

THIRD PART OF "PREPARATION FOR DEATH"

CONSIDERATION XXII.

The habit of Sin.

"The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth."—*Prov. xviii. 3.*

FIRST POINT.

The Habit of Sin Blinds the Soul.

THE evil inclination to sin is one of the greatest injuries that we have received from the sin of Adam. This made the Apostle weep when he saw himself impelled by concupiscence to the very evil which he abhorred. *I see another law in my members . . . , captivating me in the law of sin (Rom. vii, 23).* Hence it is so difficult for us, who are drawn to evil by this concupiscence and by so many enemies, to reach, without sin, the land of bliss. What would you say of a traveler who, being obliged to cross an agitated sea in a shattered vessel, would load the ship with a burden which, even in a calm sea, would be sufficient to sink the vessel? What hopes could you entertain of the safety of such a man? Now, we may say the same of the man who has contracted an evil habit: he must pass the sea of this life (a sea always tempestuous, in which so many perish) in the weak and shattered vessel of the flesh, to which we are united: and he overloads this vessel with sins of habit. It is very difficult for such a man to save his soul; because a bad habit blinds the understanding, hardens the heart, and thus makes the sinner obstinate till death.

First, a bad habit *blinds* the understanding. Why do the

saints always implore light from God, and tremble lest they should become the greatest sinners in the world? Because they know that if they lose God's light they may commit the greatest crimes. How does it happen that so many Christians live obstinately in sin until they are lost in the end ? *Their own malice blinded them (Wis. ii, 21)*. Sin blinds them, and thus they are lost. Every sin produces blindness; the more sins are multiplied, the greater the blindness they produce. God is our light; and therefore, the farther the soul is removed from God, the more blind it becomes. *His bones, says Job, shall be filled with the vices of his youth (Job, xx, 11)*. As the light of the sun cannot enter a vessel filled with clay: so a heart replete with vices cannot admit the light of God. Hence we see certain sinners lose the divine light, so that they go on from sin to sin without ever thinking of repentance. *The wicked walk round about (Ps. xi, 9)*. Fallen into the dark pit of sin, they do nothing but commit sins, they speak only of sins, they think only of sinning, and scarcely feel any longer that sin is an evil. The very habit of sin, says St. Augustine, does not allow them to see the evil which they do (Serm. 98, E.B.). Hence they live as if they no longer believed in the existence of God, of heaven, **hell**, or eternity.

And behold ! after an evil habit is contracted, the sins which before excited horror are now viewed with indifference. *Make them, says David, like a wheel, and as stubble before the wind (Ps. lxxxii, 14)*. See, says Gregory, how a straw is blown about by every breath of air. In like manner a person, before he falls into sin, resists and combats temptations, at least for some time; but, after having contracted a bad habit, he yields instantly to every temptation, and falls in every occasion of sin: and why ? Because the habit of sin has deprived him of light. St. Anselm says that the devil acts toward certain sinners like a person who fastens a cord to a bird:

he allows it to fly away; but, whenever he pleases, draws it back to the earth. These are, according to the Saint, habitual sinners. St. Bernardine says (tom. iv. serm. xv.) that some continue to commit sin without being exposed to any dangerous occasion. He compares habitual sinners to the wings of a windmill, which *are driven round by every wind*, and turn the mill even when there is no corn to be ground, and against the will of the master. You will find habitual sinners who indulge in bad thoughts even without any occasion to excite them, without pleasure, and drawn into them as it were involuntarily and forcibly by the effects of evil habits. As St. Augustine says a bad habit brings on a certain necessity. (Conf. 1, 8, c. 5). And according to St. Bernardine, evil habits are changed into our nature. (T. iii, s. 15). Hence, as it is necessary for a man to breathe, so it appears that habitual sinners become the slaves of sin, and bring themselves into a necessity of falling into sin. I have said that they become *slaves* of sin. There are servants, who serve for wages, and slaves, who serve by force and without remuneration. With these we may compare certain miserable men, who sin even without pleasure.

The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins contemneth. (Prov. xviii, 3). This passage St. Chrysostom explains of habitual sinners, who, sunk in an abyss of darkness, despise corrections, sermons, censures, **hell**, and God: they despise everything, and resemble the vulture, that waits to be killed by the fowler, rather than abandon the dead body on which it feeds. Father Recupito relates that a man condemned to death, even when going to the place of execution, raised his eyes, saw a young female, and consented to a bad thought. Father Gisolfo relates that a blasphemer, who had been likewise condemned to death, when thrown off the scaffold, broke out into a blasphemy. St. Bernard goes so far as to say that it is almost useless to pray for habitual

sinners,—that we must weep over them as lost forever. If they no longer see their danger, how can they escape the precipice? To preserve them from it, a miracle of grace is necessary. The miserable wretches will open their eyes in **hell**, when the sight of their misery will serve only to make them weep more bitterly over their folly.

Affections and Prayers.

My God ! Thou hast bestowed more favors on me than on Others, and I have done greater injuries to Thee than any person whom I know. O sorrowful heart of my Redeemer, so much afflicted and tortured on the cross at the sight of my sins; give me through Thy merits a lively sense of my faults, and a lively sorrow for them. Ah, my Jesus! I am full of vices, but Thou art omnipotent: Thou canst easily fill my soul with Thy holy love. I therefore hope in Thee, who art infinite Goodness and infinite mercy. I repent, O Sovereign Good ! of having offended Thee. O that I had died rather than have ever offended Thee! I have forgotten Thee; but Thou hast not forgotten me; this I see with the light which Thou now givest me. Since, then. Thou givest me this light, give me also strength to be faithful to Thee. I promise to die a thousand times rather than ever turn my back upon Thee. But in Thy aid I place my hopes. *In Thee! O Lord, I have hoped; let me never be confounded.* I hope, O my Jesus! in Thee, that I shall never more see myself confounded in sin, and deprived of Thy grace. To thee also. O Mary, my mistress! I turn. In thee, O Lady ! I have hoped ; let me not be confounded forever. O my hope, I trust in thy intercession, that I shall never again see myself the enemy of thy Son. Ah! beg of him to strike me dead rather than abandon me to this sovereign misfortune.

SECOND POINT.

The Habit of Sin Hardens the Heart.

A bad habit *hardens* the heart. And this hardness of heart God justly permits in punishment of resisting his calls. *The Lord, says the Apostle, hath mercy on whom He will: and whom He will He hardeneth (Rom. ix, 18).* According to St. Augustine, God hardens the sinner by not showing mercy (De Div. Quaest. Ad Simpl. n. 15). It is not that God directly hardens habitual sinners, but he subtracts his graces in punishment of their ingratitude for past favors, and thus their heart becomes hard like a stone. "*His heart shall be as hard as a stone, and as firm as a smith's anvil.*" (Job, xli, 15). Hence, it is that, while others are softened, and shed tears in hearing sermons on the rigor of divine justice, on "the pains of the damned or on the Passion of Jesus Christ, the habitual sinner remains unmoved, he speaks and listens to others speaking on these subjects with as much indifference as if they did not concern him; and thus these sermons will serve to render him more obdurate. *His heart shall be as firm as a smith's anvil.*

Even sudden deaths, earthquakes, thunder and will no longer strike terror into the heart of the habitual sinner: instead of awaking, and making him enter into himself, they will rather encourage him in the deadly sleep of death and perdition in which he slumbers: *At Thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, they have all slumbered (Ps. lxxv, 7).* An evil habit gradually takes away all remorse of conscience: to the habitual sinner crimes the most enormous appear trifling. The commission of sin is naturally accompanied with shame; but, according to St. Jerome, they who contract evil habits lose even the shame of committing sin. St. Peter compares the habitual sinner to the swine that wallows in the mire (2 Peter, ii, 22). As the swine wallowing in the mire feels not its

stench, so the habitual sinner perceives not the stench of his crimes, which disgusts all others. "And," says St. Bernardine, "what wonder is it that, after the mire of sin has blinded him, he should not see his miserable condition, even when God scourges him for his iniquities? (T. 11., s. 20, a. 2, c. 4). Hence, it happens that, instead of regretting his sins, he rejoices at them, he laughs at them, and boasts of them. *They are glad when they have done evil (Prov. ii, 14). A fool worketh mischief as it were for sport (Ib. x, 23).* Are not these clear signs of diabolical obduracy ? They are, says St. Thomas of Villanova, all signs of damnation (Fer. 6 p. Dom. 1 Quadr.). My brother, tremble lest this may happen to you. If you have contracted any evil habit, endeavor to abandon it now that God calls you. Rejoice and be glad as long as conscience reproves you; for it is a sign that God has not as yet abandoned you; but amend, and instantly shake off the bad habit; if you do not, the wound will become gangrenous, and you will be lost.

Affections and Prayers.

 Lord, how shall I be able to thank Thee as I ought for so many graces which Thou hast bestowed upon me ! How often hast Thou called, and I have resisted ! Instead of being grateful to Thee, and loving Thee, for having delivered me from **hell**, and for having called me with so much love, I have continued to provoke Thy wrath, by offering repeated insults to Thee. O my God! I will no longer outrage Thy patience : I have offended Thee enough. Thou alone, who art infinite Goodness, couldst have borne with me till the present moment. But I now see that Thou canst bear no longer with me. Pardon me then, O my Lord and my Sovereign Good! pardon me all the injuries I have offered to Thee. I am sorry for them with my whole heart, and purpose never more to offend Thee. Shall I forever continue to

provoke Thee ? Ah, be appeased with me, O God of my soul! not through my merits, for which nothing else is reserved but vengeance and **hell**, but through the merits of Thy Son and my Redeemer, in which I place all my hopes. For the love of Jesus Christ, receive me into favor, and give me perseverance in Thy love. Banish from me all impure affections, and draw me entirely to Thyself. I love Thee. O supreme God ! I love Thee, O sovereign lover of souls ! who art worthy of infinite love. Oh! that I had always loved Thee. O Mary, my Mother! obtain for me the grace to spend the remainder of my life not in offending, but in loving thy Son, and in bewailing the displeasure I have given him.

THIRD POINT.

The Habit of Sin Leads to Final Impenitence.

When the understanding is deprived of light, and the heart hardened, the sinner ordinarily makes a bad end, and dies obstinate in his sin. *A hard heart shall fare ill at the end (Ecclus. iii, 27)*. The just continue to walk in the straight path. *The path of the just is right to walk in (Isa. xxvi, 7)*. But habitual sinners always *walk round about (Ps. xi, 9)*. They give up sin for a little, and afterward return to it. Their damnation St. Bernard regards as certain. " Woe to the man who follows this circle." (In Ps. xc, s. 12). Some of them say: I will amend before death; but it is very difficult for an habitual sinner, even in his old age, to change his life. *A young man, says the Holy Ghost, according to his way, even when he is old, he will not depart from it (Prov. xxii, 6)*. We are very weak. *Your strength, says the Prophet Isaias, shall be as the ashes of tow (Isa. 1, 31)*. Hence, as St. Thomas of Villanova says, the soul deprived of grace cannot abstain from committing new sins (Dom. 4, Quadr.). But would it not be the extreme of folly to play for, and voluntarily to

lose, all your property, with the hope of winning it back in the last game ? Such is the folly of the man who continues to live in the midst of sins, and hopes at the last moment of life to repair all the evil he has done. Can the Ethiopian or the leopard change the color of his skin ? And how can he who has long indulged in the habit of sin, lead a good life ? *If, says the Prophet Jeremias, the Ethiopian can change his skin, or the leopard his spots, you also may do well when you have learned evil (Jer. xiii, 23).* Hence the habitual sinner, in the end, abandons himself to despair. Such is the manner in which his life terminates. *But he that is hardened in mind shall fall into evil (Prov. xxviii, 14).*

On the words of Job, *He hath torn me with wound upon wound, he hath rushed in upon me like a giant (Job, xvi, 15).* St. Gregory says that a person may, perhaps, be able to defend himself after the first wound; but after every additional one, he loses strength, till in the end he loses his life. So it is with sin. After the first and second transgressions, the sinner will have some strength (that is, through the aid of God's grace); but, if he continue in the habit of sin, it will rush on him like a giant. How is it possible for the sinner to escape death after his strength has been diminished, and his wounds multiplied ? Sin, as the Prophet Jeremias says, like a huge stone, oppresses the sinner (Lament. iii, 53). St. Bernard compares the habitual sinner with a man who has fallen under a large stone, which he has not strength to remove. It is as difficult for the former to shake off his bad habits, as it is for the latter to get rid of the load that presses upon him. " The man on whom the weight of a bad habit presses, rises with difficulty." (In Joan. Tr. 49).

The habitual sinner may say: Is my salvation then hopeless? No; you are not beyond hope: if you wish to apply it, there is still a remedy for the past. But a certain author says, that in grievous maladies very severe

remedies are necessary. If to a sick man in danger of death, and unwilling to take medicine, because he is not aware of the malignity of his disease, the physician said: Friend, you will certainly die unless you take such a medicine: what would be the answer of the invalid ? He would say, "As my life is in danger, I am ready to obey all your directions." Dearly beloved Christian, if you are an habitual sinner. I say the same to you. You are very ill; you are one of those invalids who, as St. Thomas of Villanova says, *are seldom cured; (Fer. 6 p. Dom. 1 Quadr.)* you are on the brink of perdition. But if you wish to recover from your illness, there is a remedy for you; however, you must not expect a miracle of grace. You must on your part labor hard to take away the occasions of sin, to avoid bad company, to resist temptations by recommending yourself to God as soon as you perceive them: you must adopt the means of salvation, by going frequently to confession, by reading a spiritual book every day, by practicing devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and continually imploring her to obtain for you strength not to relapse into sin. You must do violence to yourself; otherwise the threat of the Lord against obstinate sinners will fall upon you. *You shall die in your sin.* And if you do not adopt these means now that the Lord gives you light, you will scarcely adopt them hereafter. Listen to God calling you to repentance. *Lazarus, come forth.* Poor sinner! you are long dead: go forth from the dark grave of your sinful life. Respond at once to the call, and give yourself instantly to God. Tremble lest this should be the last call for you.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God ! what do I wait for ? Shall I wait till Thou dost abandon me and send me to **hell** ? Ah, Lord ! bear with me; I wish to change my life, and to give myself to Thee. Tell me what I must do, and I will do it, O blood of Jesus! assist me. O Mary, advocate of sinners,

come to my relief. O eternal Father! have mercy on me through the merits of Jesus and Mary. I am sorry. O God of infinite Goodness! for having offended Thee, and I love Thee above all things. Pardon me for the sake of Jesus Christ, and give me Thy love. Give me also a great fear of being lost, should I again offend Thee. Light, O my God! light and strength. I hope for everything from Thy mercy.

Thou didst bestow so many graces on me when I wandered at a distance from Thee; I hope for far greater graces, now that I return to Thee, resolved to love nothing but Thee. I love Thee, my God, my life, my all. I love thee also, O my Mother, Mary! to thee I consign my soul; preserve it by thy intercession from ever returning to a state of enmity with God.

CONSIDERATION XXIII.

Three Delusions which the Devil Puts into the Minds of Sinners.

(Although the preceding considerations contain many of the sentiments contained in this, it will be useful to collect them all together, in order to dissipate the usual illusions by which the devil succeeds in inducing sinners to relapse.)

FIRST POINT.

I will Go to Confession.—I cannot Resist.

LET us imagine a young man who has fallen into grievous sins, which he has already confessed, and who is restored to the friendship of God. The devil again tempts him to relapse: the young man resists for a while; but, in consequence of the delusions suggested by

the enemy, he begins to vacillate. Tell me, young man, I say to him, What will you do? Will you now, for this miserable pleasure, forfeit the grace of God, which you have just acquired, and which is more valuable than the whole world ? Will you, yourself, write the sentence of eternal death, and condemn yourself to burn forever in **hell** ? No, you answer, *I do not wish to damn myself, I wish to be saved: If I commit this sin, I will afterward confess it.* Behold the first delusion of the devil! Then you say that you will afterward confess it; but in the mean time you lose your soul. Tell me, if you had a jewel worth a thousand crowns, would you throw it into a river, saying I will make a diligent search for it, and hope to find it ?

You hold in your hand the precious jewel of your soul, which Jesus Christ has purchased with his blood, and you voluntarily cast it into **hell** (for in punishment of every mortal sin, you are condemned to eternal fire), and say; I hope to recover it by a good confession. But should you not recover it, what will be the consequence? To recover the divine grace, true repentance, which is the gift of God, is necessary. Should God not give you the grace of repentance; should death overtake you, and not allow you time to go to confession, what will become of you?

You say that you will go to confession before the lapse of a week. And who promises you that you will live for a week ? You then say that you will go to confession to-morrow. And who promises you to-morrow ? St. Augustine says: "God has not promised to-morrow: perhaps he will give it, and perhaps he will not." Perhaps he will deny it to you, as he has denied it to so many others who have gone to bed in good health, and have been found dead in the morning. How many have been struck dead in the act of sin, and sent to **hell** ? And should the same happen to you, how will you be able to repair your eternal ruin? Be assured that by this delusion—*I will afterward go to*

confession—the devil has brought thousands and thousands of Christians to **hell**. It is difficult to find a sinner so abandoned to despair as to wish for his own damnation. In committing sin, all sinners hope to repent and go to confession; it is thus that so many miserable souls are lost: and now there is no remedy for their damnation.

But you say: *At present I cannot resist this temptation.* Behold the second delusion of the devil, who makes it appear to you that at present you have not strength to resist your passions. First, it is necessary to know that, as the Apostle says, *God is faithful, and never permits us to be tempted above our strength (1 Cor. x, 13).* Moreover, I ask, if you are unable to resist your passions, how will you be able to resist them hereafter? After you have yielded to one temptation, the devil will tempt you to other sins, and by your consent to sin he will have gained an increase of strength against you, and you will have become weaker. If, then, you are now unable to extinguish the flame of passion, how can you expect to extinguish it when it has grown stronger? You say: God will give me his aid. But this aid he gives you at present. Why, then, do you not correspond with his grace and conquer your passion? Perhaps you expect that God will give you more abundant helps and graces after you have multiplied sins. If at present you wish for greater help and strength, why do you not ask them from God? *Ask, and it shall be given you (John, xvi, 24).* God cannot violate his promise. Have recourse to him, and he will give you the strength which you require in order to resist every temptation. God does not command impossibilities; but by his commands he admonishes us to do what we can with the actual aid which he gives us; and when this aid is not sufficient to enable us to resist temptations, he exhorts us to ask additional help, which he gives whenever we pray for it.

Affections and Prayers.

Then, my God ! why hast Thou been so bountiful to me, and I so ungrateful to Thee ? We have been engaged in a mutual contest. I fled away from Thee, and Thou didst seek after me. Thou didst confer benefits on me, and I offered insults to Thee. Ah, Lord ! the goodness alone which Thou hast shown me ought to enamor me of Thee ; for, when I multiplied sins, Thou didst multiply Thy graces. And when have I merited the light which Thou now givest me ? My Lord ! I thank Thee for it with my whole heart, and I hope to thank Thee for it eternally in heaven. I hope in Thy blood for eternal salvation, and I hope for it with certainty, since Thou hast treated me with so much mercy. I hope that Thou wilt give me grace never more to betray Thee. I purpose, with Thy grace, to die a thousand times rather than ever again offend Thee. I have offended Thee sufficiently. During the remainder of my life I wish to love Thee. And how can I but love a God who, after having died for me, has waited for me with so much patience, in spite of the numberless injuries I have done him. O God of my soul! I repent of all my sins with my whole heart; I would wish to die of sorrow for them. But if I have hitherto turned my back upon Thee, I now love Thee above all things; I love Thee more than myself. Eternal Father! through the merits of Jesus Christ, assist a miserable sinner, who wishes to love Thee. Mary, my hope ! assist me; obtain for me the grace always to have recourse to thy Son and to thee as often as the devil tempts me to offend God again.

SECOND POINT.

God is Merciful.

G*od is merciful.* Behold the third delusion of sinners by which an immense number are lost! A learned author says, that the mercy of God sends more souls to **hell** than his justice; for sinners are induced, by a rash confidence in the divine mercy, to continue in sin. and thus are lost. God is merciful. Who denies it? But great as is his mercy, how many does he send to **hell** every day ? God is merciful: but he is also just; and therefore he is obliged to punish those who offend him. He shows mercy; but to whom? To them who fear him. *He hath strengthened His mercy toward them that fear Him. As a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear Him (Ps. cii, 11, 13).* But he executes justice on those who despise him, and abuse his mercy to insult him the more. God pardons sin; but he cannot pardon the will or the determination to sin. St Augustine says, that he who sins with the intention of afterward repenting, is not a penitent, but a mocker of God's majesty. But the Apostle tells us that God does not allow himself to be mocked. *Be not deceived. God is not mocked (Gal. vi, 7).* It would be a mockery of God to insult him as often and as much as you please, and afterward to expect heaven.

But as God has shown me to many mercies hitherto, so I hope he will treat me with mercy hereafter. Behold the fourth delusion ! Then, must the Lord, because he has had compassion on you, show mercy forever, and never chastise you ? No: the greater have been his mercies to you, the more you have reason to fear that, if you offend him again, he will pardon you no more, but will take vengeance on your sins. *Say not: I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me for the Most High is a patient rewarder (Ecclus. v, 4).* Say not: I have sinned, and have not been punished; for though God endures, he will not do so , forever. When, the number of mercies which he has resolved to show to the sinner is exhausted, he then pun-

ishes all his sins together. And the longer God has waited for his repentance, the more severe will be his punishment, says St. Gregory. (In Evang. Hom. 13).

If then, O my brother, you see that you have, often offended God, and that he has not sent you to **hell** you should say; *The mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed (Lam. iii, 22)*. Lord ! I thank Thee, for not having sent me to **hell**, as I deserved. Consider how many have been damned for fewer sins than you have committed, and labor to atone, by penance and other good works, for the offences you have offered to God. The patience which he has had with you, and the great mercies which he has shown to you, and not to others, ought to animate you not to offend him again, but to serve and love him.

Affections and Prayers.

My crucified Jesus, my Redeemer and my God! behold a traitor at Thy feet. I am ashamed to appear before Thee. How often have I mocked Thee ! How often have I promised to offend Thee no more! But my promises have been so many treasons; for when the occasion of sin was presented to me I have forgotten Thee, and have again turned my back upon Thee, I thank Thee that I am not now in **hell**, but at Thy feet, where Thou enlightenest me, and callest me to Thy love. Yes; I wish to love Thee, my Saviour and my God! and I wish never more to despise Thee. Thou hast borne with me long enough. I see that Thou canst bear with me no longer. Unhappy me, if after so many graces, I offend Thee again! Lord, I sincerely wish and resolve to change my life: I wish to love Thee as much as I have offended Thee. It consoles me to have to deal with Thee, who art infinite goodness : but I am sorry above all things for having so much despised Thee, and I promise Thee all my love for the future. Pardon me through the merits of Thy Passion ;

forget the injuries I have done Thee, and give me strength to be faithful to Thee during the remainder of my life. I love Thee, O my Sovereign Good! and I hope to love Thee forever. My dear God! I will never more abandon Thee. O Mary, Mother of God ! bind me to Jesus Christ, and obtain for me the grace never again to depart from his feet. In Thee I trust.

THIRD POINT.

I am Young—Perhaps.

But I am young. God compassionates youth. I will hereafter give myself to God. We are now at the fifth delusion. But do you not know that God counts, not the years, but the sins of each individual ? You are young! But how many sins have you committed ? There are many persons of very advanced age who have not been guilty of the tenth part of the sins which you have committed. And do you not know that God has fixed the number and measure of sins which he will pardon each ? *The Lord waiteth patiently, says Holy Scripture, that when the day of judgment shall come, He may punish them in the fullness of their sins (2 Mach. vi, 44).* That is, God has patience, and waits for a certain time; but when the measure of the sins which he has resolved to pardon is filled up, he pardons no more, but chastises the sinner by sending him a sudden death while in the state of damnation, or he abandons him in his sin—a chastisement worse than death. *I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be wasted (Isa. v, 5).* If you had encompassed a field with a hedge, and cultivated it many years, and found that after all your labor and expense it produced no fruit, what would you do with it? Would you not take away the hedge and abandon it? Tremble, lest God should treat you in a similar manner. If you continue to offend him, you will gradually lose remorse of conscience—you will cease to think of eternity, or of the salvation of your soul—you

will lose all light and fear: behold the hedge taken away: behold your soul already abandoned by God.

Let us come to the last delusion. You say: *It is true that if I commit this sin, I shall lose the grace of God, and shall be condemned to hell; it may be that in punishment of it I shall be damned; but it may also happen that I shall afterward make a good confession, and save my soul.* Yes, it may, I admit, happen that you will be saved; for I am not a prophet, and therefore I cannot say for certain, that, if you commit this sin, God will show you no more mercy. But you cannot deny that, if, after the great graces God has bestowed upon you, you offend him again, you will expose yourself to very great danger of being lost forever. Attend to the language of Scripture. *A hard heart shall fare evil at the last (Ecclus. iii, 27). Evil-doers shall be cut off (Ps. xxxvi, 9).* The wicked will in the end be cut off by divine justice. *What things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap (Gal. vi, 8).* He that sows sins, will reap nothing but pains and torments. *I called and you refused. . . . I will laugh in your destruction, and will mock when that shall come to you which you feared (Prov. i, 24).* I have called you, says the Lord, and you have mocked me; but I will mock you at the hour of death. *Revenge is mine, and I will repay them in due time (Deut. xxxii, 35).* To me belongs the punishment due to sins: I will inflict it when the time of vengeance arrives. Such are the threats of the Scriptures against obstinate sinners; such is the chastisement which reason and justice demand. You say: *It may happen, after all, that I shall be saved,* I again admit that this may happen; but is it not the height of folly to trust the eternal salvation of your soul to a *perhaps*?—to a possibility of escaping **hell** when your salvation is so very improbable? Is eternal life an affair to be exposed to such imminent danger.

Affections and Prayers.

My dear Redeemer! prostrate at Thy feet, I thank Thee for not having abandoned me after I had committed so many sins. How many who have offended Thee less than I have will never receive the light which Thou now givest me ! I see that Thou earnestly desirest my salvation, and I wish to be saved, principally for the sake of pleasing Thee. I wish for heaven that there I may eternally sing the mercies which Thou hast shown me. I hope that Thou hast already pardoned me. But should I still be Thy enemy in consequence of not repenting as I ought of the offences I have offered to Thee, I am now sorry for them with my whole soul; they displease me above all things. Pardon me for Thy mercy's sake, and increase continually my sorrow for having offended Thee, who art so good a God. Give me sorrow—give me love. I love Thee above all things, but I love Thee too little. I wish to love Thee ardently. This love I ask and hope for from Thee. Hear me, O my Jesus! Thou hast promised to hear all who pray to Thee. O Mary, Mother of God! all tell me that thou never allowest a soul that recommends itself to thee to go away disconsolate. I trust in thee; recommend me to thy Son, and obtain for me eternal life.

CONSIDERATION XXIV.

The Particular Judgment.

" We must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ."— 2 *Cor.* v. 10.

FIRST POINT.

The Guilty Soul before its Judge.

CONSIDER the appearance, the accusation, the examination, and the sentence. With regard to the appearance of the soul before its Judge, it is the common opinion of theologians, that the particular judgment takes place at the very moment of death; and that on the very spot where the soul is separated from the body, it is judged by Jesus Christ, who will not send, but will come himself to judge it according to its works. *At what hour you think not the Son of man will come (Luke, vii.40).* "He will," says St. Augustine, "come in love to the good, in terror to the wicked." (Serm. 181, E.B.). Oh ! how great will be the terror of the soul the first time it sees the Redeemer, and sees his countenance full of wrath ! *Who, says the prophet Nahum, shall stand before the face of His indignation ? (Nahum, i, 6).* This thought made Father Louis da Ponte tremble so as to shake the cell in which he lay. Hearing the *Dies Irae* sung, and reflecting on the terror of the soul when it is presented before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, the venerable P. Juvenal Ancina took, and afterward executed, the resolution of forsaking the world. The sight of the wrath of the Judge will announce the sentence. *The wrath of the King is as messengers of death (Prov. xvi, 14).* St. Bernard says that the soul will suffer more in seeing the indignation of Jesus Christ, than in **hell** itself. When presented before an earthly judge, criminals have been known to perspire with a cold perspiration. Such was the confusion which Piso felt at the thought of appearing as a criminal before the senate, that he killed himself. How great is the pain of a child, or of a vassal, in appearing before an angry parent or an enraged sovereign ! Oh, how much greater will be the pain and confusion of the soul when it beholds Jesus Christ enraged against it for the insults which it offered to him during life ! *They shall look upon me whom they have pierced (John, xix, 37).* The soul will see in wrath the Lamb that bore with it so patiently during life, and that there is no hope of appeasing his anger. This shall make the soul

call upon the mountains to fall upon it and to hide it from the fury of the wrathful Lamb (Apoc. vi, 16). Speaking of judgment, St. Luke says: *Then they shall see the Son of Man (Luke, xxi, 27)*. Oh ! what pain will the sight of the judge in the form of man excite in the soul of the sinner! The sight of a Man-God who died for his salvation will upbraid him with his ingratitude. When the Saviour ascended into heaven, the angels said to the disciples: *This Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come as you have seen Him going into heaven (Acts. I, 11)*.

With the same wounds with which he ascended into heaven, Jesus Christ will come to judge the soul. "Great joy of the beholders," says the Abbot Rupert, "great terror of those who are in expectation." (De Op. Sp. S. 1, 9, c. 8). The wounds of the Redeemer will console the just and terrify the wicked. When Joseph said to his brothers, *I am Joseph, whom you sold*, the Scripture tells us that, through fear, they were silent and unable to utter a word. *His brethren could not answer him, being struck with exceeding great fear (Gen. xlv, 3)*. Now what answer will the sinner make to Jesus Christ ? Will he dare to ask mercy when he must first render an account of his abuse of the mercy which he has received? " With what face," says Eusebius Emisenus, " will you, who are to be first judged for contempt of mercy, ask for mercy ?" What, then, will become of him? Where, says St. Augustine, will he fly ? He will behold an angry judge above; **hell** open below; on one side his own sins accusing him; on the other, the devils ready to inflict chastisement; and within, the remorse of his conscience. "Above shall be an enraged Judge; below, a frightful chaos; on the right, sins accusing him ; on the left, the devils dragging him to punishment; within, a burning conscience: beset in this manner, whither will the sinner fly ! (Ap. S. Bonav. Diaet. Sal. T. 9).

Affections and Prayers.

O my Jesus! I will always call Thee Jesus. Thy name consoles and encourages me, because it reminds me that Thou art my Saviour, who didst die for my salvation. Behold me at Thy feet I acknowledge that I have deserved **hell** as often as I have offended Thee by mortal sin. I am unworthy of pardon, but Thou hast died to merit pardon for me. Pardon me then, immediately, O my Jesus! before Thou comest to judge me. I shall not then be able to ask pardon: I can now ask it from Thee, and I hope for it. Thy wounds will then fill me with terror, but now they give me confidence. My dear Redeemer! I am sorry above all things for having offended Thy infinite goodness. I purpose to submit to every pain, every loss, rather than forfeit Thy grace. I love Thee with my whole heart. Have pity on me. " Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy." O Mary, Mother of mercy! obtain for me a great sorrow for my sins, pardon, and perseverance in thy divine love. I love thee, O my queen, and trust in thee.

SECOND POINT.

Nothing will Remain Hidden.

CONSIDER the accusation and scrutiny: *The judgment sat and the books were opened (Dan. vii, 10)*. There will be two books, the Gospel and conscience. In the Gospel will be read what the accused should have done, and in his conscience what he has done. " Each individual," says St. Jerome, will see what he has done. In the balance of divine justice, not riches nor dignities, nor nobility, but works only, will have weight. *Thou art weighed in the balance, said Daniel to Balthasar, and art found wanting. (Dan. V, 27)*. "Neither his gold," says Father Alvarez, "nor his wealth, but the king alone, is

weighed." The accusers will then come forward; and first of all the devil. "The devil," says St. Augustine, "will be at hand, and will recite the words of your profession. He will charge us before our face with what we have done, he will state the day and the hour in which we have sinned." * *He will recite the words of your profession*—that is, he will bring forward the promises we have made and afterward violated: he will recount all our sins, pointing to the day and hour in which they were committed. According to St. Cyprian, he will then say to the Judge, "I have suffered neither stripes nor scourges for these men." I have suffered nothing for this ungrateful sinner; and, to become my slave, he has forsaken you, who have died for his salvation: he therefore belongs to me. Their angel guardians will also, as Origen says, accuse sinners; each of them will say: I have labored so many years for the salvation of that man, but he has despised my admonitions. Thus "his very friends will then despise him." (Lam. I, 2). The very walls within which he sinned shall bear witness against the sinner. *The stone shall cry out of the wall (Hab. ii, 11)*. His own conscience will accuse him. *Their conscience, says St. Paul, bearing witness to them . . . in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men.*" (Rom. ii, 15). Their very sins, says St. Bernard, will speak and say, "You have made us; we are your works; we shall not desert you."—*Lib. Med. cap. ii*. Finally, according to St. Chrysostom, the wounds of Jesus Christ will accuse the sinner: "the nails shall complain of thee, the wounds and the cross of Christ shall speak against thee." The examination will now begin.

I, says the Lord, will search Jerusalem with lamps (Soph. I, 12). The lamp, says Mendoza, penetrates every corner of the house. In explaining the words *with lamps*, Cornelius a Lapide says, that God shall then place before the sinner the examples of the Saints, all the lights and inspirations bestowed upon him during his life, and all the years that

had been given him that he might do good. *He hath called against me the time (Lam. i, 15)*. The sinner shall have to render an account of every glance of the eye. According to the prophet Malachi, the Lord *shall purify the sons of Levi, and shall refine them as gold (Mal. lii, 3)*. As gold is refined by removing the dross, so our good works confessions and communions will be subjected to a severe examination. *When I shall take a time, I will judge justices (Ps. lxxiv, 3)*. In fine, St. Peter tells that at judgment, the just will scarcely be saved. *If the just man shall scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? (1 Peter, iv, 18)*. If the sinner must answer for every idle word, what account will he have to give for consenting to so many bad thoughts, for uttering so many obscene words? Speaking of the authors of scandal, who have robbed him of so many souls, the Lord says: *I will meet them as a bear that is robbed of her whelps (Os. Xiii, 8)*. With regard to works, the Judge will say: *Give her of the fruit of her hands (Prov. xxxi, 31)*. Reward him according to the works which he has performed.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus! wert Thou now to reward me according to my works, **hell** would be my lot. O God! how often have I myself written the sentence of my condemnation to that place of torments! I thank Thee for the patience with which Thou hast borne me so long. O God! were I now obliged to appear before Thy judgment-seat, what account should I have to render of my past life! *Enter not into judgment with Thy servant*. Ah Lord ! wait for me a little longer, do not judge me yet. Wert Thou now to judge me, what should become of me ? Wait for me, since Thou hast treated me with so many mercies hitherto, grant me this new favor, infuse into my heart a great sorrow for my sins. I am sorry, O infinite Good! for having so often despised Thee. I love Thee above all

things. Eternal Father! pardon me for the love of Jesus Christ; and through his merits, grant me holy perseverance. My Jesus! I hope for all things from Thy blood. Most holy Mary, in thee I trust. " Turn, then, O most gracious advocate, thy eyes of mercy toward us." Behold my miseries, and have pity on me.

THIRD POINT.

The Sentence.

In fine, to obtain eternal life, the soul must be found, at judgment, to have led a life conformable to the life of Jesus Christ. *Whom he foreknew, he predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his Son (Rom. viii, 29).* It was this that made Job tremble. *What shall I do when God shall rise to judge me? and when he shall examine, what shall I answer him? (Job, xxxi, 14).* Philip II, rebuking a domestic for having told him a lie, said to him: *Is it thus you deceive me ?* The domestic went home, and died of grief. What will the sinner do? what answer will he make to Jesus Christ, his Judge? He will, like the man in the Gospel, who came to the feast without the nuptial garment, remain silent, because he will not know what to answer. His very sins will close the sinner's mouth. *All iniquity shall stop her mouth (Ps. cvi, 42).* St. Basil says that the sinner will then suffer more from shame than from the very fire of hell. (Orat. De fut. Jud.).

Finally, the Judge will pass sentence. *Depart from Me ye cursed into everlasting fire (Matt. xxv, 41).* Oh ! what an awful thunder-clap will that sentence be to the sinner ! " Oh! how frightfully," says Denis, the Carthusian, "will that thunder resound !" (De Quat. Nov. a. 26). " He," says St. Anselm, " that does not tremble at such thunder, sleeps not, but is dead." (Medit. 2). Eusebius writes, that the

terror of sinners at hearing the sentence of their condemnation, will be so great, that, if they could, they would die again. "The wicked shall be seized with such dismay at the sight of the Judge pronouncing sentence, that, were they not immortal, they should die a second time." There is then no more time for prayer, no more intercessors whom the sinner can invoke. "There," says St. Thomas of Villanova, "there is no opportunity of praying; there no intercessor, no friend, no father, shall assist." (Dom. 1 Adv. Conc. 2). To whom will the sinner then have recourse? Is it to God, whom he has so much despised? "Who," says St. Basil, "shall deliver you? Is it that God whom you have insulted?" (Oratio de Penit.). Perhaps he may have recourse to the Saints, or to Mary? No: for then *the stars*—that is, his holy advocates—*shall fall from heaven, and the moon, which represents Mary, shall not give her light (Matt. xxiv, 29)*. "Mary," says St. Augustine, "will fly from the gate of heaven." (Ad Fratres in er. ser. 10).

"O God! with what indifference," exclaims St. Thomas of Villanova, "do we listen to persons speaking on judgment! We appear to feel as little as if the sentence of condemnation could not fall upon ourselves, or as if we were not to be judged. (Dom. 1 Adv. conc. 1). And is it not," says the same Saint, "great folly to entertain security in so perilous an affair." (De S. Mart. Conc. 1). My brother, St. Augustine admonishes you not to say: Will God really send me to **hell**? Say it not, says the holy Doctor; for even the Jews did not persuade themselves that they should be exterminated. So many of the damned did not believe that they would be cast into **hell**, but afterward the final vengeance came upon them. *An end is come, the end is come. . . . Now I will accomplish My anger in thee, and will judge thee (Ezek. vii, 6)*. And thus, as St. Augustine says, the same will also happen to you. "The day of judgment will come, and you shall find the threats of God

verified." (In Ps. lxxiii). At present it depends on us to choose whatever sentence we please. It is in our power, says St. Eligius, to determine the character of the sentence which we shall receive. What then must we do? We must adjust our accounts before judgment. *Before judgment prepare thee justice (Ecclus. xviii, 19)*. St. Bonaventure says that, to escape the danger of failing in business, prudent merchants frequently review and settle their accounts. The Judge may be appeased before judgment, but not during judgment," says St. Augustine. Let us then say with St. Bernard: " I desire to present myself before Thee already judged, and not to be judged." (In Cant. s. 55). O my Judge, I wish to be judged and punished during life, which is a time of mercy and pardon; for after death will be the time of justice.

Affections and Prayers.

My God! if I do not appease Thee now, there will then be no more time for turning away Thy anger. But how shall I, who have so often despised Thy friendship for miserable beastly pleasures, be able to appease Thy wrath? I have repaid with ingratitude Thy immense love. How can a creature ever make sufficient satisfaction for having offended the Creator? Ah, my Lord! I thank Thee, for giving me in Thy mercy a means of appeasing Thy anger and satisfying Thy justice. I offer Thee the blood and death of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, and behold! I see a superabundant atonement and satisfaction made to Thee. To appease Thy anger, my repentance is also necessary. Yes, my God! I repent with my whole heart of all the injuries I have done Thee. Judge me now, O my Redeemer! I detest above all things all the offences I have offered to Thee. I love Thee with my whole heart and above all things, and I purpose to love Thee always, and to die rather than ever offend Thee again. Thou hast promised to pardon all who repent. Ah! judge me now,

and absolve me from my sins. I accept the punishment which I deserve, but reinstate me in Thy grace, and preserve me in it till death. Such is my hope. O Mary, my Mother! I thank thee for all the mercies which thou hast obtained for me. Ah ! continue to protect me to the end.

CONSIDERATION XXV

The General Judgment.

" The Lord shall be known when He executeth judgments."— *Ps. ix. 17.*

FIRST POINT.

The General Resurrection.

AT present there is no one in this world more despised than Jesus Christ. There is more respect shown to a peasant than to the Lord; for we are afraid to insult a peasant, or provoke him to anger, lest he should seek revenge. But insults are offered to God, and are repeated as wantonly as if he could not avenge them whenever he pleases. *The wicked, says Job, looked upon the Almighty as if He could do nothing (Job, xxii, 17).* Therefore the Redeemer has appointed a day of general judgment, and which is called in the Scripture, *the day of the Lord*; on which Jesus Christ will make known the greatness of his majesty. *The Lord shall be known when He executeth judgments (Ps. ix, 17).* Hence that day is called, not a day of mercy and pardon, but *a day of wrath, a day of tribulation and distress, a day of calamity and misery.*" (*Soph. 1, 15*). Yes, for then the Lord will come to repair the honor which sinners have sought to take from him on this earth. Let us examine how the judgment of this great day will take place.

The coming of the Judge will be preceded by fire. *A fire shall go before Him (Ps. xcvi, 3)*. Fire will descend from heaven, and shall burn the earth and all things upon the earth. *The earth, and the works which are in it, shall be burnt up (2 Petr. iii, 10)*. Thus palaces, churches, villas, cities, kingdoms, all must be reduced to one heap of ashes. This house, defiled by sins, must be purified by fire. Behold the end of all the riches, pomps, and pleasures of this earth After the death of all men, the trumpet will sound, and all will rise again (1 Cor. xv, 52). "As often," says Jerome, "as I consider the day of judgment, I tremble; that trumpet appears always to sound in my ears, *Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment*. At the sound of this trumpet, the souls of the just will descend to be united to the bodies with which they served God in this life; and the unhappy souls of the damned will come up from **hell** to take possession of the accursed bodies with which they offended God.

Oh ! how great will be the difference between the bodies of the just and the bodies of the damned ! The just will appear whiter, more beautiful, and more resplendent than the sun. *Then the just shall shine as the sun (Matt. xiii, 43)*. Happy he who knows how to mortify his flesh in his life by refusing it forbidden pleasures; and who, to keep it under greater check, imitates the saints, by denying it even lawful gratifications, and by treating it with severity and contempt. Oh! how great will then be the happiness of those who will have practiced mortification of the flesh ! We may estimate it from the words which St. Peter of Alcantara addressed after death to St. Teresa: "O happy penance, which merited for me so great glory." (In ejus off. lect. 6). But, on the other hand, the bodies of the reprobate will appear black and hideous, and will send forth an intolerable stench. Oh! how great the pain of the damned in taking possession of their

bodies ! Accursed body, the soul will say, to indulge you, I have brought myself to perdition. And the body will say: Accursed soul! why have you, who had the use of reason, allowed me the pleasures which have merited for you and me the eternal torments of **hell** ?

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus and my Redeemer, who will be one day my judge, pardon me before that day arrives. *Turn not away Thy face from me.*" Thou art now a Father to me ; and, like a father, receive into Thy friendship a son who casts himself with sorrow at Thy feet. My Father, I ask pardon. I have offended Thee ; I have unjustly forsaken Thee. Thou didst not deserve such treatment from me. I repent of it; I am sorry for it with my whole heart. *Turn not away Thy face from me;* do not cast me off as I deserved. Remember the blood which Thou hast shed for me, and have pity on me. My Jesus, I wish for no other judge than Thee. " I willingly," said St. Thomas of Villanova, " submit to the judgment of him who died for me, and who, that he might not condemn me, has condemned himself to the cross." St. Paul has said the same. *Who is he that shall condemn ? Christ Jesus, that died (Rom. viii, 34).* My Father, I love Thee, and, for the future, I will never more depart from Thy feet. Forget the injuries I have done Thee, and give me a great love for Thy goodness. I desire to love Thee more than I have offended Thee; but if Thou dost not assist me, I shall not be able to love Thee. Assist me. O my Jesus! make me always grateful to Thy love, that on the day of judgment I may be found in the valley of Josaphat, among the number of Thy lovers. O Mary, my Queen and my advocate ! assist me now ; for if I am lost, thou wilt not be able to help me on that day. Thou prayest for all; pray also for one who glories in being thy devoted servant, and who places so much confidence in thee.

SECOND POINT.

The Valley of Josaphat.

After their resurrection, all men will be told by the angels to go to the valley of Josaphat, that there they may be judged, *Nations, nations, in the valley of destruction; for the day of the Lord is near (Joel, iii, 14)*. When the whole human race will be assembled, the angels will come and separate the reprobate from the elect. *The angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked from among the just (Matt. xiii, 49)*. The just will stand on the right, and the wicked will be driven to the left. How great would be the pain that you would feel at being driven away from a party of pleasure, or at being expelled from the church ! But how much greater will be the pain of those who are banished from the society of the saints ! " What think you," says the author of the Imperfect Work, " must be the confusion of the wicked, when, after being separated from the just, they will be abandoned !" (In Matth. Hom. 54). This confusion alone would, according to St. Chrysostom, be sufficient to constitute a **hell** for the reprobate. The son will be separated from the father, the husband from the wife, and the master from the servant. *One shall be taken and one shall be left (Matt. xxiv, 40)*. Tell me, my brother, what place do you think will fall to you ? Would you wish to be found at the right hand ? If you do, abandon the life which leads to the left.

In this life the princes of the earth and the worldly rich are deemed fortunate, but the Saints, who live in poverty and humiliations, are despised. O faithful souls who love God, be not troubled at seeing yourselves in contempt and tribulations on this earth: *Your sorrow shall be turned into joy (John, xvi, 20)*. On the day of judgment you will be

called truly fortunate, and will have the honor of being declared as belonging to the court of Jesus Christ. Oh ! how beautiful will then be the appearance of St. Peter of Alcantara, who was despised as an apostate ! of St. John of God, who was treated as a fool! of St. Peter Celestine, who, after having renounced the papal throne, died in a prison ! Oh ! how great will then be the honors of so many martyrs who have been torn to pieces by their executioners ! *Then shall every man have praise from God (1 Cor. iv, 5).* But on the other hand, how horrible will be the appearance of Herod, of Pilate, of Nero, and so many other great men of this earth, who are now damned ! O lovers of the world, in the valley, in the valley I expect you. There, without doubt you will change your sentiments, there you will weep over your folly. Miserable beings, who for the sake of making a figure for a short time on the theatre of this world, will afterward have to act the part of reprobate in the tragedy of judgment. The elect will then be placed on the right; according to the apostle, they will, for their greater glory, be raised in the air above the clouds, and will go with the angels to meet Jesus Christ descending from heaven. *We shall be taken up together with them to meet Christ into the air (1 Thess. iv, 16).*

But the damned, like so many goats destined for the slaughter, will be compelled to remain at the left, waiting for the Judge, who will publicly pronounce sentence of condemnation against all his enemies.

But behold the heavens are already opened, the angels come to assist at the Judgment, carrying the symbols of the Passion of Jesus Christ. " When," says St. Thomas, " the Lord comes to judge, the sign of the cross and the other emblems of his passion shall be exhibited." (Comp. theol. P. 1, c. 244). The cross especially will appear. *And then, says the Redeemer, shall appear the sign of the Son of*

*man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn (Matt. xxiv, 30). Oh ! says Cornelius a Lapide, how great, at the sight of the cross, will be the wailing of sinners who, during life, disregarded their own salvation, which the Son of God purchased at so dear a price ! Then, says St. Chrysostom, "shall the nails complain of thee; the wounds, the cross of Christ shall speak against thee." The holy apostles and all their imitators will act as assessors at the general judgment, and shall, together with Jesus Christ, judge the nations. *The just shall shine. . . . They shall judge nations (Wis. iii, 7-8).* Mary, the Queen of angels and saints, will also come to assist at the judgment. Lastly, the eternal Judge will come seated on a throne of majesty and light. *And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty (Matt. xxiv, 30). At their presence, says the prophet Joel, the people shall be in grievous pains (Joel, ii, 6).* The sight of Jesus Christ will console the elect; but in the reprobate it will excite more pain than hell itself. "It would," says St. Jerome, "be easies to bear the pains of hell than the presence of the Lord." St. Teresa used to say: " My Jesus, afflict me with every pain, but do not allow me to see Thy countenance enraged against me on that day." And St. Basil says, " This confusion surpasses all torture." Then will be verified the prediction of St. John, that the damned will call upon the mountains to fall upon them, and to hide them from the sight of an angry judge. *And they shall say to the mountains and rocks: Fall upon us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. (Apoc. vi, 16).**

Affections and Prayers.

 my dear Redeemer! O Lamb of God, who hast come into the world, not to punish, but to pardon sins; ah! pardon me immediately: pardon me before the arrival of that day on which Thou wilt judge

me. Then the sight of Thee, O divine Lamb! who hast borne with me so long and with so much patience, should, if I were lost, be the hell of hells. Ah! I say again, pardon me soon ; draw me by Thy merciful hand from the abyss into which my sins have cast me. I repent, O sovereign Good ! of having offended Thee, and of having offended Thee so grievously. I love Thee, my judge, who hast loved me so tenderly. Ah! through the merits of Thy death, grant me a great grace, which will transform me from a sinner into a saint. Thou hast promised to hear all who pray to Thee. *Cry to me and I will hear thee. (Jer. xxxiii, 3).* I do not ask earthly goods: I ask Thy grace, Thy love, and nothing else. Hear me, O my Jesus! Through the love which Thou didst bear to me when Thou didst die on the Cross for my salvation. My beloved Judge, I am a criminal, but a criminal who loves Thee more than he does himself. Have pity on me. Mary, my Mother! come to my aid, and come immediately ; now is the time that thou canst assist me. Thou didst not abandon me when I lived in forgetfulness of thee and of God ; come to my relief now that I am resolved to serve thee always, and never more to offend my Lord. O Mary! after Jesus, thou art my hope.

THIRD POINT.

The Eternal Sentence.

But, behold! the judgment already begins. The books, which shall be the consciences of each individual, are opened. *The judgment sat, and the books were opened (Dan. vii, 10).* The witnesses against the reprobate will be—first, the devils, who, according to St. Augustine, will say: "Most just God, declare him to be mine who was unwilling to be yours." (De Sal. Doc. c. 62). Secondly, they will be their own consciences: *Their own conscience bearing witness to them (Rom. xxix, 23).* The

very walls of the house in which they have offended God will bear testimony, and will cry for vengeance against them. *The stone shall cry out of the wall (Hab. ii, 11)*. Finally, the Judge himself, who has been present at all the insults offered to him, will give evidence against the sinner. *I am the Judge and the witness, saith the Lord (Jer. xxix, 23)*. St. Paul says, that then the Lord *will bring to light the hidden things of darkness. (1 Cor. iv, 5)*. He will make known to all men the most secret and shameful sins of the reprobate, which they concealed even in the tribunal of confession, *I will discover thy shame to thy face (Nah. iii, 5)*. The Master of the Sentences, along with other authors, is of opinion that the sins of the elect will not be manifested; but will, according to the words of David, be covered: *Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered (Ps. xxxi, 1)*. But St. Basil teaches that with a single glance all will see, as in a picture, the sins of the damned. If, says St. Thomas (*De Hum. chr. a. 25*), in the garden of Gethsemane, at the words of Christ, "*I am He*" the soldiers who came to take him prisoner fell prostrate on the ground, what will be the condition of the damned when, sitting in judgment, he will say to them: Behold, I am He whom you have so much despised ?

But now comes the sentence. Jesus Christ will first turn to the elect, and address them in these consoling words: *Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Matt. xxv, 34)*. So great was the consolation which St. Francis of Assisi felt when he learned by revelation that he was predestined, that he could not contain himself. How great will be the joy of the elect in hearing the Judge say to him: Come, blessed children, come to a kingdom; for you there are no more pains, no more fears; you are and shall be saved forever. I bless the blood which I have shed for you, and I bless the tears which you have shed for your

sins. Let us ascend into Paradise, where we shall remain together for all eternity ! The most holy Mary will also bless her servants, and will invite them with her to heaven. And thus, singing Allelujas, the elect will enter heaven in triumph, to possess, to praise, and to love God forever.

But on the other hand, the reprobate, turning to Jesus Christ, will say to him: What will become of us? Since, the Judge will say, you have renounced and despised my grace, *depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire (Matt. xxv, 41). Depart;* begone from Me; I wish neither to see nor to hear you ever more. *You cursed, go,* and since you have despised my blessing, go accursed. And where, O Lord, will they go? ***Into fire, into hell, to burn both in soul and in body.*** And for how many years, or for how many ages? ***Into everlasting fire;*** for all eternity; as long as God shall be God. After this sentence, says St. Ephrem, the reprobate will take leave of the angels, of the saints, of relatives, and of the divine Mother. " Farewell, ye just! farewell, O cross ! farewell, O paradise ! farewell, fathers and children, for we shall never see any of you again! farewell, O Mary, Mother of God!" (De Variis Torm. Inf.). Then, in the middle of that valley, a pit will be opened, into which the devils and the damned will fall. O God ! they will see those gates closed, never to be opened, never, never for all eternity. O accursed sin, to what a melancholy end will you one day lead so many poor souls ! O unhappy souls, to whom this unhappy end is reserved !

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Saviour and my God ! what sentence shall I receive on that day? If, O my Jesus! Thou now demandest an account of my life, what could I say to Thee but that I deserve a thousand hells? Yes, it is true, O my divine Redeemer! I deserve a thousand hells; but

remember that I love Thee, and that I love Thee more than myself; and for the insults I have committed against Thee, I feel so great a sorrow, that I would be content to have suffered every evil rather than have offended Thee. Thou, O my Jesus! condemnest obstinate sinners, but not those who repent and wish to love Thee. Behold me penitent at Thy feet; make me feel that Thou pardonest me. But this Thou hast declared by the mouth of Thy prophet. "Turn ye to me, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will turn to you."—(*Zac. i. 3.*). I give up all things; I renounce all the pleasures and goods of this world; I turn to Thee, and embrace Thee, O my beloved Redeemer! Ah ! receive me into Thy heart, and there inflame me with Thy holy love ; but inflame me in such a manner, that I shall never again think of separating from Thee. O my Jesus! save me, and let my salvation consist in loving Thee always, and in singing Thy mercies forever. *The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever (Ps. lxxxviii, 2).* Mary, my hope, my refuge, and my Mother, assist me, and obtain for me holy perseverance. No one has been lost who has had recourse to thee. To thee I recommend myself; have pity on me.

CONSIDERATION XXVI.

The pains of Hell.

"And these shall go into everlasting punishment."—*Matt. xxv. 46.*

FIRST POINT.

The Pain of Sense.

IN committing sin, the sinner does two evils. He abandons God, the Sovereign Good, and turns to creatures. *For My people have done two evils. They*

have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns—broken cisterns—that can hold no water (Jer. ii, 13). Since, then, by turning to creatures the sinner offends God, he will be justly tortured in **hell** by the same creatures by fire, and by devils: in this punishment consists the pain of sense. But because his greatest guilt and the malice of his sin consists in turning his back on God, his principal torment, his **hell**, will be the pain of loss, or that pain arising from having lost God.

Let us first consider the pain of sense. It is of faith, that there is a **hell**. In the middle of the earth there is a prison reserved for the chastisement of rebels against God. What is this **hell**? It is what the glutton who was damned called a place of torments. (Luke, xvi, 28). A place of torments, where all the senses and powers of the damned will have their proper torment, and where, the more a person has offended God by any sense, the more he will be tortured in that sense. *By what things a man sinneth, by the same also he is tormented (Wis. xi, 17). As much as she hath glorified herself and lived in delicacies, so much torments and sorrow give ye to her.—Apoc. xviii. 7.* The sight will be tormented with darkness. *A land, says Job, that is dark, and covered with the mist of death (Job, x, 21).* How pitiable the condition of a man who is shut up in a dark cave for forty or fifty years, or during his whole life! Hell is a dungeon closed up on every side, into which a ray of the sun, or of any other light, shall never enter. *He shall never see the light (Ps. xlviii, 20).* The fire of this world sends forth light; but the fire of **hell** is utterly dark. *The voice of the Lord divided the fire (Ps. xxviii, 7).* In explaining these words, St. Basil says, that the Lord will separate the light from the fire, so that this fire will burn, but will not illuminate. Albertus Magnus expounds them more briefly, and says that God "will divide the flame from the heat." The very smoke that issues from that fire

shall form a storm of darkness which, according to St. Jude, will blind the damned. *To whom the storm of darkness is reserved forever (Jud. 13)*. St. Thomas teaches that the damned have only the light which serves to increase their torments. In that glimmering light they will see the deformity of their associates, and of the devils, who will assume horrible forms in order to increase the terrors of the damned.

The sense of smell will also be tormented. How painful to be confined in a close room along with a putrid corpse ! *Out of their carcasses, says the Prophet Isaias, shall rise a stink (Isa. xxxiv, 3)*. The damned must remain in the midst of so many millions of the reprobate, who, though forever alive to pain, are called carcasses on account of the stench which they send forth. St. Bonaventure says, that if the body of one of the damned were placed on this earth, it would, by its stench, be sufficient to cause the death of all men. Miserable fools ! the greater the number of the damned in hell, the more insufferable will be their torments. " There," says St. Thomas, " the society of the reprobate will cause, not a diminution, but an increase of misery." Their sufferings are more intolerable on account of the stench, on account of the shrieks of the damned, and on account of the narrowness of the place. In **hell**, they will be one over the other, like sheep gathered together in the winter. *They are, said David, laid in hell like sheep (Ps. xlviii, 15)*. They will be even like grapes pressed under the wine-press of God' s wrath. *And he treadeth the wine-press of the fierceness of the wrath of God the Almighty (Apoc. xix, 15)*. From this will arise the pain of immobility. *Let them become immovable as a stone (Exod. xv, 16)*. Thus, in whatsoever position the damned will fall into **hell** after the last day, in that they must remain, without ever changing their posture, and without ever being able to move hand or foot, as long as God will be God.

The sense of hearing will be tormented by the unceasing howling and wailing of those miserable beings, who are sunk in an abyss of despair. The devils will torment the damned by continual noises. *The sound of dread is a/ways in his ears (Job, xv, 21)*. How painful to a person longing for sleep to hear the groans of a sick man, the barking of a dog, or the screams of an infant! But, oh ! how miserable the condition of the damned, who must listen incessantly for all eternity to the clamor and cries of the companions of their torments! The damned will be tormented by a ravenous hunger. *They shall suffer hunger like dogs (Ps. lviii, 15)*. But they never will have a morsel of bread. Their thirst will be so great that all the waters of the ocean will not be able to quench it; but they will never be allowed a single drop. The rich glutton asked for a drop of water; but he has not as yet had it, and he never, never will have it.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Lord ! behold at Thy feet one who has so much despised Thy grace and Thy chastisements ! Miserable should I be, O my Jesus! if Thou hadst not taken pity on me. How many years should I be in that fetid furnace, in which so many of my companions are now burning! Ah, my Redeemer! why does not this thought make me burn with Thy love ? How can I ever again think of offending Thee ? Ah, my Jesus! may I never more displease Thee. Strike me dead a thousand times rather than permit me ever again to insult Thee. Since Thou hast begun, complete the work. Thou hast taken me out of the abyss of so many sins, and hast so lovingly called me to love Thee. Ah! grant that I may spend for Thee all the time which Thou now givest me. How ardently should the damned desire a day or an hour of the time granted to me! And shall I continue to spend it in offending Thee ?

No, my Jesus! through the merits of that blood, which has hitherto delivered me from **hell**, do not permit it. I love Thee, O Sovereign Good ! and because I love Thee I am sorry for having offended Thee. I wish never more to offend Thee, but to love Thee forever. Mary, my Queen and my Mother! pray to Jesus for me, and obtain for me the gift of perseverance and of his holy love.

SECOND POINT.

The Fire of **Hell**.

The pain which most severely torments the senses of the damned arises from the fire of **hell**, which tortures the sense of touch. *The vengeance on the flesh of the ungodly is fire and worms (Ecclus. vii, 19)*. Hence, in passing sentence, the Lord makes special mention of it. *Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire (Matt. xxv, 41)*. Even in this life, the pain of fire is the greatest of all torments; but according to St. Augustine, our fire, compared with the fire of **hell**, is but painted fire. St. Vincent Ferrer says, that in comparison with the fire of **hell** our fire is cold. The reason is, that the fire of this earth has been created for our use; but God has made the fire of **hell** purposely to torment the damned. As Tertullian remarks: "Fire which is made for the use of man in this world, is very different from that which is used for the justice of God." (Apolog. c. 48). The wrath of God lights up this avenging fire. *A fire is kindled in my rage (Jer. xv, 14)*. Hence, the Prophet Isaias calls the fire of **hell** the spirit of heat, *If the Lord shall wash away the filth of the daughters of Sion by the spirit of burning (Isa. iv, 4)*. The damned will be sent, not to the fire, but into the fire. "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire." Thus, like a piece of wood in the furnace, they will be surrounded by fire. They will have an abyss of fire below, an abyss of fire above, and an abyss of fire on every side.

If they touch, or see, or breathe, they touch and see, and breathe nothing but fire. They will live in fire, like a fish in water. But this fire will not only surround the damned, but will also enter into their very bowels to torment them. Their bodies will become all fire. Thus, this fire will burn the bowels, the heart, the brain, the blood within the veins, and even the marrow within the bones. Each of the damned will be in himself a furnace of fire. *Thou shalt make them as a furnace of fire (Ps. xx, 10).*

Some cannot bear to walk under a strong sun, or to remain in a close room before a large fire ; they cannot endure a spark that flies from a candle ; and still they fear not the devouring flames of **hell**. *Which of you, says the Prophet Isaias, can dwell with devouring fire? (Isa. xxxiii, 14).* As a wild beast devours a lamb, so the fire of **hell** devours the damned ; but it devours them without ever causing death. " Fools," says St. Peter Damian, addressing the unchaste, "continue, continue to indulge your flesh; a day will come when your impurities, like pitch, will nourish and increase within your bowels the flame which will torment you in **hell**." (De Caelib. Sac. c. 3). St. Jerome says that this fire will bring with it all the pains and torments to which men are subject on this earth—pains in the sides, in the head, in the bowels, in the nerves. In this fire the damned will suffer even the pain of cold. *Let him, says Job, pass from the snow waters to excessive heat (Job, xxiv, 19).* But we must always keep in mind, that all the torments of this earth are, as St. Chrysostom says, but the shadow of the pains of **hell**.

The powers of the soul will also have their proper torment. The damned will be tormented in the memory by the remembrance of the time which was given to them in this life, that they might save their souls, and which they spent in procuring their own damnation; by the remembrance of the graces which they have received

from God, and of which they have not profited. They will be tormented in the understanding by thinking of the great good which they have lost in losing heaven and God, and that this loss is forever irreparable. In the will, by seeing that they will be refused whatsoever they ask. *The desire of the wicked shall perish (Ps. cxi, 10)*. The miserable beings will never have anything which they desire, and will be forever afflicted with the eternal torments which they abhor. They would wish to be rid of these torments, and to enjoy peace; but in these torments they will forever remain, and peace they will never find.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus! Thy blood and Thy death are my hope. Thou hast died to deliver me from eternal death. Ah, Lord! who hast partaken more of Thy merits than I, who have so often deserved **hell**? Ah! do not allow me to live any longer ungrateful to the great graces Thou hast bestowed upon me. Thou hast delivered me from the fire of **hell**, because Thou wishest me to burn, not in that tormenting fire, but with the sweet flames of Thy love. Assist me, then, that I may satisfy Thy desire. Were I now in **hell**, I could never more love Thee. But since I am able to love Thee, I wish to love Thee. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness! I love Thee, O my Redeemer! who hast loved me so tenderly. How have I been able to live so long in forgetfulness of Thee? I thank Thee for not having been forgetful of me. Hadst Thou forgotten me, I should now either be in **hell** or without sorrow for my sins. This sorrow which I feel in my heart for having offended Thee, and my desire to love Thee ardently, are gifts of Thy grace, which still assist me. I thank Thee for them, O my Jesus! I hope for the future to give Thee the remainder of my life. I wish to think only of serving and pleasing Thee. Remind me always of the **hell** I have deserved, and of the graces Thou hast bestowed upon me, and do not permit me ever

again to turn my back upon Thee, and to condemn myself to that pit of torments. O Mother of God! pray for me a sinner. Thy intercession has delivered me from **hell**. Deliver me also, O my Mother, by thy prayers, from sin, which alone can again condemn me to **hell**.

THIRD POINT.

The Pain of Loss.

But all these torments are nothing, compared with the pain of loss. **Hell** does not consist in the darkness, stench, shrieks, and fire; the pain which constitutes **hell** is, the pain of having lost God. "Let torments," says St. Bruno, "be added to torments, and let them not be deprived of God." (serm. de jud. fin.). And St. John Chrysostom says that a thousand hells are not equal to this pain. (Ad pop. Ant. hom. 48). According to St. Augustine, if the damned enjoyed the vision of God, "they should feel no pain, and hell should be converted into a paradise." (De Tripl. Hab. c. 4). To conceive some notion of this pain, consider that, should a person lose a jewel worth a hundred crowns, the loss would occasion great pain, but were the jewel worth two hundred crowns, his pain is doubled; and if it were worth four hundred crowns, the pain is still greater. In a word, the pain which he suffers increases in proportion to the value of what he has lost. What have the damned lost? They have lost God, who is an infinite good. Hence St. Thomas says that the pain of the damned is, in a certain manner, infinite. (I. 2, q. 87. a. 4).

This pain is dreaded only by the saints. St. Ignatius of Loyola used to say: Lord, I am willing to bear every pain, but not the pain of being deprived of Thee. But, because they live in the midst of darkness, sinners who are content to live for months and years without God do not

understand this pain. However, they will know at death the great good which they lose. At its departure from this world, the soul, as St. Antonine says, instantly sees that it has been created for God. (P. 4, t. 14, c. 5, #10). Hence it will suddenly rush forward to embrace its Sovereign Good: but, if it be in sin, God will cast it off. If a dog sees a hare, what efforts does he not make to break his chains and seize his prey. At its separation from the body, the soul is naturally drawn to God, but sin drags it away and sends it to **hell**, at a distance from him. *Your iniquities*, says the Prophet Isaias, *have divided between you and your God (Isa. lix, 2)*. The entire, then, of the hell of the damned consists in that first word of the sentence of their condemnation—*Depart from Me, you cursed. Go*, Jesus Christ shall say; I do not wish you ever again to see my face. When Absalom heard that David condemned him never more to appear before him, he said: *Tell my father either to permit me to see his face, or to put me to death.—2 Kings, xiv. 24*. To one of his grandees, whom he saw guilty of irreverence in the church, Philip II. said: "Do not dare ever again to appear in my presence." So great was the pain which the nobleman felt, that, after having returned home, he died of grief. What will be the anguish of the reprobate at the hour of death, when God will say to him: Begone; I will never see you again ! *I will hide my face from thee; . . . all evils and afflictions shall find them (Deut. xxxi, 17)*. On the day of judgment Jesus Christ will say to the reprobate: You are no longer mine; I am no longer yours. *Call his name not, my people; for you are not my people, and I will not be yours (Os. I, 9)*.

With what pain does a son at the death of a father, or a wife at the death of a husband, say: My father, my wife, I shall never see you again ! Ah ! if we now heard the wailing of one of the damned, and asked him why he weeps so bitterly, his answer would be: I weep because I have lost God, and shall never see him more. Perhaps the

miserable man can love God in **hell**, and can resign himself to his will ? No, if he could do this, **hell** would not be **hell**. The unhappy being can never resign himself to the divine will ? Neither can he love his God; he hates and will hate him forever; and his **hell** will consist in the conviction that God is an infinite good, and that he is compelled to hate him, while he sees that he is worthy of infinite love. When St Catharine asked a devil who he was, he said: "I am that wicked wretch that is deprived of the love of God." The damned will hate and curse God; and in cursing God, they will also curse the benefits he has conferred upon them; they will curse the benefits of creation, of redemption, of the sacraments, particularly the sacraments of baptism and penance, and, above all, the most holy sacrament of the altar. They will hate all the angels and saints, but especially their angel-guardians and their holy advocates, and above all the divine Mother. But they will principally hate the Three Divine Persons, and among them they will hate in a special manner the Son of God, who once died for their salvation; they will curse his wounds, his blood, his pains, and his death.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God ! Thou then art my supreme and infinite Good ; and I have so often voluntarily lost Thee! I knew that in committing sin I gave Thee great displeasure, and that I lost Thy grace; and with this knowledge I have consented to sin! Ah! if I did not see Thee, O Son of God, nailed to the cross in order to die for me, I should not have courage to ask or hope for pardon from Thee. Eternal Father! look not on me, but behold Thy beloved Son, who asks mercy for me; hear him, and pardon me. I ought at this moment to be in hell, without any hope of being ever more able to love Thee, or to recover Thy lost grace. My God! I am sorry above all things for the injury I have done Thee in renouncing Thy

friendship, and despising Thy love for the miserable pleasures of this world, Oh ! that I had died a thousand times, rather than have offered Thee so great an insult! How could I have been so blind and foolish ! I thank Thee. O my Lord ! for giving me time to repair the evil I have done. Since, through Thy mercy, I am not in hell, and can love Thee, O my God! I wish to love Thee. I will wait no longer to convert myself entirely to Thee. I love Thee, O infinite goodness! I love Thee, my life, my treasure, my love, my all. Remind me always, O Lord ! of the love which Thou hast borne to me, and of the hell which I have deserved, that this thought may continually excite me to make acts of love, and to say always, *I love Thee, I love Thee, I love Thee*. O Mary, my Queen, my hope and my Mother, if I were in hell, I could never more love thee. I love thee, O my Mother! and in thee, after Jesus, I trust that I shall never again cease to love my God and thee. Assist me; pray to Jesus for me.

CONSIDERATION XXVII.

The Eternity of Hell.

" And these shall go into everlasting punishment."—*Matt.* xxv. 46.

FIRST POINT.

Hell is Eternal.

WERE **hell** not eternal, it would not be **hell**. Torments which continue but a short time, are not a severe punishment. The man who is afflicted with an abscess or cancer submits to the knife or the cautery. The pain is very sharp; but, because it is soon over, the torture is not very great. But, should the incision or cauterization

last for a week, or for an entire month, how frightful should be his agony! A slight pain in the eye, or in the teeth, when it lasts for a long time, becomes insupportable. Even a comedy, a musical entertainment, would it continue for an entire day, produces intolerable tediousness. And would it last for a month, or for a year, who could bear it ? What then must **hell** be, where the damned are compelled, not to listen to the same comedy or the same music, nor to submit merely to pains in the eyes, or in the teeth, or to the torture of the knife, or of the red-hot iron, but to suffer all pains and all torments ? And for how long ? For all eternity. *They shall be tortured forever and ever (Apoc. xx, 10).*

This belief in eternity is an article of faith; it is not an opinion, but a truth attested by God in so many places in Holy Scripture. *Depart from Me, you accursed, into everlasting fire. And these shall go into everlasting punishment (Matt. xxv, 41. 46). Who shall suffer eternal punishment in destruction (2 Thess. I, 9). Every one shall be salted with fire (Mark, ix, 48).* As salt prevents putrefaction, so the fire of **hell**, while it tortures the damned, performs the office of salt by preserving their life.

Now, how great would be the folly of the man who, for the sake of a day's amusement, would voluntarily condemn himself to be shut up in a dungeon for twenty or thirty years ! If **hell** lasted but a hundred, or even but two or three years, it would be the extreme of folly in a Christian to condemn himself to fire for two or three years for the vile pleasure of a moment. But there is not the question of thirty, of a hundred, or of a hundred thousand years; but there is question of eternity; there is question of suffering forever the same torments—torments which will never end, and will never be mitigated in the slightest degree. The saints then had reason, as long as they were on this

earth, and in danger of being lost, to weep and tremble. Blessed Isaias, even while he lived in the desert in fasting and penitential rigors wept and said: Ah! unhappy me, who am not as yet free from the danger of losing my soul.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God ! if Thou hadst sent me to **hell**, as I have often deserved, and hadst afterward drawn me from it, how deeply should I feel my obligations to Thee! What a holy life would I have begun ! And now that Thou hast shown me greater mercy by preserving me from falling into that place of woe, what shall I do ? Shall I again offend Thee and provoke Thy wrath, that Thou mayest send me to burn in that prison of rebels against Thy majesty, where so many are buried in fire for fewer sins than I have committed ? Ah, my Redeemer ! I have hitherto done so; and instead of availing myself of the time which Thou gavest me to weep over my sins, I have spent it in provoking Thee still more. I thank Thy infinite goodness for having borne with me so long. If Thy goodness were not infinite, how couldst Thou have borne with me ? I thank Thee for having waited for me till now with so much patience. I thank Thee in a most special manner for the light which Thou now givest me, by which Thou makest me see my folly, and the injury I have done Thee in insulting Thee so often by my sins. My Jesus! I detest them, and am sorry for them with my whole heart. Through the merits of Thy Passion, pardon me, and assist me with Thy grace, that I may never more offend Thee. I now have just reason to fear that, if I commit another mortal sin, Thou wilt abandon me. My Lord ! I entreat Thee to place this just fear before my eyes whenever the devil will tempt me to offend Thee again. My God ! I love Thee; I do not wish ever more to lose Thee; assist me by Thy grace. O most holy Virgin! do thou also assist me. Obtain for me the grace always to have recourse to thee

in my temptations, that I may never again lose my God. Mary, after Jesus, thou art my hope.

SECOND POINT.

The Weight of Eternity.

He that enters **hell**, will not depart from it for all Eternity. This thought made David tremble and say; *Let not the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me (Ps. lxxviii, 16)*. As soon as the damned fall into that pit of torments, its mouth is closed never to be opened. In **hell** there is a gate for admission, but none for egress. "There will be a descent," says Eusebius, "but there will be no ascent." In explaining the words of the Psalmist, this author says, *and let not the pit shut her mouth*; because when it shall have received them, it will be closed above and opened downward! (De Epiph. Et Inf. hom 3). As long as the sinner remains on this earth, he may hope to reverse the sentence of his damnation; but as soon as death overtakes him in sin, all his hopes are at an end forever. *When the wicked man is dead, there shall be no hope any more (Prov. xi, 7)*. Perhaps the damned may flatter themselves with a false hope, and thus find some relief in their despair. The man who is mortally wounded, confined to his bed, and given over by his physicians, may console himself with the hope of finding a physician or a remedy to heal his wounds. The man who is condemned to the galleys for life may also find comfort in the expectation of being one day delivered from his chains. And may not the damned at least say: Who knows but I shall one day escape from this prison? and thus delude himself with this false hope. No: in **hell** there is no hope, whether true or false; there is no *perhaps*. *I will set before thy face (Ps. xlix, 21)*. The unhappy damned will always see the sentence of their reprobation written before their eyes. In it they will read,

that they will weep forever in that pit of torments. *And many shall awake: some unto life everlasting, and others unto reproach, to see it always (Dan. xii, 2).* Hence the damned not only suffer the torments of each moment, but in each moment they endure the pain of eternity, saying, What I now suffer, I must suffer forever. "They bear," says Tertullian, "the weight of eternity."

Let us then pray to the Lord in the words of St. Augustine: "Here burn, here cut, here spare not, that you may spare for eternity." The chastisements of this life pass away: *Thy arrows pass;* but the pains of the next life last forever, *the voice of Thy thunder in a wheel (Ps. lxxvi, 19).* Let us dread these punishments. Let us dread that thunder of eternal damnation which will issue from the mouth of the Judge in passing sentence against the wicked. "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire." The Psalmist says: "The voice of thy thunder in a wheel." A wheel is a figure of eternity, which has no end. *I have drawn my sword out of its sheath, not to be turned back (Ezek. xxi, 5).* The punishment of **hell** will be great; but what ought to terrify us more is, that it will be irrevocable.

But the unbeliever will say: Can it be just to punish a sin which lasts but a moment, with eternal torments? But how, I ask, can a sinner, for a momentary pleasure, dare to insult a God of infinite majesty? St. Thomas says that, even in human judgments, the punishment of crime is measured, not from its duration, but from its malice. **Hell** is but a small punishment for mortal sin; an offence against infinite majesty deserves infinite chastisement. "In every mortal sin," says St. Bernardine of Sienna, "an infinite insult is offered to God; but an infinite injury merits infinite punishment." But, because, says St. Thomas, a creature is not capable of suffering pain infinite in point of intensity, God inflicts punishment infinite in extension or duration. (T. ii, s. 12, a. 2, c. 2).

Besides, since the damned are incapable of making satisfaction for their sins, their punishment should be necessarily eternal. In this life penitent sinners can atone for their iniquities only in as much as the merits of Jesus Christ are applied to them. But, from the application of these merits the reprobate are excluded. Hence, since they cannot appease the anger of God, and since their sin is eternal, their punishment also must be eternal. *He shall not give to God his ransom. . . . And he shall labor forever (Ps. xlviii, 8-9)*. Hence Belluacensis says: "There sin can be forever punished, and can never be expiated;" (Spec. Mor. 1, 2, p. 3, d. 3). for, according to St. Augustine, "there the sinner cannot repent." Therefore the wrath of the Lord shall be always provoked against him. *The people with whom the Lord is angry forever (Mal. i, 4)*. Moreover, the damned, though God should wish to pardon them, are unwilling to be pardoned; for their will is obstinate and confirmed in hatred against God. And St. Jerome says that the reprobate "are insatiable in the desire of sinning." Hence, because the damned refuse to be healed, their wounds are incurable. *Why is my wound desperate, so as to refuse to be healed? (Jer. xv, 18)*.

Affections and Prayers.

Then, my Redeemer! if at this hour I were damned, as I have deserved, I should be obstinate in hatred against Thee, my God ! who hast died for me. O God ! what a hell should it be to hate Thee, who hast loved me so tenderly, who art infinite beauty, infinite goodness, and worthy of infinite love ! Then if I were now in hell, I should be in such an unhappy state, that I would not even wish for the pardon which Thou now offerest to me. My Jesus, I thank Thee for the mercy Thou hast shown me; and since I now can obtain pardon, I wish to love Thee. Thou offerest me pardon, and I ask it from Thee,

and hope for it through thy merits. I am sorry for all the offences I have committed against Thee, O infinite Goodness ! Pardon me, then. I love Thee with my whole soul. Ah, Lord ! what evil hast Thou done me, that I should have to hate Thee forever as my enemy? And what friend have I ever had who has done and suffered so much for me as Thou, O my Jesus! hast done and suffered for me ? Ah, do not permit me ever more to fall into enmity with Thee, and to lose Thy love. Take me out of life, sooner than permit this sovereign evil to befall me. O Mary! take me under thy protection, and do not permit me ever more to rebel against God and against thee.

THIRD POINT.

Eternity is Unchangeable.

In this life death is greatly feared by sinners; but in **Hell** it will be most ardently desired. *Men shall seek death, and shall not find it; and they shall desire to die, and death shall fly from them (Apoc. ix, 6).* Hence St. Jerome has written: " O death, how sweet should you be to those to whom you have been so full of bitterness!" (Apud S. Bonav. Sol. C. 3). David says, that death will feast on the damned. *Death shall feed upon them (Ps. xlviii, 1).* In explaining this passage, St. Bernardine observes that as, in feeding, sheep eat the blades of grass, and leave the roots untouched; so death feeds on the damned: it kills them every moment, but leaves them life in order to continue to kill them by pains for all eternity. Thus, according to St. Gregory, the damned die every moment without ever dying. Delivered up to avenging flames, they will die always. A man who dies through pain is an object of pity to all who behold him. Perhaps the damned, too, experience commiseration from others? None; they die every moment, and have not, and never will have, any one to take compassion on them. The Emperor Zeno, being

one day shut up in a pit, continually cried out: *For pity's sake, open this grave and release me.* But no one heard him, and he was found dead, after having eaten the flesh off his arms. The damned cry out from the pit of **hell**, says St. Cyril of Alexandria, but no one comes to deliver them—no one feels compassion for them. (Orat. De exitu anni).

And for how long will this their misery last ? Forever, forever. In the spiritual exercises of Father Paul Segneri, written by Muratori, it is related that in Rome, a devil in the body of a man possessed, being asked how long he would remain in **hell**, began to beat his hand against a chair, and answered in a rage: *Forever, forever !* At hearing this great sermon of two words, *forever, forever*, many students of the Roman seminary, who were present, made a general confession, and changed their lives. Poor Judas ! he has spent more than eighteen hundred years in **hell**, and his hell is still at its commencement. Poor Cain, he is in fire for more than five thousand eight hundred years, and his hell is at its beginning. Another devil was asked how long it was since he had been sent to hell. He answered, Yesterday. " How," said the person who asked him, " could it be yesterday, when you are damned for more than five thousand years ? He replied: Oh ! if you knew what is meant by eternity, you would easily conceive how a thousand years, compared with it, are but a moment. If an angel said to one of the damned: You will leave hell, but only after the lapse of as many ages as there are drops of water in the ocean, leaves on the trees, or grains of sand in the sea; he would feel greater joy than a beggar would at hearing of his elevation to a throne. Yes; all these ages will pass away, they will be multiplied an infinite number of times, and **hell** will be at its commencement. Each of the damned would make this compact with, God: Lord, increase my pain as much as Thou wishest, let it last as long as Thou pleasest; but put

an end to it, and I am content. But this end will never take place. In **hell**, the trumpet of divine justice will sound nothing else but these words—*forever, forever, never, never*.

The damned will ask the devils what is the hour of the night. *Watchman, what of the night? (Isa. xxi, 11)*. When will it end? When will these trumpets, these shrieks, this stench, these flames, these torments cease? Their answer is *never, never*. And how long will they last? *Forever, forever*. Ah Lord! give light to so many blind Christians, who, when entreated not to damn themselves, say: If I go to **hell**, I must have patience. O God! they have not patience to bear the least cold, to remain in an overheated room, or to submit to a buffet on the cheek. And how can they have patience to remain in a sea of fire, trampled by the devils, and abandoned by God and by all, for all eternity!

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, Father of mercies! Thou dost not abandon him who seeks Thee. *Thou hast not forsaken them that seek Thee, O Lord (Ps. ix, 11)*. I have hitherto turned my back upon Thee so often, and Thou hast not abandoned me: do not abandon me now that I seek Thee. I repent, O Sovereign Good! of having made so little account of Thy grace, which I have exchanged for nothing. Look at the wounds of Thy Son. Listen to his cries, which implore Thee to pardon me; and grant me pardon. O my Redeemer! remind me always of the pains Thou hast suffered for me, of the love Thou hast borne me, and of my ingratitude, by which I have so often deserved **hell**, that I may always bewail the injury I have done Thee, and that I may live always burning with Thy love. Ah, my Jesus! how can I but burn with Thy love, when I reflect that for so many years I ought to burn in **hell**, and continue to burn in it for all eternity; when I remember that Thou hast died in

order to deliver me from it, and that Thou hast with so much mercy rescued me from that land of misery! Were I in **hell**, I should now hate Thee there, and should have to hate Thee forever: but now I love Thee, and will love Thee forever. Thou lovest me, and I also love Thee. Thou wilt love me forever unless I forsake Thee. Ah, my Saviour! save me from the misfortune of ever leaving Thee, and then do with me whatsoever Thou pleasest. I merit every punishment, and I accept every chastisement, that Thou mayest deliver me from the punishment of being deprived of Thy love. O Mary, my refuge! how often have I condemned myself to **hell**, and thou hast preserved me from it. Ah, deliver me now from sin, which alone can deprive me of the grace of God, and bring me to **hell**.

CONSIDERATION XXVIII.

The Remorse of the Damned.

"Their worm dieth not."—*Mark, ix. 47.*

FIRST POINT.

The Little for which the Damned are Lost.

ACCORDING to St. Thomas, this worm which dieth not is to be understood of remorse of conscience, which will eternally torment the damned in **hell**. The remorse which will gnaw the hearts of the reprobate will be many; but the most excruciating will be, first, the thought of the trifles for which they are damned; secondly, the thought of the little which they required to do in order to save their souls; and thirdly, the thought of the great good which they have lost. After Esau had eaten the pottage of lentils for which he had sold his birthright, the Scripture says that, through sorrow and remorse for the loss, *he began to roar aloud (Gen. xxvii, 34)*. Oh ! how

will the damned howl and roar at the thought of having, for a few momentary poisoned pleasures, lost an eternal kingdom of delights, and of having condemned themselves forever to a continual death ! Hence they will weep far more bitterly than Jonathan did when he saw himself condemned to death by his father for having eaten a little honey. *I did but taste a little honey, and behold I must die (1 Kings, xiv, 43)*. O God ! what torture will each of the damned feel in thinking that he was the cause of his own damnation ! At present our past life appears to us but a dream, a moment. But what will he who is in **hell** think of the fifty or sixty years which he spent on this earth, when he will be in the abyss of eternity, and, after the lapse of a hundred and a thousand millions of years, will see that this **hell** only begins? But were these fifty or sixty years all years of pleasure? Perhaps a sinner living without God, always feels happy in his sins ! How long do the pleasures of sin last ? Only for a few moments. All the remaining hours of the man who lives at enmity with God are full of pain and bitterness. But what will these moments of pleasure appear to the unhappy damned ? How will he view that last sin in particular, by which he brought himself to perdition ? Then he will say: For a miserable brutal pleasure, which lasted but a moment, and which was scarcely indulged when it vanished like air, I must burn in this fire, in despair, and abandoned by all, as long as God will be God—for all eternity.

Affections and Prayers.

Lord ! enlighten me, that I may feel the injustice which I have done Thee, and the eternal chastisements I have deserved, by offending Thee. My God! I feel a great remorse for having offended Thee ; but this pain consoles me. Hadst Thou sent me to **hell**, as I deserved, the thought of the trifle for which I was damned should be the hell of my hell. But now this

remorse, I say, consoles me; because it encourages me to hope for pardon from Thee, who hast promised to pardon all who repent. Yes, my Lord! I repent of having outraged Thee. I embrace this sweet pain of remorse. I even entreat Thee to increase it, and to preserve it in my heart till death, that I may always weep bitterly over the offences I have offered to Thee. My Jesus ! pardon me. O my Redeemer! who, to procure mercy for me, hadst not mercy on Thyself, but condemnedst Thyself to die through pain in order to deliver me from **hell**, have rnercy on me. Grant that my remorse for having offended Thee may keep me always sorrowful, and, at the same time, inflame my whole soul with love for Thee, who hast loved me so tenderly, who hast borne with me so patiently, and who now, instead of chastising me, enrichest me with Thy lights and graces. I thank Thee, O my Jesus! and I love Thee. I love Thee more than myself. I love Thee with my whole heart. Thou knowest not how to despise a soul that loves Thee. I love Thee. Do not banish me from Thy face. Receive me, then, into Thy friendship, and do not permit me ever more to lose Thee. Mary, my Mother! accept me for thy servant, and bind me to Jesus, thy Son. Ask him to pardon me, to give me his love and the grace of perseverance till death.

SECOND POINT.

The Little that was Required for their Salvation.

St. Thomas says that the principal pain of the reprobate will consist in seeing that they are damned for nothing, and that, if they wished, they could with so much facility acquire for themselves the glory of Paradise. The second remorse of conscience, then, will arise from the thought of the little that was necessary to be done for the attainment of salvation. A person who was damned appeared to St. Humbert, and said to him that the most

excruciating pain which he suffered in hell was caused by the thought of the trifles for which he was lost, and of the little which he required to do in order to save his soul. The unhappy soul will then say: Had I mortified myself by not looking at such an object; had I overcome human respect at such a time; had I avoided such an occasion of sin, such a companion, such a conversation, I should not now be damned. If I had gone to confession every week; if I had frequented the confraternity; if I had read every day a spiritual book; if I had recommended myself to Jesus Christ and to Mary, I should not have relapsed into sin. I have so often purposed to do these things, but have either neglected my resolutions, or after having begun to practise these exercises, I gave them up, and therefore I am lost.

The torture of this remorse will be increased by the good examples of virtuous friends and companions, which the reprobate has witnessed; and still more by the gifts which God has given him for the salvation of his soul; gifts of nature, such as good health; gifts of fortune, which were so many talents which the Lord had given him, that he might make a good use of them, and become a saint; gifts of grace; so many lights, inspirations, calls, and so many years given to him that he might repair the evil which he had done. But he will see that, in the miserable state to which he is reduced, there is no remedy. He will hear the angel of the Lord proclaiming and protesting that time shall be no more. *And the angel whom I saw standing . . . swore by Him that liveth forever and ever... that time shall be no longer (Apoc. x, 5)*. Oh! what cruel swords will all these gifts and graces be to the heart of the unhappy reprobate, when he sees that the time in which he could repair his eternal ruin is already past! With tears and despair he and his companions will say: *The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved (Jer. viii, 20)*. He will say: if the fatigues to which I had

submitted for my damnation had been borne for God, I should have become a great saint; and now what advantage do I derive from them but pain and remorse, which will torment me for eternity? Ah ! the thought that it was in his power to be forever happy, and that he must be forever miserable, will torture the damned more than the fire and all the other torments of **hell**.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus! how hast Thou been able to bear with me ? I have so often turned my back upon Thee, and Thou hast not ceased to seek after me. I have so often offended Thee, and Thou hast pardoned me. Ah! impart to me a portion of that sorrow which Thou didst feel in the Garden of Gethsemane for my sins, and which made Thee there sweat blood. I am sorry, O my Redeemer! for having so badly repaid Thy love. O accursed pleasures! I detest and curse you. You have made me lose the grace of my Lord. My Beloved Jesus! I now love Thee above all things, and I renounce all unlawful gratifications, and purpose to die a thousand times, rather than ever more offend Thee. Ah! through that affection with which Thou dost love me on the cross, and offered for me Thy divine life, give me light and strength to resist temptations, and to have recourse to Thy aid whenever I shall be tempted. O Mary, my hope! thou art all-powerful with God; obtain for me holy perseverance, obtain for me the grace never more to be separated from his holy love.

THIRD POINT.

The Great Good that the Damned have Lost.

The third remorse of the damned shall arise from seeing the great good which they have lost. St. John Chrysostom says that the reprobate will be tormented more by the loss of paradise than by the pains of hell! A certain princess once said: *If God gives me a reign of forty years, I will renounce paradise.* The unhappy princess reigned for forty years; but now that her soul has departed from this world, what does she say? Certainly she has changed her sentiments. Oh! how great at present must be her affliction and despair at the thought of having, for the enjoyment of an earthly reign of forty years, lost for eternity the kingdom of heaven!

But the torment which will most grievously torture the damned for eternity will arise from the conviction that they have lost heaven and God, their sovereign good, not by any unlucky accident, nor by the malevolence of others, but by their own fault. They will see that they have been created for paradise, and that God placed in their hands the choice of procuring for themselves eternal life or eternal death. *Before man is life and death; ... that which he shall choose shall be given him (Ecclus. xv, 18).* Thus they will see that they had it in their power, if they wished, to be eternally happy, and that they have voluntarily precipitated themselves into, that pit of torments, from which they can never escape, and from which no one will ever deliver them. They will see among the elect many of their companions, who were placed in the same, or perhaps in greater, danger of sinning, and who saved their souls because they restrained their passions by recommending themselves to God, or, if they fell into sin, soon repented and gave themselves to God. But because they would not give up sin, they have in the end unhappily gone to **hell**—they have fallen into that sea of torments without any hope of remedy for all eternity.

Brother, if you too have been so foolish as, by your own

free acts, to lose paradise and God for a miserable pleasure, endeavor as soon as possible to apply a remedy, now that you have time. Do not voluntarily continue in your foolishness. Tremble lest you should have to weep over your folly for all eternity. Who knows but this consideration which you now read is the last call which God will give you ? Perhaps, if you do not now change your life, if you commit another mortal sin, the Lord will abandon you, and, in punishment of that sin, send you to suffer forever among that crowd of fools who are now in **hell**, and confess their error (*therefore we have erred*), but confess it with despair, because they see that it is forever irreparable. When the devil tempts you again to sin, remember **hell**, have recourse to God and to the Most Holy Virgin. The thought of **hell** will preserve you from **hell**, because it will make you have recourse to God. *Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin (Ecclus. vii, 40).*

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Sovereign Good ! how often have I lost Thee for nothing ! how often have I deserved to lose Thee forever! But I am consoled by the words of Thy prophet: *Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord (Ps. civ, 3)*. I must not, then, despair of finding Thee again, O my God ! if I sincerely seek Thee. Yes, my God! I now sigh for Thy grace more than for any other good. I am content to be deprived of all things, even of life, rather than see myself deprived of Thy love. I love Thee, O my Creator! above all things; and, because I love Thee, I am sorry for having offended Thee. O my God! whom I have lost and despised, pardon me immediately, and enable me to find Thee again; for I wish never more to lose Thee. If Thou dost admit me again to Thy friendship, I will leave all things, and will seek to love Thee alone. I hope to do so through Thy mercy, Eternal Father! Hear me for the

love of Jesus Christ: pardon me, and give me the grace never more to be separated from Thee. If I voluntarily lose Thee again, I ought to fear that Thou wilt abandon me. O Mary, O advocate of sinners! obtain for me the grace to make peace with God, and afterward keep me under thy protection, that I may never more lose him.

CONSIDERATION XXIX.

Heaven.

"Your sorrow shall be turned into joy."— John, xvi. 20.

FIRST POINT.

Entrance of a Soul into Paradise.

LET us at present animate ourselves with the hope of heaven, to bear patiently the afflictions of this life, and to offer them to God in return for the sufferings which Jesus Christ endured for the love of us. All these afflictions, sorrows, persecutions, and tears, will one day have an end, and will, if we save our souls, become to us sources of joy and happiness in the kingdom of bliss. This is the ground of courage and hope which the Saviour holds out to us. *Your sorrow shall be turned into joy (John, xvi, 20).* Let us then this day make some reflections on the joys of heaven. But what shall we be able to say on these joys, when the most enlightened of the saints knew not how to give us an idea of that happiness which God has prepared for his faithful servants? David could only say that paradise is a good exceedingly to be desired. *How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts (Ps. lxxxiii, 2).* But, my beloved St. Paul, do you, at least, who had the happiness of being rapt up into heaven, declare to us some of the things you have seen. No, exclaims the

Apostle, what I have seen it is impossible to describe. The delights of heaven *are secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter (2 Cor. xiii, 4)*. They are so great that they only who enjoy them are able to comprehend them. Ah! that I can say of them, says the Apostle, is, that *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him (1 Cor. ii,9)*. No man living has ever seen, or heard, or conceived the beauty, the harmony, the delights which God has prepared for those who love him.

At present it is impossible for us to comprehend the happiness of heaven, because we have no idea but of earthly enjoyments. Were a horse capable of reasoning, he would, if he expected a rich feast from his master, imagine it to consist in excellent hay and oats; for these are the only species of food of which he has any idea. It is thus we form our notions of the happiness of heaven. It is beautiful in the summer to behold at night the starry heaven; it is delightful in the spring to stand on the shore when the sea is unruffled, and to see in its bosom the rocks covered with seaweed, and the fishes gliding through the waters; it is also delightful to be in a garden full of fruits and flowers, ornamented with flowing fountains, and enlivened by the flutter and singing of birds: in such a scene one is tempted to exclaim: Oh ! what a paradise ! what a paradise ! But far different are the delights of heaven. To form some imperfect idea of them, let us reflect that in heaven is an all-powerful God, who has pledged himself to make the soul that loves him happy. Do you wish, says St. Bernard, to know what is in heaven ? " There is nothing there that gives displeasure; there is everything that delights." De Divers. S. 16).

O God ! what will be the sentiments of the soul on its entrance into that happy kingdom ? Let us represent to our minds a young maiden, who, after consecrating

herself to the love of Jesus Christ, dies and quits this world. The soul of the young maiden is presented for judgment: the Judge embraces her and pronounces the sentence of her salvation. Her angel-guardian meets and congratulates her; she thanks him for his assistance, and the angel then says: " Rejoice, O happy soul ! thy salvation is now secure; come and behold the face of thy Lord." Behold, the soul now passes beyond the clouds, the spheres, the stars, and enters into heaven. O God ! what will be her feelings on first setting her foot in this happy country, and beholding, for the first time, this city of delights ! The angels and the saints will come to meet her, and will receive her with a joyous welcome. What shall be her consolation in rejoining there her relatives or friends, who have been already admitted into heaven, and in meeting her holy advocates !

The soul will wish to bend her knees to venerate these saints, but they will say: *See thou do it not, for I am thy fellow-servant (Apoc. xxii, 9)*. She will thence be carried to kiss the feet of Mary, the Queen of heaven. What tenderness will not the soul experience in first beholding this divine Mother, who gave her so much assistance in the work of her salvation; for then the soul will see all the graces she obtained through the intercession of Mary, who will embrace her with love and tenderness. This Queen of heaven will then conduct the soul to Jesus, who will receive her as his spouse, and will say: *Come from Libanus, my spouse . . . thou shall be crowned (Cant. iv, 8)*. My spouse, rejoice: there is now an end to tears, to sufferings, and to fears: receive the eternal crown I have purchased for you by my blood. Jesus himself will then present her to receive the benediction of his divine Father who shall embrace and bless her, saying: *Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord; (Matt. xxv, 21)* and shall bestow upon her the same happiness which he himself enjoys.

Affections and Prayers.

BEhold, O my God! at Thy feet an ungrateful sinner, whom Thou hast created for heaven, but who has so often, for the sake of a wretched pleasure, renounced Thee to Thy face, and has consented to be condemned to **hell**. But I hope Thou hast already pardoned me all the injuries I have done Thee, for which I am always sorry, and will be sorry as long as I live. Of these injuries I desire to receive from Thee new pardon. But, O God! although my sins have been already forgiven, it will still be always true that I have dared to afflict Thee, my Redeemer, who hast given Thy life to bring me to Thy kingdom. But may Thy mercy be forever praised and blessed, O my Jesus! for having borne me with so much patience, and for having bestowed upon me multiplied graces, instead of chastising me as I deserved. I see, my dear Saviour ! that Thou ardently desirest my salvation, and that Thou wishest to bring me to Thy kingdom, that I may love Thee forever; but it is Thy wish that I should first love Thee here on earth. Yes; I wish to love Thee. Though there were no heaven, I would wish to love Thee while I live, with my whole soul and with all my strength. It is enough for me to know that Thou, my God. desirest to be loved by me. My Jesus! assist me by Thy grace; do not abandon me. My soul is immortal : I must then either love Thee or hate Thee for all eternity. Ah ! it is my wish to love Thee for eternity, and I wish to love Thee without reserve here, that I may love Thee without reserve hereafter. Dispose of me as Thou pleasest, chastise me as Thou wishest; do not deprive me of Thy love, and then do with me what Thou wishest. My Jesus! Thy merits are my hope. O Mary! I place great confidence in thy intercession. Thou didst deliver me from hell when I was in sin ; now that I wish to give myself to God, obtain for me the grace to save my soul, and to become a saint.

SECOND POINT.

Happiness of Heaven.

When the soul has once entered into the happy kingdom of God, *there will be nothing to molest it. God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more; for the former things are passed away. And He that sat on the throne said: Behold I make all things new (Apoc. xxi, 4).* In heaven there is no infirmity, no poverty, no distress; there are no longer the vicissitudes of days and nights, nor of cold and heat; but a perpetual day always serene, an eternal spring always delightful. There are no persecutions; no envy. In that kingdom of love, all love one another tenderly; and each rejoices in the good of the other as if it were his own. There are no fears; because the soul, being confirmed in grace, can no longer sin nor lose her God. *Behold I make all things new.* Everything is new; *everything gives consolation and content.* The sight will be filled with delight in beholding this city of perfect beauty. How delightful the view of a city in which the streets are of crystal, the palaces of silver, the ceilings of gold, and all adorned with festoons of flowers! Oh! how much more beautiful the city of paradise ! how splendid the appearance of these citizens, who are all clothed in royal robes; for, as St. Augustine says, they are all kings. How delightful must it be to behold Mary, who will appear more beautiful than all paradise ! But what must it be to see the Lamb of God, the Heavenly Spouse, Jesus ! St. Teresa had one transient glimpse of one of the hands of Jesus Christ, and was struck senseless by its beauty. The smell will be regaled with odors, but with the odors of paradise. The ear will be delighted with celestial harmony. St. Francis once heard from an angel a single stroke on a violin, and almost died through joy. What then

must it be to hear the whole choir of saints and angels chanting the glories of God! *They shall praise Thee forever and ever (Ps. lxxxiii, 5)*. What must it be to hear Mary praising God! St. Francis de Sales says that, as the singing of the nightingale surpasses that of all other birds, so the voice of Mary is far superior to that of all the other saints. In a word, in heaven are found all the delights which can be desired.

But the joys we have been hitherto considering are the least of the blessings of heaven. The good which constitutes heaven is God himself, the Sovereign Good. The reward which God promises us, is not merely the beauty, the harmony, and the other joys of this blessed city; the chief reward is God himself,—that is, to see and love God face to face. *I am thy reward exceeding great (Gen. xv, 1)*. St. Augustine says that, if God showed his face to the damned, "hell would be instantly turned into a paradise of delights." (De Tripl. Habit. c. 4). And he adds that, were a departed soul allowed the choice of seeing God and enduring the torments of **hell**, or of being delivered from them and deprived of the sight of God, "it would prefer to see the Lord, and to suffer these torments."

During the present life, we cannot comprehend the delight of seeing and loving God face to face: but we may form some notion of it by considering that divine love is so enchanting, that, even in this life, it has sometimes raised up from the earth, not only the souls, but even the bodies of the saints. St. Philip Neri was once lifted up into the air along with a bench which he had grasped. St. Peter Alcantara was also elevated from the earth, and a tree which he held was torn up from the roots. St. Vincent, while he was tormented, spoke, says St. Augustine, in such a manner, that one person appeared to suffer and another to speak (Serm. 275, E.B.). St. Lawrence, while he was on the red-hot gridiron, upbraided the tyrant, saying:

"Turn and eat." " Yes," says St. Augustine; "for St. Lawrence, inflamed with the fire of divine love, was insensible to the burning heat of the fire." (Serm. 206, E.B.). Besides, how great the sweetness which a sinner experiences on this earth even in weeping over his sins ! Hence, St. Bernard used to say: "If it is so sweet to weep for Thee, O my God ! what must it be to rejoice in Thee?" (Scal. claustr. c. 6). What sweetness does not a soul experience when, by a ray of light, God unfolds to it in prayer his goodness, the mercies he has shown it, and the love which Jesus Christ has borne, and still bears, to it! In such moments, the soul melts and faints away through love. Yet in this life we do not see God as he is; we see him only in the dark. *We now see through a glass in a dark manner: but then face to face (1 Cor. xiii, 10).* At present there is a veil before our eyes, and God is seen only with the eyes of faith; but what will be our joy when the veil is removed, and we see God face to face? We shall then see the infinite beauty of God; his infinite greatness, his justice, his perfection, his amiableness, and his infinite love for us.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Sovereign Good! I am that wretch who has turned his back upon Thee, and renounced Thy love. I therefore am undeserving of seeing or of loving Thee. But, to show mercy to me, Thou hast not shown mercy to Thyself, but hast condemned Thyself to a painful and ignominious death, on an infamous gibbet. Thy death, therefore, makes me hope that I shall one day see and enjoy Thee face to face, and that I shall then love Thee with all my strength. But, now that I am in danger of losing Thee forever, now that I am conscious of having lost Thee by my sins, what shall I do during the remainder of my life? Shall I continue to offend Thee? No, my Jesus! I detest with a sovereign hatred the offences I have offered

Thee. I feel a sovereign sorrow for having insulted Thee, and I love Thee with my whole heart. Wilt Thou cast off a soul that repents and loves Thee? No: I know, O my Redeemer! that Thou hast said that Thou wilt not reject any one that comes to Thee with a penitent heart. *Him that cometh to Me, I will not cast out (John, vi, 37)*. My Jesus! I renounce all things, and turn to Thee. I embrace Thee, and unite Thee to my heart: do Thou also embrace me, and unite me to Thy heart. I dare to speak in this manner, because I speak and converse with infinite Goodness. I speak with a God who was content to die for the love of me. My dear Saviour ! grant me perseverance in Thy love. My dear Mother Mary! through the love which thou didst bear to Jesus Christ, obtain for me this perseverance. Such is my hope, such is my desire.

THIRD POINT.

Heaven is Eternal.

In this life, the greatest pain which afflicts souls that are in desolation and love God, arises from the fear of not loving him, and of not being loved by him. *Man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred (Eccles. ix, 1)*. But in heaven the soul is certain that it loves God, and that he loves it. It sees that it is happily lost in the love of its Lord, and that he embraces it as a beloved child, and that this love will not be dissolved for all eternity. These blessed flames will be augmented by the increased knowledge which the soul will then have of the greatness of the love of God, in becoming man and dying for us; of his love in instituting the Most Holy Sacrament, in which a God becomes the food of a worm. Then also will the soul clearly see all the graces which God has bestowed upon it in delivering it from so many temptations and so many dangers of perdition; it will then understand that the tribulations, infirmities, persecutions,

and losses, which it called misfortunes and divine chastisements, were all love, all means intended by divine Providence to conduct it to heaven. It will see particularly the patience of God in bearing with it after so many sins, and the mercies he had shown it in giving it so many lights and invitations to his love. From that blessed mountain it will behold so many souls in **hell**, condemned for fewer sins than it had committed, and will see that it is saved, that it is in the possession of God, and secure against all danger of ever losing that Sovereign Good for all eternity.

The blessed then will forever enjoy that felicity which, during each moment of eternity, will be always as new as at the first moment of its enjoyment. The soul will always desire and always possess that joy. It shall be always satisfied, and always thirsty: forever thirsty, and always satiated with delights: because the desire of heaven begets no pain, and its possession produces no tediousness. In a word, as the damned are vessels full of wrath, so the blessed are vessels filled with happiness, so that they have nothing more to desire. St. Teresa says that even in this life, when God introduces a soul into the cellar of wine—that is, of his love, it becomes happily inebriated, so that it loses all affections for earthly things. But in entering into paradise, how much more perfectly, as David says, will the elect *be inebriated with the plenty of God's house (Ps. xxxv, 9)*. In seeing God face to face, and in embracing its Sovereign Good, the soul will be so inebriated with love that it will happily lose itself in God—that is, it will entirely forget itself, and will think only of loving, of praising, and of blessing the infinite Good which it possesses.

When, therefore, the crosses of this life afflict us, let us animate ourselves with the hope of heaven to bear them patiently. St. Mary of Egypt, being asked at the end of her

life by the Abbot Zozimus, how she had been able to live for so many years in such a desert, replied: *With the hope of heaven.* When the dignity of Cardinal was offered to St. Philip Neri, he threw up the cap in the air, exclaiming, *Paradise! Paradise!* At the mention of paradise, Brother Giles, of the Order of St. Francis, was raised up from the ground through joy. Let us likewise, when we are afflicted by the miseries of this life, raise up our eyes to heaven, and console ourselves, saying with a sigh, *Heaven! Heaven!* Let us reflect that if we be faithful to God, all these sorrows, miseries, and fears will one day have an end, and we shall be admitted into that blessed country, where we shall enjoy complete happiness as long as God will be God. Behold, the Saints are expecting us, Mary is expecting us, and Jesus stands with a crown in his hand, to make us kings in that eternal kingdom.

Affections and Prayers.

Ay dear Jesus! Thou hast taught me this prayer—*Thy kingdom come.* I therefore now pray that Thy kingdom may come into my heart, so that Thou mayest possess it entirely, and that my soul may possess Thee, its Sovereign Good. O my Jesus! Thou hast spared nothing in order to save me and to acquire my love; save me then, and let my salvation consist in loving Thee always in this life and in the next. I have so often turned my back upon Thee, and yet Thou assurest me that Thou wilt not disdain to embrace me for all eternity in heaven, with as much love as if I had never offended Thee. And knowing this, can I ever love anything else but Thee, who wishest to bestow heaven upon me after I had so often deserved hell? Ah, my Lord! would that I had never offended Thee! Oh ! were I born again I would always love Thee. But what is done is done. I can now do no more than give Thee the remainder of my life. Yes, I give it entirely to Thee. I consecrate myself entirely to Thy love.

Depart from my heart, all earthly affections; give place to my God, who wishes to possess it entirely. Yes; take possession of my whole being, my Redeemer, my Love, and my God ! From this day forward I will think only of pleasing Thee. Assist me by Thy grace. I hope in Thy merits. Augment in me continually Thy love, and the desire of pleasing Thee. Heaven! Heaven! When, O Lord ! shall the day come when I shall see Thee face to face, and embrace Thee, without fear of evermore losing Thee? Ah, my God! keep Thy hand upon me, that I may never more offend Thee. O Mary ! when shall I see myself at thy feet in heaven ? Assist me, my Mother: do not permit me to be lost, and to go forever to a distance from thee and thy Son.

CONSIDERATION XXX.

Prayer.

" Ask, and it shall be given you; for every one that asketh, receiveth." — *Luke, xi. 9, 10.*

FIRST POINT.

Efficacy of Prayer.

NOT only in this, but in a thousand places in the Old and the New Testament, God promises to hear all who pray to him. *Cry to me, and I will hear thee (Jer. xxxiii, 3).* "Call upon me, and I will deliver you from all dangers." (Ps. xlix, 15). *If you ask anything in My name, that I will do (John, xiv, 14).* Whatsoever you shall ask through my merits, I will grant. *You shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you (John, xv, 7).* Ask as much as you wish: all that you ask will be given you. There are many other similar passages. Hence Theodoret

has said that prayer is one, but can obtain all things. St. Bernard says that when we pray, the Lord will give either the grace we ask, or one that is more useful to us (In Quadr. s. 5). The prophet animates us to pray by assuring us that God is all mercy to those who invoke his aid. *Thou, O Lord, art sweet and mild, and plenteous in mercy to all that call upon Thee (Ps. lxxxv, 5)*. The words of St. James are still more encouraging. *If any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth abundantly to all men, and up-braideth not (James, i, 5)*. This apostle tells us that when we pray to the Lord, he opens his hands, and gives us more than we ask. *He giveth to all men abundantly, and upbraideth not* He does not reproach us with the offences that we have offered to him; but, when we pray to him, he appears to forget all the injuries that we have done him.

St. John Climacus used to say that prayer in a certain manner forces God to grant us whatsoever we ask of him. "Prayer piously offers violence to God." (Scala spir. gr. 28). But it is, as St. Tertullian says, a violence which is dear to him, and which he desires from us (Apolog. c. 39). Yes; for, as St. Augustine says, God has a greater desire to give us his graces, than we have to receive them (Serm. 105, E.B.). The reason is, because God is of his own nature infinite goodness. Hence he feels an infinite desire to impart his goods to us. Hence St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi used to say, that God feels as it were under an obligation to the soul that prays to him; because by prayer it opens to him the way by which he can satisfy his desire of dispensing his graces to us. David says that the goodness of God, in instantly hearing all who pray to him, showed him that he was his true God. *In what day soever I shall call upon Thee, behold, I know Thou art my God (Ps. iv, 10)*. Some, observes St. Bernard, complain that God is wanting to them; but the Lord far more justly complains that many are wanting to him by neglecting to

ask his graces. Of this precisely the Redeemer appears to have complained one day to his disciples. *Hitherto you have not asked anything in My name: ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full (John, xvi, 24)*. As if he said: Do not complain of me if you do not enjoy complete happiness; complain of yourselves for not having asked my graces: ask me for them henceforth, and you shall be satisfied.

Hence, in their conferences, the ancient monks came to the conclusion, that there is no exercise more conducive to salvation than to pray always, and say: " Lord, assist me; incline unto my aid, O God." (Ps. lxxix, 2). The Venerable Paul Segneri used to say of himself, that in his meditations he was at first accustomed to spend his time in pious affections; but, having afterward learned the great efficacy of prayer, he endeavored generally to employ himself in petitions to God. Let us always do the same. We have a God who loves us to excess, and who is solicitous for our salvation, and therefore he is always ready to hear all who ask his graces. The princes of the earth, says St. Chrysostom, give audience only to a few; but God gives audience to all who wish for it."

Affections and Prayers.

Fternal God! I adore Thee, and I thank Thee for all the benefits Thou hast bestowed upon me,—for having created me, for having redeemed me through Jesus Christ, for having made me a Christian, for having waited for me when I was in sin, and for having so often pardoned me. Ah, my God! I should never have offended Thee, if in my temptations I had recourse to Thee, I thank Thee for the light by which Thou now makest me understand that my salvation consists in praying to Thee, and in asking graces of Thee. Behold, I entreat Thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, to give me a great sorrow for my

sins, holy perseverance in Thy grace, a good death, heaven, but above all, the great gift of Thy love, and perfect resignation to Thy most holy will. I well know that I do not deserve these graces, but Thou hast promised them to all who ask them of Thee through the merits of Jesus Christ; through these merits I hope and ask for them. O Mary! thy prayers are always heard ; pray for me.

SECOND POINT.

Necessity of Prayer.

Let us also reflect on the necessity of prayer. St. Chrysostom says that, as the body without the soul is dead, so the soul is dead without prayer. He also teaches that, as water is necessary to prevent the decay of plants, so prayer is necessary to preserve us from perdition (*De or. Deo, 1, 1*). *God wills that all men be saved, (1 Tim. ii, 4)*—and is unwilling that any be lost. *The Lord . . . dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any one should perish, but that all should return to penance (2 Peter, iii, 9)*. But he also wishes that we ask him for the graces necessary for salvation. For, on the one hand, it is impossible for us to observe the divine commands, and save our souls, without the actual assistance of God; and on the other, ordinarily speaking, God will not give us his graces unless we ask them from him. Hence, the holy Council of Trent has declared that God has not commanded impossibilities; because he either gives us the proximate and actual grace to fulfil his precepts, or he gives us the grace to ask him for this actual aid (*Sess. vi, c. xi*). St. Augustine teaches, that God gives without prayer the first graces, such as vocation to the faith and to repentance; but all other graces, and particularly the gift of perseverance, he gives only to those who ask them (*De dono pers. c. 16*).

Hence, theologians, after St. Basil, St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, Clement of Alexandria, and others, teach, that for adults prayer is necessary as a means of salvation; so that, without it, it is impossible to be saved. And the most learned Lessius says that this doctrine must be held as of faith (De Just. 1, 2, c. 37, d. 3).

The Scriptures are clear on this point. *We ought always to pray, (Luke, xviii, 1). Pray, lest ye enter into temptation (Luke, xxii, 40). Ask, and you shall receive (Matt. vii, 7). Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. v. 17).* The words, *we ought, pray, ask*, according to St. Thomas (3 part, qu. 39, art. 5) and the generality of theologians, imply a strict precept, which binds under grievous sin particularly in three cases. First, when a person is in the state of sin; secondly, when he is in danger of death; and thirdly, when he is in great danger of falling into sin. Theologians teach that, ordinarily, he who neglects prayer for a month, or at most, for two months, is guilty of a mortal sin (*Less., loco citato*). The reason is, because prayer is a means without which we cannot obtain the helps necessary for salvation.

Ask, and you shall receive. He who asks, receives; then, says St. Teresa, he who does not ask, does not receive. And before her, St. James said the same thing. *You have not, because you ask not (James, iv, 2).* Prayer is particularly necessary to obtain the virtue of continence. *And, said the wise man, as I knew that I could not otherwise be continent, except God gave it, . . . I went to the Lord, and besought Him (Wis. viii, 21).* Let us conclude this point. He who prays, is certainly saved; he who does not pray, is certainly lost. All the elect are saved by prayer; all the damned are lost by neglect of prayer, and their greatest despair is, and will be forever, caused by the conviction, that they had it in their power to save their

souls so easily by prayer, and that now the time of salvation is no more.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Redeemer! how have I been able hitherto to live in such forgetfulness of Thee ? Thou wert prepared to grant me all the graces that I should ask of Thee; Thou only didst wait for me to ask them. But I have thought only of indulging my senses, and have been indifferent about the privation and loss of Thy love and of Thy graces. Lord ! forget all my ingratitude, and have mercy on me. Pardon me all the displeasure I have given Thee, and grant me perseverance. O God of my soul! give me the grace always to ask Thy aid not to offend Thee. Do not permit me to be, as I have hitherto been, negligent in the performance of this duty. Grant me light and strength always to recommend myself to Thee, and particularly when my enemies tempt me to offend Thee again. Grant, O my God! this grace through the merits of Jesus Christ, and through the love which Thou bearest to him. O Lord! I have offended Thee enough. I wish to love Thee during the remainder of my life. Give me Thy love; and may this love remind me to ask Thy aid whenever I am in danger of losing Thee by sin. Mary, my hope after Jesus ! through thy intercession I hope for the grace to recommend myself in all my temptations to thee and to thy on. Hear me, O my Queen! through the love which thou bearest to Jesus Christ.

THIRD POINT.

Conditions of Prayer.

Lastly, let us consider the conditions of prayer. Many pray, and do not obtain the object of their prayers, because they do not pray as they ought. *You ask,*

says St. James, *and receive not, because you ask amiss (James, iv, 3)*. To pray well, it is necessary, in the first place, to pray with humility *God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble: (Ibid. iv, 6)* God rejects the petitions of the proud, but does not allow the humble to depart without hearing all their prayers. *The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds, . . . and he will not depart till the Most High behold (Ecclus. xxxv, 21)*. This holds, even though they have been hitherto sinners. *A contrite and humble heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise (Ps. 1, 19)*. Secondly, it is necessary to pray with confidence. *No one hath hoped in the Lord, and hath been confounded (Ecclus. ii, 11)*. Jesus Christ has taught us to call God, in our petitions for his graces, by no other name than that of *Father*, in order to make us pray with the same confidence with which a child has recourse to a parent. He, then, who prays with confidence, obtains every grace. *All things whatsoever you ask when you pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you (Mark, xi, 24)*. And who, says St. Augustine, can fear that the promises of God, who is truth itself, will be violated ? (Conf. 1, 22, c. 1). God, says the Scripture, is not like men, who promise, but do not perform, either because they intend to deceive, or because they change their purpose. *God is not as a man, that he should lie, nor as the son of man, that He should be changed. Hath He told then, and will He not do ? (Num. xxiii, 19)*. And why, adds the same St. Augustine, should the Lord so earnestly exhort us to ask his graces, if he did not wish to bestow them upon us ? By his promises he has bound himself to grant us the graces we ask from him. " By promising," says St. Augustine, " he has made himself a debtor." (Serm. 110, E.B.).

But some will say: I am a sinner, and therefore I do not deserve to be heard. In answer, St. Thomas says that the efficacy of prayer to obtain graces depends, not on our

merits, but on the divine mercy (2, 2, q. 178, a. 2). *Every one, says Jesus Christ, that asketh receiveth;* (Matt. vii, 8) that is, says the author of the Imperfect Work, "every one, whether he be a just man or a sinner." (Hom. 18). But the Redeemer himself takes away all fear; saying: *Amen, amen, I say to you: If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it to you (John, xvi, 23)*. As if he said: Sinners, if you are without merits, I have merits before my Father. Ask, then, in my name, and I promise that you will receive whatsoever you ask. But it is necessary to know that this promise does not extend to temporal favors, such as health, goods of fortune, and the like; for God often justly refuses these graces, because he sees that they would be injurious to our salvation. "The physician," says St. Augustine, "knows better than the patient what is useful to him." (Ap. S. Prosp. Sent. 212). The holy Doctor adds, that God refuses to some through mercy, what he gives to others through wrath (Serm. 354, E.B.). Hence we should ask temporal blessings only on condition that they will be profitable to the soul. But spiritual graces, such as pardon of sins, perseverance, divine love, and the like, should be asked absolutely, and with a firm confidence of obtaining them. *If, says Jesus Christ, you being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask Him ! (Luke, xi, 13).*

Above all, perseverance in prayer is necessary. In his commentary on the eleventh chapter of St. Luke, Cornelius a Lapide says, that the Lord "wishes us to persevere in prayer even to importunity." (In Luc. xi). This maybe inferred from the following passages of Scripture: *We ought always to pray (Luke, xviii, 1). Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times. Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. v. 17).* It may be also inferred from our Lord's repeated exhortations to prayer. *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to*

you (Luke, xi, 9). It might be sufficient to have said, *ask;* but no; the Lord wishes us to understand that we ought to imitate beggars, who do not cease to ask, to entreat, and to knock at the gate, until they receive an alms. But final perseverance, in particular, is a grace which is not obtained without continual prayer. We cannot merit this grace of perseverance; but, according to St. Augustine, it may be merited in a certain manner. "This gift," says the holy Doctor, "can be suppliantly merited; that is, it may be obtained by supplication." (De dono persev. c. 6). Let us, then, if we wish to be saved, pray always, and never cease to pray. And let all confessors and preachers, if they desire the salvation of souls, never cease to exhort their penitents or hearers to prayer. And, in conformity with the advice of St. Bernard, let us always have recourse to the intercession of Mary. Let us ask grace, and ask it through Mary: for what she asks, she obtains, and her prayer cannot be fruitless." (Serm. De Aquaed.).

Affections and Prayers.

My God ! I hope that Thou hast already pardoned me; but my enemies will not cease to fight against me till death. Unless Thou dost assist me, I shall lose Thee again. Ah ! through the merits of Jesus Christ, I ask holy perseverance. Do not permit me to be separated from Thee. And I ask the same grace for all who are at present in the state of grace. I hope, with certainty in Thy promise, that Thou wilt give me perseverance if I will continue to ask it from Thee. But I fear that in my temptations I shall neglect to have recourse to Thee, and that thus I shall relapse into sin. I therefore ask of Thee the grace never more to neglect prayer. Grant that in the occasions in which I shall be in danger of relapsing, I may recommend myself to Thee, and may invoke the aid of the most holy names of Jesus and Mary. My God ! this I purpose and hope to do with the assistance of Thy grace.

Hear me for the sake of Jesus Christ. O Mary, my Mother! obtain for me the grace that in all dangers of losing God, I may have recourse to thee and to thy Son.

CONSIDERATION XXXI.

Perseverance.

" He that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved."—
Matt. xxiv. 13.

FIRST POINT.

Necessity of Perseverance.—Means of Defence against the Devil.

ST. JEROME says that many begin well but few persevere (Cont. Jovin. 1, 1). Saul, Judas, Tertullian, began well, but ended badly, because they did not persevere in grace. The Lord, says St. Jerome, requires not only the beginning of a good life, but also the end: (Ep. ad Fur.) it is the end that will be rewarded. St. Bonaventure says that the crown is given only to perseverance. (Diaet. Sal. 1, 8, c. 2). Hence St. Laurence Justinian calls perseverance the "gate of heaven." (De Obed. c. 26). No one can enter paradise unless he finds the gate of heaven. My brother, at present you have renounced sin, and justly hope that you have been pardoned. You are then the friend of God: but remember that you are not yet saved. And when will you be saved? When you will have persevered to the end. *He that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved (Matt. xxiv, 13).*

Have you begun a good life? Thank the Lord for it: but St. Bernard warns you that to him who begins, a reward is only promised, and is given only to him who perseveres

(De modo bene viv. s. 6). It is not enough to run for the prize, you must run till you win it. *So run*, says St. Paul, *that you may obtain (1 Cor. ix, 24)*.

You have already put your hand to the plough, and you have begun to live well; but now you must tremble and fear more than ever. *With fear and trembling work out your salvation (Phil. ii, 12)*. And why? Because if—which God forbid—you look back and return to a life of sin, God will declare you unfit for paradise. *No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God (Luke, ix, 62)*. At present, through the grace of God, you avoid evil occasions, you frequent the sacraments, and make meditation every day. Happy you if you continue to do so, and if, when he comes to judge you, Jesus Christ will find you doing these things. *Blessed is that servant whom, when his lord shall come, he shall find so doing (Matt. xxiv, 46)*. But do not imagine that, now that you have begun to serve God, there is as it were an end, or a lack of temptations: listen to the advice of the Holy Ghost. *Son, when thou comest to the service of God . . . prepare thy soul for temptation (Ecclus. ii, 1)*. Remember that now more than ever you must prepare yourself for conflicts, because your enemies, the world, the devil, and the flesh, will arm themselves now more than ever to fight against you in order to deprive you of all that you have acquired. Denis the Carthusian says, that the more a soul gives itself to God, the more strenuously **hell** labors to destroy it. And this is sufficiently expressed in the Gospel of St. Luke, where Jesus Christ says: *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through places without water, seeking rest, and not finding it, he saith: I will return into my house whence I came out. And when he is come, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then he goeth, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and entering in, they dwell there. And the last state of that man is worse*

than the first (Luke, xi, 24). When banished from a soul, the devil finds no repose, and does everything in his power to return: he even calls companions to his aid; and if he succeeds in re-entering, the second fall of that soul will be far more ruinous than the first.

Consider, then, what arms you must use in order to defend yourselves against these enemies, and to preserve your soul in the grace of God. To escape defeat, and to conquer the devil, there is no other defense than prayer. St. Paul says that we have to contend, not with men of flesh and blood like ourselves, but with the princes of **hell**. *Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers (Eph. vi, 12).* By these words the Apostle wished to admonish us that we have not strength to resist such powerful enemies, and that we stand in need of aid from God. With his aid we shall be able to do all things. *I can do all things in Him that strengthened me (Phil. iv, 13).*

Such is the language of St. Paul; such, too, should be our language. But this divine aid is given only to those who pray for it. *Ask and you shall receive.* Let us, then not trust in our purposes; if we trust in them, we shall be lost. Whenever the devil tempts us, let us place our entire confidence in the divine assistance, and let us recommend ourselves to Jesus Christ, and to the Most Holy Mary. We ought to do this particularly as often as we are tempted against chastity; for this is the most terrible of all temptations, and is the one by which the devil gains most victories. We have not strength to preserve chastity; this strength must come from God. *And, said Solomon, as I knew that I could not otherwise be continent except God gave it, . . . I went to the Lord, and besought him (Wis. viii, 21).* In such temptations, then, we must instantly have recourse to Jesus Christ, and to his holy Mother, frequently invoking the most holy names of Jesus and

Mary. He who does this, will conquer; he who neglects it, will be lost.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! " cast me not away from Thy face." I know that Thou wilt never abandon me, unless I first abandon Thee. Experience of my own weakness makes me tremble lest I should again forsake Thee. Lord ! it is from Thee I must receive the strength necessary to conquer **hell**, which labors to make me again its slave. This strength I ask of Thee for the sake of Jesus Christ. O my Saviour! establish between Thee and me a perpetual peace, which will never be broken for all eternity. For this purpose I ask Thy love. " He who loves not is dead." O God of my soul, it is by Thee I must be saved from this unhappy death. I was lost; Thou knowest it. It is Thy goodness alone that has brought me into the state in which I am at present, in which I hope I am Thy friend. Ah, my Jesus! through the painful death which Thou didst suffer for my salvation, do not permit me ever more to lose Thee voluntarily. I love Thee above all things, I hope to see myself always bound with this holy love, and to die in the bonds of love, and to live for eternity in the chains of Thy love. O Mary! thou art called the mother of perseverance; through thee this great gift is dispensed. Through thy intercession I ask and hope to obtain it.

SECOND POINT.

We must Conquer the World.

Let us now see how we must conquer the world. The devil is a great enemy of our salvation, but the world is worse. If the devil did not make use of the world and of wicked men, by whom we mean the world, he would not obtain the victories which he gains. But says Jesus Christ, *beware of men (Matt. x, 17)*. Men are often

worse than the devils; for these are put to flight when we pray and invoke the most holy names of Jesus and Mary. But when a person gives a becoming answer to wicked companions, who tempt him to sin, they redouble their efforts, they treat him with ridicule, upbraiding him with vulgarity and want of education; and when they can say nothing else, they call him a hypocrite, who only pretends to sanctity. To escape such derision and reproach, certain weak souls miserably associate with these ministers of Lucifer, and return to the vomit. My brother, be persuaded that, if you wish to lead a holy life, you must expect the ridicule and contempt of the wicked. *The wicked, says the Holy Ghost, loathe them that are in the right way (Prov. xxix, 27).* He who lives in sin cannot bear the sight of those who live according to the Gospel. And why? Because their life is a continual reproach to him; and therefore to avoid the pain of remorse caused by the good example of others, he would wish that all should imitate his own wickedness. There is no remedy. The Apostle tells us that he who serves God must be persecuted by the world. *All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Tim. iii, 12).* All the saints have been persecuted. Who was more holy than Jesus Christ? The world persecuted him so as to cause him to bleed to death on a cross.

There is no help for this; for the maxims of the world are diametrically opposed to the maxims of Jesus Christ. What the world esteems, Jesus Christ has called folly. *For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God (1 Cor. iii, 19).* And the world regards as folly what Jesus Christ has strongly recommended,—such as crosses, pains, and contempts. *For the word of the cross, to them indeed that perish, is foolishness (1 Cor. iii, 18).* But if the wicked revile and reproach us, let us console ourselves with the reflection that God blesses and praises us. *They will curse, and Thou wilt bless (Ps. cviii, 28).* Is it not enough

for us to be praised by God, by Mary, by the angels, the saints, and all good men ? Let us, then, leave sinners to say what they please, and let us continue to please God, who is grateful and faithful to all who serve him. The greater the opposition and difficulty we meet in doing good, the more we shall please God and treasure up merits for ourselves. Let us imagine that we are alone with God in this world. When the wicked treat us with derision, let us recommend them to the Lord, let us thank him for giving us light, which he does not give to these miserable men, and let us continue our journey. Let us not be ashamed to appear like Christians; for, if we are ashamed of Jesus Christ, he protests that he will be ashamed of us on the day of judgment. *For 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 (Luke, ix, 26).*

If we wish to save our souls, we must resolve to suffer, and to do violence to ourselves. *How narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leadeth to life (Matt. vii, 14). The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away (Matt. xi, 12).* He who does not violence to himself, will not be saved. There is no remedy. If we wish to do good, we must act in opposition to our rebellious nature. In the beginning, it is particularly necessary to do violence to ourselves in order to root out bad habits, and to acquire habits of virtue. When good habits are once acquired, the observance of the divine law becomes easy, and even sweet. Our Lord said to St. Bridget, that when in the practice of virtue a person suffers the first punctures of the thorns with patience and courage, these thorns afterwards become roses. Be attentive, then, dearly beloved Christian, Jesus Christ now says to you, what he said to the paralytic: *Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee (John, v, 14).* Remember, says St. Bernard, that if you have the

misfortune of relapsing into sin, your relapse will be more disastrous than all your falls (In Cant. s. 54). Woe, says the Lord, to them who begin to walk in the way of God, and afterward forsake it. *Woe to you, apostate children (Isa. xxx, 1)*. Such sinners are punished as rebels against God's light. *They have been rebellious to the light (Job, xxiv, 13)*. The chastisement of these rebels, who have been favored by God with a great light, and have been afterward unfaithful to him, is, to remain in blindness, and thus die in their sins. *But if the just man turn himself away from his justice . . . shall he live ? All his justices which he hath done shall not be remembered; in the prevarication by which he hath prevaricated, and in his sin which he hath committed, in them he shall die (Ezek. xviii, 24)*.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! such a chastisement I have often deserved, because I have, through the light which Thou gavest me, renounced sin, and have miserably returned to it. I infinitely thank Thy mercy for not having abandoned me in my blindness by leaving me entirely destitute of light, as I deserved. Great then, O my Jesus ! are my obligations to Thee, and great should be my ingratitude, were I again to turn my back upon Thee. No, my Redeemer, the mercies of the Lord I will sing forever. I hope that during the remainder of my life, and for all eternity, I will always sing and praise Thy mercies by loving Thee always, and never more seeing myself bereft of Thy graces. The great ingratitude with which I have hitherto treated Thee, and which I now hate and curse above every evil, will serve to make me weep bitterly over the injuries I have done Thee, and to inflame me still more with the love of Thee, who, after I had given Thee so many grievous offences, have bestowed upon me so many great graces. Yes, I love Thee, O my God ! worthy of infinite love. Henceforth Thou shall be my only love, my

only good. O eternal Father! through the merits of Jesus Christ I ask of Thee final perseverance in Thy grace and in Thy love. I know that Thou wilt grant it to me whenever I ask it. But who assures me that I shall be careful to ask this perseverance from Thee ? Hence, O my God, I ask perseverance, and the grace always to ask it of Thee. O Mary, my advocate, my refuge, and my hope! obtain for me by thy intercession the gift of constancy in always asking of God the grace of final perseverance. Through the love which thou bearest Jesus Christ, I ask thee to obtain for me this gift.

THIRD POINT.

We must Struggle against the Flesh.—Recapitulation.

Let us come to the third enemy—that is, the flesh, which is the worst of all: and let us see how we must defend ourselves against its attacks. The first means is prayer: but this we have already considered. The second is, to avoid the occasion of sin; and let us now ponder well upon this means of overcoming the flesh. St. Bernardine says that the greatest of all counsels, and the one which is, as it were, the foundation of religion, is to fly from sinful occasions (T. i, s. 21, a. 3). Being compelled by exorcisms, the devil once confessed that of all sermons, that which displeased him most was the sermon on avoiding the occasions of sin: and justly; for the devil laughs at all the resolutions and promises of penitent sinners who remain in the occasion of sin. The occasion of sins of the flesh, in particular, is like a veil placed before the eyes, which prevents the soul from seeing either its resolutions, or the lights received from God, or the truths of eternity: in a word, it makes it forget everything, and almost blinds it. The neglect of avoiding the occasions of sin was the cause of the fall of our first parents. God had forbidden them even to touch the forbidden fruit. *God*

commanded us, said Eve, that we should not eat, and that we should not touch it (Gen. iii, 3). But through want of caution she saw, took, and ate it. She first began to look at the apple, she afterward took it in her hand, and then ate it. He who voluntarily exposes himself to danger, will perish in it (Ecclus. iii, 27). St. Peter tells us that the devil goeth about seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter, v. 8). And what, says St. Cyprian, does he do in order to enter again into the soul from which he has been expelled? (De zelo et liv.) He seeks an occasion of sin. If the soul permit him to bring it again into the occasion of sin, he will enter again, and shall devour it. The Abbot Gueric says that Lazarus came forth from the grave bound hand and foot, and after rising in this state, he died again. Miserable, this author means to say, is the man who rises from sin bound by the occasion of sin; though he should rise, he surely will die again. He, then, who wishes to be saved must forsake not only all sin, but the occasions of sin—that is, the companions, the house, the connections which lead to sin.

But you will say: I have changed my life, and now I have no bad motive, nor even a temptation, in the society of such, a person. I answer: it is related that in Mauritania there are bears that go in search of the apes. As soon as they see a bear, the apes save themselves by climbing up the trees: but what does the bear do? He stretches himself, as if dead, under the tree; and when the apes descend, he springs up, seizes, and devours them. It is thus the devil acts: he makes the temptations appear dead; and when the soul exposes itself to the occasions of sin, he excites the temptation, which devours it. Oh ! how many miserable souls, that practiced mental prayer, frequented Communion, and might be called saints, have, by putting themselves into dangerous occasions, become the prey of **hell ? It is related in ecclesiastical history, that a holy matron, who devoted herself to the pious work of**

burying the martyrs, found one of them not dead. She brought him to her house: he recovered. What happened? By the proximate occasion, these two saints, as they might be called, first lost the grace of God, and afterward lost the faith.

The Lord commanded Isaias to proclaim that *all flesh is grass (Isa. xl, 6)*. Is it possible, says St. John Chrysostom, for hay not to burn when it is thrown into the fire? (In Ps. 1, hom. 1). And St. Cyprian says that it is impossible to stand in the midst of flames, and not be burned. (De Singul. Cler.). According to the prophet Isaias, our strength is like that of tow cast into the fire. *And your strength shall be as the ashes of tow (Isa. i, 31)*. And Solomon says that it would be folly to expect to walk on red-hot coals, without being burned. *Can a man walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? (Prov. vi, 27)*. Thus it is likewise folly to expose ourselves to the occasion of sin, and to expect not to fall. It is necessary then to fly from sin as from the face of a serpent. *Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent (Ecclus. xxi, 2)*. We ought, says Gualfrido, not only to avoid the bite or contact of a serpent, but should also abstain from approaching it. But you will say: My interest requires that I should frequent such a house, or that I should keep up a certain friendship. But if you see that such a house is for you a way to **hell**, there is no remedy; you must forsake it if you wish to save your soul. *Her house is the way to hell (Prov. vii, 27)*. The Lord tells you that if your right eye is a cause of damnation to you, you must pluck it out and cast it from you (Matt. v, 29). Mark the words; you must cast it, not beside you, but to a *distance from you*—that is, you must take away every occasion of sin. St. Francis of Assisi says, that the devil tempts spiritual souls, who have given themselves to God, in a way different from that in which he tempts the wicked. In the beginning he does not seek to bind them with a chain; he is content to hold them by a

single hair: he then binds them with a slender thread; afterward with a cord; then with a chain; and thus drags them to sin. And therefore he who wishes to be free from the danger of perdition must, in the beginning, break all these hairs, he must avoid all occasions of sins, he must give up these salutations, presents, notes, and the like. And for those who have contracted a habit of committing sins against purity, it will not be enough to avoid proximate occasions: unless they fly even from remote occasions, they will relapse.

He who sincerely wishes to be saved, must, by often repeating with the saints, *Let all be lost, provided God is not lost*, labor continually to strengthen and renew his resolution of never again renouncing the friendship of God. But it is not enough to resolve never more to lose God; it is moreover necessary to adopt the means by which you may be preserved from the danger of losing him. The first means is, to avoid the occasions of sin; of this we have already spoken. The second is, to frequent the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist. In the house which is often swept there is no uncleanness. By the sacrament of penance the soul is purified; by it it obtains not only the remission of sins, but also help to resist temptations. The Communion is called the bread of heaven; because as the body cannot live without earthly food, so the soul cannot live without this celestial bread. *Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you (John, vi, 54)*. But on the other hand, to those who frequently eat this bread, is promised eternal life. *If any man eat of this bread he shall live forever (John, vi, 52)*. Hence the Council of Trent calls the Communion a medicine which delivers us from venial, and preserves us from mortal sins (Sess. 13, cap. 2). The third means is meditation, or mental prayer. *Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin (Ecclus. vii, 40)*. He who keeps before his eyes the eternal truths—

death, judgment, eternity—will not fall into sin. God enlightens us in meditation. *Come ye to Him, and be enlightened (Ps. xxxiii, 6)*. In meditation God speaks to us, and makes known to us what we are to avoid, and what we are to do. *I will lead her into the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart (Osee, ii, 14)*. Meditation is the blessed furnace in which divine love is lighted up. *In my meditation a fire shall flame out (Ps. xxxviii, 4)*. To preserve the soul in the grace Of God, it is, as has been already said, absolutely necessary always to pray, and to ask for the graces we stand in need of. They who do not make mental prayer, will scarcely pray for God's graces; and by neglecting to pray for them, they will certainly be lost.

It is necessary then to adopt the means of salvation, and to lead a life of order and regularity. It is necessary, after rising in the morning, to make the Christian acts of thanksgiving, love, oblation, and a purpose of avoiding sin, along with a prayer to Jesus and Mary that they may preserve you from sin during the day: you should afterward make your meditation, and hear Mass. During the day you ought to make a spiritual reading, visit the Blessed Sacrament and an image of the divine Mother. In the evening, say the Rosary, and make an examination of conscience. Go to Communion several times in the week, according as your director may advise: you should ordinarily go to confession to the same confessor. It would also be very profitable to make the spiritual exercises in some religious house. It is likewise necessary to honor the Most Holy Mary by some special devotion—such as by fasting on Saturdays. She is called the Mother of perseverance, and she promises to obtain it for all who serve her. *They that work by me shall not sin (Ecclus. xxiv, 30)*. Above all, it is necessary to ask of God holy perseverance, and especially in the time of temptation, invoking then more frequently the names of Jesus and

Mary as long as the temptation continues. If you act in this manner, you will certainly be saved; if not, you will certainly be lost.

Affections and Prayers.

My dear Redeemer! I thank Thee for the lights which Thou now givest me, and for the means of salvation which Thou makest known to me. I promise to endeavor to persevere in the practice of them. I see that Thou wishest for my salvation ; and I wish to be saved principally to please Thy heart, which so ardently desires my salvation. O my God ! I will no longer resist the love which Thou entertainest for me. This love has made Thee bear me with so much patience when I offended Thee. Thou callest me to Thy love, and I desire only to love Thee. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness! I love Thee, O infinite Good ! Ah ! I entreat Thee, through the merits of Jesus Christ, not to permit me to be ever again ungrateful to Thee; either make me cease to be ungrateful to Thee, or make me cease to live. Lord ! Thou hast already begun the work ; bring it to perfection, *Confirm, O God! that which Thou hast wrought in me (Ps. lxxvii, 29).* Give me light, give me strength, give me love. O Mary! who art the treasurer of graces, assist me, accept me for thy servant, and pray to Jesus for me. Through the merits of Jesus Christ first, and then through thy prayers, I hope for salvation.

>>Fourth part of "Preparation for Death" follows>>>