

Eleven Addresses during a Retreat of the Companions of the Love of Jesus,  
engaged in perpetual intercession for the conversion of sinners.

By the Rev. E. B. Pusey, D.D.

### INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS.

WE meet to day under different circumstances from those of ordinary retreats. For we meet, not to consider about any vocation, to which some of us may trust that God is calling them. We come, not to break off the old, but to renew it. It is like the renewal of vows to the religious; to begin anew with greater fervour, not to make a beginning from the first. We have all long ago chosen Jesus, in the society of Whose love we have enrolled ourselves. We must all have seen the deadliness of sin, its awefulness, its dreadful antagonism to God and to the Blood of Jesus; its terrible wasting of souls, whom God formed for Himself, and for whom Jesus died. For our common bond has been, to pray for souls, who are wasting themselves and the Price at which they were bought, the Precious Blood of Jesus, that they for whom He died might be converted to Him, and the Price of His Blood might not be wasted in them. We must know something of the value of souls and of the end of our being, here, because we have been engaged, more or less, in praying that those countless souls, whom Jesus redeemed by all those untold Sufferings and that terrible Agony and Death, might not miss the end, for which God created them, one by one; for which Jesus, God-Man, redeemed them; for which God the Holy Ghost drew them from without, even if, not being made members of Christ, He did not dwell in them.

The object of this society has been and is as wide as the world. For it is as wide as the love of Jesus; and Jesus shed His Blood for all in every generation, for those who should know Him and those who should in the flesh never come to know Him; for those with whom, amid whatever ignorance of Himself, His Spirit pleads, among the Heathen or Jews or Mohammedans or Heretics, that they, obeying this inward grace from Him Whom they know not, may live.

And yet, it has also its nearer objects; those who are dear to us individually, but are lapsed into sin; those around us, near our homes; those in this great wilderness of souls, in which we are now gathered; those three millions, among whom, in so many faces, the world, vanity, sin, levity, sensuality, leave such distressing traces, and scarce any gladden one, except the yet innocent gaiety of children. How can we endure to be ever so short a time in the midst of them, and not be, as the Psalmist was, all “prayer”<sup>1</sup> for them? How many of them may die tonight! How many may be dying at this moment, and Satan may be disputing their souls with God! Let us at least now say, “Miserere, Domine,” and repeat to-night our “Miserere, Domine,” “Lord have mercy, Lord Jesu, mercy.” How many sins will there be to-night! Once more, “Lord Jesu, mercy, save this dishonour to Thy Name, this waste of souls.”

Yet we are, some of us, seldom here. Alas, and is not the same sad history repeated in those other great spiritual deserts, instinct and thronged with human life, our mines or manufactories? Wherever those are gathered together, who minister to our material prosperity or our comforts, *there* full often the bodily life is wasted, oftener still the soul. Our cheapened luxuries are the price of blood. They are not luxuries, they are

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<sup>1</sup> Ps. cix. 4.

men's souls which are for sale. Then there are those who belong to the body of the Church, and not to her soul, or those who belong neither to her soul or body; those who, it may be, are being tempted to their first sin and are becoming, in their childhood, estranged from God, or those who have been hardened in sin yet still hopeful perhaps in this, that the light of God's grace has not yet markedly visited them, and been, face to face, rejected. There is such variety, for whom we may pray, that, if one thought but of the interests of Jesus and the bonds of our common humanity, and what we owe Him, and the greatness of the privilege of being co-operators with God and of joining our intercessions with the ever-living Intercession of our Great High Priest, it would seem as if we could never flag. Alas for our misery! To whom of us does not our Lord seem to say anew, "Could ye not watch with Me one hour?"

But we know that perseverance in any good is the chiefest of God's gifts. We are made up of failures. The freshness, with which we first begin, fades. We seem to have a great tide of grace to set us afloat: and then perhaps the tide seems even to set against us, or we are in a dead calm. Piety becomes monotonous. We see very few of the fruits of our prayers; for they are chiefly for those, whom we do not know and shall never know in the flesh. We are creatures of sight and sense; the whole domain of prayer is faith. And so perhaps we flag and are discouraged; and we continue, rather because it is a duty which we have undertaken, and which we dare not abandon, than because we have much heart to it, or much hope about it.

I do not mean, of course, to set forth this as the state of mind of members of this Company generally, or indeed of any one of it. I know that very many in it pray very zealously; and that God has heard and hears them. We have had marvellous instances of the miraculous power of united prayer, besides all those which the Judgement-Day alone will reveal. He Who willed to hear the prayer, suggested it, and heard the Spirit's "unutterable groanings,"<sup>2</sup> and it came to Him blended with and enmightened by the Intercession of Jesus. I am speaking of temptations incidental to any persevering effort to pray, not of yielding to those temptations or of failure.

But because perseverance is so difficult, even when supported by the grace of God, thence is the value of new beginnings, such as this retreat is intended to be. For new beginnings are the life of perseverance, though they seem at first sight contradictory to it, or to presuppose its absence or suspension.

God, by nature alike and by grace, makes new beginnings the whole history of our being. We shall only know at the Judgement-Day the value of those new beginnings, which God gives us daily by the very disposition of day and night and the necessity of sleep. We can have no thought what we should lose, if we could dispense with sleep and prolong day into day, by the loss of new beginnings.

"New every morning is the love  
Our wakening and uprising prove;"  
"New blessings, each succeeding day,  
Hover around us while we pray;  
New perils past, new sins forgiven,  
New thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven."

What a world of life and strength there is in that fresh self-oblation every

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<sup>2</sup> Rom. viii. 36.

morning! What a mercy to have had yesterday past, with its wearinesses and its failures and its burdens, to have had its venial sins washed out by the Lord's prayer, and to begin anew, with self-devotion to Jesus. What a life there is, if we be not in the reach of or do not venture upon actual Communion, in that first spiritual Communion, when God the Holy Ghost comes into our souls, like the air which we breathe, yet the Very and Eternal God. Every three years, we have a thousand of such new beginnings. Then, still in their yearly dance, the seasons in their annual round of increase and decay: the years, in their ever-increasing rapidity of whirling flight: the annual commemoration of God's individual mercies and judgements, the days of our birth or of our re-birth in our Baptism or those which are marked by the loss of friends,—what is the one low chant of them all but, "Time is ebbing: time is ebbing; when it has reached its last ebb, 'no man can work';"<sup>3</sup> no grace can be gained, no work can be done, through grace, to God: no fresh capacity of the love of God can, through His grace, be won; no growth will be possible. 'As the tree falleth, so it must lie.'<sup>4</sup> Begin anew." Advent, Lent, Easter-tide preach the same, in earnest expectation of our Judge, or meditation on His Passion, or joy in His Risen life, or ascent with Him, or awaiting the descent of the Holy Ghost. Each Advent, Lent, Easter, Ascension, Whitsuntide, preach to us those same solemn words, "Begin anew;" and, if we have not so begun, we feel that that Lent or Eastertide has been wasted to us. It is a jewel lost; something for eternity dropped out of our lives; lost for eternity! O what easy words to say; what terrible realities! Lost, dropped, sunk in the boiling, tumultuous ocean, over which we are passing to eternity; not a trace of them; gone for ever!

And as of our lives as a whole, so of each employment in them. Nay, they are those inward lives, which we have by God's grace to renew, to which we have chiefly to look. The bodies of our lives, the outward or inward works, remain in their great outlines, the same. The soul of each act, how zealously it is done, with what dependence upon God; how purely it is done to Him, with how much love, how much self-forgetfulness, with what perseverance amid outward weariness, or, if the act be inward, amid spiritual dryness; what inventiveness we use to prevent weariness or disgust or dull mechanical ways coming over us, how much we ask continually His present help,—on these things the life of our acts, their value for eternity, their influence on our eternal Being, our contribution to our Dear Lord's work on earth, our "Well-done, good and faithful servant," depend.

That to which we pledged ourselves, when we were enrolled as members of this Company, is one of those spiritual acts, which have much influence over our own lives. In itself, it had nothing great in it. The conception was great; but *that* was the Foundress', not our's. That perpetual adoration, that unbroken succession of intercessions, united with our Blessed Lord's Intercession, so that night should make no break in it, is a magnificent thought; relay after relay, year after year, and at every second in each year, besieging God to pour out more powerful converting graces upon sinners,—it is like those Choirs before the Throne, with which we unite ourselves, where they rest not, day nor night, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy! But the parts in this great work, which most of us have to bear in it, are small. The night-watches fall upon the few, the most devoted. For most of us, it is but for us the Priests, to present the prayers of the whole Congregation in union with the

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<sup>3</sup> St. John ix. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Eccl. xi. 3.

Adorable Sacrifice of the Lord: it is but for us. Priests and laity, to fill up the continued Miserere, “Lord, have mercy upon the souls which Thou hast made, and hast redeemed with Thy Precious Blood,” with scarce any difficulty except that of perseverance in maintaining unbroken that link in the chain of perpetual prayer, which we have undertaken. Still, simple though it be, what does it imply? That souls, which God created, perfect in beauty, for Himself and His endless love, are in danger of forfeiting the end for which they were created and of losing the sight of God and all share in God, for ever; that an active warfare is momentarily going on between Satan,—with his marvellous talent and ever-increasing experience during these 6000 years, with all the evil knowledge which he gains from the terrible history of his slaves, the damned souls,—and each human soul; that, when souls have forfeited the grace of God or cease to ask or wish for it, God gives on the prayers of others that first re-awakening grace, which should dispose the soul to grace and to salvation. We cannot, most of us, do great things visibly in this world. Nay, what those few do, whom God highly endows with spiritual gifts, seems as nothing. Every thing seems wasted. A deluge of evil seems to overspread the world. Who, in this vast wilderness of souls, seems ever to think of Jesus, or to win others to think of Jesus? Poor Jesus! He seems to wander through the world, as when He was in the flesh, and not to find where to lay His Head! Where are the hearts, which respond to His love? “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!” Of material interests, of luxury, of pride, of pomp, of degradation, there is alas! no end. Every where we see bars and bolts to keep out Jesus; but where is there a home for Him? where are the breasts, on which He may rest? where are they who mourn for sin, and for the loss of souls, and for the dishonour done to Jesus and His Love? Where are they who zealously seek for His lost sheep in the wilderness?

And so by that act, whereby we enrolled ourselves as, “Companions of the love of Jesus,” we pledged ourselves to be on the side of Jesus; we avowed our conviction, that, whether Priests or only having the “royal priesthood”<sup>5</sup> of all members of Christ, we had something more to do in this world, than to pass through it, and he just saved ourselves somehow through the mercy of Jesus. We avowed that we knew of the deadly strife for souls, which was going on, how terrible the loss of a soul must be, how imminent the peril, and that we ourselves at least could do something for our King, Who reigns in heaven, yet Who seems an outcast in the world which He came to save. We pledged ourselves to do that “something” every day; to part every day with something of our own, our time; to let no day pass in which we would not use our appointed prayers to Jesus, for His redeemed but forgetful souls.

Simple as we are, we might have done much by this time. For God loves to hear prayer; He longs to be overcome by it. A simple form of prayer for others, is to pray, that God would, for our prayer and for the love of Jesus, stop one sin that day or that night. Be that prayer earnest, for the glory of God, it is one very likely to be heard. If said perseveringly, who knows but that, in ten years, God may not have employed us to stop nearly four thousand sins? We leave to Him, what sins and in whom. But, as every sin is the parent of other sins, and as every sin resisted may be the turning-point of a man’s life, who can say, that there may not have been as many souls saved, as there were sins checked? Again, if we have prayed daily for those nearest to His grace, who shall say that

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<sup>5</sup> 1 St. Pet. ii. 9.

our prayer, if earnest and effective, might not have obtained that last grace for some soul, which should gain him to God? Of course, such power given by God to our prayers would imply great earnestness, and zeal, and God-given power of love on our side. I am not speaking any thing to lift up ourselves, as if God is likely to do great things for us, but of what might have been or what might be, if we gain from Him such devoted love.

The object of this retreat will be, by God's grace, to kindle in us fresh devotion for the souls for whom Christ died, fresh zeal for His glory, fresh anxiety for their salvation, by dwelling on God's love for souls, on the horrible dishonour of sin, on the absolute duty and necessity of using intercessory prayer, as an integral part of Christianity itself.

But now, at the beginning, let us look back, each by himself, to his short-comings since he has taken this office on himself; what have been his hindrances; whether over-occupation, or sloth, or a mechanical way of doing most things, or the lack of stirring himself up, or self-pleasing, or self-confidence, or thinking that he had made progress, when he was really at the very beginning, or omission of meditation on eternal truths, or a way of taking all things too easily; or lack of cherishing and fanning his own love for Jesus; or a dull despondency and a sort of fatalism, as if things always had been bad and always would be; or too much of self, even in self-depreciation, as if God heard our prayers for our own sakes after all, and not for the merits of Jesus; or the presence of that sceptical atmosphere around him, which hangs like a damp fog around us, as if God, Who said, "Ask, and ye shall receive," would fail our prayers, if we do not fail-Him; or that dull mist, rising out of all the interests of this passing world which distract us so much, hiding from our eyes that unseen world which is yet so near us, and in which we are so much concerned; or that weariness of the world's sickening ways, stifling the love of souls in us, of which our Lord warned us, "because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold."<sup>6</sup> Let us look, to-night, each into our own hearts, and, imploring the light of God's Holy Spirit, look, whence our own short-comings and failures have come, and at Holy Communion tomorrow, offer ourselves to Him, in union with that Precious Blood which He shed for us sinners, to be more zealous in prayer for those, for whom with us He died, to be more jealous for His Glory and His interests, remembering for our own comfort too, the words of God, "he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> St. Matt. xxiv. 12.

<sup>7</sup> St. James, end.