

What Will The Neighbours Think?

By Rev William P. O'Keefe, C.M.
Catholic Truth Society of Ireland No.pr448a (1948)

As I sit here, fingers poised above the typewriter, wondering how to begin this new booklet, my mind goes back to a little conversation that took place here in this very room a few years ago.

Just then, the war was at its bitterest and most horrible. Submarines, in particular, had made the seas so unsafe that one perpetually pitied 'them who go down to the sea in ships, doing business in the great waters'. In what, for want of a better word to describe its deceitful promise of comfort, I must call my easy chair, there sat a young friend of mine, a young priest about to take on the following morning the dreadfully hazardous sea journey to his mission in Australia.

Other friends and acquaintances of mine, both lay and clerical, had similarly set out, but their voyage had been a rendezvous with Death, and, God rest them, they lie buried in the vast briny deep, far from home and kindred. I looked at the fine handsome, young priest before me and wondered what would be his 'journey's end' in the voyage he was about to begin. It was easy for me to muse thus, even as we conversed, for he did most of the talking, reminiscing about old times when his intelligence and industry made him the prize-winner in my Philosophy class, recalling amusing incidents and retelling many happy tales about his class-fellows and their unpredictable professor.

Then the time for departure drew near and I was startled out of my partial reverie by hearing him say: "And now, Father, before I go, may I suggest a subject for your next booklet? Take it as a last request, take it as a personal petition, take it as anything you like... but, please Father, do write a book for the Irish people on HUMAN RESPECT. Since my ordination (eighteen months previously), while I have been waiting for transport to Australia, I have had lots of time to sit back and study the land in which I grew up and the people whom I love best. And my summing up is that if we Irish have a national failing, it is in being so concerned about what the neighbours will think. It has made us a nation of in-betweens, afraid to be anything but mediocre, too shy to be great saints, too cowardly to be great sinners.

"I don't blame anybody, Father. Our ancestors had to be so careful of what landlords and others might think of their actions that caution has become ingrained in us, but isn't it high time that we realised our freedom, realised that we are no longer slaves, realised that we ought to shed the psychology of the slave, the lip-service, the hypocrisy, the pandering to human respect?

"I shall be comforted in going abroad, if I can think that by getting you to promise that you will write such a booklet I shall have done something about this. It will also help, if I reach Australia, to hope that, on my return to Old Ireland, I shall find my countrymen better able to live the life of free-men."

In the circumstances, could I refuse to write?

CHILDISHNESS.

To act always with an eye to what others will think of one's conduct is a form of selfishness. Psychologists would call it an infantile fixation, an immaturity of character, a carry-over from infancy to adulthood.

It is natural in a child to copy others. Mentally as well as physically, infancy needs support, and it is easier to copy others than to act on one's own initiative independently of what one's companions may do or say. But what is becoming in the child is, in this case, a defect in the adult; few people will condone the lack of moral courage in a grown up as they will in a young person: manliness is practically a synonym for resolution, tenacity of purpose and the ability to hold fast to one's ideals without vacillation or compromise.

WHAT IS HUMAN RESPECT?

My dictionary tells me that respect means 'deferential esteem'. Human respect means to esteem human beings too highly, to defer to men even when to do so is to spurn Him Who made man, to prefer the goodwill of the creature to that of the Creator.

Human respect is a foolish shame of appearing virtuous, a wretched shyness of seeming to be pious, a spiritual timidity in following Christ in one's daily life. The victim has a vain fear of following the dictates of his conscience lest by doing so, he should merit the derision and lose the favour of his fellow. To him would the great Saint John Chrysostom say: 'Miserable man, if you cannot abide being laughed at by your fellow slave, how will you bear being hated by your Lord?'

Here are many men, indeed, who, if they could but break the wretched bond of human respect, would find great happiness in the enjoyment of the liberty that belongs to the true children of God. Their characters are cramped and confined by their self-imposed restrictions. Like the neurotic that has to conquer his groundless fears before he can enjoy health, if they would only throw off the yoke of human respect they would soon rejoice in their new-found freedom.

'Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty?' Yes, and the peace and absence of anxiety, the contentment, tranquility and calmness that are the fruits of this divine freedom of soul.

FREEDOM.

What is more desirable than liberty; what more hated than slavery? The free-man is the symbol of beauty and nobility; the slave betokens misery and disgrace. Life itself is not more precious than liberty, and death is preferable to slavery.

But Holy Scripture tells us that to serve God according to one's conscience is true freedom: "You, brethren," says Saint Paul, "have been called unto liberty: be not the bond-slaves of men." It is saddening to think that even such as call themselves Christians can be found to doubt this teaching in practice, acting as though to serve God were slavery and to defer to men were freedom.

Saint Augustine said well: "Not without cause did Christ wish His seal to be placed on our forehead, lest the Christian should blush at the shame of his Saviour. Therefore did he place His Cross on the foreheads of those who believe in Him, for the forehead is, in a sense, the seat of modesty, and He wished those who believe to blush not at His Name, and to prefer the glory of God to being esteemed by men."

STRONG WILL.

To be a Christian means to have the Spirit of God indwelling in the sanctuary of one's soul. It means that our intelligence and our wills are guided and enlightened and strengthened by the Holy Ghost. And when the Christian has received the Sacrament of Confirmation, his power of decision, in particular, is strengthened and made firm in all that pertains to the profession of his Christian convictions. From now on, one might say, when he wills to serve God, it is not he alone who wills, but the divine dynamism that is in him, the Love of God that has taken possession of his soul, the Spirit of Jesus that indwells in him. And when he fails to assert himself in the love of God, lest he should lose the love of men, he subordinates his conscience and plays false to his ideals, then, truly he 'grieves' the Spirit of God, and acts against his own best interests. If he persists in such a fashion of acting, he may one day kill the divine life in his soul: human respect may lead him thus far, that rather than offend a fellow-mortal he would degrade his soul and besmirch his conscience by grievous sin. To quote Saint Augustine again: "A Christian must be without human respect, when he goes among men to whom Christ is unwelcome. He must be able to endure being mocked, being called a worshipper of a crucified criminal, an adorer of a dead malefactor, a venerator of one who was executed... if he is ashamed of such things; he is dead spiritually."

TOBIAS.

As the Divine Wisdom has left us, in the Book of Job, a description of patience incarnate, so, to some extent, in the Book of Tobias (or Tobit), it has left us the story of a man who excelled in moral Courage, whose character was fire-tried and well-proved, whose life was unimpeachable. With the rest of his tribe he was taken captive into Assyria, but 'even in his captivity, he forsook not the way of truth.'

As a young man in Galilee, 'he did no childish things in his work and when all went to the golden calves, which Jeroboam, the king of Israel, had made, he alone fled the company of all, and went to Jerusalem to the temple of the Lord, and there he adored the Lord God of Israel... These and suchlike things, when but a boy, did he observe according to the law of God.'

And even in captivity 'when all ate of the meats of the Gentiles, he kept his soul and never was defiled with them.' And as if to emphasise the freedom that was his in being so independent of human respect, the inspired writer continues: 'And because he was mindful of the Lord with all his heart, God gave him favour in the sight of Salmanasar (Shalmaneser) the King: and he gave him leave to go whithersoever he would, with liberty to do whatsoever he had a mind.' (Tobit chapter 1.)

Small wonder that Tobias quote with approval his future daughter-in-law's prayer when she could say: "This every one is sure of that worships You, that his life, if it be under trial, shall be crowned; and if under tribulation, it shall be delivered, and if it be under correction, it shall be allowed to come to Your mercy. You are not delighted in our being lost; but after a storm, You make a calm, and after tears and weeping, You pour in joyfulness. Be Your name, O God of Israel, blessed for ever." (Tobit 3:21-23 in the Vulgate.)

COWARDICE.

What word more hurtful than coward! Call a man a liar, a thief, a scoundrel, and he, naturally, resents it; but call him a coward, however, and you do more than malign him. You dare him in the most hurtful way to refute you. If he is no coward, he must withstand you, and will, even if successful, be grieved nonetheless to have been considered lacking in courage and manliness.

And, in a soldier, cowardice goes hand-in-hand with treachery. To be a coward is traitorous, for the coward endangers other lives as well as his own, and his very cowardice may lead him to betray his comrades to the enemy in order to save his own worthless skin; so through human respect is evil example given instead of good, and one's comrades in the army of Christ are betrayed to Satan.

HUMAN RESPECT IS TREACHERY TO CHRIST.

The Christian who has received the sacrament of Confirmation is a commissioned soldier of the Saviour. The standard of Christ has been given into his hands and he is ordered to bear it unlowered through the battlefield of this world. Enemies may press him hard. The fight may be desperately difficult; Nevertheless, he must battle on for Christ. To yield would surely be treachery to the One Who has gone before, conquering these same enemies, not for His Own but for the other's sake.

He who sins through human respect, betrays Christ to His foes. He compromises when he should be adamant. He yields when he should be most strong-willed.

Instead of trying to gain over other souls to Jesus by the force of his good example, he joins them in the camp of Satan, thus, by his evil-doing strengthening them in their irreligion, or by his bad example leading the innocent to their destruction.

THE ENEMY.

One can appreciate the position of a man who fears a superior enemy. Discretion is very often the better part of valour. Only a fool fights today, when tomorrow he would be the better able to meet his foe. But the victim of human respect fears a despicable enemy. He, the friend of Christ, the chosen soldier of Jesus, fears the laughter of mankind, the knowing smile of the mocker, the sneering grin of the ungodly. Like Saint Peter, he lacks the moral courage to stand up bravely for his Divine Friend. The titter of a servant maid, the ribaldry of a few bystanders, can turn him aside from the way of sanctity. Some day, perhaps, 'when he is aged, and stooped and, full of woe; and the long night draws in when crickets cry', his mind ranging back among the memories of long ago will grieve bitterly to find so many opportunities wasted, so much grace lost, all because of human respect; all is lost and nothing obtained in return.

AND ALL FOR WHAT?

This vice of human respect is somewhat peculiar in one way. As a rule, it offers the victim no real reward. From the enemy to whom the Captain, Christ, is betrayed no decorations are asked, no encomiums, no citation for valour. Jesus is perfidiously handed over to His foes and not even the Judas gain of thirty pieces of silver is sought by way of return.

Blackmailed by his vice, the victim pays whatever price it demands of him, content if by doing so he can keep up appearances and escape opprobrium. He is in the clutches of a relentless tyrant, in the hands of a heartless creditor whose account can never be settled.

In really bad cases, the subject of this vice loses all vestige of self-respect. To preserve outwardly some appearance of manliness he will deliberately sacrifice all moral courage. Although despising in his heart the very persons whose favour he craves, he will, nevertheless, let their opinion of him be the arbiter of his destiny. Thus, he becomes a mean, time-serving lick-spittle, little better than a mongrel cur, that fawns on any hand that will refrain from whipping it. Once more borrowing the

language of Saint Augustine, one may say: ‘He worships what he does not respect, he does what he condemns, he adores what he does not believe in.’

OMISSION OF GOOD WORKS.

I have no real doubt but that there are many potential saints among us, whose spirituality never rises above mediocrity simply because Satan has gained a grip on them through human respect. Lots of people are too ‘neighbour minded’. They show this in a thousand and one ways. I know a man who bought a perfectly lovely top-coat, that fitted him like glove and improved his appearance immensely, but he allowed it to moulder away in his wardrobe, simply because somebody remarked at the ‘preview’ that the new coat would have the neighbours wondering how he had suddenly become so prosperous. “You look,” the friend said, “like a bookie that had inside information that the favourite would finish down the field.” The little joke ended the career of a masterpiece of good tailoring and, very nearly broke up a friendship.

Of course, there are people, too, who go to quite the other extreme and are for ever trying to attract attention to themselves. They pride themselves on their unconventionality and independence. But such persons are really exceptions. The ordinary man looks on them as eccentric oddities. For his own part, the average man prefers to avoid publicity and hides himself from the limelight. If he has to make a little speech at a social function, say, at a friend’s wedding, he finds the ordeal embarrassing and unpleasant. He has no exhibitionist tendencies in his make-up and instinctively dislikes ‘notice-boxes’.

Perhaps for this very reason he is the more easy victim to human respect, because to be holy means, so often, to swim against the current of companionship and to ‘attract attention’ to oneself, and the temptation to avoid this bears hard on the average man.

CONSULT YOUR CONSCIENCE.

A little consultation with our conscience on the subject of human respect might be profitable at this point. Let each of us consider how far the actions of his life reflect this craven fear of ‘what the neighbours will say’.

“Why am I ashamed to raise my hat when passing a church?”

“Why am I ashamed to say the Angelus in public?”

“Why am I ashamed to open out and read my Catholic newspaper in a bus?”

“Why am I ashamed to bless, myself at meals in a restaurant?”

“Why do I sit silent in a music hall where dirty jokes are perpetrated or sacred things treated irreverently?”

“Why am I dumb at my Trade Union meeting when I hear false doctrine put across?”

“Why do I make no protest when a conversation degenerates into lewdness or backbiting?”

Then let us dwell on the words of Saint Paul: “Do I seek to please men? But if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”

Or the words of Saint Peter: “Who is he that can hurt you, if you be zealous of good... Be not afraid of their fear and be not troubled.”

We have plenty of food for thought in the words of Our Blessed Lord Himself: “He that shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him the Son of Man shall be ashamed, when He shall come in His Majesty.” And if these eminently clear and unequivocal words do not wean us from the way of human respect, if we still “be afraid of mortal man, who shall wither away like grass, forgetting the Lord, our Maker, who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth,” we shall be very deserving of pity when, repudiated by Christ, we shall have become “a reproach among the dead forever”.

WORSE.

If human respect did no more than to prevent progress in holiness, it would still be a deplorable evil. If it achieved nothing more than to prevent people from performing good works, it would still be a powerful ally of Satan. But it is much more potent for harm than in this negative way. Not alone does it cause people to omit good acts, but it provides them with a positive inducement to sin.

One is present in company where the conversation takes a turn for the worse. The character of the absent is being defamed, religion is being scoffed at, crude un-chastity is made to pass as pleasantry; and, through human respect, although one’s conscience is sadly hurt by what takes place, nevertheless one fails to protest against what is going on.

How many a young man entered on a career of intemperance simply because human respect led him to drink when he had neither the desire nor the need for it? How many, through human respect, took the first faltering steps on the road to ruin only by doing violence to their natural inclination as well as their conscience, who but for this vice might well have carried their baptismal innocence unsullied to the grave? And is human respect never the cause of unworthy confessions and sacrilegious communions? Would that it were not! Not until Judgement Day will it be known how many with no real sorrow for their sins, with no genuine purpose of amending approached the Sacred Tribunal of Penance merely in order to keep up the appearance of virtue; Not until the books are opened at the last great Court session will it be revealed how frequently men approached the Divine Banquet of Holy Communion without the wedding garment of grace, and did so quite consciously, quite deliberately, lest by absenting themselves they should imperil their undeserved reputation for holiness. The Saviour, Whom they dishonour by their hypocrisy, is the same Who said to certain people before them: “Woe to you, hypocrites; who will show you how to flee from the wrath to come? You are like whitened sepulchres, that outwardly appear beautiful to men, but inwardly are full of rottenness and dead men’s bones and of all filthiness. You serpents, brood of vipers, how will you flee from the judgement of hell? Behold your house shall be left to you desolate.”

CONVERSATION WITH A BISHOP.

Earlier in this booklet, I mentioned a young Irish priest, who, on the eve of his departure to Australia, made me promise to write on human respect. By a coincidence, just now, I have had a long conversation with a Bishop from the same country, a wise and saintly man of long experience. In the course of our talk, His Lordship asked me: “Have you given up writing little booklets? I haven’t seen one of yours for some time.” I replied that I was engaged on one just at the moment. “And may I ask, Father, what is it about?” I told him and he continued: “Human Respect? You’ve certainly hit on a good subject there, a topic for the times, a thought that is well worth stressing.” He paused for a moment and then, with a characteristic gesture of emphasis, he said: “Pitch it strong, Father. Say the things that should be said and say them as plainly as you can, namely, that it’s a crying shame and a disgrace that Catholics can let Christ down, that they will betray their principles

just when they should be most faithful to them, that they can play false to the cause for which Christ died."

I assured him that these things were not being left unsaid by me, and he went on: "It saddens me sometimes to see men, who show no end of physical courage and endurance so miserably lacking in moral bravery. During the war, there was a great danger that Rome would be bombed by advancing Allied forces. I organized some public meetings to ask that the Holy City should be spared. I approached some well-known Catholics who hold public positions of eminence in my diocese, and I was most disappointed when some of them deserted from me through human respect.

"Not merely that, Father, but they tried to get others, who had promised to attend, to withdraw their support, in order that their own cowardice might then be the less apparent. But their lack of manliness saddened me, Father, much more than their effort to injure our cause. I believe that a Catholic is only a hindrance to Christ and the Church nowadays, if he hasn't the hide of a rhinoceros and a backbone of tempered steel."

HEROES OF THE FAITH.

His Lordship's words gave me food for thought, especially his concluding remarks. Come to dwell on it, is it not a fact that Satan, like most enemies, conducts a twofold war? He fights a war of blood and slaughter when emerging into the open he persecutes the Church, offering Christians the frank alternative of death or apostasy. But he also tries the war of nerves, plays on the fears and anxieties of his opponent perhaps by subtly insinuating himself as their support and their strength and then suddenly threatening to withdraw that aid if his demands are denied.

In olden times, the emphasis was on the former kind of conflict. The arch-enemy of mankind attacked Christianity savagely and furiously, but time and again he had to retire defeated. The Faith of our fathers is living still 'in spite of dungeon, fire and sword'. And so, nowadays, the stress is on other things. Satan says: "Yes, of course, one must be charitable and kind to others, but let's be reasonable about it. Charity begins at home. We live in a strange world, where everything is insecure, so we must store up more than might otherwise be necessary."

And all the dupes listen, and the rich grow richer and the poor more miserable, and class-warfare flourishes, and nobody hears in the tumult the quiet voice that says: "Be not concerned for the morrow, for the morrow will provide for itself." "Sell all that you have and give to the poor, and come follow Me, and you shall have treasure in Heaven."

Satan leads others into public life; he takes them, as it were, up to a lofty mountain, and shows them the world at their feet, holding out to them wonderful prospects of advancement and success. They see no snag in all this, and can hardly credit that their friend speaks with the accents of the snake. "All these shall I give you, if falling down you will adore me." When he suggests a doubtful course of action, he adds: "If you hesitate, think of what people will say. Think of what others quite as good as you did and do. If you will not follow my suggestion, you will lose the support of your influential friends. Remember that your future is here at stake."

Ah, yes, the future may indeed be at stake, the future of the soul; and all too often, he who hesitates to say: "Begone, Satan!" is lost for ever.

BACK TO YOUR BAPTISM.

How meanly he acts who thus forsakes the sweet service of Jesus for the deceitful and torturing slavery of Satan. Summed up, it means that he refuses to ratify that magnificent promise that was once made in his name. While he was still but an infant, two sponsors thrice over asserted in his name before the priest, the representative of Jesus Christ: "I renounce the devil and all his works and pomps." With a protestation more vehement than that of the holy novice who vows her life to God, they solemnly undertook for him that his life, now but beginning, would be lived solely for God. Could one repudiate that undertaking more basely or more meanly than by sinning through human respect?

LOVE YOU ME MORE THAN THESE?

You remember that little scene that took place by the shore of the Sea of Galilee after the resurrection, when Our Lord asked Saint Peter: "Love you Me more than these?" Three times had Peter denied Christ; and for these sins, as for all others, the Precious Blood had since been shed in anguish. Already had Peter wept bitterly over his sad downfall.

Now, through an act of divine kindness, Jesus allows the repentant Apostle an opportunity of expiating his triple sin by a threefold act of love.

Peter, you see, had sinned through human respect, a vice that is dreadfully destructive of divine love in the soul; therefore, it behooved him to renew himself particularly in charity.

In the heart of one who is afraid to confess Christ before men, divine charity pines away and dies more quickly than a plant that is deprived of the sunshine and air that it needs for survival. Hence, we must be careful to exorcise ruthlessly and repeatedly any affections that would seriously rival the love we have for our Saviour. If He should at any time call us before Him for judgement and ask us: "Love you Me?" we must be able to answer in all sincerity: "Lord, You know all things: You know that I love You."

NO GREATER LOVE.

Can anybody have such a claim on our love and loyalty as He Who has served us to the very shedding of His Precious Blood? It is true that we owe much to our parents, friends and other benefactors, and it is right that we should seek to serve and try to avoid paining those to whom we are indebted for life, liberty, health, wealth, love, happiness and other precious advantages. But from only one Benefactor have we received eternal life, the adoption of sons of the eternal Father, and freedom from the slavery of Satan; from only one Patron have we received the riches of Heaven, its grace and truth, all that our spirit needs for its well-being; from only one Friend have we received the Love that is a Divine Person dwelling in our hearts, the Spirit of heavenly peace. What then does it matter what others may say, or what others may do; no other but Jesus has died for me on the Cross. No shame can ever be so great nor ingratitude so deep as the base ingratitude of dishonouring Jesus in order to keep the esteem in which others may hold me. I need never hang my head in shame until I have betrayed that friendship; never can I hold my head high and look the world in the face if I am a traitor to that King of Love.

PILATE.

Who was it that signed the decree of condemnation and pronounced sentence of Death against the Son of God? Was it Annas, the hypocrite, or the cunning Caiphas? Was it the cruel, lecherous Herod, who mocked Him and, with his court, set Him at naught? No! That sad distinction of passing mortal judgement on Christ was left to Pilate, the, weak, vacillating character, who would have

liked to have saved the Victim from His enemies, but feared lest by acquitting Him – he might fall into disfavour with his emperor and prejudice his own future. It was not drunkenness, or blasphemy, or pride, or adultery, that was foreman of the jury that found the Sinless One “worthy of death”, it was Human Respect. On his own confession, Pilate “found no cause in Jesus to put Him to death”, but the voices of the Jews prevailed over his conscience and he hearkened not to conscience, as he was deaf also to the other dear whisper that said: “Have nothing to do with this Just Man”. And thus, the great tragedy was consummated: under the nom de plume ‘Pilatus’. Human Respect signed – for all sinfulness, – and thereby effected the betrayal of the King.

I BRING THE SWORD.

Among the strangest words ever spoken by Jesus were those in which He, the Prince of Peace, stated His vocation and mission. “I am come,” He said, “not to send peace but the sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.” Down to the end of time, the battle will go on between the powers of Hell and the Prince of Peace. In each man’s heart Christ will be arraigned again before the tribunal, injustice will plead against justice for His Life, and human respect will again and again ask for a verdict ‘against the Divine Accused’.

To be worthy of His Name, to be fit to call ourselves true Christians, we must be able to refute all the sophisms and specious pleadings of the enemies of Truth. We must have the answer even to arguments that echo most loudly in our hearts, even to the appeals of those dearest to us; for “he that loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” And for having the courage of our convictions, we ourselves may have to suffer with Jesus. For that too we must be prepared and ready. “He that takes not up his cross and follows Me is not worthy of Me!” But that in itself would be victory: that would be death to our foes. “He that finds his life shall lose it and he that shall lose his life for Me shall find it.”

MEMBERS OF CHRIST.

The supreme argument, therefore, against human respect is that it is entirely contrary to the spirit of Christ. “If the world hate you, know ye that it hated Me before you. If you had been of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

But although Christ had many foes, He was beloved by all whose love was something precious and worth having. We are His members, ‘chosen by Him,’ and we need expect no better fate than our Divine Head. If, however, we stand faithful to the truth that is in us, we shall have our enemies undoubtedly, but we shall not always lack friends. We shall win the esteem that is desirable, the friendship that is valuable, the love that will last. Even if our own mother should desert us, His mother will stand by our cross, as She stood by His. Even if our own father should forsake us, the Eternal Father will speak in Heaven: “This is My beloved son in whom I am well pleased.” And our good example will affect even our foes, as the patience of Jesus caused the centurion to say on Calvary: “Truly, this Man was the Son of God.”

CONCLUSION.

It is to be expected that if we serve God honestly and perseveringly we shall sometimes fall into disfavour with others, whose consciences are more elastic than ours, or who deliberately and callously prefer sin to virtue. In such circumstances let us pray to God for strength to do what is

right and for the patience to endure the trial of being misunderstood or openly reproached for our virtue. Let us reflect that the judgement of men is fickle and uncertain. Today we win their approval by what we do. Tomorrow the same course of action may set them against us. The esteem of mankind is fleeting. We do not always capture it by chasing after it. Quite often, we gain it by the most unlikely behaviour. But whether men applaud us or reproach us, let us remember that over and above their judgement is the judgement and approval of God. It is this alone that will last, this alone that can bring us unending happiness or misery. “Some men’s sins are manifest, going before them to judgement; and some men they follow after. In like manner also good deeds are manifest: and they that are otherwise cannot be hid!” (1 Timothy 5:24-25.)

If we are wise we shall prefer to be esteemed by God, rather than by his creatures; if we are just, we shall be more faithful to His love than to any human affection; If we are grateful, we shall think more of our Divine Benefactor than of any other: and on earth we shall take comfort from the promise that He will spend eternity in redeeming: “Every one that shall confess Me before men, I will confess him before My Father, Who is in Heaven.”

PRAYER OF SAINT IGNATIUS FOR GENEROSITY IN THE SERVICE OF GOD.

Eternal Word! Incarnate Son of God! I beg of You, teach me true generosity; teach me to serve You as You do deserve; to give without counting the cost; to battle without regarding the wounds; to labour without seeking respite; to offer myself up without a thought of reward; to ask naught save the consciousness of having done Your Holy Will. Amen.
