

Mystery of Faith - The Eucharist - Man's Final Destiny

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PART III

THOUGHTS ON THE CREDO OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

This is the third and final part of Father Henry Johnston's reflections on The Credo of the People of God, promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 30 June, 1968.

Again we have that clarity of thought and simplicity of expression which has marked Father Johnston's writings over the years.

The whole of this series should be of great help to those who wish to deepen their grasp and love of the truths of our Catholic faith.

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-THE EDITOR

1. THE MYSTERY OF FAITH

In our progress through the Creed in which Pope Paul has set forth for us our faith and the faith of the Church, we come now to a truth which is both of the highest practical importance for us and has been called, in a special sense, the mystery of faith.

We believe, as a truth revealed by God, that in the Mass Jesus Christ, our saviour, is made really present, God and man, as our victim in sacrifice, and that we thereby continue the offering of the actual sacrifice by which we were redeemed.

We believe that when we partake of the victim thus offered we are receiving Jesus Christ himself as the food of our souls.

We believe that in every Catholic church where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, our risen Lord is as truly present as he is in heaven or as he was at Bethlehem or in Nazareth or on Calvary. As God he is, of course, everywhere; we can never be separated from him. But as Man he is only in heaven and in the Blessed Eucharist.

There is hardly any need to repeat here what the Mass is and what it means for us. A recent ACTS pamphlet of mine, We Offer the New Mass, is easily available, and it opens with a brief summary of the meaning of the mass.

What a wonderful thing it would have been if we could have changed the unbelieving, mocking throng on Calvary into reverent believers, fully appreciating what was taking place! But that is what happens when the Church gathers her children round the altar on which Christ's sacrifice is continually being offered.

In union with Christ our Redeemer and supported by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we offer to God the Father the wonderful sacrifice by which the world was redeemed; and this not on a single privileged occasion which could leave only a precious memory behind, but every time we come to Mass. We have here a source of graces and blessings which we could never exhaust.

When we receive holy communion we unite ourselves with the victim of sacrifice in the most intimate way, by entering into a living union with him. He promised, we remember, that those who would eat him would live by his life. So when we offer this victim of infinite value we also offer ourselves to the Father in the best possible way, losing ourselves in his beloved Son.

In order that we may lead a vigorous supernatural life we need food to sustain and strengthen us. Could we ever have dreamed of a food like this, or if we had could we have dared to hope for it? Yet here the Son of God makes himself our food; we have his strength and holiness to nourish us.

Reservation

Though Mass and holy communion are the primary purpose of this mystery, and it was only gradually that worship of the reserved sacrament grew up in the Church, we can appreciate today the opportunity which the continual presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament offers us, so that we may develop our personal devotion to him, manifest our gratitude, and come to a better understanding of his love for us.

The mystery of the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Eucharist consists in this, that through the power of God what was bread or wine is changed into Jesus Christ, while all that our senses could perceive of the bread or wine is maintained by God just as it was. The reality of a thing, what makes it what it really is, is something our intellect deals with. The way in which it manifests itself to us is dealt with by our senses.

Common sense makes a distinction between the appearance of a thing and the reality which has this appearance. Nature or art may vary the appearance of a person's face, but it is still the same face. When you grow bigger you are not a different person because of your increase in size. You are the same being, the same reality, whether you are ill or in good health, hot or cold, wise or foolish, virtuous or the opposite. On the other hand, twins may be identical in appearance, but they are not the same human being.

Change of the Reality

What we regard as the reality of a thing, as distinct from its appearance, can be changed, either naturally or by miracle. There is a natural change when bread and butter become our flesh and blood, or when water is resolved into oxygen and hydrogen, or when radio-active elements change ultimately into lead, or when chlorine (a poisonous gas) and sodium (a metal which may ignite when thrown into water) are combined chemically to become common salt. A miraculous change took place when Christ changed water into wine at the marriage feast of Cana.

This last change gives us a parallel - though not an exact one - for the change which takes place when the bread and wine are changed into Christ himself. In this case the change is only in the

reality, and God maintains the shape, colour, taste, and anything in the bread and wine which could be perceived by our senses, exactly as they were before. This being understood, there can be no reasonable quarrel with the statement of the Council of Trent, and the Church ever since, that the change worked by God "is suitably and properly called transubstantiation".

But we must not think that setting it forth in this way explains the mystery. It remains as much a mystery as ever. We must not expect to understand it; much less must we allow our imagination to deal with the mode of Christ's presence, which is something imagination cannot cope with and reason cannot understand.

Admittedly this is a great mystery, but so is the Incarnation itself. We cannot understand how the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, remaining absolutely unchanged in his divine nature, took to himself a human nature, so that he became truly man. God's power, like his love, has no limits and exceeds our comprehension. But we must have good reason for accepting the mystery of the Blessed Eucharist, and here we are on sure ground; we have the word of God.

We are familiar with the words our Lord used when he instituted the Blessed Eucharist, "This is my body", "This is my blood". We might well wonder if these words alone would have been sufficient to reveal to the apostles this momentous truth in its fullness. But a year before, at the previous Pasch, they had been prepared.

The Promise

At Capernaum many of Christ's hearers had grumbled because he had said that he was the bread that had come down from heaven, something better than the manna of old. To their objections he replied: "I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert and they are dead. I am speaking of the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and never die... Moreover, the bread which I will give is my own flesh; I give it for the life of the world".

This led to a fresh outburst of opposition. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" But Jesus refused to withdraw or modify what he had said. Instead, he repeated it over and over again in stronger and, to his listeners, more offensive terms: "In truth, in very truth I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you can have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood possesses eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. My flesh is real food; my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells continually in me and I dwell in him." (John 6: 53-56).

As a result, many of those who heard him gave up following him and listening to his teaching. He let them go. This was a truth about which there could be no compromise. Long before St. John wrote these words St. Paul had told the Corinthians: "Any one who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of desecrating the body and blood of the Lord" (I Cor. 11: 25).

Later Testimony

St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch and martyr, belonged to the century in which our Lord and his apostles lived. He has left us seven letters, written to different christian communities. In that sent to the Christians of Smyrna he alludes to an early heretical sect which maintained that our Lord's human nature was not real, but only an appearance which he assumed. "They abstain," he writes, "from the Eucharist because they do not admit that the Eucharist is the flesh of our saviour, Jesus Christ, that suffered for us."

St. Justin Martyr lived in the early part of the next century and wrote two defences of Christianity. About the Eucharist he writes: "This food is called by us Eucharist and no one is permitted to partake of it unless he believes that our teaching is true, and has received the washing for the forgiveness of sins and for the new birth (baptism), and lives according to the teaching of Christ. For we do not receive it as ordinary bread or ordinary drink, but... we have been taught that the food consecrated by the word of prayer coming from Jesus Christ... is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh".

St. Irenaeus, in the same century, tells us that in his youth he had associated with St. Polycarp, who had known St. John the apostle, "and with others who had seen the Lord". One quotation from him will suffice: "Wine and bread are by the word of God changed into the eucharist, which is the body and blood of Christ".

There is no need to go on with a list of testimonies throughout the history of the Church for we are dealing with a doctrine which is one of those most firmly held at all times and most clearly and explicitly defined by the Church.

The Church! That is where we rest. We are Catholics precisely because we accept the teaching of Christ's Church as the teaching of Christ himself. When many had turned away from him at Capernaum, (John 6: 67-71), because they would not accept his teaching, our Lord put this question to his apostles, "Do you also want to leave me?" Peter answered him for us all, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Your words are words of eternal life."

2. WHO HEARS THE CHURCH HEARS CHRIST

In all the records which we have of God's dealing with men we find that it was through men that he delivered his message. We are told that God sent Moses as "ruler and deliverer", and that he led his people "by the hand of Moses and Aaron".

He spoke to them through the prophets, through whom the people received "the oracles of God." Our Lord told the people to obey those who sat "in the chair of Moses"; and the high priest, we are told, spoke more truly than he knew because of the position he occupied. (John 11: 51)

But all that happened under the old dispensation was only a preparation for what was to come. God had spoken through the prophets and made known his revelation progressively but incompletely; finally he was to speak to us through his Son. "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

It was noticed at once by his hearers that Christ spoke with an authority that was new among the Jews. He claimed to possess universal power on earth and a royal dignity. He said he had come down from heaven, and that his teaching was only what had been learned in the intimate life of the Blessed Trinity.

The message of Jesus was, in consequence, the message of the Father, whose ambassador he was. When people listened to Jesus they were listening to the Father, and when they refused to listen it was the Father's word that they refused to accept. This was the final and complete revelation of God to his people.

But when we examine the records of the life of the Redeemer in this world we are at once struck by an extraordinary feature of it. He spent only two or three years in his public ministry and he never went much outside a very small country, situated on the confines of the Roman Empire.

The Redeemer came for all mankind and for all generations; how was this brief appearance on earth and this teaching of a handful of people to have an influence on future generations throughout the wide world? When Christ had left the earth, as far as his visible presence was concerned, he had accomplished little.

We read that after his resurrection he appeared on one occasion to 500 of his disciples at once, and it would almost seem that this number would represent about all who - at least in Galilee - had been won over to belief in him.

But one thing we do notice is that Christ associated other men with him in his work. We read of 72 disciples sent out in pairs to prepare the way for him. Moreover, there was a special band of twelve, individually chosen, who became his constant associates and were carefully instructed and trained in a way that others were not. He even shared with them his divine powers of healing, and later of granting the forgiveness of sins through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Mission of the Apostles

Gradually it became clear that they were destined for a more important role than that of mere helpers; they were to take the Redeemer's place and carry on his work, a work which he would only inaugurate. They would occupy the same position in regard to him as he occupied in regard to his Father: "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you."

Addressing his Father, he said: "The words which you have given me I have given to them." "Go into the whole world and preach the good news to all mankind," was their commission. He gave them the name of "apostle" which, before it acquired its technical sense, meant simply "messenger", "one sent". He said that whoever welcomed one whom he sent would be welcoming him, and that would be the same as welcoming his Father. On the other hand, rejection of his messengers was rejection of him.

We find the apostles, thus instructed by their master, carrying their message abroad with a sense of authority. There was no gospel of man; it was not learned from man, but by revelation from Jesus Christ.

If the revelation of the Old Law carried with it such grave obligation to listen and obey, how much more guilty would they be who rejected the fuller message of salvation now offered, "delivered in the first instance by the Lord himself, and guaranteed to us by those who heard it from his own lips, with God adding his testimony by signs and wonders" (Hebrews 2:3).

"By what authority and in whose name have you done this?" was the first challenge to the apostles from those who opposed them (Acts 4: 7). They had no doubt about the answer; it was always "by the authority of the Lord Jesus"; they were obeying God and not man.

This authority of God, committed to his representatives, made the Church an hierarchical body from the beginning. The revelation was not made directly to all men, but to "witnesses chosen beforehand by God" (Acts 10:40), "Christ's ambassadors" (2 Cor. 5:20), ministers through whom faith is received (1. Cor. 3: 5).

Whatever spiritual gifts the Corinthians deemed themselves to have, Paul insisted that they should recognize in his teaching "the commandment of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37). Every man is accursed who preaches any other gospel than that which comes with the authority of the apostles (Galatians 1: 9). The duty of Christ's messengers was not simply to put before people certain doctrines and

rites for their consideration, to be accepted only by those who approved of them, but to teach Christ's doctrine and demand obedience and faith.

We read that they found fault with unauthorized persons who disturbed the Christians with their private views on a disputed question, "without any instructions from us" (Acts 15:24).

Teaching with Authority

All through the latter part of the New Testament we find the greatest insistence laid on the necessity of holding fast to the truth delivered once and for all to God's chosen ones (Jude 3). Paul invokes a curse on himself, and extends it to an angel from heaven, if he should attempt to teach any other faith than that already preached. (See Gal. 1: 8)

The divine plan of salvation rests on acceptance of God's teaching, and St. Paul tells Timothy to see that certain men do not teach another doctrine, as opposed to the "sound doctrine" of his gospel. By abandoning this "some have made shipwreck of their faith." (See 1 Tim 1: 11 & 19; 6: 3; 2 Tim 1: 13; 4: 3) He advises the Romans (16: 17) to avoid those who cause dissensions and depart from the teaching they have received.

When a man has received one or two warnings, he tells Titus (3: 10), he is to be avoided if he still keeps obstinately to his own opinions. St. John is even stronger: if a man comes with false doctrine the believer should not receive him into his house, or even greet him (2 John 10).

But the activity of the apostles, though wider in sphere and more extended in time than that of Christ, would still be very limited. It would not be long before most of them found their work ended by a violent death; yet countless generations of men who had not heard their message were still to be born, and salvation was for all.

Christ had died, not for the Jewish people alone, but that he "might gather into one the scattered children of God" (John 11:52). The Kingdom was to be preached, so the master said, throughout the world "for a witness to all nations". Though the preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sin was to begin in Jerusalem, it was in Christ's plan to be carried over the whole earth.

The Apostolic College

The apostolic college was established, not as a group that would in time disappear, but as a corporation which would last. This appears plainly from Christ's words to his apostles before he left them: "I shall be with you all days till the end of the world." (See Mt. 28: 20) Another Counsellor would take his place, the Spirit of Truth; and he would be with them "for ever." (John 14: 16).

It was what had already been proclaimed at the dawn of the new era: the promise was for Abraham and for his children "for ever" (Luke 1: 55). That was why Christ said that he was building his Church on rock, so that it might never be destroyed by the forces of evil.

We find, accordingly, that the apostles chose others, just as they themselves had been chosen, to take their place and carry on their work. At the very beginning Peter decided that the place of Judas should be filled, and God was asked to make known which of two disciples he chose for the ministry and apostleship from which the traitor had fallen.

During the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas priests were appointed "in every church" (Acts 14:23). Paul asked Timothy to hand on the doctrine received from him to trustworthy men who could teach others in their turn (2 Tim. 2: 2).

In Ephesus Paul had committed the care of the faithful to a group of priests, and he exhorted them to pay attention to the flock of which the Holy Spirit had given them charge, as shepherds of the Church of God (Acts 20: 28).

St. Peter gave the same charge to priests to be true shepherds of the flock of God, recalling the supreme Shepherd to whom they were responsible (1 Peter 5: 2). We have, of course, no guarantee that all the members of the Church will remain faithful to her teaching. Our Lord himself warned us against "false prophets", who would look as harmless as sheep, but would be in reality as dangerous as wolves.

The apostles themselves had experience of this. When Paul urged the priests of Ephesus to be good shepherds, he foretold that after his departure fierce wolves would make an attack on the flock, and that some of the shepherds themselves would go astray and draw a number of the disciples after them (Acts 20:29-30). There are many other such warnings in the New Testament.

Unshaken Trust

But we can have unshaken trust in Christ's Church. "The Holy Spirit," the pope writes in the Credo which we are studying, "unfailingly assists her in her charge of guarding, teaching, explaining, and spreading that truth which was foreshadowed in the prophets and which God fully and completely revealed to men in the Lord Jesus."

If, even under the Old Law, the teaching of the prophets could be trusted, because their word was God's word, how much surer can we be now that Christ has come with the complete and final revelation of God and has sent us his accredited messengers. He said that we must listen to his Church, because in listening to his Church we are listening to him.

With good reason, then, did St. Paul write that the Church of God is "the pillar and support on which the truth rests" (1 Tim. 3: 15). How blessed we are to be guided by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, ever living in his Church!

3. "MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD"

"Thy Kingdom come!" These are the words which are often on our lips; what do we mean by them? We pray that the sovereignty of God may be established over all mankind. We may also take Kingdom in a more material sense, as the collection of all those redeemed by Christ, a work which is constantly going on.

When this work of redemption is finally completed (in so far as men will accept it) then the man Christ, our ruler, will offer himself with us to his Father, "and God will rule completely over all" (1 Cor. 15, 28).

The Kingdom is a supernatural one. Its citizens receive a new life, which is a marvellous sharing by creatures in the divine life. It calls for a constant striving towards God in faith, hope and love. It could never be acquired by the powers of human nature, but can come from God alone.

This does not mean, of course, that it is not a life lived by men on earth, with duties that concern this world. But it is truly a divine life, and every part of it is derived from God and directed towards him. In particular, our love of God must manifest itself in love of all his children for his sake. Such charity has always been characteristic of the Church.

Many Catholic Charities

It would astonish most Catholics if they had before them a list of all the works of charity carried out by Catholics, lay and religious, in the home lands and in the missions all the world over. Think of the work of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in every part of Australia and elsewhere. Think of the work of so many religious and others tending lepers and the sick of every kind.

How many young people receive under Catholic care a loving attention they could find nowhere else! How many aged people receive the charity of Christ in homes such as those under the care of the Little Sisters of the Poor or the Sisters of Nazareth!

How many children are taught their religion and prepared for it by devoted catholic teachers! How many lay people give generous help to charitable works, both by money and personal service! Increasing numbers of lay persons are devoting their services to the missions.

However, we must never be satisfied; it is desirable that this interest in our fellow-men should become wider and deeper. Our love for God can be truly measured only by our love for his children on earth.

A Danger

But it is unfortunate that a great danger has arisen in what is one of the great glories of the Church. It is that our concern for our fellow-men should drift away from its true centre, which is God, and descend to the level of mere humanitarianism. It is part of the loss of the supernatural spirit, which leads men - and even Catholics - to regard created beings as the centre of everything instead of God.

God, of course, is the great reality. He is the fullness of being, and the source of all reality outside himself, the one on whom everything entirely depends.

That greatest of men, as our Lord called him, John the Baptist, put the matter quite clearly when he said, "No one can have anything unless God gives it to him." (John 3: 27).

God's Love for Us

In his love God drew us out of nothingness; he sent his Son to be our saviour, and gave us the incredible gift of a share in the sonship of his only-begotten Son; he has destined us to be allowed to know him as he really is, and actually share in the divine life, the life of the Blessed Trinity, forever.

But of course created things appeal to us much more easily and more forcibly than the great reality of God. This creates a constant danger for us, and one which is specially threatening today. The Pope in the Credo we are studying stresses this point. He writes:

"We confess that the Kingdom of God begun here below in the Church of Christ is not of this world whose form is passing, and that its proper growth cannot be confounded with the progress of civilization, of science or of human technology, but that it consists in an ever more profound knowledge of the unfathomable riches of Christ, an ever stronger hope in eternal blessings, an ever more ardent response to the love of God, and an ever more generous bestowal of grace and holiness among men.

"But it is this same love which induces the Church to concern herself constantly about the true temporal welfare of men.

"Without ceasing to recall to her children that they have not here a lasting dwelling, she also urges them to contribute, each according to his vocation and his means, to the welfare of their earthly city,

to promote justice, peace and brotherhood among men, to give their aid freely to their brothers, especially to the poorest and most unfortunate.

"The deep solicitude of the Church, the Spouse of Christ, for the needs of men:, for their joys and hopes, their griefs and efforts, is therefore nothing other than her great desire to be present to them, in order to illuminate them with the light of Christ and to gather them all in him, their only Saviour.

"This solicitude can never mean that the Church conform herself to the things of this world, or that she lessen the ardour of her expectation of her Lord and of the eternal Kingdom."

There is a great danger that devotion to human needs, which is so noble a work, should make us forget that there is something far more important, union with God in supernatural life.

Our Lord makes this point clear when he puts the question whether it would be a good bargain to win everything this world could offer, at the cost of losing one's soul. Profit and loss; work it out.

A Tragic Mistake

It would be a tragedy, and the frustration of Christ's work on earth, if for Christianity we substituted humanitarianism, as if our ultimate end was prosperity and happiness in this world; as if it was man that really mattered instead of God. A good pagan could accept all that.

Our Lord Jesus Christ went about doing good, but it was not just material good or for material ends. "Man does not live by bread alone," he said. If we seek earnestly to submit ourselves to the sovereignty of God, we shall really have nothing to worry about.

God looks after the birds of the air and the lilies of the field; he will not neglect us. We are to be concerned with treasures in heaven rather than treasures on earth. Our Lord went so far as to say, "Blessed are you poor, and you who are hungry now, and you who weep now."

Jesus Christ did much for the suffering and sorrowing, but it was all subordinate to his care for souls. One who was cured was warned to avoid sin, lest some worse evil befall him. When he cured the paralysed man he said, "Your sins are forgiven you." That was the important point.

Martha and Mary were told that there was only thing necessary. He said that he came on earth that we might have life in all its fullness; and he did not mean an earthly life. The life he brought us consisted in knowing the only true God, and Jesus Christ sent by him.

Greatly to be commended are the Australian Catholics who contribute so generously to Project Compassion, Catholic Relief Services and Caritas. But it would be a strange deficiency in their faith if they were not more generous still in supporting the work of the missions. This is an example of how the spirit of naturalness may creep in, so contrary to the spirit of Christ.

Necessity of Faith

Faith and its necessity are something our Lord was constantly stressing. It means acceptance of his teaching and his claims, and a readiness to obey and follow him. He always demanded faith in those for whom he worked miracles. In Nazareth St. Mark says our Lord could not work any miracles because of want of faith in the inhabitants.

He explicitly told some of those he cured that it was their faith that made them well. Before giving sight to two blind men, he asked them if they believed he was able to do this. He gave special praise to two pagans who displayed greater faith than Israelites. When the apostles failed to work a

miracle, their master told them it was because of their want of faith. On the other hand, everything was possible for one who had faith. Eternal life comes through faith.

We must make sure that in these troublous times our faith in Christ, far from wavering, should become stronger and more whole-hearted. The Son of God came to give us God's final revelation, after many and various messages given through the prophets.

When men refused to accept his teaching he passed on and left them. He told his apostles that if a town refused to listen to them they were to leave it and shake off the dust of that town from their shoes. Their main work would be to carry his doctrine of salvation all over the world. It was the purpose, he said, for which he had come on earth, to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God.

Over and over again he insists that his messengers have his authority, and that rejection of them is rejection of him. It is well for us these days to keep in mind St. Paul's warning: "Watch out for those who cause divisions and upset people's faith, who go against the teaching you have received" (Rom. 16: 17).

Our Lord's words, too, can easily be forgotten, that we cannot enter the Kingdom of heaven unless we approach it in the spirit of a little child and the higher our position will be the more childlike we become.

"Keep the Commandments"

It has been urged at times that children should not be taught to keep the commandments of God and of his Church. Love is everything. It is true, of course, that mere mechanical keeping of laws (going to Mass "because I have to") can be without any spiritual value. Still we must remember that when a good young man ("Christ looked at him and loved him") asked our Lord the plain question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" he received the equally plain answer, "Keep the commandments." He said that anyone who did what his Father in heaven wanted him to do would be as close to him as brother, sister, or mother.

It is hard to understand how anyone can make light of the keeping of the law when our Lord so emphatically declared it to be the real test and proof of love.

"You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John 15: 14).

"Whoever loves me will obey my message... Whoever does not love me does not obey my words" (John 14: 23-24).

"I do what the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father" (John 14: 31).

"If you obey my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love" (John 15: 10).

St. John, who knew our Lord's heart so well, says much the same in his first and second letters.

Necessity of Obedience

Obedience has fallen out of favour in some quarters, but it shines out in the teaching and example of our one Master. The greater part of his life is described in the Gospel simply as spent in obedience. St. Paul exhorts us to have the spirit of Christ. When he became man he did not claim the dignity and position due to him as Son of God; instead, he was humble and walked the path of obedience

that led him to death, death on a cross (Phil. 2: 6-8). Can we hope to do better than Christ when he was on earth? Here is his own description of the principle on which his life was based:

"My food (what I live on day by day) is to do the will of him who sent me" (John 4: 34).

"I am not trying to do what I want, but only what he who sent me wants" (John 5: 30).

"I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me" (John 6: 38).

"I always do what pleases him" (John 8:29).

If, then, we turn our backs on obedience, we turn our backs on Jesus Christ.

What is Love?

We are told that love is the great thing. But what do we mean by love? Our Lord was once asked a very important question, "What is the greatest commandment of the law?" the one to which we should devote most attention. The answer concerns us very deeply. "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."

It is true that he added a second commandment, "like the first" (the love of God and our neighbour is really one virtue), but we must never forget that the love of God must come first, and that if we are not loving others for God's sake it is not a christian virtue. Our Lord's words, "You did it to me," give us the true motive for charity.

Self-denial

A natural religion does not believe in self-denial, yet it is the stamp of the religion of Christ. We must be prepared to carry a cross after him if we are to be true to him. Some are called to leave everything and follow him. We are told even that we must hate father and mother, wife and children, and brothers and sisters, and even our own life in order to be his true disciples.

Of course this has to be understood in the language in which it was spoken. The Jews had few means of indicating shades of difference between more and less; they did not even have a comparative or superlative of the adjective; so things had to be expressed in a way that must sometimes appear too blunt to us. The real meaning of this saying of our Lord is that we must not allow the most sacred of human ties to come between us and his service.

"My Kingdom is not of this world." We cannot change the character of Christ's Kingdom. No one can lay any foundation, St. Paul reminds us, other than the foundation already laid, namely, Jesus Christ. He tells himself that no one can come to the Father except through him.

The New Testament, which is God's revelation to us, can never be out of date. If we adopt new ideas incompatible with those of Christ, one thing we can be certain of is that our ideas are false. If Christ walks one way and we take another, one thing we can be certain of is that we are on the wrong road.

4. WHAT WILL THE END BE?

We live a life of faith; and faith demands trust and abandonment. We can accept the word of God with full assurance, but we must walk in darkness while we are in this world.

The realities in which we believe remain hidden from us. That is in keeping with what the letter to the Hebrews tells us, that faith is the assurance of the reality of the things we hope for, and the conviction of the truth of things we do not see.

But this life of faith is not to be our permanent state; it is only a time of preparation. We are pilgrims on earth; but where is the holy shrine to which we are making our way? We are wayfarers; but what is the destination towards which we are travelling? The brief answer is, eternal life with God. It is the assurance of reaching this end through our faith that must encourage and sustain us till faith and hope are swallowed up in love.

How can we describe this life, which is a sharing in the life of God himself? We know directly only created things, and they cannot give us a true understanding of the things of God. The words we use describe properly only created things, and cannot truly represent divine things. We are forced to use parallels, symbols, images, all of them imperfect and some liable to be misleading.

An English poetess, Christina Rossetti, has put it this way:

Does the road wind up-hill all the way? Yes, to the very end. Will the day's journey take the whole long day? From morn to night, my friend. But is there for the night a resting-place? A roof for when the slow dark hours begin. May not the darkness hide it from my face? You cannot miss that inn. Shall I meet other wayfarers at night? Those who have gone before. Then must I knock, or call when just in sight? They will not keep you standing at that door. Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak? Of labour you shall find the sum. Will there be beds for me and all who seek? Yes, beds for all who come.

To give any true description of the life that awaits us in eternity would be as hard as to describe a sunset to a blind man, or to paint the beauty of the sunlit world for one who had always lived underground. But we have some idea of what happiness is, and from our experience of imperfect happiness we can make some guess at what perfect happiness will be.

Happiness involves release from painful labour. Activity is good and the exercise of bodily or mental powers can be exhilarating. But hard and wearisome labour is painful to human nature, and in the midst of toil we look forward to rest as relief. In heaven there will be no more hard work, no distasteful duties to perform; our tasks will have been completed; we shall be at rest.

Peace

Happiness implies peace. In this world we must always be fighting if we are to be safe. We must fight to overcome obstacles and dangers from without, and - worse still - we must engage in unceasing warfare with ourselves. Our worst enemies are within us.

But if we are faithful, the day of victory will surely dawn, and peace will be our portion for ever. There will be no more fighting against temptations from without, or against our own unruly passions. Selfishness, pride, greed, and all our other enemies will have disappeared; the good within us will have finally triumphed.

For complete happiness there must be the absence of everything that can hurt. But what human being in this world is immune from pain, sorrow, disappointment and anxiety? Who does not suffer sometimes from unkindness, injustice, neglect and ingratitude?

But in heaven there will be nothing to trouble us; no shadow of evil will be found in God's home. "God will wipe away all tears from their eyes; there will be no more death, and no more mourning or sadness, for the former things have passed away." (Apoc. 21: 4).

Content

Happiness means content. No one can be at peace or rest while discontented. And how little real content there is in this world. "We look before and after, and pine for what is not." Our thirst for happiness is never fully satisfied, because there is nothing on earth that can satisfy a nature that has been made to find its end in God.

Saint Augustine's well-known words are true: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts can never rest till they rest in you." But when we reach our journey's end and find at last in God infinite good and the source of limitless happiness, we shall be content; there will be no desire of our hearts that will not have its complete fulfilment. It does not mean the absence of desire; our desires will be all the keener then, but their object will not be beyond our reach, as so often happens on earth.

Joy

But happiness implies more than peace, rest, and content; it includes the highest form of pleasure. We need not exclude bodily pleasure, though here we must be careful. We may think of the pleasure it gives to be in perfect health, when we say that it is good to be alive, or the pleasure that is found in the exercise of any skill. But pleasure belongs chiefly to the mind and will. There is pleasure in the search for truth, in the gradual conquest of some branch of science or philosophy, in the unravelling of problems, and the resolution of apparent contradictions. But the efforts of our minds in this world cannot compare with the clear and penetrating vision of truth we shall have in the presence of God.

In heaven the easy grasp of truth and its enjoyment will not be the privilege of a few, but the common possession of all. There is no need to insist on the pleasure that the human mind can experience through music, literature, and art. How, then, can we conceive the pleasure that will be ours when we find infinite beauty?

Go through the whole universe and pick out every bit of beauty you can find. Like a bee gathering honey, take the beauty of the skies at night, at sunset, or at dawning; look for beauty on the earth, in the mountain and valley, by lake and stream, the tumbling of the waves on the sea and the rock-bound coast; gather the beauty of flower and tree, and the beauty of the songs of birds; draw all their beauty from literature, art, and music; take all the beauty of human character; put it all together, and how inconceivable that beauty would be. But put it beside the beauty of God, and it would be as noticeable as the stars in the sky when the sun is shining. It is true of God to say, not so much that he has beauty, but that he is beauty itself.

Love

The chief source of happiness is love. None are so satisfied and so thoroughly happy as those who are in love; and in proportion to the purity of the love and the worthiness of the object loved is the happiness love produces. Eternal life is above all a life of love. There our hearts will be filled to overflowing with the love of the infinite goodness of God. We shall be united with him in a union incomparably closer than any union on earth. Our love will have none of the pain or the limitations

inseparable from love here below, though even on earth it is the love of God that can give the truest happiness.

Eternal

All things on earth are passing; but it is the crown of the happiness of heaven that it can have no end. We cannot lose it by any fault of our own, for no sin or imperfection will then be found in us, nor the possibility of them. Nor can there be any other evil that can enter God's home to spoil our happiness or bring it to an end. We can never lose our happiness because we can never be separated from the source of it, God, whose life we shall share for ever.

But will unending happiness not mean satiety? In this world we tire, not of happiness, but of the objects in which we seek our happiness, none of which are ever sufficient for all our desires. We do not tire of the happiness of love, but we cease to love some particular object and thus cease to enjoy the happiness which its love can give. But the source of the happiness of love in heaven is God himself, of whose beauty and goodness we can never tire because, being infinite, they will always be as fresh and wonderful to us as in the first moment we are ravished by the sight of them.

Perfect Fulfilment

It is true that heaven is a reward for a life of faith on earth. "Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life", we read in the Apocalypse. But there is something more. We are not just children who have to be bribed to be good by the promise of enjoyments to come. We do not speak of the flower or the ear of corn as the reward of the seed that was planted; it is the seed's natural growth to perfection. So the life of eternity is the development of the life of grace in this world; it is the perfection to which our life of faith and hope lead us.

It is rather what we shall be than what we shall receive that will constitute the happiness of eternity. Heaven is the state in which, having struggled painfully in this world, with the help of God's grace, to hold fast to God's truth and carry out his will, we shall become what the New Testament calls "the just made perfect". Our imperfect union with God in this world will blossom into a wonderful sharing in the life of the Blessed Trinity.

We can gather from the word of God in the New Testament a better idea of our final destiny than can be put in merely human words. It would be impossible to give all; but here are a few specimens of what we are there taught:

"You believed in Christ, and God put his seal of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit he had promised. The Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it" (Ephesians 1: 13-14).

"To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality God will give eternal life" (Romans 2: 7).

"I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8: 18).

"We are God's children now; it is not yet clear what we shall become, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (I John 3: 2).

"You have sorrow now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (John 16: 22).

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