

Plain Sermons by Contributors to 'Tracts for the Times'
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SERMON LXXXV.
CONDITIONS OF ACCEPTABLE PRAYER.

ST. JOHN xvi. 23.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the FATHER in My Name, HE will give it you."

MOST persons have, at some time or other, felt painfully how far this great promise has been from being fulfilled to them, in their prayers either by themselves or with the Church. To take one prayer only, we pray daily for the gathering in of the heathen into the one fold, and how few are brought in; that those already gathered into the Church may "hold the faith," yet how many depart from it; "in unity of spirit," and how are we divided; "in the bond of peace," and how are we rent asunder and contending one against another, Church against Church; those who have forsaken the Church, saying, "down with her;" and ourselves, within, speaking one against the other, accusing one another; "in righteousness of life," and yet how do all sorts of sins, and open impurity and ungodliness, stare us in the face everywhere, and seem to have the mastery among us, and covetousness seems to be let loose, like a demon, over our land, and almost to possess us, ruling us, knowing or unknowing, with a rod of iron, corrupting our dealings with each other, and making men hardhearted to the poor, and stinting the alms of those who do give; besides all the secret sins which witness against us before the All-seeing GOD. Then, as to ourselves, we pray against our infirmities, and find ourselves still weighed down by them; against "the sin which doth so easily beset us," and find ourselves still overtaken; to be more heavenly, and find ourselves on earth; against bad thoughts, and are still haunted by them; against distractions in prayer itself, and yet wander from our FATHER'S presence to the nothingnesses of this life. Again, our LORD has promised to guide us into His truth, yet persons pray on this side and that, in the Church and out of it, and since they are opposed to each other, some must remain in error.

How is it then? Our LORD has said, "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Since then "the LORD'S promise standeth sure," have we no belief, that we receive not? Do we not "abide in HIM, or His words abide in us," that His word is not fulfilled; "if ye abide in ME and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you?" Do we not "ask," that we "receive" not? Are we not "seeking," that we "find" not? Not "knocking," that it is not "opened" to us? Are we not "asking in His Name," that the 'FATHER giveth "not to us? And if it be so now, what are our hopes for the future, or have we any?

Alas, of very many it is too certain that they never pray, make not even the show of prayer; of many, who seem to pray, asking with their lips, what in their hearts they care not for, or would dread to have; asking that GOD'S "will be done" but following only their own; to be "delivered from evil," yet evil is in all they love and live in. Of the prayers, which come forth from the lips, one must fear, that if we knew "the secrets of men's hearts," as GOD ALMIGHTY knoweth them, we should find that of many thousands, the real prayers are very few. So that we can no longer be surprised that prayer is so little heard, when there is reason to fear that there is so little of prayer.

But for ourselves, who are in earnest praying, or seeking to pray, what are the conditions

implied by our LORD'S promise? so may we see more distinctly, whether we are in the way to obtain it, and if not hitherto in the way, or sorely grieving that our prayers have hitherto so manifoldly failed, how we may attain to it. HE says, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My Name," as elsewhere, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing;" and again, "If ye abide in ME, and My words abide in you;" and again, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing that ye shall have them;" and again, "That men ought always to pray and not to faint." Whence it appears that the conditions of prayer which shall be heard are:—1. A right faith; "in My Name." 2. A right life; "if My words abide in you." 3. That we be members of His body; "If ye abide in Me." 4. A confidence as to the very subject of our prayer; "Believing that ye shall have them." 5. Perseverance.

And these points mutually bear, the one upon the other, in a way and degree which we should not at first think. Thus, whence comes want of perseverance, but from want of humility, in that we think we have a claim to receive at once what we ask for, or from want of faith, not realizing the value of what we hope for? Whereas, did we feel our own meanness by nature,—”man, which is a worm,” our exceeding deformity and foulness by our own sins, deserving wrath only, or the greatness of what we hope for, what prayer were earnest, fervent, lowly, persevering enough, for beings such as we are to ask for things so unutterably great? that men should for ever behold, be likened to, possess, God!

Again, we, in the Church, are not mostly tempted to actual unbelief or misbelief in the Object of our faith, being happily fenced round by the Creeds, which we repeat in our devotions; still they cannot have worthy thoughts of HIM, whose life is unworthy of HIM; they cannot have reverent thoughts of HIM, whose habit of mind is irreverent; they cannot think worthily of the HOLY GHOST, who continually go against His gracious suggestions, or are by wilfulness grieving HIM away; not of GOD the SON, who think little or carelessly of those sins for which HE died. They cannot pray rightly in His Name, or believe in His Divine intercession for us, whom sin hinders from knowing their own nothingness, who approach to God easily and lightly, as though they might ask in their own name. Our true thoughts of GOD are GOD'S thoughts in us; as we are then, such must our thoughts of HIM be; of the wicked, GOD saith, "thou thoughtest that I was such an one as thyself;" the churl cannot think of GOD as bountiful; the impure of HIM as pure; the unmerciful of HIM as merciful; the unholy of HIM as holy; they only can believe in HIM as HE is, who shall, hereafter "see HIM as HE is?" They whom HE has purified, and who are now "purifying themselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in His fear."

We must not then take these conditions of acceptable prayer separately, but together; since then only will they, severally also, be of the right sort in us, when they are found, in whatever degree, growing up in us together. Not then, as some have said, that their faith cannot be wrong, whose life is in the right, taking at once a carnal standard both of life and faith; or as others, many ways, that if the faith be right, if they hold the words of the Creed, (it may be without realizing them,) or if they profess to be justified through the all-sufficient merits of our REDEEMER, and in no way trust in themselves, the fruits of such profession must needs be a right life; but watching over each separately, examining each, praying that in each what is yet lacking may be supplied.

"In My Name." "Whatsoever ye shall ask the FATHER in My Name, HE will give it you," as again, HE saith, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My Name, that will I do, that the FATHER may be glorified in the SON "if ye shall ask any thing in My Name, I will do it;" shewing thereby that we must ask HIM as One GOD with the FATHER, of equal Power and Majesty with the FATHER, so that whatsoever is given to our prayers, is given to us equally by the FATHER and the SON, as

being One.

It suffices not then, that we ask “in His Name,” if we believe not in HIM, as HE has revealed HIMSELF unto us: we ask not in His Name, “the Name which is above every name, whereat every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and earth, and under the earth;” if we ask in His Name, as other than HE is, “Very GOD of Very GOD,” not according to any “doctrines of men,” but as HE has declared HIMSELF, existing in the Co-Eternal and Co-Equal Trinity in Unity, and Unity in Trinity, in Whose Name we were, by Baptism, made members of the Ever-Blessed SON. And this we should seek to impress upon ourselves, by repeating our Creeds, and earnest meditation, that we approach HIM not only as the REDEEMER and High Priest, Who was not ashamed to “call us Brethren,” but as our LORD and our GOD, Who as GOD heareth the prayers, which as GOD, Who hath taken into HIMSELF our manhood, HE presenteth to the FATHER with Whom HE is One GOD. So only shall we be saved from irreverence, and pray really in His Great Name.

“In My Name;” not then in any way or degree in our own name, but in His; in the hallowed adorable Name of JESUS, of HIM Who “shall save His people from their sins;” not as deserving any thing of ourselves, but in HIM; not as being any thing in ourselves, but acquiring our only right of approaching HIM, in that we have been taken out of ourselves, our natural state of nothingness and decay, and have been grafted into HIM. Yea, and being in HIM, still in His Name, not as having any confidence in ourselves, our faith, our works, our feelings, GOD’S gifts to us or in us, our talents, station, wealth; nay, nor if GOD have wrought any thing by our hands, but rather fearing the more exceedingly, for every gift which GOD has bestowed upon us, lest it turn to our condemnation; confessing our poverty, the more HE has enriched us; our blindness, the more HE has enlightened us; our waywardness, the more HE has done to favour us; our emptiness, the more HE has bestowed upon us. For this it is which oftentimes makes our case so sad to us; “if I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin;” it is the many calls which we have had from HIM, but not obeyed as we ought; it is the abundant grace, which we have not used; it is the richness and fulness of His ordinances afforded to us, year by year, week by week, day after day, which we have so often wasted; it is that we have, too likely, ever stopped short of what His graciousness designed for us, never have used to the full the talents committed to us, which makes our failures and our sins such an intolerable burthen. Yet this sense of nothingness we find not only in such as we mostly are, but, and that much more—and therefore how much more should it be in us—in those eminent saints, whose prayers have been especially regarded by GOD. When Abraham prayed for Sodom and the cities of the plain, and obtained that all should be spared, if there were but ten righteous, when he was exalted to be an image of the All-prevailing “MEDIATOR between GOD and man,” he confessed himself to be but “dust and ashes;” when Job was bid to be a mediator and offer sacrifice, and pray for his three friends, it was when he had said, “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes;” when Daniel’s prayer was accepted for his people, and Gabriel was sent forth from the presence of GOD to declare to him the coming of our LORD, “to make reconciliation for sin and bring in everlasting righteousness,” it was when he had set his face to the LORD his GOD to seek by prayer, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes, was confessing his sin and the sin of his people, “to us belongeth confusion of face,” “not for our righteousnesses, but for Thy great mercies.” This sense of nothingness there must be in us, if we would be accepted, not working ourselves up to feel it, or deceiving ourselves, but confessing it the more, if we feel it not, since we have not, for our sins or our pride, obtained of GOD the grace to feel it, confessing it by an act of faith as what we know and believe of ourselves, though our hearts be

too hard and cold and stony to feel it, and praying HIM, Who brought water out of the stony rock, to moisten our stony hearts with the dew of His Life-giving SPIRIT that we may feel it. This is the very essence of all prayer; confession of need to HIM, Who Alone hath. The parched and gaping earth, the young raven's cry, the lion's roar, are set forth to us as so many images of our prayer; only they, unreasoning as they be, know what they need, and we, duller still, know not what to ask, and so have the more need to pass by ourselves and cast ourselves on HIM, and pray in His Name, Who has "all things in heaven and earth," to give us what HE knows to be good for us; to give us, above all, His SPIRIT, Who, when "we know not what we should pray for as we ought, maketh intercession for us with unutterable groanings," and that "according to the will of God."

In Heaven they have and praise; in Eden we had, and might have praised; in Heaven again, they who are brought thither safe, shall have of their own, have the "true riches," and "everlasting joy," and shall praise for ever; here, while we are pilgrims and strangers,—estranged the more from our home, in that we make this too much our home,—we must pray, as then only "possessing all things," when we know we "have nothing." What we have, we have not of our own, but lent us; nothing abides with us, as a token to us that here we shall not abide ourselves; what we seem most to have of our own is so, but by a continual renewal of what is decaying; our strength daily decays, and is exhausted, to be renewed by daily food and nightly sleep; our wealth and subsistence is daily spent and daily replenished; our memories are ever decaying and ever restored; our spirits live not on what we had, once for all, but are continually fed by the teaching of the same truths, the hearing of the same Word of GOD, the repeating of the same Creeds, the praying of the same prayers, and, if we are full grown and faithful, by the continual receiving of the same Bread of Life. We are, throughout life, by holding what we have, as not our own, learning to be fitted to have of our own, in the only way in which created being can have any good, in entire dependence upon HIM, Who created all, and Whose own all are, since in HIM and through HIM all have and had their being. As without HIM we could not be, so without HIM we could not use one function of our being, and neither have what we have, nor use what we seem to have, except to our own ruin, our strength, and the power to use it, and much more the grace not to abuse it; our thoughts, and the power to controul or direct our thoughts, are from HIM; without HIM we could not think one good thought, speak one good word, form one good wish, perform one good act; all grace whereby we do things gracious and grateful to HIM, is His; all power to use His grace is a second grace of His; that we fall not more short of His grace than any do, is His: all which is our own, is for the most part our short-comings, infirmities, negligences, ignorances, sins; at best, it is the not casting aside His grace in us, going along with it when moved, rising when called standing up when bid in That Name which gives strength to our palsied limbs, over which It was in Baptism first pronounced, and by virtue of which all other calls have their power. And if what we seem to have is dependent upon HIM, to be supplied daily by HIM, how much more what we have not—alas! one need not speak, in such as most of us are, of increase of grace and glory, but of repentance yet incomplete and to be perfected; of sins, whose pardon is as yet unsealed; of vanities, yet slowly to be unlearned; of defilements yet to be burned out; of fitness for Heaven yet to be acquired; of perseverance to the end yet to be obtained. So truly, whether we look to what we have or what we have not, have we need to ask in His saving Name, that what we have may, notwithstanding our often misuse of it, our never-ceasing short-comings, be continued to us, what we have not may be added for His sake, for Whom alone we have what we have, in Whom alone our very being is. So truly is the confession of our emptiness, the very condition of our being filled: "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it;" fill it in proportion to the wide-ness of thy petitions, "according to thy faith be it unto

thee;" more if our faith be more, if less, in that degree lost.

"In My Name;" we must then have a right to approach in That Name, a right to ask in That Name; and that is, if we have been admitted within the compass of that Name of strength, and having been, abide in CHRIST; in other words, if, by being baptized into That Name, we have become members of His Body, and having been made such, do by obedience abide in HIM. We could have no right to name that Name of ourselves; sinners could have no right to name that Holy Name, at which devils tremble. "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?" Our very faith entitles us not to it; it belongs to us not by any act of our own, but by His, adopting us, re-creating us, giving us a "new Name," even His own, as having been re-created in Himself; and putting It into our mouths, and emboldening us to utter It: it belongs to us, because HE has by His minister pronounced it over us, even His Names, since where HE is, there is the ever-blessed TRINITY; nor is He where They are not; whence in Holy Scripture it is all one, whether it speaks of being baptized into the Name of the LORD JESUS, or of being baptized in the Name of the FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST; it is but another way of speaking of those words of Baptism, which were ever used in the Church, as we still use them, because it was thus commanded by the LORD.

Sad then as it is to speak of, one cannot say that they have a full right to pray in That Name, who, in the growing ignorance or carelessness of the ordinances of our LORD, neglect to receive That Name, as HE commanded it, in Holy Baptism; for Scripture says, "all who have been baptized into CHRIST, have put on CHRIST, have been buried with CHRIST, have risen with CHRIST, been new-created in CHRIST, but no where gives us hope, that they are clad with HIM, or have been buried into His Death, who have not, as HE bade, been baptized in HIM; would that one could say confidently, that they had a right to use it, who use it out of the One Body, which HE formed in One Faith, by One Baptism in our One LORD! In better times, schism or division from the Church, cut off from the Body of CHRIST, which the Church is: in whatever degree it does not now, it must be by the sin of the Church; and readily may the Church bear a portion of the sin, either in her neglect to provide for those entrusted to her, or of acting up to her duties, and glorifying her FATHER by that holiness which should mark her out to be His; if so those now separate from her may not be cut off altogether. And as she shares the sin, go does she share the punishment; for since the promise was made to the One Body formed in the One Name, all must suffer, now that that oneness is broken; one member cannot suffer without the other members suffering with it; the promise was to those who love in HIM, are one in HIM; since we then are many, and love has been impaired, we have much to fear, lest we have forfeited the fulness of the promise: enough to be saved we know we have ourselves, we trust all have who, amid an inherited ignorance of the privileges of the Church, believe in that saving Name; yet it is too likely that all our privileges are impaired by these rents, that the stream of grace no longer runs so richly through all the branches, which are thus torn, though not wholly severed; we have all more reason to pray for the peace and unity of the Church, as suffering ourselves from its disunion. As we are not saved by ourselves, are not members of our LORD by ourselves, but in His Church and the Communion of Saints, so our privileges and the helps to our salvation are, in a mysterious way, wrapped up in the well-being of the Church; all her sons share probably in the health or sickness of "the mother of us all;" to take only this one subject of prayer, since St. Paul so earnestly desired the prayers of his converts; if he, the inspired Apostle, who "had the SPIRIT of GOD" "and "the mind of CHRIST," and "spoke in CHRIST," still needed the prayers of others, that he might "speak the mystery of CHRIST;" if he, "the ambassador in bonds for the Gospel," needed their prayers that he might "speak boldly, as he ought to speak," how must not we all

suffer that the prayers of the Church are so minished, many large portions of the Church never pray for us at all, they who pray lessened, the prayers of those who pray, weakened by lack of love! Certainly Christian life is every where in a maimed state, as well as Christian love. The gathering in of the scattered sheep may not only gladden the forsaken fold, but may, we hope, draw down the gracious look of the Good Shepherd, Who, the more for our earnest prayers, will bring them on His shoulders rejoicing.

But as we must have been brought into HIM, so, in order to pray aright in His Name, must we, by obedience as by faith, be abiding in HIM. "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you." Then only do we abide in HIM, when His words abide in us, "hidden within our hearts, that we sin not against HIM;" abide in us, directing and controlling, urging or restraining, keeping us in the narrow way when we turn to the right hand or to the left, and hastening us on in it. "The foundation of the LORD is sure, having this seal, 'The Lord knoweth them that are His,' and 'Let every one that nameth the Name of CHRIST depart from iniquity.' GOD'S seal upon us, whereby HE acknowledgeth and taketh knowledge of them that are His, is only then sure, when we keep unbroken that other inscription given by His finger upon us, "let every one that nameth the Name of Christ depart from iniquity." Some sins, we know, as hypocrisy, turn prayer itself into sin; "let his prayer be turned into sin," "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD;" "he that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination," but every sin is contrary to prayer and a hinderance to it; "if I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear me;" it is contrary to the very nature of prayer; since prayer is a dependence upon GOD, sin seeks happiness out of GOD; it makes men falter in their prayer, so that they unsay in their hearts what they have said with their lips; "give me continence," prayed, in his unbaptized state, he who was afterwards St. Augustine, "only not now;" he prayed for it as a blessing, but shrunk from its cost; and so too now men often draw back from their prayers, long to pray, half pray, yet dread the condition the hearing of their prayers may involve of strictness, hardness, sacrifice, self-denial; they would be of GOD'S side, yet cannot be wholly. Or, again, they would attain some grace, or break off some sin they know of, yet some sin they have hidden from themselves bars them from the grace, and gives the mastery to the sin they loathe; or they would fain attain the truth, but some hidden defect, vanity, self-opinion, love of praise, or ease, sensuality, covetousness, blinds them to it. I have said "them," but who amongst us must not sorrowfully own, that his prayers are held back by manifold infirmities, the sad offspring, at best, of his former sins? who must not long to live "more as he prays," that he may pray more as he ought? who not pray to be "delivered from the bonds of those sins which by his frailty he has committed?" who not, to be cleansed from the sins which by unfaithfulness he has hidden from himself, and now are become "secret" to him, that his prayers be not hindered, and his life be not a hindrance to and belie his prayers? And so we have need, not only to pray that we be guided into the truth of doctrine or of life, but also not to rely upon our own prayers too confidently, as though we should of course possess the truth because we pray, while we know not of ourselves whether we are such as are worthy to have "all truth" disclosed to us, whether we have not all the while some darkness in us, which hinders the shining-in of all GOD'S holy truth. Even on this ground may we entrust ourselves the rather to the guidance of GOD'S Church, which we know, and in our Creeds confess, to be "holy," while we sorrowfully confess our own unholiness, and pray the while that GOD would "look well whether there be any way of wickedness in us," and so "lead us in the way everlasting" of faith and life; so when we are holy like her, we shall see also for ourselves the truth committed to her, to be the truth of GOD. And on this account alone must it be very dangerous to find fault with any thing we find in her, not only lest we be irreverent and

break “the first commandment with promise,” but lest what we ignorantly blame be just the very truth which is wanting to us, and which some defect in ourselves blinds us from seeing.

As all sin hinders prayer, so though we trust our prayers shall not be shut out, that we perish, yet is there an endless difference in the efficacy of the prayers of those of whom we hope with ourselves, that their prayers are in their measure accepted. There is then much room for diligence, in that we would help to save others and those we love; but also for ourselves, since one knows not whether the degree of prayer, or faith, or duty, which may be accepted for others will be for ourselves; since it may be, though we know it not, that we are of those to whom much having been given, much will be required of them. As we are, such are our prayers and GOD’S hearing of them. ‘If ye abide in Me and My words abide in you,’ our LORD saith, “ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be given you.” Our access to the FATHER is through the closeness of our union with the SON; and that union, having been received through Baptism, is upheld through obedience, which is the life of our faith. “If ye keep My commandments,” HE saith, “ye shall abide in My love.” Every sin in its degree loosens that union; every act of obedience knits it closer, because it admits more of that HOLY SPIRIT through Whom HE dwelleth in us, and we in HIM. All, who shall be saved, must abide in HIM; yet do they abide in HIM in different degrees; some, like Apostles and Martyrs, and doubtless many hidden saints now, whom the world knows not of, or whose outward life alone it can know of, cleaving to HIM with an ever-glowing love, fruitful in all holy obedience, and conforming the whole man, feature by feature, to the LORD, on Whom they hang with adoring love, Whom alone in all they see, in Whom their whole life is; but most of us, it is to be feared, under their feet, abiding, (if by His undeserved goodness we do yet abide,) weakly, uncertainly, unsteadfastly; our hold broken by our many sins and infirmities; our “sins separating between us and our GOD,” so that though “His hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, nor is His ear heavy that it cannot hear, our sins have hid His face from us that HE will not hear;” and “though we make many prayers,” it is a great mercy that some pass through. We are so unlike His SON, Whose imperfect members we yet hope we are, that we scarce dare hope HE will look on members so full of decay, so “ready to perish.” And so, while the prayers of others may prevail with GOD for the kingdoms of the world, or for the Church which is “not of this world;” may bind Satan, or loose whom he has bound; may save souls, which have not “sinned unto death;” obtain free course for the Gospel of GOD; close heaven, as Elijah, or open it; plead with GOD, as Moses and Phinehas, that HE cast not off the people HE had chosen; stop persecutions, hold back the powers of darkness, even when they are about to have rule given them over a guilty land, (as one knows not whose hidden lowly prayers yet hold in check the elements of evil, the lawful offspring of our sins, which an unseen Hand alone hinders from making our homes desolate,) ours, even if accepted, may hardly and with difficulty be saving ourselves.

But be it so, there is comfort yet; be it that the faith and prayers of others may avail much; that “the prayer of faith” may “heal the sick” in body or in soul; may be “turning many to righteousness,” to be their glory and crown while they “shine as the stars for ever;” and the fresh life and love which GOD is pouring into His Church be granted to their fervent righteous prayer, to their endless glory; while we poor and blind and miserable, our crown forfeited, our birth-right in great part wasted, our hopes and our selves decayed, our FATHER’S first blessing bestowed on more entire faithful service; they whom we might have resembled first, and we last; have rather to pray that we be “saved so as by fire,” that the burthen of our many sins be lightened, our sores healed, our stains blotted out, our leprosy cleansed, the injuries we have caused to others cancelled; and when we pray for others, for our friends, and the Church, (as pray we must) we

must be oppressed by the sense of our own utter unworthiness to be heard, there is comfort yet; “Whoso cometh unto ME, I will in no wise cast out.” Persevere we to the end, week by week, and day by day, through His help, through Whom alone we could have begun, or can begin, and in Whose Name we may yet pray, in the covenanted mercies of that Holy Sacrament wherein It was called upon us, and we were made His,—persevere we, day by day, hating and confessing to HIM the sins which press upon us, praying for humility and true repentance, and labouring to practise what we pray; praying HIM to give us “broken hearts, which HE will not despise,” to “wash us thoroughly from our wickedness” in His Blood, and cleanse us from all our sin; and HE who gave us our godly sorrow, will make our sorrow our joy, will heal our wounds here, or make them healthful to us, as hating thereby the more the sins which made them; and in the end, “they who sow in tears shall reap in joy.” Well might we faint, did we think what endless joy is, the joy of His Holy Countenance, and that we, so sin-defiled, seek to be admitted there, and yet that others shall be shut out! “Well might we faint at the greatness of the rewards,” said a holy man, “did we not consider the dignity of the price paid,” the Blood of HIM, Who, being man, was GOD! Well might we faint at sight of our own sins, were not our PHYSICIAN ALMIGHTY! HE healed our infirmities by His Life; HE bore our sins by His Death; HE “is ever at the right hand of GOD, and maketh intercession for us.” Shrink we not then from the daily task of sorrow and repentance; so it may be that HE who heareth the cry of the humbled, will hear our prayer, not for ourselves only, but, among others, for those we love or ought to pray for also; our very sense of unworthiness may render them acceptable in His sight, Who “resisteth the proud and giveth grace unto the humble,” for the sake of His worthiness, at the footstool of Whose mediatorial throne we fall low. Come we to HIM, pleading to HIM His own Cross and Passion, which HE suffered that we might not; praying HIM by His own descent into hell, that “the pit may not shut its mouth upon us;” come we to HIM with the words and faith of those on whom HE wrought His cures while on the earth; pray HIM, “JESU, Master, have mercy on me;” show HIM as our High-Priest the sores we cannot hide from HIM as our Judge, and HE will look upon us, and our leprous spots, and by His compassionate look will heal them, and cleansing them will pronounce them cleansed. He will “forgive all our iniquities, and heal all our diseases,” “redeem our life from destruction, and crown us with loving-kindness and tender mercies.” Meanwhile, tarry we His leisure and persevere; “though HE tarry, wait for HIM, because HE will surely come, HE will not tarry;” it may be that suffering and suspense is the appointed fire through which He would purge our sins; seek we, through His grace, to deepen in us all which makes prayer acceptable, a lowly faith, a righteous life, cleaving to HIM, persevering trust, and if HE seem to hide His face from us, it will but be, that, praying the more earnestly, HE may hear us the more; though, as HE tried the Canaanitish woman, HE seem to deny us, yet, if following her faith, we own ourselves as dogs, unfit to have the children’s bread, HE will say to us, at the last, “Be it unto thee according to thy word;” if we seek to be but hired servants, HE will at the last make us once more sons.

Only remember we, that charity and fasting are the wings of prayer; fasting as a token and means of self-abasement, charity to man as a token of our love to GOD, Whom we see not, and drawing down His ineffable love to us through Whom we love; charity in forgiving wrong, charity in showing mercy in our prayers, as we hope to have others’ prayers for us, charity especially in self-denying almsgiving to CHRIST’S poor; so forgiving, may we be at last forgiven; being “merciful,” we may at the last “obtain mercy;” giving, it shall be “given to us, good measure, pressed down and shaken together, shall they give into our bosom,” even the

overflowing love of GOD, which HE will pour into the hearts of those who love in HIM, opening them by His love to receive His love, even HIMSELF, Who is Love.