

# Thoughts For The Sundays Of Advent

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These sermons and ‘Thoughts’ were originally preached around 1875, but their spiritual value is such that we present them here in this new format for the benefit of modern readers.

[Of course, Father Perry is referring to the Liturgy of Saint Pius V, when he mentions the readings set for a particular Sunday.]

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT. ON THE GENERAL JUDGMENT.

“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, by reason of the confusion of the roaring of the sea and of the waves; men withering away for fear and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world. For the powers of the heavens shall be moved.” (Luke 21:25-26.) [Gospel for Year C.]

THESE are some of the signs which are to precede the last day, and to indicate its approach. Now, if the mere signs of that day will be so alarming, as even to make “men wither away for fear of what shall come upon the whole world;” what must be that fearful account which is to follow? It is to this account that our Lord alludes, when, speaking of these signs, that “they are but the beginnings of sorrows.” And it is to the same account that I intend now to call your attention.

### POINT 1. All mankind most strictly examined

“Oh! terrible hour!” exclaims St. Ephrem; “who shall relate, or who shall bear to hear, this last and fearful rehearsal?” For we shall then have to account for our whole life — for every thought, word, and deed; for every omission of duty; for every sin we have criminally caused in others; and even for our very virtues, on account of the imperfections accompanying them.

#### 1. THOUGHTS. —

Then will be brought against you all the evil thoughts, which you have willfully entertained; all those thoughts of pride, by which, like the proud Pharisee, you have raised yourselves above what you are, and despised others; those thoughts of envy, hatred, and revenge, which you have cherished in your mind; those thoughts of groundless suspicion, and of rash judgment, whereby you have put a bad construction even on the innocent actions of others; and those thoughts of impurity, which have been indulged with pleasure, with desire, and perhaps even with the intention of accomplishing what you desired. All these will be strictly examined.

#### 2. WORDS. —

Your words also must be accounted for — they will be brought to judgment, all those words of lying by which you have spoken against the truth; of rash judgment, detraction, and calumny, whereby, your neighbor’s character has been destroyed or lessened; those words of injustice, by which you have been guilty of deception in your dealings with your neighbor; those words of contention, quarrelling, and contumely, which have created animosities, disturbed peace amongst

neighbors, and been the cause of many other evils; those words of cursing and blasphemy, which you have uttered to the injury of yourselves, and the dis-edification of others; and those words of indecency and double meaning, whereby you have defiled not only your own soul, but also the souls of them that listened to you. All these will be examined, and set against you.

### 3. ACTIONS. —

Then come your actions: all the thefts and injustices, by which you have taken to yourselves what did not belong to you, or in any other way wronged your neighbor; all the excesses in drinking, whereby you have degraded yourselves, scandalized your neighbor, and grieved and injured your family; and all the improper liberties, and shameful acts, of which St. Paul says, that they “ought not to be so much as even named among you, as becomes Saints.” (Eph. 5:3.) All these will be brought against you, and put to your account.

### 4. OMISSIONS. —

And not only will you have to account for the evils done, but for the good you have left undone — for all your omissions of duty; for all your omissions of deeds of charity, by refusing alms to the poor, when you ought to have given them; your omissions of prayer, meditation and spiritual reading, and of assisting at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, through negligence, sloth, tepidity, or indifference; your omissions of the means of grace provided for you in the Sacraments by having seldom or never received them, from those like sloth, or tepidity; your omissions of the duties of your state of life, to the dis-edification and prejudice of your family, or your employers; you neglect of religious instruction, which, by causing you to live in ignorance of your religion, has produced many other omissions and transgressions of duty. All these, with their consequences, will be examined, and added to your account.

### 5. SINS OF OTHERS. —

And you will not only have to account for the evils which you have done yourself, and for your own omissions of duty; but moreover, for all those sins of commission and omission, which you have criminally caused in others. “Soul for soul” will be required from those parents, through whose neglect, or bad example their children have become wicked; heads of families will have many sins of their domestics to answer for, on account of having exposed them to the occasions of those sins, or for not having removed such occasions, when they ought to have done; and those who have withdrawn others from their duty, and seduced them by leading them into evil, will have to answer to their Judge for the long habits of sin, of which they have been the guilty cause. Oh! what an account! Such, indeed, is the perversity of human nature, that scandals will come; and therefore our blessed Lord says: “Woe to the world because of scandals; for it must needs be that scandals come; but nevertheless, woe to that man by whom the scandal comes.” (Mt. 18:7.)

### 6. DEFECTIVE VIRTUES. —

But have you not at least some good works — some virtues, to be put in the scale against so much evil? Alas! even these are to be closely examined — to be nicely weighed; and in how many instances will they be “found wanting?” You have prayed, and, perhaps, frequently; but how? with what attention? with what disposition of heart? You have abstained and fasted; but in what spirit? You have approached the Sacraments; but was it from a pure intention? with due preparation? with proper dispositions? “And it shall come to pass at that time (says the Lord), that I will search Jerusalem with lamps.” (Sophonias [Zephaniah] 1:12.) What, then, will become of the wicked

Babylon? “If the just man shall scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (1 Peter 4:18.) And after this fearful examination, where, my Brethren, shall we appear?

POINT 2. Every sin is publicly exposed. But there is another circumstance in this examination, which will add very much to our distress; for the conscience of each individual will be known, not only to himself and God; but, moreover, to all his relatives, friends, and acquaintances — to the entire world! Oh! what will be the sinner’s shame and confusion, at seeing himself thus publicly exposed? You may judge of this by what your feelings would be if an Angel were to descend now into this temple and reveal all your secret sins to the rest of the congregation. What then will be your feelings at the last day, when all those secret sins will be revealed to the whole world? Overwhelmed with confusion, will you not “call upon the mountains and rocks to fall upon you, and to hide you?” (Apoc. 6:16.) But there is no escape.

POINT 3. The sentence is pronounced.

All mankind having been thus strictly examined, and every conscience exposed to public view, the Judge will pronounce the irrevocable sentence. To the just He will say “Come, all you blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” But to the wicked: “Depart from Me, all you cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels.” “And these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the just into life everlasting.” (Mt. 25)

Thus will terminate the last and fearful day. By these two sentences, the lot of each individual of the human race will be finally and eternally fixed. But oh! what a difference between the lot of the saint, and that of the sinner! The saint in heaven, the sinner in hell; the one perpetually happy, the other perpetually miserable; the one with God in eternal glory, the other with the devils in everlasting flames.

And where will you be, my Brethren? where is it your wish to be? Make now your choice, for you can do so — it is at present in your power; because this life is the time of mercy and grace: “Now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation.” (2 Cor. 6:2.) But if you defer your repentance and amendment of life, and die in the state of mortal sin, then, at the last day, you will receive “judgment without mercy.” (James 2:13.)

Judge yourselves now, my Brethren, by making a due preparation for the Sacrament of Penance, and you will not then be judged; repent now, and you will not have to repent then. Enter now upon a new life, and you will deprive that day of all its terrors. For then, instead of being banished from God eternally with the reprobate, you will be found worthy to hear from your Judge that consoling sentence: “Come, all you blessed of My Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Mt. 25:34.)

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

ON THE VIRTUE OF HOPE.

“Now the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in Hope, and in the power of the Holy Ghost.” (Rom. 15:13.)

DURING the time of Advent, we have to prepare ourselves for worthily and profitably celebrating the approaching Festival of Christmas, wherein we commemorate the first coming of our blessed Lord, when, in quality of our Redeemer, He came “to seek and to save the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel.”

### POINT 1. We must fear God.

To guide and assist us in this preparation, the Church directs our attention, on the First Sunday of Advent, to the terrible judgments of God, which, at the last day, or the second coming of Christ, will be executed severely and eternally upon impenitent sinners: “Depart from Me, all you cursed, into everlasting fire.” (Mt. 25:41.) And thus, we are led to the fear of God, which, according to the Council of Trent, is the first step in the sinner’s conversion to God. (Session 6, chapter 6.) And it is the first step also in his preparation for Christmas.

### POINT 2. We must also hope in God.

But, on this Second Sunday of Advent, it would seem to be the intention of the Church to lead you on, through this salutary fear of God’s judgments, to the consideration of His Mercy and Goodness; that so you may be raised to a firm hope that He will be propitious to you for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Redeemer. This hope, according to the same Council, is the second step in the sinner’s conversion to God; and it is the second also in his preparation for Christmas. [Read Romans 15:4-9, the reading set for Year A on this Sunday.]

God has revealed to us, in the book of Ecclesiasticus (2:9), that this is the sure way of escaping His severe judgments, and of drawing down upon us the consoling effects of His mercy: “All you that fear the Lord,” He says, “hope in Him, and mercy shall come to you for your delight.” May “the God of hope,” therefore, from the riches of His mercy and goodness infuse bountifully into your souls this necessary, this saving virtue; “that you may abound in hope, and in the power of the Holy Ghost.”

We will consider now the powerful motives, which urge us to place all our hope in God; and also the qualities, which our hope should have.

### POINT 3. Why we must hope in God.

Hope is a theological virtue, which “helps us to expect, with confidence, that God will give us all things necessary for our salvation, if, on our part, we do what He requires of us.” (Catechism.) This virtue is of strict obligation — it is absolutely necessary for us, as a means of salvation, and it is grounded on the most solid foundation.

For we have every motive to induce us to hope in God — to place an unlimited confidence in His mercy and goodness.

1. We have the pressing Exhortations, or rather, Commands of God: “Trust in Him, all you congregation of people:... God is our helper for ever.” (Psalm 62:8 or Psalm 61:9 in the Vulgate.) “Have confidence in the Lord with all your heart; and lean not upon your own prudence.” (Proverbs 3:5.) “And hope in God always.” (Osee [Hosea] 12:6.) “Casting all your care upon Him, for He has care of you.” (1 Pet. 5:7.)

2. We have also the infallible promises of God, whereby He has pledged Himself to reward those who “cast all their care upon Him.” For He says “Because he has hoped in Me, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he has known My Name.” (Psalm 91:14 or Psalm 90:14 in the Vulgate.) And consequently He declares, that “Blessed is the man whose trust is in the Name of the Lord.” (Psalm 40:4 or Psalm 39:5 in the Vulgate.) “Do not, therefore, lose confidence,” He says, “which has a great reward,” (Hebrews 10:35.)

We read in the Gospel, that our Lord attributed many of the miracles which He wrought, solely to the great confidence with which the petition for cure was presented to Him. Thus, He said to the centurion: "As you have believed, so be it done to you." (Mt. 8:13.) In like manner, to the blind men, He said: "According to your faith" (that is, your confidence), "be it done unto you." (Mt. 9:29.) The woman, who, for twelve years, had been laboring under an infirmity, which, during that period, had been incurable, "said within herself: If I shall touch only the hem of His garment, I shall be healed. But Jesus seeing her, said: Be of good heart, daughter; your faith (that is, your confidence) has made you whole." (Mt. 9:20.)

3. Other motives of confidence are the great Love of God towards us, — His infinite goodness and mercy in our regard, — and (lest our past sins should weaken our hope) the infinite merits of Christ, which more than supply for our unworthiness.

These are the powerful and solid motives, which should excite our confidence in God — the sure grounds whereon our hope is founded.

POINT 4. How we must hope in God.

And resting, as it does, on sure grounds, it follows, that our hope should be firm and unlimited.

#### 1. FIRM. —

It should be firm, because the goodness, power, and promises of God leave no room for the least diffidence. And hence St. Paul calls this virtue: "The anchor of the soul, sure and firm" (Hebrews 6:19); it being impossible that God should lack either the power, or the will, to assist them that trust in Him; or, that He should be untrue to His promises.

#### 2. UNLIMITED. —

Our hope must also be unlimited; that is, we should hope for ALL that we need, both for soul and body — we should hope for eternal happiness, and for all the means necessary for obtaining it, if only, on our part, we will do what God requires from us. And nothing should make us lose our confidence in God. "For He has said: I will not leave you; neither will I forsake you: So that we may confidently say The Lord is my helper." (Hebrews 13:5-6.) And He positively assures us that "He will not suffer us to be tempted above that which we are able" (to resist); "but that He will make with temptation issue, that we may be able to bear it." (1 Cor. 10:13.) He declares, indeed, that "the hope of the wicked shall perish" (Proverbs 10: 28); but this is to be understood of such only, as will not have recourse to His mercy.

Examine now, my Brethren, whether your hope is such as it ought to be. Is it not weak and languishing? When attacked by temptations, or oppressed with misfortunes, do you not immediately, "lose confidence," and become dejected and "sorrowful, even as others who have no hope"? (1 Thess. 4:12.)

By commanding you to pray for salvation, for help in temptations, for pardon, for daily bread, and for all that you stand in need of, God thereby engages Himself to grant these things; and He will grant them, according to His repeated promises, if you pray with an entire confidence in Him, grounding that confidence on His infinite goodness and promises, through the infinite merits of Jesus Christ.

Never fail, therefore, to have immediate recourse to God, with a firm and unlimited hope, in your difficulties, dangers, and temptations, and in all your necessities.

On all occasions, cast yourselves confidently upon Him, for He will not withdraw that you may be left to fall. And let it not weaken or diminish your hope, when He appears to defer the help you crave, or if it should seem to you that He even positively refuses your requests. For He is then only trying your faith, as He tried the Canaanite woman, whose faith, or firm, unlimited hope, He afterwards admired and rewarded: “O woman, great is your faith: be it done unto you as you will.” (Mt. 15:28.) “Do not therefore lose your confidence, which has a great reward” (Hebrews 10:35); but “hope in your God always” (Osee [Hosea] 12: 6); because “mercy shall encompass him that hopes in the Lord” (Psalm 32:10 or Psalm 31:10 in the Vulgate); for “no one has hoped in Him, and been confounded.” (Ecclesiasticus 2:11.)

### THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT. ON PRAYER.

“In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God.” (Philippians 4:6.) [Reading for Year C.]

AT the commencement of the time of Advent, we were led to a fear of God, by the consideration of those eternal judgments, which, at the last day, are to be executed upon all impenitent sinners: “Depart from me, all you cursed, into everlasting fire.” (Mt. 25.) And in the Epistle of the Second Sunday, we were cheered with the consoling prospect, which hope holds out to us: “The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.” (Rom. 15:13.) [See Rom. 15:4-9.] For it is the consoling effect of hope, that it gives us an assured confidence of God being willing, and even desirous, to pardon our sins; through Jesus Christ; and so to avert from us those heavy judgments, to which our sins have exposed us; and that it encourages us, moreover, to apply to Him confidently for these happy effects of His mercy. And hence we see the reason of that tender solicitude and anxious desire of the Apostle, as expressed in the concluding words of last Sunday’s Epistle: “That you may abound in hope, and (also thereby) in the power of the Holy Ghost.” (Rom. 15:13.)

On the present Sunday we are directed to consider, not so much in the feelings of fear as of hope, the destitute state of our souls to which sin has reduced us; to look to our wants and necessities, and to exercise our hope in God, by having recourse to His mercy and goodness for relief. “In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God.”

It is on prayer, therefore, that I intend now to address you — on its Necessity, and its Advantages, and on the Conditions that are required for rendering it effectual in obtaining for us the grant of our petitions.

#### POINT 1. Necessity of Prayer.

#### WE MUST NECESSARILY PRAY. —

And this necessity of prayer arises from our relation to God, from His absolute dominion over us, and our entire dependence on Him for everything. It is from Him that we received and still hold our being; for He created us, and is continually preserving us. We must therefore pay Him the homage of our adoration, praise, thanksgiving, and supplication.

Having created us, God placed us in this world between two extremes; for we must either serve Him while we are here, and thereby come to possess and enjoy him eternally, or else we must neglect His service, and thereby lose that supreme happiness, and be condemned to perpetual banishment from Him in the flames of hell. We have to escape the one by gaining the other. This is a work which every one of us has to accomplish; and no work can be of greater importance to us. But, of

ourselves, we can do nothing towards it; at every step, we need God's assisting and protecting grace; but that needed grace cannot be obtained without prayer. Without prayer then we must perish eternally.

We see the reason, therefore, why St. Paul so earnestly admonishes us to pray on all occasions "In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God."

The same Apostle also says: "Be instant in prayer." (Col. 4:2.) "Pray without ceasing." (1 Thess. 5:17.) And our blessed Lord repeatedly commands us to pray: "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation." (Mt. 26:41.) "You ought always to pray and not to faint." (Luke 18:1.) "Ask, and you shall receive." (John 16:24.)

It is clear from these, and from many other considerations, that it is necessary for us to pray, and to pray continually; that prayer is the first and most necessary thing for us to learn and make use of; that it is both the key which must unlock for us the treasury of God's graces, and also the channel through which those graces are to be conveyed to our souls. The treasury of graces cannot be unlocked and opened to us, without the proper key; nor will the graces be conveyed to us otherwise than through the appointed channel.

#### POINT 2. Advantages to be gained by prayer.

What has been already said on the necessity of prayer, serves, in a great measure, to show also its advantages, as being the effectual means of obtaining the necessary wants, and of saving our souls. No supply of our employment, therefore, can be more profitable; nor, at the same time, more consoling.

##### 1. PROFITABLE. —

For how can we be more profitably employed, than in drawing down upon ourselves the graces and blessings of heaven? and these we can obtain, and do obtain, by prayer. For the truth of this, we have the positive assurance of our blessed Lord Himself: "Amen, Amen I say to you: if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you. Ask, and you shall receive; that your joy may be full." (John 16:23.) "For every one that asks, receives; and he that seeks, finds; and to him that knocks, it shall be opened." (Mt. 7:8.)

##### 2. CONSOLING. —

What, therefore, can be a source of greater consolation than prayer? St. Chrysostom calls it, "an angelic occupation;" and St. Gregory, "an anticipation of the joys of heaven." What sweet consolations have not the Saints drawn from prayer? And when God, for their greater good, withdrew those consolations from them for a time, their persevering fidelity to prayer did not fail to afford comfort to their souls.

#### POINT 3. Conditions which must accompany our prayer.

But, in order that prayer may be effectual in drawing down these advantages, it must be accompanied with certain Conditions; it must be offered to God with such dispositions of soul, as He requires.

1. We must pray, therefore, with humility — with a deep sense of our nothingness, of our unworthiness, and sinfulness: "To whom shall I have respect," says Almighty God, "but to him that

is poor and little, and of a contrite heart, and that trembles at My words?" (Is. 66:2.) "He has had regard to the prayer of the humble, and He has not despised their petition." (Psalm 102:17 or Psalm 101:18 in the Vulgate.) "The prayer of him that humbles himself, shall pierce the clouds; and he will not depart till the Most High behold." (Ecclesiasticus 35:21.) "To the humble He gives grace." (1 Peter 5: 5.) In King Ahab (Achab), we have a striking example of the advantage of humbling ourselves before God in prayer. For, as soon as he had done so, God said to Elias (Elijah): "Have you not seen Ahab humbled before Me? Therefore, because he has humbled himself for My sake, I will not bring the evil in his days." (1 Kings [3 Kings in the Vulgate] 21:29.)

2. We must pray also all with confidence in God. Nothing honors God more — nothing is more pleasing to Him, nor more effectual in drawing down His blessings, than praying to Him with an humble, but entire confidence in Him: "And Jesus says to them: Have the faith of God. Amen, I say, to you, that whosoever shall say to this mountain, be you removed, and be cast into the sea; and shall not stagger in his heart, but believe, that whatsoever he says shall be done; it shall be done unto him. Therefore I say unto you, all things WHATSOEVER you ask when you pray, believe that you shall receive and they shall come unto you." (Mark 11:23.) When Mary Magdalen, with an entirely humble confidence, prostrated herself at our Lord's feet, He said to her: "Your sins are forgiven you; your faith (that is your confidence) has made you safe; go in peace." (Luke 7:48-50.) "If any of you want wisdom," says St. James, "let him ask of God, who gives to all men abundantly; ...and it shall be given him: but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea, which is carried about by the wind. Therefore, let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." (James 1:5-8.)

3. We must pray, likewise, with perseverance — we must continue knocking at the door of God's mercy, till it be opened to us: For "we ought always to pray, and not to faint." (Luke 18:1.)

We must "be instant in prayer." For God wishes us to constrain Him, as it were, to show mercy: "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent bear it away." (Mt. 11:12.)

4. God requires, moreover, that we should pray with attention and fervor; for He looks to heart more than to the lips. "Prayer is the raising up of the mind and heart to God;" and not merely the raising up of the voice to Him. In order that you may pray with attention, put yourselves in the presence of God at the beginning of your prayers. St. Ignatius says you should do so before every prayer, however short. And this is the direction which God Himself gives us, when He says: "Before prayer prepare your soul; and be not a man that tempts God." (Ecclesiasticus 16:23.)

Humble yourselves, my Brethren, at the thought of not having profited more by this powerful means of grace. Look back, and examine what it is that has rendered your prayers ineffectual. Is it not attachment of your heart to creatures — to some passion, which, producing a want of fervor and attention, which has hindered the effect of your prayer or has there not been a neglect of preparation which has produced the same effect? has there not been spiritual sloth; and consequently a want of perseverance? or has not your confidence in God been deficient? Whatever you may find to have been the defect, it must be corrected in future. Resolve therefore to begin, from this present moment, to take the necessary means of correcting it. "He lives well," says St. Augustine, "who prays well."

#### THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT. ON PREPARING FOR CHRIST'S COMING.

"A voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare, all of you, the way of the Lord; make straight His paths. Every valley shall be filled; and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the

crooked shall be made straight; and the rough ways plain; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” (Luke 3: verses 4, 5 and 6.) [This is also the Gospel in Year C for the Second Sunday of Advent.]

THE Prophet Isaias, [Isaiah] foreseeing the coming of the promised Redeemer, and unable to contain his joy, breaks forth into these fervid exclamations: “Be comforted, be comforted, my people, says your God. Speak, all of you, to the heart of Jerusalem;... for her evil is come to an end — her iniquity is forgiven... [O joyful messenger to Sion,] Get you up into a high mountain, you that brings good tidings to Sion;... say to the cities of Judah: Behold your God.” (Is. 40: verses 1, 2 and 9.) Yes, my Brethren, the time is at hand, when we are to celebrate the birth of our Redeemer — of our Savior — of our God! That happy day approaches, which the ancient Saints so ardently longed for — that happy day, at the prospect of seeing which Abraham rejoiced; and, when he saw it in spirit only, he was glad; that happy day is fast approaching; and the Church now calls upon us to prepare our hearts for celebrating it in a propitious manner. Let us do so, my Brethren, by considering, in the first place, why Jesus Christ came on earth; and, secondly, how we are to prepare our hearts to profit by His coming.

#### POINT 1. Why Jesus Christ came upon earth.

Jesus Christ came “to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10.) To be convinced of this we need only follow Him from the manger to the Cross. The slightest attention to His life will be a sufficient proof.

1. For, why was He born in poverty, in humiliations, and sufferings? It was to teach us how to avoid and expiate sin. Why did He receive the Name of JESUS, at the same time shedding His blood? An Angel from heaven tells us the reason “You shall call His Name JESUS, for He shall save His people from their sins.” (Mt. 1:21.)

2. How clearly, how forcibly, does His ardent desire for our salvation shine forth in those tender parables, which He delivered to the Jews, during the three years of His public ministry? At one time, He represents Himself as the Good Shepherd going in search of the lost sheep, and continuing His search till He has found it (Luke 15); at another time, as the kind and compassionate Samaritan, soothing and healing the wounds of one that had fallen amongst robbers (Luke 10); and again, as the loving and forgiving Father, receiving back His prodigal but repentant son, and restoring him to favor. (Luke 15.) These parables are so evident in their meaning and object, that they need no explanation. For how clearly, and how forcibly do they show, that “the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost!” (Luke 19:10.) And more especially when we consider that the parable of the lost sheep, and that of the prodigal son, were intended by our Lord to answer the objection which the Jews had made against Him: “This man receives sinners, and eats with them.” (Luke 15:2.)

3. If we still further consider those tender and pressing invitations, whereby He urges sinners to return to Him, how plainly again does He manifest the same earnest desire of our salvation? “Come to Me, all you that labor and are burdened; and I will refresh you.” (Mt. 11:28.) “Go and learn what this means: I will have mercy and not sacrifice... For I am not come to call the just but sinners.” (Mt. 9:13.) “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered together your children, as the hen does gather her chickens under her wings, and you would not?” (Mt. 23:37.)

4. How powerfully, and with what complete conviction, does He still further prove the ardor of His desire of procuring our eternal happiness, by the constant labors which He underwent in teaching us

the truths of salvation? “And Jesus went about all the cities, and towns; teaching in their synagogues; and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom; and healing every disease, and every infirmity; and seeing the multitudes, He had compassion on them, because they were... lying like sheep that have no shepherd.” (Mt. 9:35-36.) Thus did He go about from place to place, “to enlighten them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to direct our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:79.)

5. How vividly, moreover, and how strikingly has He exemplified this same earnest desire to save sinners, in the mercy by which He received and pardoned Magdalen (Luke 7:48), and Zaccheus (Luke 19:9), the humble publican of his parable (Luke 18:13 – no doubt based on a true example) and the penitent thief? (Luke 23:43.)

Indeed, so much did He show His tender mercy towards sinners, that the Jews accused Him of being “a friend of publicans and sinners.” (Luke 7:34.) But, in answer to them, He said: “They that are whole need not the physician, but they that are sick: I am not come to call the just, but sinners to penance.” (Luke 5:31-32.)

6. Only follow Him, my Brethren, through the different stages of His Passion. Contemplate Him, agonizing in the Garden; seized by His own chosen people, and dragged by them from one tribunal to another, amidst insults, injuries, and ill-treatment of every kind; most inhumanly scourged at a pillar, and barbarously crowned with thorns; falsely accused, and unjustly condemned, and thus allowing Himself to be “reputed with the wicked.” (Is. 53:12.)

Contemplate Him on the Cross, dying the most cruel and humiliating death; and shedding the last drop of His Sacred Blood for our Redemption; at the same time praying for His enemies, that is for sinners. Now, why did He suffer all this, but to atone for our sins, and enable us to obtain forgiveness? Why did He shed the last drop of His Blood upon the Cross, but to wash away the sins of the world, and reconcile lost man to his offended God?

7. If further proof be necessary, consider what takes place on our altars. Why does He daily renew the Adorable Sacrifice of the Mass till the end of the world? Why does He thus continue His presence amongst us; and even feed and nourish our souls with His own Body and Blood, in the Holy Communion? Could He give us stronger testimonies of the tenderest love? of the most ardent desire to save our souls?

8. And, that our sins might not prevent Him from visiting us in the Holy Communion, and enriching our souls with His strengthening graces, He has still further manifested His desire of our salvation, by instituting in His Church a means of pardon — the Sacrament of Penance.

You see, then, His great goodness and mercy towards us. His sincere desire to save, not only the just, but also sinners who return to Him by repentance.

POINT 2. How we are to prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ.

Go to Him, therefore, with confidence; be not disheartened at the thought of difficulties; for His mercy will assist you. You see the means of pardon provided for you, in the Sacrament of Penance; and of future advancement and perseverance, in the Holy Communion. It is by preparing for these Sacraments, that you are to “prepare the way of the Lord, to make straight His paths.” For, by taking a review of your past sins, and by the humiliation of confession, “every mountain and hill shall be brought low;” that is, your pride will be humbled. By your contrition and resolutions of amendment “the crooked shall be made straight;” that is, your vicious habits will be corrected;

divine grace, obtained by these Sacraments, will make “the rough ways plain;” that is, will smooth down every difficulty.

But you must not only bring down the mountain of pride and make your crooked ways straight by renouncing your evil habits; but you must also “fill up every valley,” that is, your want of virtue must be supplied by religious exercises, by good works.

To “fill up every valley,” then, practice “The Christian’s Daily Exercise,” which you find at the end of the Catechism. As you are there taught, give the first moments, when you awake, to prayer; adoring God, and offering to him your heart, with all the actions of the day. Reflect, at least for a short time, on some pious subject; resolving to conquer some vice, and to labor for some particular virtue. During the day bear in mind the presence of God; making to Him frequent aspirations of love, conformity, contrition, and patience. Be always intent upon mortifying your passions, receiving, in the spirit of penance, all the crosses, contradictions, and troubles with which you may meet.

At night, make your general and particular examination of conscience; thanking God for the blessings you have received; lamenting your sins, and craving pardon; resolving to avoid them in future, and imploring the graces necessary for that purpose.

Sanctify the Sundays and Holidays; and be regular in approaching to the Sacraments.

Practice these duties, my Brethren; then all your days will be full days — full of merit and good works; for it is by practicing these duties, that “every valley will be filled up” — that every vacancy or deficiency of your past life will be supplied; that your souls will be adorned with virtue, and fitted, not only for worthily celebrating our Savior’s coming amongst us, but also for enjoying Him eternally in the Kingdom of His glory.

#### APPENDIX – from the Catechism.

##### Daily Exercise.

How should you begin the day?

I should begin the day by making the sign of the cross as soon as I awake in the morning, and by saying some short prayer, such as, 'Oh my God, I offer my heart and soul to you'.

How should you rise in the morning?

I should rise in the morning diligently, dress myself modestly, and then kneel down and say my morning prayers.

Should you also hear Mass if you have time and opportunity?

I should also hear Mass if I have time and opportunity; for to hear Mass is by far the best and most profitable of all devotions.

Is it useful to make daily meditation?

It is useful to make daily meditation, for such was the practice of all the Saints.

On what ought we to meditate?

We ought to meditate especially on the four last things, and the Life and Passion of our Blessed Lord.

Ought we frequently to read good books?

We ought frequently to read good books, such as the Holy Gospels, the Lives of the Saints, and other spiritual works, which nourish our faith and piety, and arm us against the false maxims of the world.

And what should you do as to your eating, drinking, sleeping, and amusements?

As to my eating, drinking, sleeping, and amusements, I should use all these things with moderation, and with a desire to please God.

Say the grace before meals.

'Bless us, O Lord, and these your gifts, which we are about to receive from your bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.'

Say the grace after meals.

'We give you thanks, almighty God, for all your benefits, who live and reign, world without end. - May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.'

How should you sanctify your ordinary actions and employments of the day?

I should sanctify my ordinary actions and employments of the day by often raising up my heart to God whilst I am about them, and saying some short prayer to him.

What should you do when you find yourself tempted to sin?

When I find myself tempted to sin I should make the sign of the cross on my heart, and call on God as earnestly as I can, saying, 'Lord, save me, or I perish'.

If you have fallen into sin, what should you do?

If I have fallen into sin, I should cast myself in spirit at the feet of Christ, and humbly beg His pardon by a sincere act of contrition.

When God sends you any cross, or sickness, or pain, what should you say?

When God sends me any cross, or sickness, or pain, I should say, 'Lord, your will be done; I take this for my sins'.

What prayers would you do well to say often to yourself during the day?

I should do well to say often to myself during the day such prayers as: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be in the world without end. Amen. In all things may the most holy, the most just, and the most lovable Will of God be done, praised, and exalted above all for ever. Oh Sacrament most holy, Oh Sacrament divine, all praise and all thanksgiving be every moment Yours. Praised be Jesus Christ, praised for evermore. My Jesus, mercy; Mary, help.

How should you finish the day?

I should finish the day by kneeling down and saying my night prayers.

After your night prayers what should you do?

After my night prayers I should observe due modesty in going to bed; occupy myself with the thoughts of death; and endeavor to compose myself to rest at the foot of the Cross, and give my last thoughts to my crucified Savior.

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