

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

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ADDRESS III.

God's Love for each soul in the Incarnation.

“WHAT is the value of a soul?” We might answer by another question, “What was the Price of a soul?” “The Blood of God!” For what God did for all, He did for each, as St. Paul says, “He loved me and gave Himself for me.” Nay, our Blessed Lord has been thought to have said, that He would be crucified again, if so He could save one single soul more. It is thought that God would have become incarnate, even if Adam had not fallen. This too would be part of His infinite love for our human souls, that He would have been willing to take our manhood into Himself, even if there had been no ground for it, except that love, whereby He would unite us as closely as He could to Himself. God the Word would have united, it has been thought, our human nature to His Divine, even if He had had no occasion to pay the penalty of our sins, to suffer and to die for us. He would have willed, it is thought, to have chosen us, the least and lowest of His rational creation, to unite in us His creation with Himself. His creation was, so to speak, outside of Himself. He had endowed Angels and man with free-will. Angels too He must have made in a likeness of Himself; yea, in a nearer likeness to Himself than man, because they are purely spirits. He had bound them to Him, if their free-will would be bound, by that created grace, with which He invested them. He had clothed both angels and man with His grace. Yet His creation stood in a manner over-against Himself, a beautiful kingdom, of which He was the supreme King; but still there was no link, no bond of union, between the creature and God, except the profuseness of the out-pourings of His love, and their God-enabled allegiance, returning love for love; free created love, reflecting, penetrated with, gushing back to meet that Infinite tide of love.

But this was not enough, it never had been enough, for the boundless love and condescension of our God. In all eternity, when God had not made time, when there was no creature out of God, when He had not gone forth out of Himself, finding the full adequate object of His love within Himself, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, He willed to create us, and in us, by becoming one of us, to unite in one the creature with the Creator. Yet then too He foresaw Adam's wasting of His grace, wherewith He would hold him to Himself. Then too He knew, that the fascination of free-will would be too mighty for the attractiveness of His grace, and that Adam would fall, and our race would be lost. Even then, although the Divine Mind can behold as separate, what would never in act be separate, He willed, in that eternity, to take our human nature, in us fallen and sinful, in Him sinless, that in it He might suffer, be blasphemed, mocked, scourged, crucified, spat upon; that He might bear the weight of our sins, and give up His soul to death. Would we know the value of a soul, it is not only in the Garden of Gethsemane or in those dread indignities before Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod, or on that awful road to Calvary, or in the “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” that we must learn it. The beloved disciple said of the things which Jesus did, “I suppose that the whole world could not

contain the books which should be written.”¹ For although the outside acts could be written, yet the acts, as a whole, the soul of the acts, that which made the acts what they were, could not be written adequately. For every act was instinct with His Divinity; all had a Divine excellence which is beyond the grasp of men or angels, which not this world only, but eternity itself could never fully comprehend. Especially, then, must this be true of that, which was the centre of all His acts, that for which, since we are sinners, He came into the world, to do His Father’s will, by suffering for us. “God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.”² The measure, then, of the value of the soul, is the love of the All-Holy Trinity, Father Son and Holy Ghost, Who cooperated in our redemption and in saving us. “What few simple words to say this in! They are bald naked words. I have stated the bare fact in the barest words! The fact itself embraces eternity, is coextensive with the Being of God. The love of the human soul was ever, is, ever will be, a passionless, changeless, effluence of the Being of God, Who “is Love.” This we know, because God is God, “in Whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning,” Who Is what He Is, in oneness of Being, unchanging in Himself while changing in act. He loved us transcendently, infinitely, when He brought into act that mysterious order of our Redemption. *Then*, in all eternity, that Infinite transcendent love, which when, or long after He had created time, He willed to shew, was part of His Being. One might boldly say, in reverence, since He has so loved the soul of man, that God would not have been the same God, if He had not loved it. His love of us is no accident of His being, so to speak; it is not a function of His Being, which might have been shewn to other beings, far worthier than we, and *not* to us. We know that that love *is* shewn to those, to the magnificence of whose powers the greatest of our created powers is as nothing. It may be, that He will create countless other rational beings, better than us: it would be difficult to conceive that He should create any rational beings lower than us: for then His infinite love would not have stooped as low as it could, in taking our flesh. But His love to the soul of man exhibits to us a distinct side or aspect of His love; so that His love for us, free though it is, is an essential part of His Being. It is free, because perfect freedom is inseparable from the Being of God; but freely to love us, before we were, and notwithstanding what we became, was part of the Eternal Being of God. Such was His love of the human soul, which He willed to make, that He willed in all eternity to create that human Soul, with which was to be for ever united the Godhead of the Son. Into this Union, closer than any union except that perfect Unity of the Trinity Itself, not for any foreseen merits even of His absolute essential sinlessness, but out of the Infinite forecoming love of God, was to be admitted that Human Nature of Jesus, which, though absolutely perfect, had no separate existence from, was never apart from, had no separate Personality from, God. To me more overwhelming, though not so touching, not so wounding, is the thought of the condescension, that God should will to have our Human Nature, however Deified, for ever united with His Godhead, than even those dread Sufferings of the Cross. They were indeed an unutterable extension of His condescension, that God not only took our nature, but that God was—not blasphemed only face to face, (that alas! He is every where as God,) but that God was—spat upon, God was mocked, God was buffeted, God was crucified, God died! Those Sufferings were an intense

¹ St. John xxi. 25.

² Ib. iii. 16.

aggravation of His humiliation. Only, they were not so lasting. For they, although in conception they would fill eternity, infinity, still were limited in extent to those awful hours. His whole Sufferings were restrained to those thirty-three years and the nine months, during which He “abhorred not the Virgin’s womb;” for then too His own words must have been fulfilled, “I have a Baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened, until it be accomplished!”³ *Then* too (although His Will was immoveably conformed to the Will of God,) He must have burned with the longing to “be about His Father’s business.”⁴ *Then* too, since His soul was united with His Godhead, He must have had the prevision of all those sufferings of mind and body, which He was to endure for love of us, and (worse still) of our ingratitude and horrible waste of them, for whose love He endured them. But these, although infinite in degree and in value, were bounded in time. His existence upon earth as Man, His work in meriting our salvation, was to be compressed within those thirty-four years. The condescension of that Union, whereby His Divine and Human Natures are never to be divided, is for Eternity. In all Eternity we shall, in the Light of the Godhead, see the especial lustre of those glorious Suns, the sacred Five, the Blessed Wounds, which for us He received. In all Eternity, it will be a special glory to us, that it is our Nature, which for ever exists enGodded, the own Body and Soul of God.

And that neither sex might feel itself neglected, whose is that throne, close to the Throne of the God-Man Christ Jesus? who is she, on whom those Divine eyes, radiant with His Godhead, which survey all things in heaven and on earth, must rest with an especial love, with the love of a son to His mother? What must the love and humility of that highest being of the heavenly Hierarchy, whether it be St. Michael or any of the Seraphim, belonging to those ranks which never fell, that he adores the condescension of God, not only in taking into Himself our nature, but in placing nearest to Himself, the God-Man, His purely human Mother, above himself, above every possible creature! For, grand and magnificent and highly-endowed as may be any the highest creature which God could create, none could have the nearness of her, the Mother of God! Where are we? Are we standing on earth? Are we in heaven, where He our Head is, Who has taken a body like our’s, a Soul like our own souls, a Soul created and infused into His Human Body, like our’s; a Soul, endowed indeed with all but Divine attributes, and ever, from it’s first creation, admitted to the beatific Vision, and seeing and knowing all things through the knowledge of God the Son, the Word and Wisdom of the Father, Who took it. Yet still a Soul, Which could, in the Flesh, sorrow like our’s, suffer—like our’s, should I say?—nay which could by His upholding Deity suffer in Itself Sufferings, unimaginable by us, in It’s Body; Sufferings, which all the suffering, from righteous Abel to those whom Anti-Christ shall torment, could not, if all were concentrated in one, ever reach?

We may see something of the greatness of this love of God, in men’s difficulty to receive or believe it. It were easier almost, but that God has placed the faith in our heart, to believe any thing, rather than the intensity of the condescension of the love of our God. We could not believe it, but that God gave and supported our belief! We may be sure that our faith is of God, because we have it; for none save God could give it us. People could believe anything, rather than that God, such as we believe and know Him to be, could take to Himself our human soul and body in the Virgin’s womb. It were no tax on faith,

³ St. Luke xii. 50.

⁴ St. Luke ii. 49.

to imagine, like various heretics of old, that God appeared in the unsubstantial likeness of the human form; or that He intimately conjoined to Himself the Man Christ Jesus; or that He descended upon Him in His Baptism; or that (shocking as were the blasphemy which it involved) He dwelt in our Lord's Human Body, in place of His Soul; or that He so absorbed His Humanity into Himself that It had no separate existence. Our mind, unless enlightened to know God, can imagine any thing, bear any thing, except the Truth. It were nothing to imagine, like the poor Heathen, that "the gods had come down in the likeness of men." Every shadow of the truth has some attractiveness, because it is its shadow. The truth alone has something, marvellously attractive indeed, yet also repelling to those who gaze on it with mere human eyes, because it is such a transcendent paradox of love. We could bear any thing almost, of our mere human minds, rather than the belief which God has revealed, that He, existing Unchangeable in His immutability, has yet conjoined with Himself a Soul, such as the very soul, with which we hear and think and speak of it, a Body like our's in form, and to which our incorruptible body shall be like; that He, remaining what He was, God, is yet what He was not, Man! Any thing rather than the overwhelming truth! To believe that one, in whose human being God especially was, died for us, would have no such difficulty of mystery. But to believe that Man is personally united with God, that He has no human, has nothing but a Divine Personality, that He lives, is adored by every creature in Heaven, by one act of worship with the Godhead, wherewith He is united,—this is an extent of humiliation, which we cannot imagine, but must adore.

Yet this is not all. Every thing, which God would ever do, must have been unchangeably present to the Divine Mind. To think of the Incarnation, as only a remedy for Adam's fall, is to imagine changeableness in God. There can be no afterthought in God. God must have eternally known and provided for it. The All-Holy Soul of Jesus must ever have been the Object of his choice. It must have been the centre of His Creation, the Primal conception of His Mind, when He willed to put in act what He ever had in mind. The central idea of His Mind, that, wherein things in heaven and things in earth were to be united, was a Human Soul. He conceived Angels and Archangels, Cherubim and Seraphim with their vast knowledge and intellectual capacities and their almost boundless fervour of adoring love. But He took not on Him the Nature of Angels. The Perfection of creation, all but Infinitely above them, save that nothing created can be infinite, was the Human Soul of Jesus, such as the Holy Trinity conceived It and loved It in Their unchangeable Eternity.

Yet neither was this all. God willed not that the Soul of Jesus should be invested with a Body, created anew, *like* our body. He willed that that Body should be formed of our very Flesh. In all Eternity, it was part of His counsel, in uniting Himself to man, not to "abhor the Virgin's womb." The Church, in choosing the word "abhor," expressed her thought of the depth of this condescension. The Soul of Jesus lay in the Eternal Mind of God, yet a Son to be united in the Virgin's womb with an All-perfect Body, which was also the object of the Eternal satisfaction of God;—a Body, the Perfection of Beauty, yet framed to suffer, beyond the capacity of all other suffering. So close did He will His oneness of nature with our's to be, that He would not choose to take that Soul and Body, except, as far as possible, as our's are derived, the Body from the substance of His Virgin-Mother, the Soul contemporaneously created by God.

Nor is this again all. Our nature was fallen. We ourselves aggravate to ourselves

the almost incredibility of that Infinite love of God, by the ways through which we degrade our nature. He took “the likeness of our sinful flesh;”⁵ i. e. He took that our very Flesh, like in every thing except sinfulness. Yet in us how loathsome, how manifoldly degraded is that flesh, which He vouchsafed to take! He took, He loved unspeakably that nature, which we lay low, lower than the beasts which perish. He took it, not to redeem it only, but so unspeakably to exalt it. He gave it in His own Person attributes belonging to *His* Humanity only. He arrayed His Soul, from the first moment of its existence, with His own unspeakable glory: He bestowed upon It from that moment the Beatific Vision of God: He framed It, so that, while capable of the extremity of suffering, It should also be capable of the utmost possible fulness of grace: He infused into It all knowledge, by the union with His Godhead. But He also framed It, so that It should be capable of meriting, meriting for Itself, meriting for us, meriting that exaltation which It should have “above every name which is named, in this world and in that to come:” meriting that restoration from the grave without corruption, and the re-union of the Body and Soul in that Godhead, Which was ever present with both; meriting, by His life-long perfect Obedience and by every act of His unceasing Will to do His Father’s Will; meriting, above all, by His Death. What a glory to our souls, what a love for them, that they should be of the same substance, the like creation to that Soul which is so hyper-exalted: that that Soul, in its creation, should be the archetype of our’s, that that Soul in Its created graces, should be the pattern for our’s!

Yes, this is a separate manifestation of the love of God for the soul, that He would conform our souls to His Soul, our bodies hereafter to His glorious Body. He would, by His merits and by His inworking, make us capable of working and of meriting. He creates our souls pure and undefiled, but He makes them capable of increase of grace here and of glory hereafter. He has set no bound to the grace and glory which they may attain; for He has merited that they should attain it, He gives grace that they may attain it. “Not I,”⁶ says the Apostle, “but the grace of God which is in me.”

O how God must have loved the soul, which He has so formed and re-formed, which we so degrade, which He so longs to exalt, for each of which souls He has made its own place in the Heavenly Choir to which in His eternal love He willed it to belong, in His own image and likeness, conformed to His Son! How can we love enough the souls, which, with our’s, God so loved!

⁵ Rom. viii. 3.

⁶ I Cor. xv. 10.