

Rev. Fr. Leonard Goffine's
The Church's Year

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY



INTROIT Adore God, all ye His angels: Sion heard, and was glad; and the daughters of Juda rejoiced. The Lord hath reigned; let the earth rejoice; let the many islands be glad. (Ps. XCVI. 1.) Glory be to the Father, etc.

COLLECT Almighty everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmity, and stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty for our protection. Through our protection. Through our etc.

EPISTLE (Rom. XII. 16-21.) Brethren, be not wise in your own conceits. To no man rendering evil for evil: providing good things not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as is in you, having peace with all men; not revenging yourselves, my dearly beloved but give place unto wrath; for it is written: Revenge is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. But if thy enemy be hungry, give him to eat; if he thirst, give him to drink; for doing this, thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good.

When are we overcome by evil?

When we wish to take revenge. "Revenge is no sign of courage," says St. Ambrose, "but rather of weakness and cowardice. As it is the sign of a very weak stomach to be unable to digest food, so it is the mark of a very weak mind to be unable to bear a harsh word." "Are you impatient," says the same saint, "you are overcome; are you patient, you have overcome."

What should we do if our reputation is injured?

We should leave its revenge, or its defence and protection to God, who has retained that for Himself. "But as a good name," says St. Francis de Sales, "is the main support of human society, and as without it we could not be useful to that society, but even hurtful to it on account of scandal, we should feel bound, for love of our neighbor, to aim after a good reputation, and to preserve it." We should not be too sensitive about this, however, for too great a sensitiveness makes one obstinate, eccentric, and intolerable, and only tends to excite and increase the malice of the detractors. The silence and contempt with which we meet a slander or an injustice, is generally a more efficacious antidote than sensitiveness, anger, or revenge. The contempt of a slander at once disperses it, but anger shows a weakness, and gives the accusation an appearance of probability. If this does not suffice, and the slander continues, let us persevere in humility' and lay our honor and our soul into the hands of God, according to the admonitions of the Apostle.

How do we "heap coals of fire on the head of our enemy?"

When we return him good for evil, for seeing our well meaning towards him, the flush of shame reddens his face for the wrongs he has done us. St. Augustine explains these words thus: "By giving food and drink or doing other kindnesses to your enemy, you will heap coals, not of anger, but of love, upon his head, which will inflame him to return love for love." Learn therefore, from the example of Christ and His saints, not to allow yourself to be overcome by evil, but do good to those that hate and persecute you.

ASPIRATION Ah, that I might, according to the words of St. Paul, so live that I may be a child of the Heavenly Father, who lets His sun shine on the just and the unjust!

GOSPEL (Matt. VIII. 1-13.) At that time, when Jesus was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him; and behold, a leper came and adored him, saying: Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, stretching forth his hand, touched him, saying: I will, be thou made clean. And forthwith his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus saith to him, See thou tell no man: but go, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift which Moses commanded for a testimony unto them. And when he had entered into Capharnaum, there came to him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying: Lord, my servant Beth at home sick of the palsy, and is grievously tormented. And Jesus saith to him: I will come and heal him. And the centurion making answer, said: Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man subject to authority, having under me soldiers; and I say to this man: Go, and he goeth; and to another: Come, and he cometh; and to my servant: Do this, and he doeth it. And Jesus hearing this, marvelled; and said to them that followed him: Amen I say to you, I have not found so great faith in Israel. And I sad to you that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast into the exterior darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said to the centurion: Go, and as thou hast believed, so be it done to thee; and the servant was healed at the same hour.

Why did the leper say: "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean"?

He believed Christ to be the promised Messiah, who as true God had the power to heal him. From this we learn to have confidence in the omnipotence of God, who is a helper in all need, (Ps. CVI. 6. 73. 19.) and to leave all to the will of God, saying: Lord, if it be pleasing to Thee, and well for me, grant my petition.

Why did Jesus stretch forth His hand and touch the leper?

To show that He was not subject to the law which forbade the touching of a leper through fear of infection, which could not affect Jesus; to reveal the health-giving, curative power of His flesh, which dispelled leprosy by the simple touch of His hand; to give us an example of humility and of love for the poor sick, that we may learn from Him to have no aversion to the infirm, but lovingly to assist the unfortunate sick for the sake of Jesus who took upon Himself the leprosy of our sins. The saints have faithfully imitated Him in their tender care for those suffering from the most disgusting diseases. Oh, how hard it will be for those to stand before the Tribunal of God at the Last Day, who cannot even bear to look at the poor and sick!

Why did Christ command the leper to tell no man?

To instruct us that we should not make known our good works in order to obtain frivolous praise, (Matt. VI 1.) which deprives us of our heavenly reward.

Why did Christ send the healed leper to the Priest?

That he might observe the law which required all the healed lepers to show themselves to the priests, to offer a sacrifice, to be examined and pronounced clean: that the priest if he beheld the miracle of the sudden cure of the leper, might know Him who had wrought the cure, to be the Messiah; and finally, to teach us that we must honor the priests because of their high position, even when they do not live in a manner worthy of their dignity, as was the case with the Jewish priests.

What it taught by the centurion's solicitude for his servant?

That masters should take care of their sick servants, see that they are attended to in their illness, and above all that they are provided with the Sacraments. It is unchristian, even cruel and barbarous, to drive from the house a poor, sick servant, or to leave him lying in his distress without assistance or care.

Why did Christ say: I will come and heal him?

Because of His humility, by which He, although God and Lord of lords, did not hesitate to visit a sick servant. Here Christ's humility puts to shame many persons of position who think themselves too exalted to attend the wants of a poor servant.

Why did the centurion say: Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof?

Because he recognised Christ's divinity and his own nothingness, and therefore regarded himself as unworthy to receive Christ into his house.

From this we learn to humble ourselves, especially when we receive Christ into our hearts, hence the priest in giving holy Communion uses the centurion's words, exhorting those to humility who are about to receive.

Why did he add: But only say the word, and my servant shall be healed?

By this he publicly manifested his faith in Christ's divinity and omnipotence, because he believed that Christ, though absent, could heal the servant by a word.

If a Gentile centurion had such faith in Christ, and such confidence in His power, should not we Christians be ashamed that we have so little faith, and confidence in God?

What is meant by: Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast into the exterior darkness?

This was said by Christ in reference to the obdurate Jews who would not believe in Him. Many pagans who receive the gospel, and live in accordance with it, will enjoy heavenly bliss with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who were the most faithful friends of God, while the Jews, God's chosen people, who as such, possessed the first claim to heaven, will, because of their unbelief and other sins, be cast into outer darkness, that is, into the deepest abyss of hell, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Thus it will be with those Christians who do not live in accordance with their faith. Therefore, fear lest you, for want of cooperation with God's grace, be eternally rejected, while others who have faithfully corresponded to the divine inspirations will enter into your place in the kingdom of heaven.

ASPIRATION O Jesus, rich in consolations! grant me the leper's faith and confidence, that in all things I may rely upon Thy omnipotence, and may resign myself to Thy divine will, and may ever honor Thy priests. Grant me, also, O most humble Jesus! the centurion's humility, that for Thy sake, I may compassionately assist my neighbor, and by doing so render myself worthy of Thy grace and mercy.

ON RESIGNATION TO THE WILL OF GOD

Lord, if thou wilt. (Matt. VIII. 2.)

Those who in adversity as well as in prosperity, perfectly resign themselves to the will of God, and accept whatever He sends them with joy and thanks, possess heaven, as St. Chrysostom says, while yet upon earth. Those who have attained this resignation, are saddened by no adversity, because they are satisfied with all that God, their best Father, sends them, be it honor or disgrace, wealth or poverty, life or death. All happens as they wish, because they know no will but God's, they desire nothing but that which He does and wills. God does the will of them that fear Him. (Ps. CXLIV. 10.) In the lives of the ancient Fathers we find the following: The fields and vineyards belonging to one farmer were much more fertile and yielding than were his neighbors'. They asked how it happened and he said: they should not wonder at it, because he always had the weather he wished. At this they wondered more than ever: How could that be? "I never desire other weather," he replied, "than God wills; and because my desires are conformable to His, He gives me the fruits I wish." This submission to the divine will is also the cause of that constant peace and undimmed joy of the saints of God, with which their hearts have overflowed here below, even in the midst of the greatest sufferings and afflictions. Who would not aspire to so happy a state? We will attain it if we believe that nothing in this world can happen to us except by the will and through the direction

of God, sin and guilt excepted, for God can never be the cause of them. This the Holy Ghost inculcates by the mouth of the wise man: Good things and evil, life and death, poverty and riches, are from God, (Eccles. XI. 14.) that is, are permitted or sent by God; all that which comes from God, is for the best, for God doeth all things well. (Mark VII. 37.) Whoever keeps these two truths always in mind, will certainly be ever contented with the will of God, and always consoled; he will taste while yet on earth the undisturbed peace of mind and foretaste of happiness which the saints had while here, and which they now eternally enjoy in heaven, because of the union of their will with the divine will.

INSTRUCTION FOR MASTERS AND SERVANTS

The master of a house should be careful to have not only obedient, faithful, willing, and industrious servants in his home, as had the centurion in the gospel, but still more, pious and God-fearing ones, for God richly blesses the master because of pious servants. Thus God blessed Laban on account of the pious Jacob, (Gen. XXX. 30.) and the house of Putiphar because of the just Joseph. (Gen. XXXIX. 5.) The master should look to the morals and Christian conduct of his servants, and not suffer irreligious subjects in his house, for he must, after this life, give an account before the tribunal of God, and he makes himself unworthy of the blessing of God, often liable to the most terrible punishment by retaining such. Will not God punish those masters and mistresses who suffer those under them to seek the dangerous occasions of sin, keep sinful company, go about at night, and lead scandalous lives? Will not God, one day, demand the souls of servants from their masters? The same punishment which will befall those who deny their faith, will rest upon careless masters and mistresses, for St. Paul the Apostle writes:

But if any man have not care of his own, and especially of those of his house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. (I. Tim. V. 8.)

Subjects should learn from the centurion's servants who obeyed his only word, that they also should willingly, faithfully, and quickly do every thing ordered by their masters, unless it be something contrary to the law of God. They should recollect that whatever they do in obedience to their superiors, is done for God Himself. Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not serving to the eye, as pleasing men, but in simplicity of heart, fearing God. Whatsoever you do, do it from the heart as to the Lord, and not to men: knowing that you shall receive of the Lord the reward of inheritance. Serve ye the Lord Christ. (Col. III. 22-24.)