. Whoever is not just like them is held in disgrace, in disparagement and contempt. Only themselves are worthy of admiration. But he who measures up to them, whose life is equally respectable-ah! he is righteous and a good friend; with him they can associate with perfect satisfaction to themselves as individuals who love only righteousness and the righteous, and hate nothing but wickedness and the wicked. They are not aware of the secret satanical pride in the inmost recesses of their hearts, which pride is the very reason they haughtily and meanly despise their neighbors for their imperfections.

14. Love of virtue and hatred of vice may spring from two different motives; one heathenish, the other Christian. Christ, too, is an enemy to sin and a friend to righteousness. Psalms 45, 7 says of him, "*Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness.*" And this saying does not conflict with Moses' declaration concerning Christ, "*Dilexit populos, Yea, he loveth the people.*" Deut 33, 3. But heathen love of virtue and hatred of vice, like the unreasoning swine, indiscriminately roots up and tosses together vices and virtues, regardless of the individual; truly a friend to no one but itself. This truth is evident from the fact that so long and so far as virtue adorns the individual, so long and so far heathenism loves him and is interested in him; but when virtue is lacking, the individual is rejected.

15. Now, the Christian hatred of sin discriminates between the vices and the individual. It endeavors to exterminate only the former and to preserve the latter. It does not flee from, evade, reject nor despise anyone: rather it receives every man, takes a warm interest in him and accords him treatment calculated to relieve him of his vices. It admonishes, instructs and prays for him. It patiently bears with him. It does only as the doer would be done by in circumstances of like infirmities.

16. The Christian's whole purpose in life is to be useful to mankind; not to cast out the individual, but to exterminate his vices. This we cannot do if we refuse to tolerate the faulty person. It would be a very inconsistent case of charity in which you should desire to feed the hungry, satisfy the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick, but at the same time should not permit the hungering, the thirsting, the naked and the sick to approach you. But just so your unwillingness to tolerate a wicked or faulty person is inconsistent with your willingness to help him, or to aid him to godly living.

17. Let us learn from this that the life of Christian love does not consist in seeking godly, upright, holy individuals, but in making them godly, upright and holy. Let this be the Christian's earthly labor, whether it calls for admonition, prayer, patience or other exercise. For the Christian does not live to seek after the wealthy and strong in virtue, but to make such virtuous ones from the poor, weak and infirm.

18. So, then, the text admonishes to two thoughts – to Christian love and to good and noble works; not only to bearing with our neighbor's spiritual imperfections of faith and conduct, but also to receiving him into fellowship, to healing him and to restoring from infirmities. They who fail so to do, create seditions, sects and divisions; as in time past the heretics, Donatists and Novatians, and many others, separated from the Church because unwilling to tolerate sinners and the faulty. There must be heretics and sects where the doctrine of Christian love is ignored; it cannot be otherwise.

19. St. Augustine, commenting on the sixth chapter of Galatians, says: "In nothing is one's religious character so well shown as when, in dealing with the sinful individual, he insists on redemption of the sinner rather than on reproach; on his welfare rather than on reproof." Upon this subject of Christian love, Paul says (Gal 6, 1-2): "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." In other words: "Neglect not to take upon yourselves the burdens of your neighbor – whatever is hard for him to bear. Seek not to derive advantage from him, but bear his burdens." To use him for your own advantage is not bearing but being borne. Advantage belongs to the angels in yonder life. At the same time we are to make a distinction between the two classes before mentioned. We are to avoid as heathen those who obstinately attempt to justify their sins and are unwilling to forsake them. For so we are taught in Matthew 18, 17. The doctrine of Christian love is applicable only to them who, though perceiving the wrong, yet stumble through weakness or imperfection. Let us examine the text.

THE WORD OF HOPE.

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope."

20. In the selection of this epistle passage it should not have been made to begin with these words. They pertain to the first part of the chapter. We shall therefore present the text in its proper order. The apostle with the fifteenth chapter begins to teach the aforesaid principle of love which is to have expression in our attitude toward our neighbor of erring conduct; even as in the fourteenth chapter he taught us to manifest love toward our neighbor of imperfect faith. He says, "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each one of us please his neighbor for that which is good, unto edifying. For Christ also pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell upon me. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope." In these truly forcible words Paul teaches the principle of love that is to enable us to bear with the imperfect conduct of our neighbor.

21. First, he tells us we are under obligation to forbear. Whence arises this obligation? Doubtless from the Law and from love (Mt 7, 12): "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them; for this is the law and the prophets." Now, there is no one of us who would not have others bear with him in his infirmities and help him to do better. In return, we are under obligation to conduct ourselves in a similar manner toward our fellows. The strong should bear with the feeble and help them to better things.

22. Secondly, Paul teaches we are not to take pleasure in ourselves; that is, not to consider ourselves good because of abilities superior to those of our neighbors. For that means but to delight in beholding others in sin and depravity, from unwillingness to see them our equals or our superiors; and to rejoice at the misfortunes which prevent their gaining ascendancy. Truly this spirit is diametrically and fundamentally opposed to love. The Pharisee in the Gospel (Lk 18, 11) thanks God he is not like other men. So good does he regard himself and so does he delight in himself, it would be painful indeed to him were there any other without sin.

23. Now, are not they detestable individuals who begrudge grace and salvation to others, and who rejoice to see them ruined in sin, but at the same time are ambitious to be regarded pious and holy, strong enemies to sin and friends to godliness? But what is Paul's teaching? Emphatically not this. He says no one should unduly approve himself – regard himself good. What then? Let him secure the approbation of others. Let everyone so conduct himself as to gain the approval of his neighbor. Each should bear his neighbor's infirmities with patience and gentleness, and by kindness win his love and confidence. Let him not treat his neighbor with a rashness and severity that shall warrant the latter's fear and shall drive him farther away, leading him to expect no favors ever and to become but more sinful.

24. But you will say, *"If I proceed in the way that shall please my neighbor I must let him have his own way and allow him to continue as he is. But this is not Paul's thought, for he adds the modifier "for his good."* His meaning is that each should so conduct himself as to please his neighbor in the things that make for that neighbor's betterment, and in those only. And, indeed, our conduct toward our fellow may be such as to deny him his will without incurring his displeasure. But if he be dissolute beyond our power to benefit him, let him go; we have made a reasonable effort to gratify him in so far as we could contribute to his improvement. We cannot force his approval of our efforts to please him. Paul requires no more of us than to please our neighbor in the way of ministering to his good. The world does not delight even in the fact that God gave his own Son to die for its happiness.

25. Therefore, when Paul tells us everyone should please his neighbor in that which is good, his intent is not for us merely to strive to please our fellows; that is not what is required of us. But he would have us, in obedience to the rule of love, conduct ourselves in a way we might reasonably expect pleasing to them; in a way that if we fail we are not at fault. Paul says in First Corinthians 10, 33: *"Even as I also please all men in all things."* So would he have us please everyone in all things. How did Paul please all men when Jews and gentiles were his deadly enemies? He did everything for their benefit, and what reasonably should have pleased them.

26. Now, in the third place, to more effectually impress this doctrine, the apostle cites the example of Christ, saying Christ did not please himself. And what does he mean? Simply that notwithstanding Christ's holiness and graciousness, he did not despise us. Nor did he have pride in himself as the Pharisee did because he possessed something we had not. He rejoiced not in the fact that we had nothing while he had all things and all power. On the contrary, because he was grieved over our destitute condition, he devised a plan to be with us whereby we may become like him – possessing what he possesses and being liberated from our sins. There being no other way, he put forth his whole being and all his powers to accomplish our redemption. He assumed our sins and exterminated them. His purpose in it all was to please us and to win our affection. Thus is fulfilled Psalms 69, 9: *"The reproaches of them that reproach thee are fallen upon me."* Our sins reproach and dishonor God, as our good conduct contributes to his honor and praise. So the prophet speaks of God's reproach and dishonor. All our sins are fallen upon Christ so as to be removed from us. Had Christ treated us as the Pharisee treated the publican, and as haughty saints do poor, faulty sinners, who of us would have been redeemed? Paul again holds up the example of Christ in Philippians 2, 5-8: *"Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross."*

27. Such should be our spirit in regard to the sins of our neighbor. We should not judge, backbite nor condemn him. We should keep an undesigning eye upon him, solely for the purpose of delivering him, even at the hazard of our own bodies, our lives, fortunes and honor. Let him who fails here, know he has lost Christ and is a heathen saint.

28. Now follows our text. It is because of the words cited from Psalm 69 concerning Christ that Paul says, "*For whatsoever things were written aforetime,*" etc. By way of explaining the bearing of that passage here, and in what way it concerns us when it was spoken of Christ and is fulfilled in him, the apostle goes on to give us a general admonition from the Scriptures, saying that not only this passage but the entire Scriptures were written for our learning. True, the Bible contains much about Christ. But so it contains much about numerous saints – Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob - - which was not recorded for their sakes. The Bible was written long after their time; they never saw it.

29. So, however much is written about Christ, it is not for his sake; he had no need for it. It is recorded for our instruction. The record of Christ's words and deeds is for our edification, the model for us to follow. It is with this same understanding Paul says in First Corinthians 9, 9: "For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn." Do you suppose God's care is for the ox, or is not the verse written for our sakes? Surely for our sakes. As if the apostle had said: "God's care is not for the ox but for us." Not that God does not govern and provide for all creatures, but that he does not write and speak for them. What should he write and speak to oxen? Only to man does he speak. So here; although the words are about Christ, they are not directed to him but to us, for our learning: we, too, are to conduct ourselves as the Scriptures tell us Christ and his saints have done.

30. Mark the book the apostle here presents for the perusal and study of Christians – none other than the holy Scriptures. And he tells us it contains doctrine for us. Now if our doctrine is to be found in the Bible, we certainly should not seek it elsewhere; all Christians should make daily use of this book.

31. Observe, however, what the devil has accomplished through the Papists. It was not enough for them to throw the Bible under the table, to make it so rare that few doctors of the holy Scriptures possess a copy, much less read it; but lest it be brought to public notice they have branded it with infamy. For they blasphemously say it is obscure; we must follow the interpretations of men and not the pure Scriptures. What else is their proceeding but giving Paul the lie here where he says the Bible is our manual of instruction? They say it is obscure and calculated to mislead.

32. How was God to reward such blasphemers and criminal destroyers of the Scriptures? Had he consulted with me about the matter, I would have entreated him—since they cast

reproach upon his clear word, declaring it obscure and unsafe, and exclude it from the sight and knowledge of men, throwing it under the table – to give them in its stead Aristotle and Averrois, along with the endless statutes and fallacies of the Pope; to let them rave after these, studying Aristotle all the days of their lives and learning nothing; and yet to permit the dolts to be crowned masters of the liberal arts and doctors of the holy Scriptures. Yet up to this time none of them have understood a single line in Aristotle, or at most have learned no more than a five-year-old child or the most depraved dolt knows. For Aristotle is a hundredfold more obscure than the holy Scriptures. If you would know what he teaches, I will tell you in few words: *"A potter can make a pot from clay; a blacksmith cannot unless he learns how."* If there is anything in Aristotle more exalted than this, believe not a word I have said. Demand of me to prove it and I will.

33. I say this to show how well Christ has rewarded the Papists for denouncing his Scriptures as obscure and unsafe, and for perverting their design; for he permits the Papists to read the writings of a dead heathen, who is not strong in real science, no, not in anything but darkness. What I have cited is the very best thing in Aristotle. I say nothing of his virulent and fatal positions. The universities deserve annihilation. Nothing more pernicious and satanic ever has been or ever will be on earth.

34. Now, let us return to Paul. He tells us here what we should read and where we should seek our doctrine. Were there any other book he would have designated it. Further, he shows the nature of the fruit resulting from perusal of the Bible; for he says, "That through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope." Now let all other doctrine present itself, let all other books be introduced, and see if they have any virtue or power to comfort a single soul in its least tribulation. Truly, no comfort but that of God's word is possible to the soul. But where will we find God's word except in the Scriptures? What do we accomplish by reading other books to the exclusion of the Book? Other books may have power to slay us, indeed, but no book except the holy Scriptures has power to comfort us. No other bears the title here given by Paul – book of comfort – one that can support the soul in all tribulations, helping it not to despair but to maintain hope. For thereby the soul apprehends God's word and, learning his gracious will, cleaves to it, continuing steadfast in life and death. He who knows not God's will must doubt, for he is unaware what relation he sustains to God.

35. But how shall I express the situation? The calamity is beyond the power of words, even inconceivable. The evil spirit has accomplished his design; he has suppressed the Book and introduced in its stead so many books of human doctrine that we may well say we are deluged with them. Yet these contain only error, falsehood, darkness, venom, death, destruction, hell and the devil. This condition of things our abominable ingratitude has merited.

36. Observe the aptness of Paul's expression where he links patience with the comfort of the Scriptures. The Bible does not remove adversity, suffering and death. No, it simply reveals the holy cross – Paul calls it the Word of the Cross – therefore patience is necessary. In the midst of suffering, however, the Bible consoles and strengthens, that our patience may not fail but press on unto victory. Under the strong comfort of God's solacing assurance that he is present to direct, the soul bears up with courage and joy beneath its sufferings.

This life is simply a mortification of the old Adam, which must die. So patience is essential. Again, since the life to come is not evident to mortal sense, it is necessary for the soul to have something to which it may cleave in patience, something to help it to a partial comprehension of that future life, and upon which it can rest. That something is God's Word. To it the soul cleaves; therein it abides, and therein is conveyed from this earthly life to the life to come as in a safe ship. Thus does the hope of the soul continue steadfast.

37. Mark you, the real mission of the Scriptures is to comfort the suffering, distressed and dying. Then he who has had no experience of suffering or death cannot at all understand the comfort of the Bible. Not words but experience must be the medium of tasting and finding this comfort. Paul mentions "patience" before "comfort of the Scriptures" to indicate that he who, unwilling to endure suffering, seeks consolation elsewhere cannot taste the comfort of the Word. It is the province of the Word alone to comfort. It must therefore meet with patience first. It is jealous and will not permit human relief on a level with itself, which would be to frustrate the purpose of patience and suffering.

38. Now, it is no small cross and calls for no little measure of patience to bear the imperfections and sins of our neighbors. In some instances these things are oppressive enough to evoke, on the part of the sufferers, desire for death, either for themselves or someone else. To maintain Christian patience under these trials, the afflicted must comfort themselves with those portions of Scripture that show Christ's example. They will be helped to steadfastness and submission in suffering by perceiving that for their sakes Christ has submitted to far greater suffering, and has taken upon himself the infinitely heavier burden of their sins in the effort to redeem them.

39. Note, the comfort accompanying this patience is productive of a firm hope in Christ that we shall be like him. By contemplation of his record we are assured that for our sakes he has submitted, and continues to submit, to suffering. But to him who forgets Christ's example and the Scriptures, there remains very little comfort and patience, even when reason and material things have done their best to comfort him. For their efforts must be ineffectual. They cannot reach the inmost life of the heart. All the patience and comfort they are capable of affording is merely visionary.

"Now, the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus."

40. This epistle lesson should have commenced here. This verse has reference to the imperfections of both our faith and our conduct, but more especially to the frailties of faith, as we shall see. It is a prayer, with which Paul follows his preaching and teaching and concludes his letter to the Romans. Lest one might presume to exercise patience and to know the comfort of the Scriptures all by his own power, Paul in his prayer reminds us they are gifts of God, to be obtained through prayer. Particularly is it beyond our power to bear with the imperfections of others and to preserve the simple unity of faith.

41. Therefore, Paul says, "God of patience and of consolation;" that is, God is the Lord, and grants patience and consolation. just as he is the God of heaven and earth, so is he the God of patience and consolation. All are his gifts and his creatures. Paul says God "grants" patience and comfort; we do not possess them of ourselves. If they are granted they are not of nature but of grace, and are gifts. If God does not direct his Word to the heart to fit the needs of the individual, the heart will never discover this patience and consolation. Indeed, where God does not grant them, the Scripture is neglected and human doctrine sought, as in the case of condemned popery. But where he grants grace to search the Scriptures first, he gives likewise patience and consolation. There is no more marked manifestation of God's wrath than the fact that he permits the decline of his spoken and written Word; so not undesignedly the apostle uses the particular language of this prayer. On the other hand, God gives no greater blessing than when he exalts his Word among us and permits it to be read. Truly, then, we should all repeat this prayer with the apostle.

42. *"To be like-minded one towards another."* What do these words imply? How can the weak be *"minded"* like the strong? The phrase means each to tolerate the prejudices of another, and think that may be good which appears proper to another. Prejudice is the cause of all parties, sects, discord and heresy. As the proverb says, "Pleased with his own way is everyone, Hence the land with fools is overrun."

Paul here would arrest self-pleasing and prejudice. Nothing is more intolerable and pernicious to the Christian faith and the Church than prejudice. The victim of it cannot rid himself of the fault. He must follow his own way, differing from the commonly- accepted one. He must establish a course pleasing to himself. This is the cause of the many parties and various customs in the different institutions and cloisters of the world, all mutually discordant. Each one is best pleased with his own choice and condemns the way of others.

43. But the apostle enjoins the Romans to be of one mind and tolerant of one another. The weak in conscience should accept as right what they of strong faith and sound conscience observe. The effort should be for a oneness of faith and conscience, and a sameness of opinion; and to avoid the wrangling occasioned by conflicting personal ideas of what is right. He would have them illustrate the psalmist's declarations (Ps 68, 6): "God setteth the solitary in families;" and (Ps 133, 1): *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"* For instance, should one of weak

faith observe one whose faith is strong eat meat or indulge in drink, or do what to him appears sinful, let him refrain from judging, even though he would not and could not do likewise. He should be of Paul's opinion on the subject: *"Let each man be fully assured in his own mind."* Rom 14, 5. Then malice, contention and condemning may be avoided, and unanimity of purpose and disposition maintained. On the other hand, if the weak in faith is unable to do as his stronger brethren, they should not force him to it or despise him, but be content to tolerate him in regard to his eating, drinking and doing until he is likewise strong. Paul says, *"Him that is weak in faith receive ye, yet not for decision of scruples."* Rom 14, 1. That is, ye shall not compel him saying, "This is right and that wrong," but treat him considerately and instruct him until he, too, shall become strong.

44. It is not necessary that we should all follow the same occupation. One may be a smith and another a tailor without impairing unity of faith and purpose, only let one tolerate the outward calling of the other. If some foolish individual were to interfere and teach that the occupation of a smith is an ungodly trade, he would be responsible for erring consciences and weakened faith. As privilege of occupation is right, so in the external things of meats, apparel and place, we are at liberty to follow our own pleasure. Then he who comes along and teaches it is wrong for you to use such and such things, as the Pope and the clergy teach, causes you to err. On the other hand, if another comes saying you must use certain things, he likewise causes you to err. But he who pursues a medium course, teaching liberty in the matter, not condemning you but permitting you to retain your own custom until you extricate yourself, and at the same time hard presses the wolves that would force you into that custom as a thing not optional but binding – this teacher gives you true instruction.

45. It is not wrong to fast in honor of the name of an apostle, or to confess during Lent. But neither does he who omits these things commit any evil by this omission. Let him who desires to fast and make confession, do so, but let not one censure, judge, condemn or quarrel with his fellow over the matter. One individual should be like-minded with another – tolerant of what the other does and regarding his action as right because in itself blameless.

46. He deserves censure who in these questions rashly presumes to judge according to the dictates of his own doctrine and destroys this unity saying, "Do so and you do right; do not so and you do wrong." He is an apostle of the devil, and his teaching is the doctrine of Satan. This is the manner of the Pope and the Papists. It pertains not to shepherds but to wolves to preach doctrine of this character.. Under such a condition of things, Christian unity must be dissolved. Difference of opinion becomes manifest: "You are a heretic"; "you are disobedient to the Church"; "you do wrong," and so on-just what the devil desires.

47. Having destroyed unity, taken captive the conscience and deprived of liberty, the Pope proceeds to take your money. Then he gives you a bill of exchange permitting you

to eat butter, eggs and meat a privilege Christ gave you in the Gospel, a privilege whereof the Pope robbed you and which he as the pious shepherd sells to you again. But your indulgence in the privilege again, gives offense to your fellows. In short, the government of the Pope so abounds with grasping and re-grasping, with offense and repetition of offenses, with exchanges and re-exchanges, that it is plainly evident it simply belongs to the designing devil who effects confusion of conscience until no one is able to comprehend the right course.

48. But I refer to toleration only in the things wherein we are at liberty to be lenient. We should resist the Pope with his wicked and foolish laws as we would resist a wolf; and yet we are to permit the weak in faith to continue in their practices for a time, until we are able finally to extricate them from error. They must not be too hastily and rashly rejected, with disastrous results to their consciences.

49. But in things not optional with us, things prescribed or prohibited by Christ, there is little room for disputation, whether it be the weak in conscience or the strong who are concerned. In such case every individual, the least as well as the greatest, is under obligation to withstand the Pope; for instance, when he and all his followers teach that the mass is to be regarded as in the nature of a sacrifice and a good work. This is the most monstrous abomination that ever arose on earth. On it is founded the Pope's government with all its cloisters and other institutions. In this error no one is excusable, whether weak or strong; for Christ instituted the mass as a sacrament and testament. No one, can sell or transfer it or give it away. As in the case of baptism, each must receive it for himself. There are in the Pope's canons many more abominations similar to this misuse of the mass. Indeed, considering the foundation, it is easy to perceive the character of the building. Everything existing in popedom is the wantonness of the devil, from turret to foundation. He who does not believe it, will experience it.

50. The apostle enjoins us to be like-minded "*according to Christ Jesus*"; that is, from a Christian point of view. For unbelievers, too, are like-minded, but according to the flesh, the world and the devil, and not according to Christ. The Jews were of one mind against God and his Christ, as Psalm 2, 2 tells us. Christian unity resists sin and everything opposed to the religion of Christ without, however, committing or designing any sin. It works to the unifying of Christians generally, first with reference to faith and then to outward conduct.

51. When one is weak in faith and defective in conduct, the spirit of Christian unity, though deploring his condition, does not forsake him, much less disparage, reject or condemn him. His Christian fellow is interested in his welfare and conducts himself toward the weak one as he would himself be treated, and as Christ has indeed treated him in similar and more important matters. Thus is perpetuated that principle wherein the individual follows the way approved of others, conforming to their views and adhering to the same opinions. But the obstinate pursue a course quite the reverse, forsaking,

rejecting and judging him who differs from them, and following their own ways, guided by their own opinions; as do the orders of popery, and other sects.

"That with one accord ye may with one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

52. All the good we can do to God is to praise and to thank him. This is the only true service we can render him, according to his words in Psalm 50, 23: "Whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth me; and to him that ordereth his way aright will I show the salvation of God." We receive all blessings from him, in return for which we should make the offering of praise. If anything else purporting to be service to God is presented for your consideration rest assured it is erroneous and delusive. For instance, the distracted world attempts to serve God by setting apart houses, churches, cloisters; vestures, gold-trimmed, silk and every other kind; silver vessels and images; bells and organs, candles and lamps; the money for which expense should have been appropriated to the poor if the object was to make an offering to God. Further, it keeps up a muttering and wailing in the churches day and night. But true praise and honor of God, a service that cannot be confined to place or person, is quietly ignored the world over. The pretenses of priests and monks about their system of exercises being service to the Lord, are false and delusive.

53. Service to God is praise of him. It must be free and voluntary, at table, in the chamber, cellar, garret, in house or field, in all places, with all persons, at all times. Whosoever teaches otherwise is no less guilty of falsehood than the Pope and the devil himself. But how shall there be with us honor and praise of God, true service to him, when we neither love him nor receive his blessings? And how shall we love him when we do not know him and his blessings? And how shall we know him and his blessings when no word is preached concerning them and when the Gospel is left to lie under the table? Where the Gospel is not in evidence, knowledge of God is an impossibility. Then to love and praise him is likewise impossible. As a further consequence it is necessarily impossible for divine service to exist. Even if all the choristers were one chorister, all the priests one priest, all the monks one monk, all the churches one church, all the bells one bell; in brief if all the foolish services offered to God in the institutions, churches and cloisters were a hundred thousand times greater and more numerous than they are, what does God care for such carnivals and juggling?

54. Therefore, God complains most of the Jews in the second chapter of Micah, because they silenced his praise, while at the same time, they piped, blared and moaned like we do. True divine service of praise cannot be established with revenues, nor be circumscribed by laws and statutes. High and low festivals have nothing to do with it. It emanates from the Gospel, and certainly is as often rendered by a poor, rustic servant as by a great bishop.

55. It is plainly evident who have abolished divine service and still daily suppress it. They are none but that hopeless rabble, the Pope and his blockheads the bishops and priests, monks and nuns, whose great boast is of their divine services; who delight to be called the spiritual class and, by their juggling, grasp the advantages and honors of the world and live in riotousness. Yet they pretend to help others to heaven with their foolish works and no mention of the Gospel. Indeed, they persecute and condemn the Gospel, giving Peter just occasion to term them children of condemnation.

56. Note, Paul says divine service must be rendered with "one mind" and with "one mouth." We render divine service when we are harmonious, and when we recognize our common equality and our common blessings in Christ; when none exalts himself above another nor assumes special advantages.

Do you ask how it is we are equal, I reply: All outside of Christ are equally condemned. One needs Christ as much as another. When converted, all receive the same baptism and sacrament, the same faith, the same Christ and Spirit, the same Gospel – in a word, the same God. Here in this wilderness the heavenly bread is impartially distributed. Then how can it possibly be right for one to exalt himself over his fellow spiritually, one priest above the other? What can he have that surpasses Christ? And each has the same Christ, and Christ receives each one unreservedly.

57. True, one may embrace Christ more fervently than another; he may love him more and be more steadfast in his faith. Nevertheless, he has not for that received of Christ more than another. Christ is one and the same Christ to all, and in the things of salvation alike to everyone. Therefore he is truly Christ. Since there is one common blessing for the weak and the firm in faith, for the strong in Christian conduct and for the erring, one should not esteem another more lightly than himself, nor reject him. He is to recognize his fellow as an equal. Then shall praise to God arise harmoniously, and emanate as from one heart and one mouth. For so each individual praises God, and heart and mouth are actuated by the same impulse common to his fellows. All recognize Christ and render thanksgiving for what they receive through him; as prophesied in Psalm 72, 15: "Men shall pray for him continually; they shall bless him all the day long." But he who offers thanks simply for his own advantages or possessions, destroys unanimity of purpose and expression, and belongs not to the communion of saints. Thus the Papists and sects do. From them we never hear praise of Christ, but praise of their own works.

58. That Paul calls us to praise "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and not to confine our praise to Christ, is worthy of special notice in our day when we extol the honor of the saints so highly that we trust in them and fail to press into God's very presence. We find one satisfied in calling upon St. Barbara and obtaining her favor, while there is no certain knowledge that she is a saint. Another is satisfied with Christofel, which is without doubt one of the greatest fictions and lies. But scarcely anyone is satisfied to honor the Virgin Mary and have her favor.

59. I fear abominable idolatry will thus gain ground, because we place in the saints the confidence and trust that should be placed in God alone, and expect from them what we can receive from God alone; and if no other evil were involved, it is a question whether the worship and honor of saints is supported by a passage or example in Scripture, and whether it is not contrary to this and like sayings of Paul, which teach us to press into the presence of God and place all our trust in him and expect everything we need for him. Christ, too, through the whole Gospel, points us to the Father. He came into the world that we should through him come to the Father.

60. To come to the Father does not mean to walk on bodily feet to Rome or to fly to heaven on wings. It means to rely upon God with sincere confidence as upon a gracious parent; as the opening of the Lord's Prayer implies. In proportion as we have such confidence of heart, do we come nearer to the Father. Both reason and experience must confess, if the heart trusts in God, the Creator, that all trust in creatures vanishes, whether in saints in heaven or upon earth. Therefore Peter says: *"Knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ so that your faith and hope might be in God."* 1 Pet 1, 18-21. And Paul says, *"Through whom [Christ] also we have had our access by faith into this grace,"* etc. Rom 5, 2.

61. I admit that some can make a proper use of honoring the saints and the virgin Mary; though it is seldom they do. The example is dangerous and it should not be introduced into the congregation as a practice. The teaching of Christ and of all the apostles is, that we should cheerfully approach God the Father alone through Christ. For it soon happens, because of man's terrible fall, that people seek comfort more from the saints than from God, and pray to their names for help rather than to God. It is a perverted, an unchristian, state of things that exists at present. I fear the world is full, yes, full, of idolatry.

62. God permits the worshiper of saints at times to receive help and perform wonders; yet, he does so through the agency of the devil. For it is God who gives to the servants of Satan their bodies and lives, their possessions and honor, and this he does through the agency of Satan. This is plainly evident; like a rich prince may give a treasure to one knave through another knave. Hence we are not to build upon miraculous signs nor upon the example of the multitude, but alone upon the teachings of Christ, or of his apostles, in this and all cases.

63. Now, while Christ is our common blessing, as before said, we should at the same time ascribe all to the Father; for Christ is the Father's gracious manifestation whereby our hearts are drawn to himself. So we should confidently love and praise the Father for his lavish blessings. With such exercise our hearts will learn to comfort themselves in him and to look to him for every blessing in life or death; but this through Christ and not through merit in ourselves. Christ was given that by him we might thus confidently approach the Father. John 14, 6 declares: *"No one cometh unto the Father, but by me."*

64. Notwithstanding Christ is truly God and one might safely repose confidence in him, yet he constantly points to the Father; for he would not have mankind continue to trust in his humanity as the disciples did before his suffering, instead of lifting its thoughts above his humanity, up to his divinity. We must look upon Christ's humanity as enabling him to be a way, an evidence, a work of God, whereby we come to God. We are to place our whole confidence in God, and in him alone, being very careful not to devote any portion of it to the mother of God or any saint and so set up an idol in our hearts.

"Wherefore receive ye one another, even as Christ also received you, to the glory of God."

65. What is the significance here of that word *"wherefore?"* *"There are two reasons,"* the apostle would say to the Romans, *"why ye should receive one another. The first is, because of Christ's example. As ye have heard, the Scripture presents Christ to us as one upon whom fell the infamy of our sins – for us he was ignominious in God's sight – and who did not despise, reject or revile us, but received us that he might redeem us from our sins. We are, then, under particular obligation to receive one another."*

66. The other reason the apostle presents for our receiving one another is that thus we contribute to the praise and honor of God. This we learn from Christ. He everywhere testifies that all he does is in obedience to his Father's will, and that he came for no other purpose than to do the will of God. It is certain, then, he bore the ignominy of our sins simply because it was his Father's will.

67. Mark the exceeding mercy of the Father's controlling will in placing upon his beloved and only Son our sins, and permitting him to bear the shame of them, merely that we might escape condemnation therefor. Now, a true recognition of this, God's gracious will, must evoke sincere love and praise to him and gratitude for his mercy. For, once the individual glimpses the Father's merciful will, he has a conscience so happy and serene he cannot restrain himself but must honor and praise God for his priceless blessings.

68. Note, Paul says Christ has in himself upheld the honor of God by receiving us and bearing, yes, exterminating, our sins. So should we likewise take upon ourselves the burdens, the sins and imperfections, of our neighbors, and bear with and help to reform them. When such Christian conduct is manifest before sinners and the spiritually weak, their hearts are attracted to God and forced to exclaim: *"Truly, he must be a great and gracious God, a righteous Father, whose people these are; for he desires them not to judge, condemn nor reject us poor, sinful and imperfect ones, but rather to receive us, to give us aid and to treat us as if our sins and imperfections were their own. Should we not love and exalt such a God? Should we not praise and honor him and give him the implicit confidence of our hearts in all things? What must be the character of that God who desires his people to be so noble?"*

69. Mark you, this is the praise God would have from us, that we receive one another and regard our neighbor's condition as our own. Such conduct on our part would encourage others to believe and would strengthen the faith of believers. But where will we find in all the world any who follow Christ's example in this respect? Only tyrants, yes, devils, rule in church offices, who do nothing but excommunicate and condemn, drive and hound the people.

MISSIONS TO THE HEATHEN.

"Now I say that Christ hath been made a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, that he might confirm the promises given unto the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy."

70. The apostle has submitted to the Romans his sentiment that, in obedience to the example of Christ, they should receive one another, to the honor of God, and make no distinction between Christ's people, whether saints or sinners, strong or weak, rich or poor, since all are entitled to the same privileges. For all have the same blessings in Christ, who creates unity of heart, spirit, mind and word and renders common all things, whether spiritual or temporal, and however diverse they may be. Now Paul goes on to establish his position with strong passages of Scripture. Standing between Jews and gentiles as an arbitrator and mediator, he by the use of scriptural authority dissipates all causes of discord. He would say: *"You Jews cannot reject the gentiles, even though they do not follow your customs in eating and drinking, for they have the very same Christ you have, according to Scripture prophecy."* Again, *"You gentiles cannot despise the Jews for not conforming to your ways in the matter of eating and drinking, for the Scripture promises to them the same Christ you profess."* "Now," Paul's argument is, *"since the Scripture gives to all equal privileges in Christ, and Jews and gentiles are brought together under his authority, and since outside of Christ is naught for anyone, but in him everyone has all things – in view of these facts, why contend, why judge one another and stir up factions? Why not much rather receive one another in kindness as Christ received you? No one is favored over another and no one has less than another. Why then contend, and create schisms, over the question of meats, drink, clothing; over observance of time and place; over manners and such things? These are not vital in any respect; they are temporal things, outside of Christ, and contribute nothing to salvation. Let every man exercise the liberty he desires in these matters. If any is still weak in faith and has not freedom of conscience, patiently bear with him till he becomes strong, for your lenience will cost you nothing; you will still have Christ unreservedly."*

71. To understand Paul's words here we must remember he is wont to refer to the Jewish people as "the circumcision." For they practiced the rite. Circumcision was a token

whereby they were distinguished from other peoples. Such metaphors are often employed; for instance, we refer to women when we say, "*Misfortune is oft woven with a weft of tresses*"; to monks in the words, "*Observe, what the cowl may not do*"; or designate the priests when we exclaim, "*How avaricious the bald pate!*" And horsemen are indicated by the words "*spurs*" and "*stirrups*." It is in this metaphorical sense Paul, referring to a characteristic sign, terms the Jews "*the circumcision*" and the gentiles "*praeputium*," "*the uncircumcision*": "*They saw that I had been entrusted with the Gospel of the uncircumcision, [that is, of the uncircumcised gentiles] even as Peter with the Gospel of the circumcision [that is, of the Jews].*" Gal 2,7-8. And again: "*Remember, that once ye, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called Circumcision,*" etc. Eph 2, 11. So here he says, "*I say that Christ hath been made a minister of the circumcision*"; that is, of the Jewish people. Using a convenient term, he calls Christ a "*minister*," as he calls all preachers and apostles ministers. "*What then is Apollos? and what is Paul? Ministers through whom ye believed.*" 1 Cor 3, 5. The substance of the apostle's words is this: Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision. That is, a preacher, teacher, apostle, messenger, sent from God to the Jewish people. For Christ never preached to the gentiles. He was not sent to them, but to the Jews only.

72. But Christ was a minister to the Jews, not because of their merit, but as here stated, "*for the truth of God.*" And what do we understand by those words? God promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that Christ should be born of their seed. To maintain God faithful in his promises, Christ came in fulfilment thereof. Thus is the truth of God proven; God keeps his promises. For the sake of God's truth, or in other words, that God might be proven truthful, and not for the sake of merit on the part of anyone, Christ became an apostle and a minister of the circumcision. This explanation is necessary to satisfy the succeeding phrase, "*that he might confirm the promises given unto the fathers.*" Observe the apostle's meaning in the words "*the truth of God*" – the fulfilment and establishment of the divine promise made to the patriarchs concerning Christ.

73. True, Jews and gentiles have Christ in common, yet the promise was not to the gentiles; it was to the Jews exclusively. Paul tells us in Romans 3, 2 that the Jews "*were entrusted with the oracles of God*"; and again, in Romans 9, 4, that the Law was given to them. So, too, Christ came to the Jews alone, as he says himself: "*I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" Mt 15, 24. it was the peculiar privilege of the Jews to have Christ promised to them, and to be able to await his coming. But to the gentiles was nothing promised, and they awaited nothing. At the same time, Jews and gentiles are on common ground in the fact that, Christ being promised of pure grace, he was given to the gentiles also. After the promise was made to the Jews, the gentiles had just reason to regard the coming Messiah as given to them also.

74. The Jews, then, have Christ not only through grace in the promise, but also because of the truth of God in fulfilment of his promise. But the gentiles have neither the grace of the promise nor the truth of fulfilment. They have merely the naked, unpromised,

unexpected mercy Christ gives to them. There is no promise, and no obligation for fulfilment of the truth of God. Yet, the Scriptures having revealed that the gentiles should obtain Christ, though without promise, hope or expectation, the Scriptures must be fulfilled. Therefore, one people is not favored over the other. But Christ was given to the Jews through divine promise and divine truth, and to the gentiles through pure, unexpected mercy. Since the Scriptures contain a promise to the Jews and prediction concerning the gentiles, the two peoples have common bond in Christ. Hence each should receive the other as a participant in the common blessing. The Jews are not to despise the gentiles; because the Scriptures say the gentiles shall praise God for his mercy, and how shall the Jews despise those who enjoy God's mercy and praise him for it? On the other hand, the gentiles should not despise the Jews; for to the latter was Christ promised, and in fulfilment of the promise he became their minister and preacher, making God faithful to his word.

75. Let us see what is Paul's intent in declaring: "I say that Christ hath been made a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, that he might confirm the promises given unto the fathers." Why this claim? Doubtless that none may despise the Jews, but rather receive them, in obedience to the example of Christ. Christ did not despise them; nay, he was even publicly promised and given to them as their own minister, preacher and apostle. But what do you say, Paul, in regard to the gentiles? "I do not say they are promised aught, but I say they enjoy and praise the mercy of God given them without promise, as the Scriptures imply. So, too, none should despise the gentiles, but rather receive them, in obedience to Christ's example." As Christ is a common bond between Jews and gentiles, though not given to each people in just the same way; so should there be unity among us. We must receive one another, bear one another's burdens and have patience with imperfections, regardless of personal appearance, name, condition or anything else.

"Therefore I will give praise unto thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name."

76. Now the apostle goes on to quote some Scripture passages revealing the fact that the gentiles shall praise God for his mercy. This first quotation is found in Psalm 18, 49, and also in Psalm 108, 3. The words are spoken by the prophet for Christ, as in both cases the whole Psalm makes plain. Now, if this declaration is to be verified, Christ must be present with the gentiles, not physically but spiritually. For unless Christ is present spiritually, praise of him is not forthcoming; but the singing of his praise is guarantee of his spiritual presence. So this quotation forces us to conclude that the gentiles shall believe in Christ and possess him; in other words, enjoy the mercy of God. Yet the verse makes no promise to them. It is merely a revelation concerning their future conduct.

77. We have before mentioned what constitutes true service of God. Here the prophet refers to it as praising and singing unto God's name. And so is it defined throughout

the Scriptures. Now, praise is simply a confession of blessings received. The Hebrew and apostolic word in this verse is "*confitebor*," "*I will confess thee*"; meaning, "*I will thank and praise thee and declare, All have I received from thee.*" "*And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.*"

78. These words are quoted from Deuteronomy 32, 43, where Moses says, "Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people." The Hebrew, however, admits of the rendering, "Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with him" (understand "his people"). It is with this thought of God, it seems to me, the apostle introduces the quotation. Yet, whether we read it thus or otherwise, clearly no one praises the people of God, nor rejoices with him, unless he be partaker of God's blessings and own him God. For he who does not possess God and his blessings is an enemy to God's people, cursing and persecuting, them, as God says in Genesis 12, 3, "*I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse.*" Here you see, they who bless God's people are partakers of his blessings. So this second quotation teaches conclusively that the gentiles shall become Christians.

"And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and let all the peoples praise him."

79. This verse is Psalm 117, 1-2. It also has reference to true service of God. Therefore it, too, teaches that the gentiles shall be the people of God. For only they serve (praise and honor) God who are his people. "*And again, Isaiah saith, There shall be the root of Jesse, and he that ariseth to rule over Gentiles, on him shall the Gentiles hope.*"

80. We have this declaration in Isaiah 11, 10. In Hebrew it reads: "And it shall come to pass in that day that the root of Jesse, that standeth for an ensign of the people, unto him shall the nations seek; and his resting-place shall be glorious." The meaning evidently is that the gentiles shall possess Christ and he shall reign over them. Paul makes a slight change in the words, following the rendering of the old translators who wrote the Bible in the Greek

language. The meaning of the quotation is the same, however. The "*root*" of Jesse should not be understood here as "*stem*" or "*tree*" in the genealogical sense, as the artist would delineate the "*tree*" of Jesse, the father of David, with its many branches; and as we understand when we sing of the blessed Virgin, "*the stem of Jesse has sprung forth.*" That would be altogether a forced construction. Christ himself, and none other, is the "*stem*" or "*root.*" The construction of this passage from Isaiah makes that meaning plain, for it says practically, "*The gentiles shall hope for the stem or root of Jesse, which is to rule the nations,*" etc. This prophecy cannot be made to refer to the human Jesse or to our blessed Virgin.

81. Christ is the root of Jesse. He descended from the lineage of Jesse, through David, but in him physical descent ceased. He suffered and was buried in the grave as an ill-favored root, concealed from the world, and out of him grew that beautiful tree, the Christian

Church, spreading out into all the world. The root of Jesse is properly delineated when portrayal includes the sufferings of Christ and their fruits.

82. Paul's assertion *"and he that ariseth to rule over the Gentiles" is equivalent to the Hebrew "that standeth for an ensign of the people."* It shows Christ's government a spiritual one. The Gospel raises him as a standard before the whole world, an ensign to which we must be loyal through faith. We do not see him physically; we behold him only through the ensign, the Gospel. And it is through the Gospel he reigns over men; not in a physical presence.

83. Again, the expression "on him shall the Gentiles hope" does not materially differ from the Hebrew rendering "to it shall the Gentiles seek." The meaning is, the gentiles shall look unto the root of Jesse and cleave only to him, placing all confidence and hope in him and finding in him their consolation. They shall seek for and desire naught else. But the phrase "and his grave [resting place] shall be glorious," contained in the quotation from Isaiah but emitted by the apostle, is not well rendered by Jerome, who thinks Isaiah refers to the glorious grave of Christ. Isaiah's thought was of Christ's rest being glorious; that is, his death should mean something more than that of ordinary mortals, to whom death is the end of glory. The glory of the root of Jesse had its beginning in his death. For not until then was he raised to true life and power, to real glory and honor—an ensign for the gentiles, and ruler of them. Indeed, then he was seated at the right hand of God, Lord over all things.

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit."

84. Paul concludes this passage with a noble prayer, desiring the Romans to be filled with joy and peace. He calls upon the "God of hope," referring to the hope God alone gives through Christ and in Christ.

85. The way we possess peace and joy we have before spoken of; the secret is in perceiving the will of God, how he gave Christ to bear our sins, which we are under obligation to believe. The more clearly we perceive his will, the stronger will be our faith, our hope and love. Hence we must continually preach the Gospel – receive it and meditate upon it. For faith comes through no other medium than the Gospel. The apostle says, in effect: "May God, who through the Gospel effects hope, grant you grace, enabling you to appropriate the Gospel and believe. Through believing, you first perceive Christ. Thereupon follow perfect peace and an assured conscience. These are blessings common to all, and you will have harmony among yourselves." The Christian's peace and joy is something received, not as the gift of the world is received, through mortal sense, but through faith. He who is the source of your good, and from whom you derive your peace and joy, is not recognized by sight or touch. However, in the world you will have disquietude and grief. But learn that Christ is the common blessing of all and

you will enjoy blessed peace. For all being alike rich, no one can begrudge another anything. This is what it means to have peace and joy through faith or in faith.

86. "That ye may abound in hope," continues the prayer. In other words, "that your hope may ever increase." Now, suffering and persecution contribute to the increase of hope. We are not given increased hope to decrease adversity; no, adversity is increased that hope may not rely on human power, but be established through the power of the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit aids us, fortifying our hope and enabling us not to fear nor to flee from the disasters of the world; but to stand firm even unto death, and to overcome all evil; so that evil must flee from us and cease its attacks. Remember, it is hope in the power of the Holy Spirit, not in human weakness, that must do all this through the medium of the Gospel. As before said, "Through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we have hope." Where the Gospel is not, there is neither hope, comfort, peace, joy, faith, love, Christ, God, nor anything good. Evidence of this fact is before us in the wretched, spiritless, carnal clerical orders, notwithstanding their much praying and holding of masses. From these things, O thou God of hope, of patience and of comfort, graciously preserve us. Amen.

Content Page



First Page

Second Sunday in Advent