

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 IV.

The Love of God and Jesus for single souls as seen in His sufferings.

WHAT, again, we may ask, is the value of a soul? the souls of those we pray for, or our own? The price paid for them is the Blood of God; the sufferings of Him Who is, in his own Nature, impassible, yet Who still, since His Person was Divine, was God,—the sufferings of God. One could repeat them, as the Holy Gospels tell them, or as what those sacred words involve, without distinctly saying them; but to tell of them as proofs of His Love, what soul, unless especially enlightened by His Spirit, can lift the veil, and enter ever so little into the Ocean of love in that agonising Heart, which burned to vindicate in itself the awful righteousness of God, to meet its dread requirements, and to win back to His love and allegiance our bewildered passion-tossed world?

It would, as St. John says, “fill the world with books to write the things which He did;”¹ and no action of His was without suffering. Let us think then of some aggravations of them, which most of us perhaps do not commonly think of, and thence gather some thoughts of His love for single souls and for our own.

1st then, to think of His prevision of them, His continual sight of them. We can hardly ever know certainly, that any suffering either of mind or body will come upon us. We cannot imagine beforehand, what they would be. We can commit them to God’s Hands, and look away from them, and are distracted from the anticipation of them by life’s manifold cares and duties. How little do we think of that one suffering, which alone is absolutely inevitable, our Death! If once the dread of it does take possession of any soul, even though intermitting, as it must be, how does it change life! what a piercing, purifying, yet often bewildering, suffering, continually wakes up anew in the soul, transpiercing it! And yet then too it comes only at intervals, and is broken by sleep, or becomes a dull anxiety, or is mitigated by prayer: else reason would give way. And then too it is either a shrinking from something unknown, or, as far as it is dread of “judgement to come,”² it does not know the awfulness of that judgement; and the suffering is softened by some hopefulness of the unknown, unfelt mercy of God.

But to Jesus, every detail of suffering of mind or body, every source of agony, to the withdrawing of His Father’s Face and of the consolations of His Divinity, the whole of His sufferings and every separate pang or throb, or piercing, heart-crushing, oppressive, stifling agony, were unchangeably present. He knew them in their exact “number and weight and measure.” The sight of them never left Him. He ever felt them. Whether He was doing His deeds of love, or was followed by the admiring multitudes, or was teaching those who, for the time, hung upon His lips, and said “never man spake as this Man,”³ the issue of it all was ever entirely before His Eyes. He knew that those same

¹ John xxi. 25.

² Acts xxiv. 25.

³ St. John vii. 46.

multitudes would be stirred up to cry, “Crucify Him, crucify Him.”⁴ That one occasion, when He “looked up to heaven and sighed,”⁵ when about to perform a miracle, revealed one side of His inner self, sorrow for the hardness of heart, which would not be converted and live. We count our chequered years by something, which was predominant in them, something which gave them their colouring. Some change came over our lives, and left us other than we were. But each year, and each day and hour in each year, has been made up of countless variations of thoughts and feelings, chasing one another, like clouds hurrying before the wind; and even those clouds which hang the heaviest were ever stirring, and were mitigated by the fact that they were passing. Even if they were to be succeeded by the like, it was something that so much of them was passed through. It is a mercy to us, that “nothing continueth at one stay.” There is no absolute monotony of suffering. We cannot sustain long any fixed thought, any more than we can any one motionless posture of the body. We cannot conceive it. But then we have no thought, whereby to imagine what those His sufferings, mental and bodily, were. But being so intensely beyond all human thought, this we know, that, for love of us, Jesus beheld them as though they already were, with that unbroken fixed gaze of those some 300,000 hours of His earthly existence. Never did they fade from His sight; never did His gaze falter. He ever longed that they should come; He ever willed that the Righteousness of God should be justified. He had to endure at once the unutterableness of those Sufferings and their delay. The Sufferings which He was not in act bearing, were ever present to His Soul. The Sufferings Were enhanced through delay; the joy in their accomplishment was put off.

2. But, at last, they came. Yet still there was that same concentration of suffering. He Alone could have borne all which He bore; and His might of bearing did but aggravate His Suffering. To *us*, all suffering comes, one by one. God so tempers it to us, that we rarely feel two bodily pains at once. We may feel them alternately; the feelings may come so quick upon each other, that we may think that we feel them together. But when some intenser pang comes, then it arrests our thoughts, and we know on reflection, that we have felt it alone. It is known how strong mental pain makes people insensible to any suffering of the body; or contrariwise, strong bodily pain is a distraction to the mind from its own suffering. The variation of suffering, though people complain of their manifold ills, is doubtless a relief. The human mind can bear anything, rather than one monotony of suffering. But this belonged to that Divine Sufferer, that He ever saw all which He saw, He ever felt all which He felt. His Soul, collected in itself and seeing all in the light of the Godhead, was undistracted in His Suffering. No pressure of one suffering drove out another. They came thick upon Him, one after the other; but He felt them before they came; they passed in act, but they passed not in effect.

3. But the Sufferings of the Soul came in no succession. All were upon Him at once, and unvaryingly. He came to bear our sins, and His Father’s displeasure at sin. All the sins of the whole world were upon Him at once; all which ever have been, all which there are at this moment, all which there will be to the end; the sins of those who will not be redeemed; the sins of those, who would sin against the light of His love; the sins of those, whom He came to save, whom He pursues with His love, yet who flee from it. All were upon Him at once; and He saw and felt the horribleness, the loathsomeness of each

⁴ St. Luke xxiii. 21.

⁵ St. Mark vii. 34.

and all, as we cannot imagine as to one sin. He saw each and all, not, as we do all we can see as a panorama, all around Him; but each by a direct vision, borne in upon His Soul, in all its individuality, and in all its distinct horrors, as God Alone can see them, and His God-united Soul. Those words, which in their wonderful individuality of love, “Who loved *me* and gave Himself for me,”⁶ so speak to our souls of His indivisible love for each one of His redeemed, even of our sinful selves, tell us also of the individuality of His Sufferings. He Who had each one of us in His Heart, had also the sins and ingratitude of each to Him and to His Father ever before His eyes. O that multitudinous ingratitude of ours. Sin and ingratitude! sin and ingratitude! “He looked for some one to have pity upon Him and there was no one, neither found He any to comfort Him.”⁷ Every where, in their varied shapes, wherever He looked, sin and ingratitude! And O! our own. We can, by our own, form some estimate, what a world of sin there is in every human soul, (though we each doubtless feel that no one on earth has been so ungrateful as we ourselves) and these to be multiplied by the millions upon millions in each successive generation; and all on Him Alone!

And as He saw, so He felt them all. Not, as we do, by revolving things in our minds, not by any act of will, bringing them before Him. Each weighed upon Him with its own individual weight; each pressed upon Him with its own individual offensive-ness; each pierced Him with its own special aggravations. Every sight brought its own grief; yet the weight of the whole did not interfere with the piercingness of each. He felt all together and severally at once.

It makes one dizzy, and yet it is the simplest truth. The world seems to reel round one, as one thinks of it. It is like setting oneself to calculate eternity. How many sins are there being enacted at this moment in this one city; and this which is called a Christian city! Neither night nor day gives any respite to sin. Is there day or night, in which there are not many more millions of sins, than there are millions of people? Each day or night has sins of its own, besides all which they have in common. The sun never sets on sin. Every moment, in this round world of our’s, some are waking to a fresh day of sin. Eight hundred millions of human beings! how many living in direct enmity of God! How many grieving Him! Day by day, the same horrible history! It is the reversal of the Psalmist’s words as to the material creation, “Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.”⁸ Through our free choice, day unto day transmitteth sin, and night unto night, ungodliness. It is such a comfort to think of the little ones, who cannot knowingly offend God! And all this sin from these eight hundred millions of human beings, has been going on during these more than sixteen millions of hours, since our Lord died for us! And all rested on Him, with all sin’s terrible aggravations of wilfulness, ingratitude, contempt of God. Nor this only, but all the sins, which were committed before He died for sin, rested on Him. For all sin, which ever was forgiven to those who knew Him not or before He came, was forgiven for His merits alone. It rested on Him, as we saw, not in one confused undistinguishable mass, but to His Eye, which illumined by His Godhead, saw things, which had been or as yet were not, in one dreadful present, each bore upon His soul its own separate pang.

And to what a Soul! we cannot imagine It, any more than we can imagine God.

⁶ Gal. ii. 20.

⁷ Ps. lxxix. 20.

⁸ Ps. xix. 2.

But this was a separate aggravation of His suffering, His All-Holiness, His Love for His Father, His being so separate from sinners, and yet brought into such close contact with its leprous touch. There are some sins, which wound even us, which pierce us with a thrill of horror, which we loathe, as though to hear of them denied us, which make our flesh creep, as if some very loathsome creature left its slime upon us. Yet this is the very least part of sin's horrible nature. The especial malice of sin is, that it is against God. And God was His very own Father. But from our loathing at some sin, from the instantaneous piercing shock, which some sin gives us, even when we are not electrified by our love for the sinful being, we may, (I say not, estimate, but we may) have a faint shadowy notion of what it was to His All-purity. For the feeling belongs to us, as we belong to God, and His Image is on our souls. But each aspect of sin had its own separate suffering for His Soul. Its loathsomeness crept around His All-purity; its coarseness grated against His holy delicacy; its brutality crushed His tenderness; its fierceness glared upon His meekness; its blasphemy wounded His One-mindedness with God: its hatred breathed a withering scorching poisoned death-blast against His love. All, all was aggravated a million fold by His love. The blasphemous mocking or horrible hate of devils, as they crowded, in legions, round His Cross, and taunted Him doubtless with the impenitent robber, who would not be saved, and whose soul they were about to snatch from the side of His lifeless Body, as soon almost as His Spirit was gone to the Father, did not wound Him so, because they had shut themselves out for ever from His love. They are all hate, and are none of His. Their blasphemies were wounding, only as far as they were grounded on truth, that men for whom He died, *would* not be redeemed, *would* become such as they, *would*, as *they* did, hate Him everlastingly. "Why endure such agony," the devils might say, "for those who will not thank Thee, who will not believe in Thee, who will mock at Thee, who will hate Thee as *we* do for whom Thou didst not die, for whom Thou didst prefer that wretched form of clay to our grand pure ethereal being? Justly did we rebel against Thee for preferring their material form to our's! Now Thou hast it, what hast Thou gained by it? They would crucify Thee again, as far as they can; they will despise Thee, or will patronise Thee, but will not obey Thee. Thou a king! We will dispute Thy kingdom, we will rend Thy subjects from Thee; they shall again choose Barabbas, not Thee. Why suffer thus, when Thou canst not save those for whom Thou dost suffer?" *They* would have had no power to wound Him, but for us and for His love for us. They but echoed in their horrible malice what He knew too well. Yes! they were our sins which drove the thorns into His sacred Brow; our sins they were, which pierced like the piercing of a sword. Our sins, because He loved us, because He knew, if we should be saved at all, how we should waste the Price of His Blood, how we should grieve His love; how, perhaps, we should be on the very verge of Hell, if we did not fall over into the bottomless pit; how we should tarnish the crown, which He prepared for us, how we should lose, perhaps, some nearness to Himself, some capacity for His love, which He, in His eternal love, prepared for us, if we would accept it. And we would not have it! He stretched forth those Holy Arms so wide upon the Cross, to embrace the whole world, and in it, each of us, one by one, in His love, and we would not! He "stretched forth His Hands,"⁹ as of old, "to a disobedient and gainsaying people." But we have seen Him, and have neglected Him or done despite to Him.

And yet He loved us! What must have been His love to those who remained,

⁹ Rom. x. 22.

when, for their sake, He endured all this for those who would reject it, and endured it though we should waste it. Oh love, love, love! love of our God, love of our Jesus! must thou for ever be wasted? must thou ever be wandering up and down our earth, homeless and a stranger, and so few to take thee in, and those grudgingly, and after having perhaps long shut thee out? shall we not say, “O Love, Love Incarnate, Love Infinite, too late have I loved Thee! would, for love of Thy love, I had ever loved Thee! would I could win some other souls to love Thee! Do Thou Thyself give might to our prayers, that we may win some to love Thee, some to be for ever blessed in Thy love. Grant us more who shall pray, that Thy love be spread abroad. ‘O that Thou wouldest rend the heavens asunder and come down,’¹⁰ and melt the mountains of our rocky hearts; that they may be molten into the fire of Thy love, and the smoke arise to Thee, as the incense of prayer, that the smoke of the torments of Thy lost ones may not ascend so terribly!”

¹⁰ Is. lxiv. 1.