

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

INSTRUCTION ON THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST



Implore God for help and protection against all temptations both visible and invisible, and say with the priest at the Introit:

INTROIT Behold, God is my helper, and the Lord is the protector of my soul: turn back the evils upon my enemies, and cut them off in thy truth, O Lord, my protector. (Ps. LIII.) Save me, O God, by thy name, and deliver me in thy strength. Glory etc.

COLLECT Let the ears of Thy mercy, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy suppliants: and that Thou mayest grant them their desires, make them to ask such things as please Thee. Through etc.

EPISTLE (I Cor. X. 6-13.) Brethren, Let us not covet evil things, as they also coveted. Neither become ye idolaters, as some of them: as it is written: The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed fornication, and there fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them tempted, and perished by the serpents. Neither do you murmur, as some of them murmured, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them in figure, and they are written for our correction, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore he that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall. Let no temptation take hold on you, but such as is human: and God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be

tempted above that which you are able but will make also with temptation issue that you may be able to bear it.

Can we sin by thought and desire?

Yes, if we desire evil and forbidden things, or voluntarily think of them with pleasure, for God prohibits not only evil deeds, but evil thoughts and desires in regard to our neighbor's wife or goods. (Exod. XX. 17.) Christ says, (Matt. V. 28.) that he who looks upon a woman with evil desire, has already committed adultery. But wicked thoughts and imagination are sinful only when a person consents to, or entertains them deliberately. They become, however, an occasion of gaining merit, if we earnestly strive against them. For this reason God sometimes permits even the just to be tempted by them.

What is meant by tempting God?

Demanding presumptuously a mark or sign of divine omnipotence, goodness or justice. This sin is committed when without cause we desire that articles of faith should be demonstrated and confirmed by a new miracle; when we throw ourselves needlessly into danger of body or soul expecting God to deliver us; when in dangerous illness the ordinary and, natural remedies are rejected, and God's immediate assistance expected.

Is it a great sin to murmur against God?

That it is such may be learned from the punishment which God inflicted on the murmuring Israelites; for besides Kore, Dathan, and Abiron whom the earth devoured, many thousands of them were consumed by fire; and yet these had not murmured against God directly, but only against Moses and Aaron whom God had placed over them as their leaders. From this it is seen that God looks upon murmuring against spiritual and civil authority, instituted by Him, as murmuring against Himself. Hence Moses said to the Israelites: Your murmuring is not against us, but against the Lord. (Exod. XVI. 8.)

ASPIRATION Purify my heart, I beseech Thee; O Lord, from all evil thoughts and desires. Let it never enter my mind to tempt Thee, or to be dissatisfied with Thy fatherly dispensations. Suffer me not to be tempted beyond my strength, but grant me so much fortitude, that I may overcome all temptations, and even derive benefit from them for my soul's salvation.

GOSPEL (Luke XIX. 41-47.) At that time, when Jesus drew near Jerusalem, seeing the city, he wept over it, saying: If thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace: but now they are hidden from thy eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, and thy enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and straiten thee on every side, and beat thee flat to the ground, and thy children who are in thee: and they shall not leave in thee a stone upon a stone, because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation. And entering into the temple, he began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought, saying to them: It is written, My house is the house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves. And he was teaching daily in the temple.

Why did our Saviour weep over the city of Jerusalem?

Because of the ingratitude and obduracy of its inhabitants who would not receive Him as their Redeemer, and who through impenitence were hastening to destruction.

When was the time of visitation?

The period in which God sent them one prophet after another who urged them to penance, and whom they persecuted, stoned, and killed. (Matt. XXIII. 34.) It was especially the time of Christ's ministry, when He so often announced His salutary doctrine in the temple of Jerusalem, confirmed it by miracles, proving Himself to be the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, but was despised and rejected by this hardened and impenitent city.

Who are prefigured by this hardened and impenitent city?

The hard-hearted, unrepenting sinners who will not recognize the time of God's visitation, in which He urges them by the mouth of His preachers, confessors, and superiors, and by inward inspiration to reform their lives and seek the salvation of their soul, but who give no ear to these admonitions, and defer conversion to the end of their lives. Their end will be like to that of this impious city; then the enemy, that is, the evil spirit, will surround their soul, tempt, terrify, and drag it into the abyss of ruin. Oh, how foolish it is to squander so lightly, the time of grace, the days of salvation! Oh, how would the damned do penance, could they but return to earth! Oh, how industriously would they employ the time to save their soul! Use, then, my dear Christian, the time of grace which God designs for you, and which, when it is run out or carelessly thrown away, will not be lengthened for a moment.

Will God conceal from the wicked that which serves for their salvation?

No; but while they are running after the pleasures of this life, as St. Gregory says, they see not the misfortunes treading in their footsteps, and as consideration of the future makes them uncomfortable in the midst of their worldly pleasures, they remove the terrible thought far from them, and thus run with eyes blindfolded in the midst of their pleasure into eternal flames. Not God, but they themselves hide the knowledge of all that is for their peace, and thus they perish.

ASPIRATION. I beseech Thee, O Lord, who didst weep over the city of Jerusalem, because it knew not the time of its visitation, to enlighten my heart, that I may know and profit by the season of grace.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CITY AND TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM

Has our divine Savior's prophecy concerning, the city of Jerusalem been fulfilled?

Yes, and in the most terrible manner. The Jews, oppressed by the Romans their cruel masters, revolted, killed many of their enemies, and drove them out of Jerusalem. Knowing well that this would not be permitted to pass unavenged, the Jews armed themselves for a desperate resistance. The Emperor Nero sent a powerful army under the command of Vespasian against the city of Jerusalem, which first captured the smaller fortresses of Judea, and then laid siege to the city. The want and misery of the inhabitants had already reached the highest pitch; for within the city ambitious men had caused conflicts; factions had been formed, daily fighting

each other, and reddening the streets with blood, while the angry Romans stormed outside. Then a short time of respite was granted to the unfortunate Jews. The Emperor Nero was murdered at Rome in the year of our Lord 68; his successor Galba soon died, and the soldiers placed their beloved commander Vespasian upon the imperial throne. He then left Jerusalem with his army, but in the year he sent his son Titus with a new army to Judea, with orders to capture the city at any price, and to punish its inhabitants.

It was the time of Easter, and a multitude of Jews had assembled from all provinces of the land, when Titus appeared with his army before the gates of Jerusalem, and surrounded the city. The supply of food was soon exhausted, famine and pestilence came upon the city and raged terribly. The leader of the savage revolutionists, John of Gischala, caused the houses to be searched, and the remaining food to be torn from the starving, or to be forced from them by terrible tortures: To save themselves from this outrageous tyrant, the Jews took the leader of a band of robbers, named Simon, with his whole gang into the city. John and Simon with their followers now sought to annihilate each other. John took possession of the temple. Simon besieged him; blood was streaming in the temple and in the streets. Only when the battle-din of the Romans was heard from without, did the hostile factions unite, go to meet the enemy, and resist his attack. As the famine increased, many Jews secretly left the city to seek for herbs. But Titus captured them with his cavalry, and crucified those who were armed. Nearly five hundred men, and sometimes more, were every day crucified in sight of the city, so that there could not be found enough of crosses and places of execution; but even this terrible sight did not move the Jews to submission. Incited by their leaders to frenzy, they obstinately resisted, and Titus finding it impossible to take the city by storm, concluded to surround it by walls in order to starve the inhabitants. In three days his soldiers built a wall of about ten miles in circumference, and thus the Saviour's prediction was fulfilled: Thy enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and straiten thee on every side.

The famine in this unfortunate city now reached its most terrific height; the wretched inhabitants searched the very gutters for food, and ate the most disgusting things. A woman, ravenous from hunger, strangled her own child, roasted it, and ate half of it; the leaders smelling the horrible meal, forced a way into the house, and by terrible threats compelled the woman to show them what she had eaten; she handed them the remaining part of the roasted child, saying: "Eat it, it is my child; I presume you are not more dainty than a woman, or more tender than a mother." Stricken with horror they rushed from the house. Death now carried away thousands daily, the streets and the houses were full of corpses: From the fourteenth of April when the siege commenced. to the first of July, there were counted one hundred and fifty-eight thousand dead bodies; six hundred thousand others were thrown over the walls into the trenches to save the city from infection. All who could flee, fled; some reached the camp of the Romans in safety; Titus spared the helpless, but all who fell into his hands armed, were crucified. Flight offered no better security. The Roman soldiers had learned that many Jews had swallowed, gold to secure it from the avarice of the robbers, and therefore the stomachs of many were cut open. Two thousand such corpses were found one morning in the camp of the Romans. The attempts of Titus to prevent this cruelty were unavailing. Finally, when misery had reached its height, Titus succeeded in carrying the fort, Antonia, and with his army forced a passage as far as the temple which had been held by John of Gischala with his famous band.

Desirous of saving the temple, Titus offered the revolutionists free passage from it, but his proposition was rejected, and the most violent contest then raged; the Romans trying to enter the temple, and being continually repulsed, at last, one of the soldiers seized a firebrand, and threw it into one of the rooms attached to the temple. The flames in an instant caught the whole of the inner temple, and totally consumed it, so that this prediction of our Lord was also fulfilled. The Romans butchered all the inhabitants whom they met, and Titus having razed the ruins of the temple and city, ploughed it over, to indicate that this city was never to be rebuilt. During the siege one million one hundred thousand Jews lost their lives; ninety-seven thousand were sold as slaves, and the rest of the people dispersed over the whole earth.

Thus God punished the impenitent city and nation, over whose wretchedness the Saviour wept so bitterly, and thus was fulfilled the prediction made by Him long before.

What do we learn from this?

That as this prediction so also all other threats and promises of the Saviour will be fulfilled. The destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, the dispersion of the Jews, are historical facts which cannot be denied, and testify through all centuries to the truth of our Lord's word: Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. (Matt. XXIV. 35.)

USEFUL LESSONS CONCERNING DEATH-BED REPENTANCE

Can a sinner rely upon his being converted at the end of his life?

By no means, for this would be a sin against the mercy of God which is much the same as the sin against the Holy Ghost. "God," says St. Augustine, "generally so punishes such negligent sinners, that in the end they forget themselves, as in health they forgot Him." He says: They have turned their back to me, and not their face: and in the time of their affliction they will say: Arise, and deliver us! Where are the gods whom thou hast made thee? Let them arise and deliver thee in the time of thy affliction. (Jer. II. 27-28.) And although we have a consoling example in the case of the penitent thief, yet this, as St. Augustine says, is only one, that the sinner may not despair: and it is only one, so that the sinner may have no excuse for his temerity in putting off his repentance unto the end.

What may we hope of those who are converted at the close of life?

Everything that is good if they be truly converted, but this is a very rare thing, as St. Augustine says: "It cannot be asserted with any security, that he who repents at the end has forgiveness;" and St. Jerome writes: "Scarcely one out of thousands whose life was impious, will truly repent at death and obtain forgiveness of sin;" and St. Vincent Ferrer says, "For a man who has lived an impious life to die a good death is a greater miracle than the raising of the dead to life." We need not be surprised at this, for repentance at the end of life is extorted by the fear of death and the coming judgment. St. Augustine says, that it is not he who abandons sin, but sin abandons him, for he would not cease to offend God, if life were granted him. What can we expect from such a conversion?

When should we repent?

While we are in health, in possession of our senses and strength, for according to the words of St. Augustine, the repentance of the sick is a sickly repentance. As experience proves, man while ill is so tormented and bewildered by the pains of sickness and the fear of death, by remorse of conscience, and the temptations of the devil as well as by anxiety for those whom he leaves, that he can scarcely collect his thoughts, much less fit himself for true repentance. Since it is so hard for many to do penance while they are in health, and have nothing to prevent them from elevating their mind to God, how much more difficult will it be for them, when the body is weakened and tortured by the pains of sickness. It has been made known by many persons when convalescent, that they retained not the slightest recollection of anything which occurred during their illness, and although they confessed and received the last Sacraments, they did not remember it. If then you have committed a grievous sin, do not delay to be reconciled as soon as possible by contrition and a sacramental confession. Do not put off repentance from day to day, for thereby conversion becomes more difficult, so much so that without extraordinary grace from God, you cannot repent God does not give His grace to the presumptuous scoffer.