

## Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Advent; Philippians 4:4-7

[THE TEXT, THOUGH SHORT, IS A SUGGESTIVE AND IMPORTANT LESSON IN CHRISTIAN FAITH. IT TEACHES HOW WE SHOULD CONDUCT OURSELVES TOWARD GOD AND OUR NEIGHBOUR. IT SAYS: "REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS."]

## OUR CONDUCT TOWARD GOD--REJOICE IN HIM.

Joy is the natural fruit of faith. The apostle says elsewhere (Gal 5, 22-23): "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control." Until the heart believes in God, it is impossible for it to rejoice in him. When faith is lacking, man is filled with fear and gloom and is disposed to flee at the very mention, the mere thought, of God. Indeed, the unbelieving heart is filled with enmity and hatred against God. Conscious of its own guilt, it has no confidence in his gracious mercy; it knows God is an enemy to sin and will terribly punish the same.

Since there exist in the heart these two things--a consciousness of sin and a perception of God's chastisement the heart must ever be depressed, faint, even terrified. It must be continually apprehensive that God stands behind ready to chastise. Solomon says (Prov 28, 1), "The wicked flee when no man pursueth." And Deuteronomy 28, 65-66 reads, "Jehovah will give thee there a trembling heart . . . and thy life shall hang in doubt." One may as well try to persuade water to burn as to talk to such a heart of joy in God. All words will be without effect, for the sinner feels upon his conscience the pressure of God's hand. The prophet's injunction (Ps 32, 11) likewise is: "Be glad in Jehovah, and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart." It must be the just and the righteous who are to rejoice in the Lord. This text, therefore, is written, not for the sinner, but for the saint. First we must tell sinners how they can be liberated from their sins and perceive a merciful God. When they have been released from the power of an evil conscience, joy will result naturally.

But how shall we be liberated from an accusing conscience and receive the assurance of God's mercy? The question has been sufficiently answered in the preceding postils, and will be again frequently satisfied later on. He who would have a quiet conscience, and would be sensitive of God's mercy, must not, like the apostates, depend on works, still further doing violence to the heart and increasing its hatred of God. He must place no hope whatever in works; must apprehend God in Christ, comprehend the Gospel and believe its promises.

But what does the Gospel promise other than that Christ is given for us; that he bears our sins; that he is our Bishop, Mediator, and Advocate before God, and that thus only through him and his work is God reconciled, are our sins forgiven and our consciences set free and made glad? When this sort of faith in the Gospel really exists in the heart, God is recognized as favourable and pleasing. The heart confidently feels his favour and grace, and only these. It fears not God's chastisement. It is secure and in good spirit because God has conferred upon it, through Christ, superabundant goodness and grace. Essentially, the fruits of such a faith are love, peace, joy, and songs of thanksgiving and praise. It will enjoy unalloyed and sincere pleasure in God as its supremely beloved and gracious Father, a Father whose attitude toward itself has been wholly paternal, and who, without any merit on its part, has richly poured out upon that heart his goodness.

Such is the rejoicing, mark you, of which Paul here speaks--a rejoicing where is no sin, no fear of death or hell, but rather a glad and all-powerful confidence in God and his kindness. Hence the expression, "Rejoice in the Lord"; not rejoice in silver or gold, not in eating or drinking, not in pleasure or mechanical chanting, not in strength or health, not in skill or wisdom, not in power or honour, not in friendship or favour, nay, not in good works or holiness even. For these are deceptive joys, false joys, which never stir the depths of the heart. They are never even felt. When they are present we may well say the individual rejoices superficially, and without a heart experience. To rejoice in the Lord--to trust, confide, glory and have pride in the Lord as in a gracious Father--this is a joy which rejects all else but the Lord, including that self-righteousness whereof Jeremiah speaks (ch. 9, 23-24): "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he hath understanding, and knoweth me." Again, Paul enjoins (2 Cor 10, 17), "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

The apostle further commands in our text to rejoice "always." Thus he rebukes those who rejoice in God--who praise and thank him--only a portion of the time. These rejoice when it is well with them; when not, rejoicing ceases. Concerning them Psalm 48 teaches, they will praise God when he favours them. David does not so. He declares (Ps 34, 1): "I will bless Jehovah at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth." And David has good reason to do so, for who will harm or distress one favoured of God? Sin harms him not; nor death nor hell. David sings (Ps 23, 4): "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." And Paul queries (Rom 8, 35): "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" And then he goes on (verses 38-39): "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

"Again I will say, Rejoice."

The apostle emphasizes his admonition by repeating it. It is essential that we rejoice. Paul, recognizing that we live in the midst of sin and evil, both which things depress, would fortify us with cheer. Thus rejoicing, even if we should sometimes fall into sin, our joy in God will exceed our sorrow in sin. The natural accompaniment of sin truly is fear and a burdened conscience, and we cannot always escape sin. Therefore we should let joy have rule, let Christ be greater than our sins. John says (1 Jn 2, 1-2): "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins." Again (1 Jn 3, 20): "Because if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things."

#### OUR CONDUCT TO MAN--FORBEARANCE.

"Let your forbearance [moderation] be known unto all men."

Having instructed the Corinthians concerning their conduct toward God--their duty to serve him with joyful hearts--Paul proceeds briefly to teach them how to conduct themselves before men, saying, "Let your moderation be known unto all men." In other words: Rejoice always before God, but before men be forbearing. Direct your life so as to do and suffer everything not contrary to the commandments of God, that you may make yourselves universally agreeable. Not only refrain from offending any, but put the best possible construction upon the conduct of others. Aim to be clearly recognized as men indifferent to circumstances, as content whether you be hit or missed, and holding to no privilege at all liable to bring you into conflict or produce discord. With the rich be rich; with the poor, poor. Rejoice with the joyful, weep with the mourning. Finally, be all things to all men, compelling them to confess you always agreeable,

uniformly pleasant to mankind and on a level with everyone.

Such is the meaning of the little word here employed by the apostle--"epiikia," equity, clemency, accommodation--and which we cannot better render than by "moderation" or "forbearance." It is the virtue of adapting or accommodating oneself to another; of endorsing that other; of making all equal; of presenting a like attitude toward all men; not setting oneself up as a model and pattern; not desiring mankind to do homage to one, to conform to one's position. Justice may be classified as severe and mild. Too severe justice is often mitigated, and that is the equity, the moderation and clemency of the law. The Latin translator has rendered our word "modestiam," "moderation." This word would properly convey the thought were it not generally understood in its relation to eating, drinking and dressing. Here the intent is to indicate that moderation of life which adjusts and adapts self to the abilities and circumstances of others, yielding, commending, following, mitigating, doing, allowing, forbearing, according as one recognizes what the capacity and condition of a neighbour demands, even to the disparagement of one's own honour and life, and the detriment of his possessions.

For the sake of a better understanding, let us illustrate: Paul says (1 Cor 9, 19-22): "For though I was free from all men, I brought myself under bondage to all, that I might gain the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, not being without law to God, but under law to Christ, that I might gain them that are without law . . . I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some." That is, Paul ate and drank with the Jews according to the law, and generally conducted himself in harmony with its requirements; though he was not obliged so to do. He also ate and drank with the gentiles regardless of the law, and conducted himself without respect to its requirements and as the custom of the gentiles. For only faith and love are requisite. All else man is free to omit or to observe. Therefore, for the sake of one, all laws may be observed; for another, omitted. Observance must be adapted to the individual case. Now, suppose some blind, capricious individual intrudes, demanding as necessary the omission of this thing and the observance of that, as did certain Jews, and insisting that all men follow him and he none--this would be to destroy equality; indeed, even to exterminate Christian liberty and faith. Like Paul, in the effort to maintain liberty and truth, everyone should refuse to yield to any such demand.

To illustrate further: Christ suffered his disciples to break the Sabbath--and himself frequently broke it--where necessary (Mt 12 and Mark 2); but where necessity did not require otherwise, he observed the day. He assigned as reason for his conduct, "The Son of man is lord even of the Sabbath." Mk 2, 28. That is, the law of the Sabbath permits freedom; for the sake of extending love and service to one, it may be broken; and to another, it may be observed.

Because of the Jews, Luke says, Paul circumcised Timothy. But he would not permit Titus to be circumcised for the very reason that false brethren insisted upon it and were unwilling to concede it a matter of choice. Paul claimed authority both to observe circumcision and not to observe it, according as would best contribute to the benefit of others. He deemed neither one course nor the other necessary. He did not believe in circumcision for the sake of the work itself--as a thing which must be performed.

But to make the application to ourselves: When the Pope commands us to confess, to receive the sacrament, to fast, to eat fish, or to perform any bidding of his, and insists that we must do these things because the Church requires it of us, we should calmly trample upon his injunctions, doing what is directly opposed, simply to defy him and maintain liberty. But when he does not insist upon these things, we should honour his desire by observing with observers and omitting with those who omit, presenting Christ's testimony,

"The Son of man is lord even of the Sabbath," and declaring him much more Lord of human laws. To exercise our liberty in the observance of these commands, works no harm to faith nor to the Gospel; but to observe them by a forced act of obedience, destroys faith and the Gospel.

The same rule applies to all external institutions and ordinances, as monastic vows and rules. They are in themselves but a matter of choice and are not opposed to faith or love. We should maintain the privilege of observing them in love and liberty, for the sake of our associates--to preserve harmony with them. But when it is insisted that certain ordinances must be honoured, that their observance is an act of obedience essential to salvation, we should forsake cloisters, tonsures, caps, vows and rules, and even take the opposite course, by way of testifying that only faith and love are the Christian essentials and it is our privilege to observe or omit all other things, being controlled by love and our associations. To conform to laws in a spirit of love and liberty works no harm, but to conform through necessity and forced obedience is to be condemned. Let this rule apply to ceremonials, hymns, prayers and all other Cathedral ordinances, so long as they are observed as a matter of love and liberty alone. Only for the service and for the enjoyment of the assembled company are they to be observed, and that when they are works not in themselves evil. When urged as inherently essential, we are to refrain; we must oppose them in order to maintain the liberty of faith.

Herein you see the diabolical character of the papal institutions, cloisters, in fact all popedom. For they simply make a matter of liberty and love one of necessity and forced obedience, whereby the Gospel, faith included, is exterminated, not to mention the consequent wretchedness of the common people who submit to obey for the sake of their appetites. For how many now attend the choral ceremonies and pray specified hours for God's sake? A general destruction of cloisters and other institutions would be the best reformation in this respect. They are of no benefit to Christianity and might easily be dispensed with. Before liberty could be established in one such institution, a hundred thousand souls might be lost in the others. When a thing is not beneficial and serves no purpose, but does unspeakable injury, and is beyond remedy, it is much better to utterly exterminate it.

But again, when civil government enjoins laws and demands tribute, we should freely serve, even though we are constrained. In this case our liberty and faith are not endangered. For civil government does not claim that observance of its laws is essential to salvation, but essential to civil dominion and protection. In submitting to it, then, conscience maintains its liberty, and faith is not impaired. To whatever does not do violence to our faith, and benefits others, we should fully conform. But when it is insisted that observation of any material laws is essential to salvation, our course of action should be the same as that already suggested relative to the laws of the Pope and the cloisters.

Now, the illustrations given serve as examples to follow in every instance. As Paul here teaches, let one put himself on an equality with all men, being not content to consider simply his own claims and rights, but the wishes and well-being of others. Paul has here in a single word set aside all rights. If your neighbour's condition really demands that you yield a certain personal right or privilege, and you insist upon that privilege, you act at variance with the principle of love and equality and are indeed blameworthy. For in yielding you sustain no injury to your faith, and your neighbour is profited. You would desire him to do thus unto you--a principle of natural law. Indeed, we further add, in the event of one working you harm or injury, you are to put the best construction upon his act, excusing it in the spirit of that holy martyr who, when all his possessions were taken from him, said, "Truly, they can never take Christ from me." Say you likewise: "His act injures not my faith; why not excuse him? why not submit, and accommodate myself to him?"

I cannot better illustrate than by citing the conduct of two good friends, whose manner toward each other may serve as an example for us in our conduct toward all men. How did they act? Each did what pleased his fellow. Each yielded, submitted, suffered, wrought and accepted, just in accordance with his conception of

what might profit or please the other, and all voluntarily, without constraint. Each adapted and accommodated himself to his friend, never from any selfish motive offering restraint. If one infringed upon the other's property rights, he was kindly excused. In short, in their case was neither law, demand, restraint nor fear; naught but perfect freedom and good will. Yet all things moved in a harmony the hundredth part of which could not be secured by any laws or restraints.

The headstrong and the unyielding, they who excuse none but are determined to control all things by their own wisdom, lead the whole world into error. They are the cause of all the wars and calamities known on earth. Yet they claim justice as their sole motive. Well has it been said by a certain heathen: "Summum jus, summa injuria"--the most extreme justice is the greatest injustice. Ecclesiastes 7, 16 also warns: "Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise." As the most extreme justice is the greatest injustice, so the most extreme wisdom is the greatest folly. The old adage is, "When the wise act the fool, they are grossly foolish." Were God always to execute extreme justice, we could not live a moment. Paul commends gentleness in Christ (2 Cor 10, 1), saying, "I . . . entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." So we are to moderate our attitude, our demands, our wisdom and wit, adapting ourselves to the circumstances of others in all respects.

Observe the beautiful aptness of the words, "Let your forbearance be known unto all men." You may ask: "How can one become known to all men? And must we boast of our forbearance, proclaiming it to everyone?" God forbid the latter. Paul does not say, boast of and proclaim your forbearance. He says, let it be experimentally known by all men. That is, exercise forbearance in your deeds before men; not think or speak of it, but show it in your conduct. Thus men generally must see and grasp it--must have experience of it. Then no one can do otherwise than admit you are forbearing. Actual experience will defeat every desire to speak of you in any other way. The mouth of the fault-finder will be stopped by the fact that all men know your forbearance. Christ says (Mt 5, 16): "Even so let your light so shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." And Peter (I Pet 2, 12): "Having your behaviour seemly among the Gentiles; that, wherein they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." It lies not in our power to make our moderation acceptable to all men, but it is enough for us to give everyone opportunity to perceive it in our lives.

By the phrase "all men" we are not to understand all individuals on earth, but every sort of person--friends and foes, great and humble, lords and servants, rich and poor, native and alien, relatives and strangers. Some there are whose manner toward strangers is most cordial and acquiescent, but toward their own household, their domestics, with whom they are familiar, they manifest only rigour and austerity. How many there are who excuse the harshness of the great and the rich, who wrest to the most favourable construction what they do and say, but with servants, with the poor and the inferior, are severe and unfeeling, placing, the most unfavourable construction upon their every word and act. Again, men are affectionate toward children, parents, friends and relatives, always judging them with the utmost lenience. Indeed, how often friend flatters friend, until the practice becomes a public vice as one imitates and regards admirable all acts of the other. But with foes and adversaries men adopt the opposite course. In them they can find no good, no reason for toleration or favourable construction; rather, they censure according to appearances.

In denunciation of such unequal and partial forbearance, Paul here speaks. He would have a Christian's forbearance perfect and complete, manifested toward one as toward another, whether friend or foe. He would that the Christian bear with and excuse everyone, regardless of person or merit. Forbearance is essentially good, inherently kind; just as gold remains gold whether possessed by a godly or an ungodly individual. The silver did not become ashes when Judas the traitor received it. Similarly, all gifts of God are real and remain the same in everyone's possession. That forbearance which is a fruit of the Spirit retains its

characteristic kindness whether directed toward friend or enemy, toward rich or poor.

But frail, deceptive human nature assumes that gold, though remaining gold in St. Peter's hand, becomes ashes in the hand of Judas. The forbearance of human nature, of natural reason, is kind, not to all men, but to the rich and the great, to strangers and friends. Hence it is false, empty, deceptive; mere dissimulation and treachery before God. Note how impossible it is for human nature to exercise complete spiritual forbearance, and how few individuals are conscious of the imperfections of that supposedly beautiful, transcendent forbearance they manifest toward some persons while they show the reverse to other individuals, presuming they thus act rightly. But such is the teaching of our mean, filthy human nature with that same beautiful reason, which ever decides and proceeds contrary to the Spirit and the things of the Spirit. As Paul says in Romans 8, 5, "They that are after the flesh mind the things of the flesh."

In these few words Paul comprehends the Christian's entire conduct toward his neighbour. The forbearing individual treats everyone rightly, in word and act; treats him as he ought, physically and spiritually, bearing with his evils and imperfections. Such conduct may be defined as simply love, peace, patience, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, in fact, everything included in the fruits of the Spirit. Gal 5, 22.

#### OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

But you will say: "Yes, but in that case who would be left in the enjoyment of a morsel of bread because of the wicked people ready to abuse equality and take our all, not permitting us to live on the earth even?" Note Paul's beautiful answer to your question, in the conclusion of this epistle lesson. He says, first,

"The Lord is at hand."

Were there no God, you might well thus fear the wicked. But not only is there a God; he "is at hand." He will neither forget nor forsake you. Only be forbearing to all men, and let him care for you; leave it to him how he is to support and protect you. Has he given you Christ the eternal treasure? how then shall he not give you the necessities of this life? With him is much more than anyone can take from you. Then, too, you possess in Christ more than is represented in all this world's goods. On this subject the psalmist says (Ps 55, 22): "Cast thy burden upon Jehovah, and he will sustain thee"; and Peter (1 Pet 5, 7), "Casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you." And Christ in the sixth chapter of Matthew points us to the lilies of the field and the fowls of the air. The thought of these passages is the same as that of "The Lord is at hand." Now follows,

"In nothing be anxious."

Take no thought for yourselves. Let God care for you. He whom you now acknowledge is able to provide for you. It is the heathen, unknowing he has a God, who takes thought for himself. Christ says (Mt 6, 31-32): "Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink; or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." Then, let the whole world grasp, and deal unrighteously, you shall have enough. You shall not die of hunger or cold unless someone shall have deprived you of the God who cares for you. But who shall take him from you? How can you lose him except you yourself let him go? We have no reason to take thought for ourselves when we have a Father and Protector who holds in his hand all things, even them who, with all their possessions, would rob or injure us. Our duty is to rejoice ever in God and be forbearing toward all men, as becomes those assured of ample provision for body and soul; especially in that we have a

gracious God. They without him may well be concerned about themselves. It should be our anxiety not to be anxious, to rejoice in God alone and to be kind to men. On this topic the psalmist says (Ps 37, 25): "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." And again (Ps 40, 17), "The Lord thinketh upon me."

## PRAYER.

"But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

Here Paul teaches us to cast our care upon God. The meaning is: Take no thought for yourselves. Should anything transpire to give you care or anxiety--and such will be the case, for many trials will befall you on earth--make no effort to escape it, be it what it may. Have no care or anxiety. Turn to God with prayer, with supplication, entreating him to accomplish for you all you would seek to effect by care. And do so in thankfulness that you have a God solicitous for you and to whom you may freely come with all your anxieties. Who does not so when misfortune befalls, but endeavors to measure it by his reason and to overrule it by his counsel, and falls into anxiety--this man plunges himself into deep wretchedness, loses his joy and peace in God, and all to accomplish nothing. He but digs in the sand, sinking himself ever deeper, and effects no good. Of this fact we daily have testimony in our own experience and in that of others.

It may be necessary to add this, however: Let no one conclude he will be utterly careless and rest upon God, making no effort, no exertion, not even resorting to prayer. Whoso adopts this course must soon fail and fall into anxiety. We must ever strive. Many care-engendering things befall us for the very purpose of driving us to prayer. Not undesignedly does the apostle contrast the two injunctions, "In nothing be anxious," and, "In all things flee to God." "Nothing" and "all" are contrasting terms. Paul thus makes plain that many things transpire which tend to create in us anxiety, but we must not let them make us overanxious; we must commit ourselves to God and implore his aid for our needs.

Now, let us examine Paul's words and learn how to frame our prayers and what attitude to assume. He makes a fourfold division of prayer: prayer, supplication, thanksgiving and petition. By "prayer" we understand simply formal words or expressions--as, for instance, the Lord's Prayer and the psalms--which sometimes express more than our request. In "supplication" we strengthen prayer and make it effective by a certain form of persuasion; for instance, we may entreat one to grant a request for the sake of a father, or of something dearly loved or highly prized. We entreat God by his Son, his saints, his promises, his name. Thus Solomon says (Ps 132, 1), "Jehovah, remember for David all his affliction." And Paul urges (Rom 12, 1), "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God"; and again (2 Cor 10, 1), "I . . . entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." "Petitioning" is stating what we have at heart, naming the desire we express in prayer and supplication. In the Lord's Prayer are seven petitions, beside prayer proper. Christ says (Mt 7, 7-8): "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." In "thanksgiving" we recount blessings received and thus strengthen our confidence and enable ourselves to wait trustingly for what we pray.

Prayer is made vigorous by petitioning; urgent by supplication; by thanksgiving, pleasing and acceptable. Strength and acceptability combine to prevail and secure the petition. This, we see, is the manner of prayer practised by the Church; and the holy fathers in the Old Testament always offered supplication and thanks in their prayers. The Lord's Prayer opens with praise and thanksgiving and the acknowledgment of God as a Father; it earnestly presses toward him through filial love and a recognition of fatherly tenderness. For

supplication, this prayer is unequalled. Hence it is the sublimest and the noblest prayer ever uttered.

These words of Paul beautifully spiritualize and explain the mystery of the golden censer whereof Moses has written much in the Old Testament, detailing how the priests should burn incense in the temple. We are all priests, and our prayers are the censer. The first is the golden vessel, which signifies the precious words of prayer; such as the language of the Lord's Prayer, the psalms, and like written prayers. Always in the Scriptures the words are represented by the vessel; for words are a medium for containing and conveying thought, just as the vessel serves to contain wine, water, coals or anything else. Similarly, the golden cup of Babylon mentioned in Revelation 17, 4 typifies human doctrine; and the sacramental cup, containing Christ's blood, is the Gospel.

The live coals in the censer stand for thanksgiving, for enumerated benefits in prayer. That coals signify benefits Paul implies where, quoting Solomon's injunction in Proverbs 25, 21-22, which the apostle cites (Rom 12, 20): "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head." Burning coals of fire, the benefits are, and powerful to take captive and enkindle the heart. The Law forbade to take coals from any place but the altar; accordingly, we must not in prayer urge our own works and merits, as did the pharisee in the Gospel (Lk 18, 11-12), but acknowledge the benefits in Christ. He is the altar upon whom we are offered. By this benefit we render thanks and pray. Paul says (Col 3, 17), "Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." God cannot permit us to regard anything but our altar Christ. Thus he teaches, where it is recorded (Lev 10) that Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, were devoured by fire before the altar because they took coals for the censer from elsewhere than that place of sacred offering.

The petition whereby prayer is made complete is typified by the smoke ascending at the laying of the thyme--the incense--upon the coals. Paul's exhortation, "Let your requests be made known unto God," recognizes and explains the symbol of the smoke rising from the censer. His meaning is: "If you would offer a sweet savour of incense to God, express your petition in supplication and thanksgiving. This is the precious, sweet incense recognized by God, ascending as straight before him as a taper and a rod." Such prayer penetrates heaven. Grateful recognition of God's benefits induces us to pray voluntarily and fervently, naturally and with delight; just as the coals of fire make strong the volume of smoke. If there be not first the coals to generate heat, if there be not gratitude for benefits to enkindle fervour, prayer will be sluggish; it will be cold and dull.

But what is meant by "making known" our prayers to God when he knows them even before we begin, in fact, comes to us first and induces us to pray? I answer, Paul uses this expression by way of teaching us how to really and truly pray--not to pray vainly or at a venture as do they who are indifferent whether God hears them or not, who are ever uncertain of being heard, yes, are inclined to think they will not be heard. That is not praying; it is not petitioning. It is tempting and mocking God. Should one entreat me for a penny and I knew he did not believe, did not have a thought, that I would give it him, I would not be disposed to hear him. I would conclude he was either mocking me or was not in earnest. How much less will God hear mere noise! True prayer is the "making known" of our desires to God. In other words, we must not doubt

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that God hears us; that our prayer reaches him; that our requests assuredly shall be granted. If we do not believe we are heard, that our prayer reaches God, undoubtedly it will not reach him. As we believe, so will it be.



The ascending smoke is but our faith when we believe our appeal reaches God and is heard. Paul's words hint at the frequent claims of the psalms: "My cry before him came into his ears." Ps 18, 6. "Let my prayer be set forth . . . before thee." Ps 141-2. Relative to this topic, Christ says, "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Mt 21, 22. See also Mk 11, 24. And James counsels (ch 1, 6-7): "But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting; for he that doubteth . . . let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord."

Easily, then, we recognize the bawling in the cloisters and cathedrals all over the world as mere mockery, a tempting of God. Prayer of that sort is well enough made known to men, considering the constant loud outcry and bellowing of them who offer it. But to God it is unknown. It fails to reach him because the offerers do not believe, or at least are uncertain, that it will. As they believe, so is it. Time indeed it is for such mockery and tempting of God to be rejected and the mock-houses, as Amos calls them in the seventh chapter, to be exterminated. Oh, if we would but pray aright, what could we not accomplish! As it is, we pray much and obtain nothing; for our prayers never reach God. Woe to unbelief and distrust!

#### THE PEACE OF GOD.

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus."

Note the beautiful logic and order of Paul's teaching. The Christian is first to rejoice in God through faith and then show forbearance or kindness, to men. Should he ask, "How can I?" Paul answers, "The Lord is at hand." "But how if I be persecuted and robbed?" Paul's reply is, "In nothing be anxious. Pray to God. Let him care." "But meanwhile I shall become weary and desolate." "Not so; the peace of God shall keep you." Let us now consider the last thought.

By the phrase, "the peace of God," we must understand, not that calm and satisfied peace wherein God himself dwells, but the peace and contentment he produces in our hearts. It is called the "peace of God" in the same sense that the message of God which we hear and believe and speak is styled "the Word of God." This peace is the gift of God, and is called the "peace of God" because, having it, we are at peace with him even if we are displeased with men. This peace of God is beyond the power of mind and reason to comprehend. Understand, however, it is not beyond man's power to experience--to be sensible of. Peace with God must be felt in the heart and conscience. How else could our "hearts and minds" be preserved "through Christ Jesus"? To illustrate the difference between the peace of God and the peace comprehensible by reason: They who know nothing of fleeing to God in prayer, when overtaken by tribulation and adversity and when filled with care and anxiety proceed to seek that peace alone which reason apprehends and which reason can secure. But reason apprehends no peace apart from a removal of the evil. Such a peace does not transcend the comprehension of reason; it is compatible with reason. They who pray not, rage and strive under the guidance of reason until they obtain a certain peace by fraudulent or forcible removal of the evil. just as the wounded seeks to be healed. But they who rejoice in God, finding their peace in him, are contented. They calmly endure tribulation, not desiring what reason dictates as peace--removal of the evil. Standing firm, they await the inner strength wrought by faith. It is not theirs to inquire whether the evil will be short or long in duration, whether temporal or eternal; they give themselves no concern on this point, but ever leave it to God's regulation. They are not anxious to know when, how, where or by whom termination of the evil is to come. In return, God affords them grace and removes their evils, bestowing blessings beyond their expectations, or even desires. This, mark you, is the peace of the cross, the peace of God, peace of conscience, Christian peace, which gives us even external calm, which makes us satisfied with all men and unwilling to disturb any. Reason cannot understand how there can be pleasure in crosses, and peace in disquietude; it cannot find these. Such peace is the work of God, and none can understand it until it has been

experienced. Relative to this topic, it is said in the epistle for the second Sunday in Advent: "The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing." What the apostle there terms "peace in believing" he here calls "peace of God."

In this verse Paul implies that for him who rejoices in God and exercises forbearance in his life, the devil will raise up a cross calculated forcibly to turn his heart from that way. The Christian should therefore be well fortified, placing his peace beyond the devil's reach--in God. Let him not be anxious to rid himself of what the devil has forced upon him. Let him suffer Satan's wantonness until God's coming shall exterminate it. Thus will the Christian's heart, mind and affection be guarded and preserved in peace. His patience could not long endure did not his heart exist above its conditions, in a higher peace--were it not satisfied it has peace with God.

"Heart" and "mind" here must not be supposed to mean human will and understanding. We are to take Paul's explanation--heart and mind in Christ Jesus; in other words, the will and understanding resultant in Christ, from Christ and under Christ. Faith and love are meant-- faith and love in all their operations, in all their inclinations toward God and men. The reference is simply to a disposition to trust and love God sincerely, and a willingness of heart and mind to serve God and man to the utmost. The devil seeks to prevent this state by terror, by revealing death and by every sort of misfortune; and by setting up human devices to induce the heart to seek comfort and help in its own counsels and in man. Thus led astray, the heart falls from trust in God to a dependence upon itself.

Briefly, this text is a lesson in Christian living, in the attitude of the Christian toward God and man. It teaches us to let God be everything to us, and to treat all men alike, to conduct ourselves toward men as does God toward us, receiving from him and giving to them. It may be summed up in the words "faith" and "love."

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