

MEDITATIONS & READINGS

ST. ALPHONSUS

VOLUME I – PART II
EPIPHANY SEPTUAGESIMA

Meditations and Readings
FOR
EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR

Selected from the Spiritual Writings of
SAINT ALPHONSUS

VOLUME ONE.
PART II.

Edited by
JOHN BAPT. COYLE, C.S.S.R.



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PRAYER. By **ST. ALPHONSUS** Jubilee Edition.

OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL SUCCOUR AND IRELAND. (στη μαρις-οσαν σιουτ-καθηραε ιη εηρε). S. U. A. C., O'Διτ-εηης.

MEDITATIONS & READINGS
FOR EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR

VOLUME I.—PART II.
EPIPHANY SEPTUAGESIMA

*Letter from His Eminence Michael Cardinal Logue,
Archbishop of Armagh and Primate
of All Ireland.*

*

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PATRITII MURRAY, C.S.S.R.

Superioris Generatis et Rectoris Majoris

ARA COELL,

ARMAGH,

16th March, 1924.

MY DEAR FATHER COYLE,

I have put off writing to thank you for your interesting and edifying volume, *Meditations and Readings for Every Day of the Year*, till I should find time to look through it. I have done so now, and I can congratulate you on undertaking a very useful work; and I hope you will be spared till you complete it.

The Ascetic Works of St. Alphonsus have done wonders in conveying solid instruction, nourishing piety and exciting fervour among the people in every stage and state of life. They have been an ever enduring source of piety, especially in inspiring love of our Holy Redeemer, and tender devotion towards His Blessed Mother. It is a question whether his great Theological Works have contributed more to the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Hence it was not without regret I noticed that these Spiritual Works were not so common among the people

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as they were in my early days. They seemed to be giving place to more showy and superficial modern works which are far from breathing the fervent spirit of the great Doctor and Saint. One of the chief fruits which I expect from the work you have undertaken is the redress of this serious spiritual loss.

You have commenced well, and I trust you will be able to continue till the Spiritual Works of St. Alphonsus are again as extensively circulated among the people as they were in the past. The scheme you have sketched out for yourself will familiarize the people with the beauty and fervour of St. Alphonsus' Works, and from using your volumes for casual reading they will be likely to drink more deeply of the source of fervour the Saint has opened up to them.

Wishing you every blessing and success in your useful work,

I am,

Dear Fr. Coyle,

Yours gratefully,

✕ MICHAEL CARD. LOGUE.

Letter of Approbation and Blessing from Most Rev. Patrick Murray, Superior General and Rector Major of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.

✕

J.M.J.A.T.

SANT' ALFONSO—VIA MERULANA.

ROMA.

23rd October, 1923.

MY DEAR FATHER COYLE,

I am very glad to hear that you have the first part of your *Meditations and Readings for Every Day of the Year from the Writings of St. Alphonsus* ready for publication, and I wish this and the succeeding volumes every success. It is difficult to exaggerate the value of these *Meditations and Readings* as is seen from the following statements of two Popes.

His Holiness Pope Pius IX., in speaking of the writings of St. Alphonsus wrote: "The works of this most holy and learned man, written with extraordinary tender piety and devotion, breathe in every page a great love for Jesus Christ and great confidence in His mercy and merits. They also inspire their readers with the most ardent devotion to the Virgin Mother of God and to the Saints, and they inflame the hearts of men with the desire of receiving the Sacraments, as well as furnish a most abundant supply of excellent admonitions, counsels and directions to those who labour for the salvation of souls."

Pope Benedict XV., also wrote recently, on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Doctorate of St. Alphonsus, that the excellence and utility of his teaching are becoming every day more apparent, and that his

writings are helpful, not only to Theologians and Professors of the Sacred Sciences, but also to the faithful of every condition of life, to whom he points out the way to solid virtue, and smooths for them the path to the highest Christian perfection. His Holiness adds that the Saint's one great ambition in all his writings was to make known to all men the infinite amiability of Jesus Christ.

It is unnecessary for me to add anything to these words of two Popes. I wish only to say that this infinite amiability of Jesus Christ is particularly well shown in the present volume, for, in addition to the Meditations and Readings on the Religious State and on other subjects, there are given about forty Meditations on the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, in which are contained some of the most beautiful and devotional pages written by the Saint. Moreover, the division of the ascetic writings of the Saint into two Meditations and a Spiritual Reading for every day of the year, and this arranged in such a way as not to interrupt the sequence of any work of the Saint, will please many, both in the Cloister and in the world, who desire to know and follow in their spiritual life the teachings of this great Doctor of the Church and Director of Souls.

In conclusion, in the name of Saint Alphonsus, I bless you and these *Meditations and Readings* with the hope that they may be everywhere known and read and well thought on so that all may know the infinite amiability and mercy of Jesus Christ and the unspeakable amiability and mercy of His Blessed Mother, and that they may thus seek and love and serve Them alone.

Your devoted servant and confrère,

PATRICK MURRAY, C.S.S.R.,
Sup. Gen. and Rector Major.

REV. J. B. COYLE, C.S.S.R.,
St. JOSEPH'S,
DUNDALK.

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MEDITATIONS AND READINGS

Monday—First Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

THE BODY IN THE GRAVE.

Christian soul, follow the advice of St. Chrysostom: "Go to the grave. Contemplate there, dust, ashes, worms—and sigh!" O God, that body pampered with so many delicacies, clothed with so much pomp—see to what it is reduced! The worms, after having consumed all the flesh, devour one another, and in the end nothing remains but a fetid skeleton.

I.

Behold how the corpse first turns yellow and then black. Afterwards the entire body is covered with a white disgusting mould; then comes forth a clammy, fetid slime which flows to the earth. In that putrid mass is generated a great multitude of worms which feed on the flesh. Rats come to feast on the body; some attack it on the outside; others enter into the mouth and bowels. The cheeks, the lips, and the hair fall off. The ribs are first laid bare, and then the arms and legs. The worms, after having consumed all the flesh, devour one another; and in the end, nothing remains but a fetid skeleton which in the course of time falls to pieces.

The bones separate from one another and the head separates from the body. *They became like the chaff of a summer threshing-floor, and they were carried away by the wind.*—(Dan. ii., 35). Behold what man is: he is a little dust on the threshing-floor which is blown away by the wind.

Behold a young nobleman who was the life and soul of conversation: where is he now? Enter his apartment: he is no longer there. If you look for his bed, his robes, or his armour, you will find that they have passed into the hands of others. If you wish to see him, turn to the grave where he is changed into corruption and withered bones. O God, that body, pampered with so many delicacies, clothed with so much pomp, and attended by so many servants, to what is it now reduced? O ye Saints, who knew how to mortify your bodies for the love of that God Whom alone you loved on this earth, you well understood the end of all human greatness, of all earthly delights! Now your bones are honoured as sacred Relics, and preserved in shrines of gold, and your souls are happy in the enjoyment of God, awaiting the last day on which your bodies shall be made partners of your glory, as they have been partakers of your cross in this life. True love for the body consists in treating it here with rigour and contempt, that hereafter it may be happy, and in now refusing it all pleasures which may make it miserable for eternity.

Behold, then, O my God, to what this body by which I have so much offended Thee, must be reduced! To worms and rottenness! This does not afflict me; on the contrary I rejoice that this flesh of mine which has made me lose Thee, my Sovereign Good, will one day rot and be consumed. What grieves me is that to indulge in these wretched pleasures, I have given so much displeasure to Thee. But I will not despair of Thy mercy. Thou hast waited for me in order to pardon me. Thou wilt forgive me if I repent. O Infinite Goodness, I repent with my whole heart of having despised Thee. I will say with St. Catherine of Genoa: *My Jesus, no more sins! No more sins! I*

will no longer abuse Thy patience. I will not wait till the hour of death to begin to love Thee. From this moment I love Thee. I embrace Thee and unite myself to Thee, and I promise never again to depart from Thee. O most holy Virgin, bind me to Jesus Christ and obtain for me the grace never to lose Him more.

II.

In this picture of death behold yourself, and what you must one day become. *Remember that dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.* Consider that in a few years, and perhaps in a few months or days, you will become rottenness and worms. By this thought Job became a Saint. *I have said to rottenness: Thou art my father: to worms, my mother and my sister.* (Job, xvii., 14).

All must end; and if, after death, you lose your soul all will be lost for you. Consider yourself already dead, says St. Laurence Justinian, since you know that you must of necessity die. If you were already dead, what would you not desire to have done? Now that you are alive, reflect that you will one day be among the dead. St. Bonaventure says, that to guide the vessel safely, the pilot must remain at the helm, and in like manner, to lead a good life, a man should always imagine himself at the hour of death. ‘‘Look at the sins of your youth, and be covered with shame!’’ says St. Bernard. ‘‘Look at the sins of your manhood, and weep! Look at the disorders of your present life, and tremble!’’

When St. Camillus of Lellis saw the graves of the dead, he said within himself: If these could return to life, what would they not do for eternal glory? And I, who have time,—what do I do for my soul? This the Saint said through humility. But you, perhaps, have reason to fear that you are the barren fig-tree of which the Lord spoke: *Behold, for these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none.*—(Luke, xiii., 7). You have been in this world for more than three years, and what fruit have you produced? Remember,

says St. Bernard, that the Lord seeks not only flowers but fruits; that is, not only good desires and resolutions, but also holy works. Learn then to profit by the time which God in His mercy gives you. Do not wait until you shall crave for time to do good, when time shall be no more. Do not wait till you are told: *Time shall be no more.*—(Apoc. x., 6). Depart! The time for leaving this world has arrived. What is done, is done! Behold, O my God, I am that tree which deserved for so many years to hear from Thee: *Cut it down! Why cumbereth it the ground?*—(Luke, xiii., 7). Yes; during the many years which I have been in the world, I have brought forth no other fruit than the briars and thorns of sin. But, O Lord, Thou dost not wish that I despair. Thou hast said to all, that he who seeks Thee shall find Thee. I seek Thee, O my God, and wish for Thy grace. For all the offences I have offered to Thee I am sorry with my whole heart. I would wish to die of sorrow for them. Hitherto I have fled from Thee, but now I prefer Thy friendship to the possession of all the kingdoms of the earth. I will no longer resist Thy invitations. Dost Thou wish me to be all Thine? I give Thee my whole being without reserve. Thou gavest Thyself entirely to me on the Cross. I give myself entirely to Thee. O Mary, my great advocate, do thou also listen to my cry and pray to Jesus for me.

Spiritual Reading.

ORIGINAL SIN.

To fulfil his duties in life, it is necessary for man to know what is his Last End in which he may find his perfect happiness. Man's Last End is to love and serve God in this life, and to enjoy Him for eternity in the next. Thus, God has placed us in this world not to

acquire riches, honours and pleasures, but to obey His Commandments, and, by observance of them, to gain the eternal Beatitude of Paradise.

For this end the Lord created Adam who was the first man, and gave him Eve for his wife, that from them mankind might be propagated. He created them in sanctifying grace, and placed them in the terrestrial paradise, with the promise that they should be thence transferred to Heaven to enjoy complete and eternal felicity. During their sojourn on this earth God gave them for their food all the fruits of that garden of delights; but, to try their obedience, He forbade them to eat the fruit of only one tree which He pointed out to them. But Adam and Eve disobeyed God, and ate the forbidden fruit. For this sin they were deprived of divine grace, were instantly banished from Paradise, and as rebels to the divine Majesty, were with all their posterity condemned to temporal and eternal death. Thus was Heaven shut against them and all their descendants.

This is the *Original sin* in which, as children of a rebellious father, we are all born children of wrath and enemies of God. When a vassal rebels against his sovereign, all the descendants of the rebel become hateful to the prince and are banished from the kingdom. Thus Original sin, by the disobedience of Adam, deprives us all of the grace of God.

According to the doctrine of the Church, the Blessed Virgin Mary had the privilege of being exempt from this Original guilt. It is certain that she was also free from all actual sin. Such is the doctrine of the Church, as the Council of Trent has declared: "If any one saith that a man 'once justified . . . is able, during his whole life, to avoid all sins, even those that are venial—except by a special privilege from God, as the Church holds in regard of the Blessed Virgin—let him be anathema." But if Mary contracted no guilt from which she required to be redeemed, must it be said that she was not redeemed by Jesus Christ as all the other children of Adam? No; she was redeemed, but redeemed in a more excellent manner. Others are redeemed

after having incurred Original guilt; Mary was redeemed by being preserved from it. And this privilege was justly given to her alone—that blessed Woman whom God had predestined to be His own Mother. Still more was it becoming that God should preserve Mary from Original sin, for He destined her to crush the head of that infernal serpent, which, by seducing our first parents, entailed death upon all men: and this the Lord foretold: *I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head.*—(Gen. iii., 15). But if Mary was to be that Valiant Woman brought into the world to conquer Lucifer, certainly it was not becoming that he should first conquer her, and make her his slave; but it was reasonable that she should be preserved from all stain, and even momentary subjection to her opponent. The proud spirit endeavoured to infect the most pure soul of this Virgin with his venom, as he had already infected the whole human race. But praised and ever blessed be God, Who in His infinite goodness, pre-endowed her for this purpose with such great grace, that remaining always free from guilt of any sin, she was ever able to beat down and confound his pride, as an ancient author writes: “Since the devil is the head of Original sin, this head it was that Mary crushed: for sin never had any entry into the soul of this Blessed Virgin, which was consequently free from all stain.” And St. Bona-venture more expressly says: “It was becoming that the Blessed Virgin Mary, by whom our shame was to be blotted out, and by whom the devil was to be conquered, should never, not even for a moment, have been under his dominion.”**

With the one exception of God’s glorious Mother all the rest of mankind are born infected with the sin of Adam, in punishment of which our understanding is darkened to the knowledge of Eternal Truth and our will inclined to evil. But by the merits of Jesus Christ we obtain at

* In the Bull, “Ineffabilis Deus” Pius IX. in the year 1854, solemnly defined as an Article of Faith that the Most Blessed Virgin was from the first moment of her conception preserved by God from all stain of Original Sin. More than 100 years before the Immaculate Conception was defined by Pius IX. St. Alphonsus bound himself by vow to defend it.—Ebdirook.

our Baptism Divine Grace and the remedy for all our miseries. We thus became the adopted sons of God and heirs of Paradise provided we persevere till death in the Grace of God. If we lose Divine Grace by mortal sin, and do not receive pardon, we shall be condemned to hell. We can obtain the pardon of mortal sin in the Sacrament of Penance.

Evening Meditation.

THE GREAT DIGNITY AND ADVANTAGES OF A SOUL IN GOD’S GRACE.

I.

If, says the Lord, *thou wilt separate the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth.*—(Jer. xv., 19). They who know how to distinguish what is precious from what is vile, are like God “Who knows how to refuse the evil and to choose the good.” Let us consider how great a good it is to be in the grace of God. Men do not understand the value of divine grace. *Man knoweth not the price thereof.*—(Job xxxviii., 13). Hence they exchange it for vanity, for a little earth, or for a beastly pleasure! But it is an infinite treasure which makes us worthy of the friendship of God. For, says the Wise Man, *she is an infinite treasure to men, which they that use become the friends of God.*—(Wis. vii., 14). Hence a soul in grace is the friend of God. The Gentiles, who were deprived of the light of Faith, deemed it impossible for a creature to attain to the friendship of God; and they, guided only by the light of nature, could scarcely think otherwise. But God has declared in several places in the Holy Scriptures, that by means of grace we become His friends if we observe His Law. *You are my friends if you do the things that I*

command you. *I will not now call you servants . . . but I have called you friends.*—(Jo. xv., 14, 15). Hence, St. Gregory exclaims: "O Goodness of God! We do not deserve to be called even servants and He condescends to call us friends!"

How fortunate would the man esteem himself who should have a king for his friend! In a vassal it would be temerity to presume to seek the friendship of his sovereign, but it is not temerity in a soul to aspire to the friendship of its God. The most men can expect to gain in the service of an emperor is, to become his friends; and should they succeed in gaining his friendship, they will expose their eternal salvation to greater risk. It is with difficulty I can ever become the friend of Caesar, but if I wish, I am this moment the friend of God.

Whosoever is in the state of grace is the friend of God. He also becomes the child of God: *You are gods and the sons of the Most High.*—(Ps. lxxxii., 6). This is the great gift which we have received from the divine love through Jesus Christ. Behold, says St. John, *what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called, and should be, the sons of God.*—(I Jo. iii., 1). Moreover, the soul in the state of grace is the spouse of God. *I will espouse thee to me in faith.*—(Osee, ii., 20). Lastly, the soul in grace is the temple of the Holy Ghost. Sister Mary d'Oignies saw a devil go out from an infant who was receiving Baptism, and the Holy Ghost enter with a multitude of Angels.

Therefore, O my God, when my soul had the happiness of being in Thy grace, it was Thy friend, Thy child, Thy spouse, and Thy temple; but by committing sin, it lost all and became Thy enemy and the slave of hell. But I thank Thee, O my God, for giving me time to recover Thy grace. I am sorry above all things for having offended Thee, O infinite Goodness, and I love Thee above all things. Ah! receive me again into Thy friendship. For Thy Mercy's sake do not reject me. I know that I deserve to be banished from Thy face, but by the Sacrifice which He offered on Calvary, Jesus Christ has

merited for me mercy and pardon. *And lead us not into temptation.* Ah! do not permit my enemies to tempt me so that I may be conquered. *But deliver us from evil.* Deliver me from hell; but deliver me first from sin, which alone can lead me to hell. O Mary, pray for me and preserve me from the great misfortune of ever seeing myself in sin and deprived of the grace of thy God and mine.

II.

St. Thomas of Aquin says that the gift of God's grace surpasses all created nature since it is a participation of the divine nature. And St. Peter said the same: *that by these ye may be made partakers of the divine nature.*—(2 Pet. i., 4). Such great things Jesus Christ merited for us by His Passion: He has even communicated to us the same splendour that He received from the Father. *And the glory which thou hast given to me, I have given to them.*—(John xvii., 22). In fine, a soul in the state of grace is one with God. *He, says St. Paul, that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.*—(Cor. vi., 17). The Redeemer has said that in a soul that loves God, the Three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity dwell. *If any one love me, my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and we will make our abode with him.*—(John xiv., 23).

So great is the beauty of a soul in the state of grace, that God Himself extols it. *How beautiful art thou! How beautiful art thou!*—(Cant. iv., 1). The Lord appears never to take His eyes off the soul that loves Him, nor to close His ears to its petitions. *The eyes of the Lord are upon the just: and his ears unto their prayers.*—(Ps. xxxiii., 16). St. Bridget used to say that one could not behold the beauty of a soul in the grace of God and not die for very joy. And St. Catherine of Sienna seeing a soul in the state of grace, said that she would willingly have given her life to prevent that soul from losing such beauty. Hence she kissed the ground on which priests walked, because through them souls recover the grace of God.

How many treasures of merits can a soul in the state of grace acquire? Each moment it can merit an eternity of glory. St. Thomas teaches that every act of love merits for the soul eternal life. Why then should we envy the great ones of the earth? If we are in the grace of God, we can constantly acquire far more greatness in Heaven. A certain Lay-Brother of the Society of Jesus, appeared after death, and said that he and Philip the Second of Spain were in the enjoyment of glory; but that his glory in Heaven was as far superior to that of Philip, as that monarch was raised above him on this earth. Moreover, he alone who has experienced it can conceive the peace which a soul in the grace of God enjoys even in this life. *O taste and see that the Lord is sweet.*—(Ps. xxxiii., 9). The words of the Lord cannot fail. *Much peace have they that love thy law.*—(Ps. cxviii., 165). The peace of a soul united with God, surpasses all the pleasures of the senses and the world. *The peace of God which surpasseth all understanding.*—(Phil. iv., 7).

O my Jesus, Thou art the good Shepherd, Who allowed Thyself to be slaughtered in order to give life to Thy sheep. When I fled away from Thee, Thou didst not cease to follow and seek after me. Thou receivest me now that I seek Thee and cast myself with a penitent heart at Thy feet. Give me Thy grace which I have miserably lost through my own fault. I am sorry for it with my whole heart; I would wish to die of sorrow at the thought of having so often turned my back on Thee. Pardon me through the merits of the painful death which Thou didst suffer for me on the Cross. Bind me with the sweet chains of Thy love, and do not permit me ever more to fly away from Thee. Since I have merited the eternal torments of hell, give me strength to bear with patience all the crosses which Thou sendest me. And since I have deserved to be for eternity under the feet of the devils, make me to embrace with love all the contempt and insults which I shall receive from men. Finally, make me obedient to all Thy holy inspirations, and give me grace to conquer all human respect for the love of Thee. I am resolved henceforward to serve Thee

only: let others say and do what they please, I will serve Thee alone, O my most amiable God! Thee only do I wish to please. But give me Thy grace without which I can do nothing. I love Thee, O my Jesus, with my whole heart, and I trust in Thy Blood. Mary, my hope, assist me by thy prayers. I glory in being thy servant, and thou dost glory in saving sinners who have recourse to thee. Come to my relief and save me.

Tuesday—First Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

THE SENTENCE OF DEATH.

Who is the man that shall live and not see death? The sentence has been already passed. Fire, water, the sword and the power of princes, says St. Augustine, may be resisted, but *death*—who shall resist it? *It is appointed unto men once to die.*

I.

The Sentence of Death has been written against all men. You are a man, you must therefore die. "Our other good and evil things," says St. Augustine, "are uncertain; death alone is certain." It is uncertain whether the infant that is just born will be rich or poor; whether he will have good or bad health; whether he will die in youth or in old age. But it is certain that he will die. The stroke of death will fall on all the nobles and monarchs of the earth. When death comes there is no earthly power able to resist it. St. Augustine says: "Fire, water, the sword, and the power of princes may be resisted;

but *death*, who shall resist it?" It is related that at the end of his life a certain king of France said: "Behold, with all my power, I cannot induce death to wait one hour longer for me." When the end of life arrives, it is not delayed a single moment. *Thou hast appointed his bounds, which cannot be passed.*—(Job xiv., 5).

Dearly beloved Christian, though you should live as many years as you expect, a day will come, and on that day an hour, which will be the last hour for you. For me who am now writing, and for you who read this little book, the day and the moment have been decreed when I shall no longer write, and you will no longer read. *Who is the man that shall live and not see death?*—(Ps. lxxxviii., 49). The sentence has been already passed.

Unhappy me, who have spent so many years only in offending Thee, O God of my soul. Behold those years are already past: death is perhaps at hand, and what do I find but pains and remorse of conscience? Oh, that I had always served Thee, my Lord! Fool that I have been! I have lived so many years on this earth, and instead of acquiring merits for Heaven, I have burdened my soul with debts to divine justice. Ah, my dear Redeemer, give me light and strength now to adjust my accounts. Death is perhaps not far off. I wish to prepare for that great moment which will decide my eternal happiness or misery. I thank Thee for having waited for me till now; and since Thou hast given me time to repair the past, do Thou tell me, O my God, what I am to do for Thee. Dost Thou wish me to weep over the offences I have offered to Thee? I am sorry for them and detest them with my whole soul. Dost Thou wish me to spend the remaining years and days of my life in loving Thee? I desire to do so, O God; I have even hitherto frequently resolved to do so; but I have violated my promises. Receive back the traitor that now casts himself with sorrow at Thy feet, that loves Thee and asks Thy mercy.

II.

There never has been a man so foolish as to flatter himself that he will not have to die. What has happened to your forefathers will also happen to you. Of the immense numbers that lived in this country in the beginning of the last Century there is not one now living. Even the princes and monarchs of the earth have changed their country, and of them nothing now remains but a marble mausoleum with a grand inscription which only serves to teach us that of the great ones of this world nothing is left but a little dust inclosed in a tomb. "Tell me," says St. Bernard, "where are the lovers of the world? Of them nothing remains save ashes and worms."

Since our souls will be eternal, we ought to procure not a fortune which soon ends, but one that will be everlasting. What would it profit you to be happy here, were it possible to be happy without God, if hereafter you should be miserable for all eternity? You have built that house to your entire satisfaction, but remember that you must soon leave it to rot in a grave. You have obtained that dignity which raises you above others, but death will come and reduce you to the level of the humblest peasant.

O my Jesus, I will be no longer ungrateful for the great graces Thou hast bestowed upon me. If I do not now change my life, how shall I be able at death to hope for pardon and for Paradise? Behold, I now firmly resolve to begin to serve Thee in earnest. But give me strength; do not abandon me. Thou didst not abandon me when I offended Thee; I therefore hope more confidently for Thy aid now that I purpose to renounce all things to please Thee. Accept me, then, as one of Thy lovers, O God worthy of infinite love! I love Thee, O my Jesus. I love Thee with my whole heart. I love Thee more than myself. Behold, I am Thine; dispose of me, and of all that I possess, as Thou pleasest. Give

me perseverance in obeying Thy commands. Give me Thy love, and then do with me what Thou wilt. Mary, my Mother, my hope, my refuge, to thee I recommend myself; to thee I consign my soul. Pray to Jesus for me.

Spiritual Reading.

ACTUAL SINS.

With regard to the sins that men actually commit, we must distinguish between *mortal* and *venial* sins.

1. To understand the nature of *mortal* sin, it is necessary to know that as the soul gives life to the body, so the grace of God gives life to the soul. Hence as the body without the soul is dead, and only fit for the grave, so by sin the soul dies to the grace of God and is doomed to be buried in hell. Hence grievous sin is called *mortal* because it *kills* the soul. *The soul that sinneth, the same shall die.*—(Ezech. xviii., 20). I said that the soul is doomed to hell. But what is this hell? It is a place to which all who die in mortal sin go to suffer eternal torments. *These shall go into everlasting punishment.*—(Matt. xxv., 46). And what pains shall they suffer in hell? Every conceivable pain. There the damned are immersed in a sea of fire, tortured by all sorts of torments, overwhelmed with despair, and abandoned for all eternity.

But is it reasonable, some one will say, that a soul should suffer an eternity of torments for a single mortal sin? He who speaks thus shows that he does not understand what a mortal sin is. Mortal sin is a turning of the back upon God. Thus it is defined by St. Thomas and St. Augustine, as a turning away from the unchangeable God. Hence God says to the sinner, *Thou hast forsaken me; thou hast gone backward.*—(Jer. xv., 6). Mortal sin is an insult offered to God

by sinners. *I have brought up children and exalted them, but they have despised me.*—(Is. i., 2). It is a dishonour done to the divine Majesty. *By the transgression of the law thou dishonourest God.*—(Rom. ii., 23). It is to say to God: I will not obey Thee! *Thou hast broken my yoke, . . . and thou saidst, I will not serve.*—(Jer. ii., 20). This is the essence of mortal sin; and for it one hell is not enough: a hundred or a thousand hells would not be sufficient to punish a single mortal sin. If a person unjustly injures a peasant he deserves to be punished. If he does it to a nobleman, a prince, or an emperor, he merits far greater chastisement. But what are all the kings of the earth and even all the Saints of Heaven in comparison with God? They are as nothing. *All nations are before him as if they had no being at all.*—(Is. xl., 17). Now, I ask, what chastisement is due to one who insults God, and a God Who has died for the love of us?

However, it must be observed that to make a sin mortal three things are required: *full advertence, perfect consent, and grievous matter.* If any of these three be wanting, the sin is not mortal. It can be only venial, or perhaps no sin at all.

2. *Venial* sin does not kill the soul, but it wounds it. Venial sin is not a grievous offence, but still it is an offence against God. It is not as great an evil as mortal sin; but it is a greater evil than all the evils that can happen to creatures. A lie, a venial curse, is a greater evil than if all men, all the Saints, and all the Angels were to be sent to hell.

Some venial sins are deliberate, others are indeliberate. *Indeliberate* venial sins, or sins committed without full advertence or perfect consent, are less culpable. All men fall into such sins. The Blessed Virgin only had the privilege of being exempt from them.

Deliberate venial sins, which are committed with full advertence and consent, are more criminal, particularly when there is an affection for them; such as certain feelings of hatred, of ambition, certain rooted attachments, and the like. "Who," says St. Basil, "shall dare to call any sin light?" It is enough to understand

