

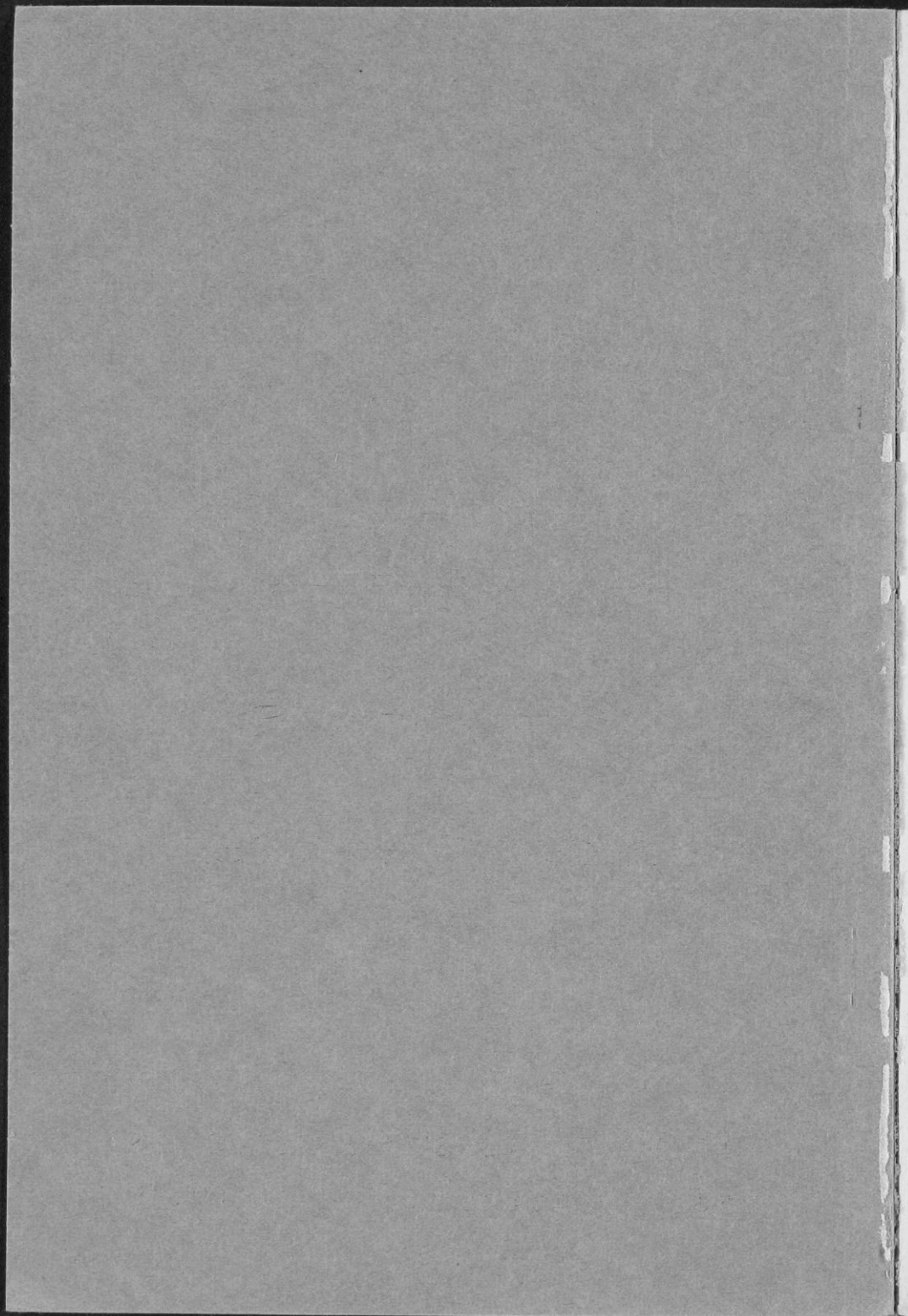
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ETERNITY



By Rev. Celestine, O.M. Cap.

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ETERNITY

A LENTEN COURSE OF SEVEN SERMONS, INCLUDING
A SERMON FOR GOOD FRIDAY

BY THE
REV. CELESTINE, O.M. CAP.

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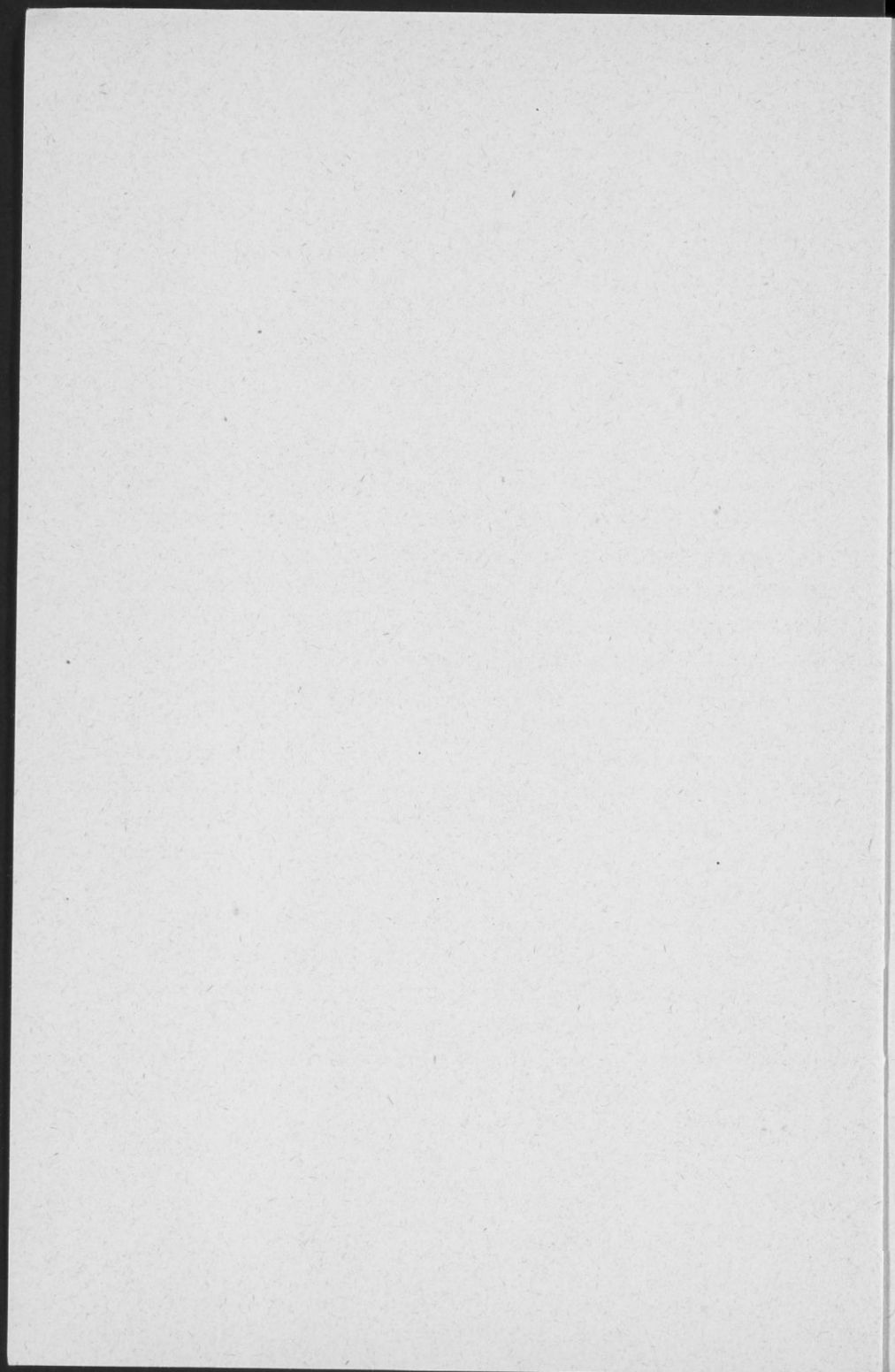
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ETERNITY

I. ETERNITY, WHAT IS IT?

"If the tree fall to the south or to the north, in what place soever it shall fall, there shall it be."—Eccles. xi, 3.

During this holy season of Lent, dear brethren, we will together contemplate some serious truths. I say contemplate, for it is not enough merely to *listen* to the word of God. We must *reflect* upon what we are told in the Gospel, ponder over it again and again, digest it, as it were. If this is properly done, the seed of the Divine word will germinate in the soul; it will thrive and produce fruit. Many persons are not much impressed by the mere hearing of religious truths, particularly if they have often heard sermons upon these subjects; their ears become dulled. When a person takes up his abode near a railway, he hears at first every train that comes and goes; especially at night he is awakened by the noise of the passing cars. But gradually they no longer disturb him; he hardly hears them, and sleeps peacefully in spite of the noise; he has become accustomed to it.

The eternal truths of our holy religion, the doctrine of death, of judgment, of heaven, of hell, are indeed startling enough, but those who are accustomed to hear sermons on these subjects are no longer easily moved by merely *hearing* about them. They must *reflect* upon these sacred truths. The sermon provides them with the material for this individual contemplation. Pepper swallowed whole is not noticed, but if chewed it begets a strong sensation.

Therefore let us try and get at the meaning of the Divine word, so as to cause a sensation in our consciences.

The serious truth, brethren, which in this holy time of Lent will claim our attention, is the doctrine of eternity. Eternity, an awful word, a more awful fact. From century to century will swing the never-ceasing pendulum of time, to the joy of the blessed, to the horror of the damned. To-day, dear brethren, let us consider eternity in a general way. Let us inquire: (1) What eternity is, and what it is not; (2) how our temporal life is followed by an eternity of glory or an eternity of torment; (3) how punishment as well as reward is exceedingly great in eternity. May the Eternal God bless my words so as to make them fruitful for you and for myself.

I. What is eternity? Whatever you say of eternity, so writes St. Augustine, you will fall far short of the subject. It is impossible for our weak intelligence to form an absolutely clear conception of eternity. For this reason the holy fathers speak of it figuratively, in accordance with the measure of our comprehension. According to them, eternity is the complete possession of a life that has no end (Boethius); it is an existence enduring for all time, unchanging and undisturbed (Dionysius Areopagitica); it is a condition comprising in itself all times, the present, past and future (St. Bernard); eternity is a long day, never followed by night (St. Gregory). Our time is measured by the course of the sun, of the moon, and of the stars; but eternity is measured by the immortal God; it will endure as long as God will be God.

What is eternity? Cornelius à Lapidè calls it a circle, the center of which is called "All time," its circumference "Never more." It is a wheel that ever revolves, without once standing still, a boundless sea into which all the rivers of time empty and depart in order to flow on again. It is written in the Scriptures: "All the rivers run

into the sea; yet the sea doth not overflow: unto the place whence the river come, they return to flow again" (Eccles. i, 7). Eternity is a labyrinth, a maze with innumerable, intricate alleys and paths: he who once enters therein will never find his way out again.

1. What is eternity? St. Dionysius tells us it is easier to say what God is not than what He is, and this applies also to eternity; it has no measure, no goal, no end. For this reason it cannot be called time, in the strict sense of the word, for all time is limited. "It is no time, likewise no period of time," says St. Gregory Nazianzen. Imagine, then, dear brethren, a period of thousands or millions of years, and you will not have reached the end of eternity. Imagine to yourself an immense number of years, and no matter how long their passing will take, you will fall infinitely short of eternity. Does it consist of as many years as there are drops in all the oceans? Is its number of years like the sands of the sea, the leaves upon the trees, the letters of all the books in the world? When as many years, numbered by all these things, have passed away, eternity will still be beginning. Let us imagine that a spider would carry up to the sun all the sands of the whole earth, on a wire stretched from the earth to the sun. The distance is many millions of miles. How much time would it even require before the spider arrived there with the first grain of sand; it would descend then by the same route to fetch another grain; and so on. Just figure, if you can, how many years it would take until all the sands of the earth were thus taken to the sun, and yet, after all these years will have passed, eternity will still be beginning.

2. (a) "But man when he shall be dead, and stripped and consumed, I pray you where is he" (Job xiv, 10)?

That every man must die is taught not only by faith but by everyday experience. It is equally certain that death strips him of every-

thing he has in the world. Inexorable death destroys the body and turns it into dust.

What will become of the soul? Is the soul of man destroyed like the unreasoning animal soul? No. Both reason and faith teach us that the soul of man is immortal. This belief prevailed even amongst pagan nations, which had lost Divine revelation. If, then, the soul is immortal, where will it be after the death of man? We find the answers in the Scriptures, where we read (Eccles. xii, 5), "Man shall go into the house of his eternity." The house of *his* eternity, because every man constructs his own eternity. It is rightly designated the house of his eternity, his eternal house. I will express myself more plainly: The just man, by good works, builds the house of his eternal happiness; the sinner, by evil works, creates the house of his everlasting torment and damnation. If a man die in the state of sanctifying grace, he will enter into the house of his eternal glory; if in mortal sin, his portion will be the house of eternal fire. This infallible article of faith is clearly and plainly set forth in Holy Scripture. It is said there: "These (sinners) shall go into everlasting punishment; but the just into life everlasting" (Matt. xxv, 46).

(b) Eternal torment, everlasting glory! One of these will be your portion, my dear Christians! You have still time to choose! But you know not how long your time will last; it may expire this very day, in a month, in a year, who knows? When once it has expired it will mean: "If the tree fall to the south or to the north, in whatever place soever it shall fall, there shall it be." Here man is compared to a tree gradually felled by the woodman, namely, by death. Trouble, suffering, and sickness are so many blows of the axe wielded by death. Some day the last blow will be struck, and the human tree is felled. It can only fall in one of two directions,

to the north or to the south, to the side of damnation, or towards the side of glory and happiness. But what should fill us with fear and trembling, dear brethren, is the fact that it will remain lying as it falls. Should you die in the state of grace, you will be eternally happy; if you die in the state of mortal sin, you will be eternally lost. There will be no change. Once in heaven, then for all eternity you will possess it; once in hell, you will not leave it for all eternity! The pendulum of the eternal clocks says Ever! Never! Ever blessed, never damned! Ever damned, never blessed!

(c) Man is compared to a tree, also, in other passages of Holy *cripture*. John the Baptist exhorted the Pharisees: "Bring forth, therefore, fruit worthy of penance. For now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree, therefore, that yieldeth not good fruit, shall be cut down, and cast into the fire" (Matt. iii, 8, 10). The tree is man, the axe death, the root of the tree the life of man, the fire is hell. Hence, the Apostle threatens: "Every tree that yieldeth not good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire."

(d) Man, in the state of mortal sin, is the fig tree of which the Saviour said: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. And he came seeking fruit on it, and found none. And he said to the tiller of the vineyard: Behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down therefore, why doth it take up the ground? The tiller of the vineyard answered him and said: "Lord, let it alone this year also, until I dig about it, and dung it; if happily it bear fruit, but if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down" (Luke xiii, 6). Oh, sinner, you owe your existence to the forbearance and goodness of God, who still waits to see whether you will bring forth fruit by your conversion and penance! How much longer will you resist grace? Your allotted time is nearly run. Forget not, dear brethren, the awful death of the sin-

ner, and the blessed death of the just. He who dies in mortal sin will pass into eternity without the slightest hope of happiness; he will continue to live, but his life, in the fire of hell, will be worse than death. The just man, on the contrary, will depart this life with the confident hope of eternal joy and bliss in heaven. There is both an eternal hell and an eternal glory. One only of these will be your portion, as it will be mine. Is it really possible that you might be damned? Yes, it is possible. If it is possible, how can you be so careless and indifferent? Why do you take such little pains to escape this awful destiny? How can you risk eternal hell by living in grievous sin? How can you take part in these dangerous and sinful pleasures? Oh, that men consider so little what eternity really is! Eternity, an inexhaustible fountain, whence two streams spring forth, one full of sweetness and Divine blessing, the other filled with bitterness and torment!

3. (a) Eternal torment, eternal joy! One or the other will be our portion. Is it a matter of indifference which your portion will be? The punishment in eternity is most terrible, the reward most glorious.

What is hell? A dungeon of extremest darkness. A certain man fell into the hands of robbers. He was thrown by them into a deep dungeon, and had to languish there, heavily laden with chains, for years. His only companions were all kinds of vermin and loathsome animals. He was almost smothered by the filth of the place and the pestilential air. He was allowed just sufficient food to prevent him from starving to death. But his life was worse than death. In a hoarse voice he cried for deliverance and help. Would not imprisonment of such kind produce madness? Imagine, dear brethren, a place a thousand times worse than this, and the blackness of hell is still much worse. And these are not pictures of the imagination.

No, the Holy Spirit Himself bears testimony to the formidableness of that place. We read in the Book of Job (xvii, 6): "The light shall be dark in his tabernacle: and the lamp that is over him shall be put out." The darkness of hell is so dense that every light is completely ineffectual against it. The damned are buried in darkness, and in the shadow of death. Their portion is blackest darkness, of which the Saviour says: "The children of the Kingdom," *i. e.*, the children of the world, who do not believe the teaching of Jesus, who will not observe his commandments, "will be cast out into exterior darkness" (Matt. viii, 12).

(b) What is hell? To the horror of darkness is added the most painful fiery ordeal. The torments are so great there that they defy description. Great sufferings, indeed, overtake man in this life. He may be laid low by the most painful illnesses, fever burns in his veins like fire, and he cries aloud and moans in agony. Think of the cruel martyrdom which the saints have suffered. Yet, however great and severe man's sufferings may be in this life, they are insignificant, trifling in comparison with hell fire. The sufferings which God sends to men on earth, He sends out of love, to chasten and purify their souls. But hell was created by the wrath of God. It is the work of the Divine vengeance. For this reason it is no wonder that it surpasses all imaginable torments. The damned drink the cup of Divine wrath to the dregs. The torments of hell are so great that human nature really stands in no relation to them at all, for God originally created this place of torment not for men but for the evil spirits. The Divine Judge will say to the ungodly: "Depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for *the devil and his angels*" (Matt. xxv, 41). Hell, therefore, was prepared for the devil. For this reason man can form no adequate conception of it. Hell is something so monstrous, and

awful, that God offered up His only begotten Son to the most bitter death, in order to preserve the children of men from hell. God has given us the seven holy Sacraments, as so many fountains of grace, through which we may obtain remission and pardon of our sins. He uses every endeavor in order to save us from hell. Let us not resist the grace of God, that we may not be lost through our own fault. The pains of hell are dreadful and terrible: "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth," says the Lord (Matt. xxii, 13). Understand well, dear brethren, that this weeping will be of a special kind, as only the damned can weep. There will be no sighing for relief, the teeth will be gnashed in fury and despair. Have mercy on yourselves, therefore, dear brethren, and do all in your power to escape this fearful place!

(c) As great and fearful as are the punishments of the damned, on the one hand, so glorious and wonderful is the reward of the blessed. The damned burn in fire, the blessed enjoy unspeakable delight and bliss. The Apostle writes: "The eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him" (Cor. ii, 9). The happiness of heaven surpasses all thought. Do not think, dear brethren, that I describe to you the full glory of heaven. Man is incapable of picturing the glory of heaven, and of describing it.

Holy Scripture, it is true, says a great deal about heaven, still it is only mentioned figuratively and suited to our understanding, falling far short of the reality. The blessed enter into the joy of the Lord. "Well done, good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things I will set thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of the Lord" (Matt. xxv, 29). The joy is so great that there is not room for it within their hearts. Joy does not enter *within them*, they *enter into joy*, *i. e.*, they plunge, as it

were, into a sea of never-ending delight. God is infinite repose, infinite happiness, infinite peace. If we would comprehend the happiness of heaven, we would have to comprehend God. But God is incomprehensible; therefore, we can form no conception of the eternal joy. We only know that the blessed are satiated with heavenly delight. "I shall be satisfied when thy glory shall appear" (Ps. xvi, 15), cries King David, enraptured, Until now, he means to say, I could find no rest, no contentment, although surrounded by royal splendor. My hunger and thirst could not be appeased. But when Thou wilt receive me into Thy glory I shall be inebriated with delight; I shall have no more desires, and no more wants. In another place the Psalmist says: "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of thy pleasure" (Ps. xxxv, 9). Similarly we read, in the Revelation of St. John: "They shall not hunger, nor thirst any more, neither shall the sun fall on them, nor any heat: For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall rule them, and shall lead them to the fountains of waters of life, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Apoc. vii, 16, 17). "And death shall be no more; nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more" (Apoc. xxi, 4). "These are they who are come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and have made them white, *i. e.*, purified their hearts, in the blood of the Lamb, by their repentance and worthy reception of the Sacraments: "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple" (Apoc. vii, 14, 15). "And his servants shall serve him. And they shall see his face: and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more: and they shall not need the light of a lamp, nor the light of the sun; for the Lord God shall enlighten them; and they shall reign forever and ever" (Apoc. xxii, 4, 5). My dear

brethren, God Himself will be our reward when we go to heaven. Even in the Old Testament the Lord said to Abraham: "I am thy reward exceeding great" (Gen. xv, 1). The same will be said to us if we have the happiness of crossing the threshold of the heavenly Jerusalem. "I am thy reward exceedingly great." Oh, unutterable mystery of love! Thou wilt be our reward, if we will be Thy children! Why do we not weep for Thee, O God, in our longing and desire to possess Thee!

Take this first contemplation of eternity well to heart, dear brethren. The thought of eternity is a powerful help against every temptation, a mighty encouragement to persevere in the path of virtue, a fiery goad to drive the sinner from the broad road of ruin back to the narrow way of righteousness. The thought would not let the Psalmist sleep. "My eyes prevented the watches: I was troubled, and I spoke not" (Ps. lxxvi, 5). About what was this man of God so disturbed? Listen to his answer: "I thought upon the days of old; and I had in my mind the eternal years" (*ibid.* 6). To what did this consideration impel him? "And I was exercised, and I swept my spirit" (*ibid.* 7). Would that the serious thought of eternity might have the same effect upon us, that we might exercise ourselves in penance and Christian virtue, that we might thoroughly cleanse our conscience from every sin. The thought of eternity animated the Psalmist to serve God with fresh zeal. "And I said: Now have I begun" (*ibid.* 11). He did not postpone his good resolutions, but put them into practise at once. We must not delay to prepare ourselves for eternity, by a new and virtuous life, so that in our case the tree may not fall to the side of eternal damnation, but to the side of everlasting happiness, which I wish you and myself with all my heart. Amen.

II. THE ETERNITY OF HELL

"And these shall go into everlasting punishment."—Matt. xxviii, 46.

In my previous discourse I referred to the great impression which the contemplation of eternity made upon the Psalmist. He awoke to its reality, he cleansed his conscience: he began to lead a new life. "Now have I begun," he says. This man of God was not the only one seriously stirred by the thought of eternity. Behold the saints! Ask St. Stephen what made him steadfast in his martyrdom. Ask St. Lawrence what rendered his death in the flames endurable. Their answer will be: "The thought of eternity." What made St. Augustine desire in this life cross and suffering? Why did he exclaim: "Here burn, here cut, O Lord!" What made the holy confessors practise rigorous works of penance? The consideration of eternity! Behold the virgins, leaving the world, and entering the cloister! What has driven others into the desert, into the hermit's cell? The thought of eternity! Kings and emperors have relinquished their crowns and renounced the world. Pope Celestin V resigned his eminent office to lead the life of a hermit. They thought of eternity! That thought which induces to prayer, fasting, study, work, the fulfilment of the duties of a Christian, of one's state of life, of every kind of penance! A lively faith in an eternal reward incites to good works. A lively faith in an eternal punishment deters from evil. Unfortunately, this lively faith is lacking in so many Christians. They wish to believe in an eternal happiness, but they do not seem to appreciate that the punishment is likewise eternal. Let us, therefore, take the eternity of hell's punishment for our sub-

ject to-day, and let us consider that: (1) The dogma of eternal punishment is supported by the testimony of Holy Scripture; (2) It is not opposed to reason.

1. Dear brethren: The Holy Catholic Church expressly declares that the eternity of that punishment is an incontestible article of faith and every Christian is obliged to believe this truth under pain of mortal sin. Holy Church, at the Council of Constantinople, anathematized all those who deny this truth. "Whoso declares that the torments of evil spirits and of the damned are only transitory, and will come to an end, let him be anathema, *i. e.*, excommunicated!" We find this truth expressly proclaimed in the Athanasian Creed. The passage reads: "He who has done good, will enter into eternal life, but he who has done evil, into eternal fire." Many passages may be quoted from the Scriptures in support of the truth, that the damned suffer eternal punishment. God Himself has declared this truth. According to Divine revelation every mortal sin merits the punishment of eternal pain. This we read in the Book of Judith: "For he will give fire and worms into their flesh, that they may burn, and may feel forever" (Judith xvi, 21). Through the Prophet Isaias the Lord threatens: "And they shall go out, and see the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched" (Is. lxvi, 2, 4). The Prophet Daniel, by Divine inspiration, tells us that "those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some unto life everlasting, and others unto reproach, to see it always" (Dan. xii, 2). In the revelation of St. John we read: "If any man shall adore the beast, and his image (*i. e.*, be the devil's adherent), he also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God: and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the sight of the holy angels, and in the sight of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torments shall

ascend up forever and ever: neither have they rest day nor night, who have adored the beast, and his image" (Apoc. xiv, 9, 10, 11). The Incarnate Son of God Himself said positively and distinctly: "Wo to the world because of scandals. If thy hand or thy foot scandalize thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee. It is better for thee to enter into life maimed or lame, than, having two hands and two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire" (Matt. xviii, 7, 8). This means, if anything be as dear and necessary to you as even your hand or your foot, but yet is an occasion of sin for you, you must renounce it at any cost, if you would not burn eternally in hell. At another time Jesus Christ called hell "an unquenchable fire, a place where the worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched, where there shall be eternal weeping and gnashing of teeth." And we know that at the end of the world the Divine Judge will say to the damned: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire" (Matt. xxv, 41). In the Gospel of St. John we read: "If any one remaineth not in me, he shall be cast forth as a branch, and shall wither, and they shall gather him up, and cast him into the fire: and he burneth" (xv, 6). The eternity of the punishment is pronounced in these two words: "He burneth." A hundred years hence: "he burneth." After a thousand, a million years have passed: "he burneth." This terrible fire is ever present, increasing, unquenchable. Who does not shudder at the thought of this eternal fire? Will this fire really never cease to burn? No, never! It will burn forever! We can understand, then, the horrible rage, the frightful despair, in that place of torment. If an angel from heaven were to descend into that frightful abyss, and announce to the damned: You will be rescued after ten million years, the news would fill those unfortunates with inexpressible joy. This faint ray of hope would make all tortures of hell bearable. But such a consoling message will

never go down to them. They are, therefore, without hope, beyond help.

Shall I quote further from the Holy Scripture about the eternity of hell's punishment? St. Paul writes in the Epistle to the Corinthians (vi, 9): "Know you not that the unjust shall not possess the Kingdom of God? Be not deceived! Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor the effeminate, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor railers, nor extortioners, shall possess the Kingdom of God." He writes to the Galatians: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are: fornication, uncleanness, immodesty, luxury, idolatry, witchcraft, enmities, contentions, emulations, wrath, quarrels, dissensions, sect, envy, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of the which I foretell you, as I have foretold to you, that they who do such things shall not obtain the Kingdom of God" (Gal. v, 19).

In these passages particular heed should be given the words: They shall not possess the Kingdom of God, they shall not obtain the Kingdom of God. These words would be untrue, so St. Augustine declares, if the damned after a length of time would be set free from hell, if they would yet possess the Kingdom of God. The utterance of the Apostle cannot be false. Therefore, the damned can never possess the Kingdom of God; they will forever remain in the state of damnation and punishment.

2. (a) In the face of all this overwhelming evidence, no reasonable man, who believes in the word of God, can have any doubts that the doctrine of the eternity of hell's punishment is a truth revealed by God.

I wish to show you now that this truth is not opposed to reason. And now I hear the objection: Is it possible that our merciful God will punish a single mortal sin with eternal torment? Before

answering this question, I must warn you not to form false conceptions of the Divine mercy. God is merciful. Does this mean He will not be just? Is God's mercy to be compared to the weakness of an indulgent father who does not dare to punish his vicious children? Such indulgence would be contrary to the Divine nature. It would be connivance at and participation in sin. In order to guard His Divine authority, in order to deter the sinner from vice, the Lord has decreed in His eternal counsels to punish mortal sin with eternal torment. Even with this Divine threat in mind, see, dear brethren, how many sins and vices take place daily. How would the stream of vice increase if the sinner were merely threatened with temporal punishment, if he had the certainty of eventually reaching everlasting happiness. "He who denies the eternity of hell's pains," says St. Jerome, "destroys the fear of God amongst men." God is merciful. He receives the sinner who contritely returns to Him. But when the reprieve of grace has run its course He must judge according to His holy justice, and punish the sinner who has abused His mercy to the end.

(b) With these facts in mind, we will now inquire why the pains of hell must be eternal. St. Bernard declares: "With justice will the punishment last eternally because the guilt can no longer be extinguished." The merciful God has given a lifetime to man as the term in which he can blot out his sin by contrition and penance. During this term there is time to do penance and obtain grace. But after this time of grace has expired, mortal sin can no longer be remitted because the sinner is no longer capable of doing adequate penance.

3. (a) Why cannot the damned do penance acceptable to God? The holy fathers distinguished between the intention and the deed. The malice of sin is in the will to sin. He who has a firm purpose

of killing another is already a murderer in the eyes of God, even if he does not succeed in carrying out the murderous deed. He who firmly intends to steal is a thief in God's sight, even if something prevents the theft. Because the sinner has a perverted and malicious will, he will be punished by God. Where the evil intention is absent, there is no grievous sin. When, for instance, a man goes out hunting and by accident shoots another hunter, he is not accounted guilty of the harm done. If a man has really committed a grievous sin, the evil deed is past, but his will remains vicious so long as he does not repent of his sinful act. Should he die without having expiated the sin, either by a good confession, or at least perfect contrition, then his will remains sinful for all eternity. "As the tree falls, so will it lie." It is no longer possible for the damned to repent of sin. And because this man remains throughout all eternity an enemy of God, therefore must his punishment last eternally.

I will make the matter still plainer. Many men there are in the world who feel at ease in their sins. They create a heaven of their own taste upon earth. They hanker after sinful pleasures. They have no desire for the pure, supernatural joys. They desire no greater happiness than the satisfying of their unbridled passions. In this way they like to live on; they fear to die, because it will put an end to their sensuality. Because such persons have the intention and the will to continue in this sinful condition, they intend to be sinners for all time. If these people persevere in this sentiment until the Lord puts an end to their evil practises, the malice of their will continues on throughout eternity. Therefore, it is just and proper that the punishment also should be eternal. "The justice of the Supreme Judge requires," says St. Gregory, "that they who in this life would never be without sin should never be without punishment in the hereafter."

Not without good cause the divine Saviour says of the unrepentant sinner: "He shall be cast forth as a branch, he shall wither, and he burneth." The sinner after his death can no longer merit grace. He repents of his sins, it is true, but only because they are the cause of his torment. It will never be possible for him to repent of them for love of God as his will is hardened in wickedness. God, who according to His nature is holy and infinite abhors wickedness, is obliged to punish sin as long as it is not expiated. And as it cannot be expiated in hell, for this reason the punishment will last eternally.

(b) But not only is the bad will deserving of external punishment, the wicked deed equally deserves it. St. Thomas Aquinas tells us: "The malice of mortal sin is infinite, for it is an assault upon the infinite Godhead." As the punishment should be in proper proportion to the guilt, it must be infinite, because the malice of sin is infinite. The malice of mortal sin is infinite. For this reason the only begotten Son of God became Incarnate, suffered and died, in order to make fitting satisfaction for the sins of the world. Only a God was capable of rendering the infinite satisfaction corresponding to the infinite malice of the sin.

If you, dear brethren, have had the misfortune of committing a grievous sin, the guilt and the eternal punishment will be remitted in the holy Sacrament of Penance. If you are truly repentant and confess your sins, you will participate in the satisfaction rendered by Jesus Christ, the infinite expiation and penance of the divine Son will be applied to you and you will receive forgiveness. You will be again a child of God, purified and sanctified in the Blood of the divine Lamb. However, if the sinner during life neglects to profit by the infinite satisfaction of Jesus Christ, and dies in his sins, the merits of Jesus Christ can no longer help him. The guilt, infinite in

its malice, continues to adhere to him. It is no longer possible for him to render to God's Majesty a befitting infinite satisfaction. Hence, there remains nothing but infinite punishment. It is, therefore, idle and ill-considered to say that a single mortal sin should not be eternally punished. As long as the sin is not expiated, it deserves infinite punishment. The gravity of a crime is not measured according to the time it took to accomplish it, but according to its malice and evil results. It is so also in the judgments of this world. In our courts the punishment is not measured according to the time in which a wicked deed is accomplished. If burglary is committed, the deed may have taken only a few moments, yet the burglar is condemned to many years imprisonment and, furthermore, is branded for life by his disgrace; his crime may even affect the reputation of his children and children's children. In reality it is not God but the sinner himself who pronounces his own condemnation. He who commits a mortal sin separates himself voluntarily from the intimate communion of love and life in God. If he dies in this state he remains eternally separated from God, because after death a return to God is no longer possible. "As the tree falls, so it remains lying." This eternal separation from God, the loss of the Supreme Good, is the greatest torture of hell, more horrible than the fiery ordeal.

There are, therefore, very reasonable grounds, my dear brethren, for the eternity of hell-fire. Let us take these thoughts thoroughly to heart; they are calculated to strengthen our faith. Let the Divine Word have more weight with us than all human reasoning. We believe that the pains of hell are eternal, because God, the eternal, infallible truth, has revealed it, and presented it for our belief through His Holy Catholic Church. The humbler this faith, the better shall we understand how equitable and just this punishment is.

If we surrender our understanding in all obedience, if we accept this truth devoutly, and often reflect upon it, it will be well with us. The more we think of hell during life, the less we shall have to fear it at death. We are far from doubting the justice and goodness of God, in the thought of the eternal pains of the damned, rather we perceive that an eternal punishment is the only means whereby God can guard His authority against the presumption and insults of His ungrateful creatures. God is infinitely holy. For this reason He is obliged to abhor and punish wickedness eternally.

If, perchance, then, dear brethren, you have fallen into grievous sin, be it only in thought, then reflect that you are standing upon the brink of hell, as long as that sin is not effaced by a good confession, or at least by perfect contrition, which includes the promise of a good confession. "Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day: for His wrath shall come on a sudden: and in the time of vengeance He will destroy thee" (Eccles. v, 8, 9). Hasten to become reconciled to God, in the holy Sacrament of Penance, for death may come as a thief in the night. Make use of the time of grace given you for repentance, and you will escape the terrible sentence which the ungodly receive at the hands of the just God. Amen.

III. THE FOLLY OF SIN

"Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity."—Eccles. i, 2.

"Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity." Solomon came to this conclusion at the end of his life. From his own personal experience he learned to despise the things of this world. As the bird on the ocean can find no place to rest, so there is nothing in this world where the soul of man can find rest and contentment. "I have seen all things that are done under the sun, and behold all is vanity, and vexation of spirit" (Eccles. i, 14). "I said in my heart: I will go and abound with delights, and enjoy good things. And I saw that this also was vanity. Laughter I counted error, and to mirth I said: Why art thou vainly deceived? . . . I made me great works; I built me houses and planted vineyards: I made gardens and orchards, and set them with trees of all kinds: and I made me ponds of water, to water therewith the wood of the young trees: I got me men servants and maid servants: and had a great family, and heads of oxen, and great flocks of sheep, above all that were before me in Jerusalem: I heaped together for myself silver and gold, and the wealth of kings, and provinces: I made me singing men, and singing women, and the delights of the sons of men, cups and vessels to serve to pour out wine: And I surpassed in riches all that were before me in Jerusalem: my wisdom also remained with me. And whatsoever my eyes desired, I refused them not: and I withheld not my heart from enjoying every pleasure, and delighting itself in the things which I have prepared: and when I turned myself to all the works which my hands had wrought, and to the labors wherein I

had labored in vain, I saw in all things vanity, and vexation of mind, and that nothing was lasting under the sun" (Eccles. ii, 1, etc.).

Let us to-day contemplate the folly of the sinner who grievously offends God in order that he might: (1) Enjoy a temporary pleasure, or (2) spare himself a temporary suffering.

1. (a) "The perverse are hard to be corrected: and the number of fools is infinite" (Eccles. i, 15). We are reminded of these words when considering the actions of a great many people. Many there are who strive after empty honors. Others indulge in impurity. They seek their joys in the filth like unclean beasts. Others, again, endeavor to heap up treasures, without ever taking thought about their souls. Greed, sensuality, and vanity are the sources of untold sins. This three-headed serpent is the mother of most vices. Hence, St. John admonishes us: "Love not the world, nor those things which are in the world. For all that is in the world, is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life. And the world passeth away, and the concupiscence thereof" (I. John ii, 15, 17). The world passeth away, and the concupiscence thereof, yet the foolish man seeks unlawful pleasure without considering the brief duration of his unholy pastime. Nor does he reflect on the consequences. I ask you, who perseverest in sin, are you a Christian? Yes! Do you believe that there is an eternity? Yes! Do you believe that God eternally rewards the good, and eternally punishes the wicked? You believe this! But do you not, then, perceive the folly of indulging your evil passions and remaining in mortal sin? How long will your unholy pleasure last? At any rate you will have to abandon it at your death. "The world passeth away, and the concupiscence thereof." And for this unlawful and sinful pleasure of brief duration, you renounce the most holy joys, renounce eternal happiness! Is this not against reason and common

sense? If we offer to a small child the choice between a piece of candy and a costly diamond, he will choose the candy, and it does not surprise us, as the child has not yet the use of reason; he does not appreciate the diamond's value. Do you perceive, dear brethren, how foolishly he acts who prefers the momentary sweetness of sin to an eternity of happiness? You know, your faith tells you, experience teaches you, that all worldly pleasures are vain and transitory. Faith tells you also that the happiness of heaven is surpassing everything and is eternal. And still you choose the momentary enjoyment rather than eternal delight and joy! Is not this folly?

What would you think of the owner of a fine orchard who would hasten into his garden and gather the blossoms from the trees. Your first thought would be: that man has gone insane; in his right mind he would never do such a thing: he must know that the blossoms can do him no good, and he deprives himself of the fruit. Yet those who persevere in sin act in this way. They say, like the foolish man of whom we read in the Bible: "Come therefore and let us enjoy the good things that are present, and let not the flower of time pass by us" (Wis. ii, 6, 7). If there are flowers of time, there is also a fruit of time, and this fruit of time is eternity. St. Bernard calls the works which we accomplish in this life the seeds of eternity. The foolish man plucks the blossoms of time. He wills to enjoy the pleasures of this world, and forfeits the fruits of eternity. He who spares not the blossom, will not reap the fruit. Those, however, who renounce the sinful pleasures of this world will accumulate in heaven the glorious fruits of eternal happiness. They will belong to the number of those of whom the Psalmist says: "Going they went and wept, casting their seeds: But coming they shall come with joyfulness, carrying their sheaves" (Ps. cxxv, 6). It will be said of them: "Blessed is he that is found without blemish. For he

hath done wonderful things in this life" (Eccles. xxxi, 8, 9). Wonderful things, because he did not allow himself to be deceived by the futile attractions of this world. "He that could have transgressed, and hath not transgressed: and could do evil things, and hath not done them: who hath been tried thereby, and made perfect, he shall have glory everlasting" (Eccles. xxxi, 10, 11). Oh, folly of the sinner, who plucks the blossoms of time, who wants to make himself a heaven after his own fashion in this world, and indulges in unlawful pleasures. Oh, folly of the sinner, who seeks his happiness in earthly honors, in possessions and pleasures, all these are like unto vapor, visible to the eye for a moment, and then vanishing. Oh, folly of the sinner, who will not practise renunciation, and who will be compelled to renounce eternal glory.

(b) But how is it that even the Christian, who believes in an eternity, pursues the pleasures of the world against his own better conviction? Why does he not shun the near occasion of sin? How can he renounce heaven and eternal happiness to enjoy a momentary wretched pleasure? What can induce him to do these foolish things? St. James furnishes us with the answer: "Every man is tempted, being drawn away by his own concupiscence and allured. Then when concupiscence hath conceived it bringeth forth sin: but sin when it is completed, begetteth death" (James i, 14, 15). It is our evil nature which generates all vices. The result is death of the soul, the loss of sanctifying grace and of Divine adoption, and, finally, eternal damnation. St. Paul writes, in his Epistle to the Galatians (v, 17): "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, for these are contrary one to another," *i. e.*, between sensuality and reason there rages a constant warfare: Reason, the spirit, desires the higher, nobler, supernatural possessions. It finds rest only in God. Sensuality, on the contrary, strives

to drag the spirit into the mire of sin. This warfare is the result of original sin. Even the saints were subjected to this continuous struggle, from which they emerged gloriously as the conquerors. From this warfare not even St. Paul was spared. He complains, in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians (xii, 17): "There was given me a sting of my flesh, an angel of Satan to buffet me." And in the Epistle to the Romans (vii, 23), he complains: "But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" It is evident from these words that sensuality is a terrible enemy of the soul, to be overcome only by incessant warfare. Assisted by Divine Grace, the saints fought this battle victoriously. The thought of eternity steeled their wills so that they were not lured by the siren song of sensuality. And because in the five senses is found the fuel of the fire of concupiscence they watched them carefully. They crucified their flesh by rigorous penance, obedient to the exhortation of St. Paul: "And they who are Christ's have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences" (Gal. v, 24). Yet the most rigorous penance was trifling to them, urged on by the thought of eternity. What, indeed, is the most rigorous penance compared to eternal delight and joy? What is the transitory penance of this life compared to eternal torment? The serious thought of eternity is a mighty weapon against the fascinations of sin.

(c) In order not to give way to the wrongful pleasures of the senses, Job made a covenant with his eyes. The eyes desired to look at dangerous objects. But his reason said: Look not upon them, and for this renunciation I promise you the everlasting blessed vision of God and of His angels and saints. In this manner his eyes were appeased. You, too, dear Christian, should make a covenant like Job, not only with your eyes, but with all your senses. If your glance

rests upon a dangerous object, say to your eyes: Be closed to the vanities of this world, and for this you will behold, in heaven, Jesus, His most holy Mother, the elect, and all the wonders of the Divine Glory. If your feet would seek out a dangerous path, an occasion of sin: Stay away, you will say to them, and for this deprivation "an entrance shall be ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II. Pet. i, 11). Your lips desire to utter impure or uncharitable words, and: Be silent, you say to them, and in eternity you shall never be tired of singing the sweetest hymns of praise. This, dear brethren, is making a covenant with our senses. In this way we are preserved from the follies to which concupiscence allures mankind.

Should the consideration of eternal happiness not suffice, dear brethren, to conquer your sensual desires, then think seriously upon the eternal pains of hell. "This terrible punishment should move those whom the reward does not attract," says St. Augustine. Place upon one side of the scales the momentary pleasure of the senses, upon the other the unspeakable pains which threaten you if you satisfy your inordinate passions. Is it possible that the lure of a single pleasure has more weight with you than has eternal damnation? When Saul was at war with the Philistines he forbade his people, under pain of death, to taste food before evening, until he had taken vengeance upon his enemies. This command was transgressed by Jonathan. He found honey in the wilderness and ate of it. When Saul discovered that his command had been disobeyed, he said: "Know and see by whom this sin hath happened to-day. As the Lord liveth, if it was done by Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." And Jonathan lamented: "I did but taste a little honey, and behold, I must die" (I. Kings, xiv). Remember, my brethren, that the Lord has forbidden you under the pain of eternal death to par-

take of the sweets of sensuality. If a mortal sin casts you into hell, you will lament your folly for all eternity, but to no purpose. Would not the thought of having lost heaven on account of a wretched momentary pleasure plunge you into the extremity of despair? Therefore, if you have tasted of this unlawful honey of sin, hasten to become reconciled with God, invoke *now* the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, the angels and saints; for once in hell there will be no one to make intercession for you.

2. (a) We have seen, dear brethren, how foolishly the sinner acts who offends God grievously in order to enjoy a vain, fleeting pleasure. And not only is temporal pleasure vain, but also temporal pain is vain when considered in the light of eternity. Some people sin in order to avoid suffering. Oh, folly of follies! Innumerable sins are committed in order to save one's self a contradiction, a humiliation, an inconvenience. Suppose that you had to live in bitter poverty all your life, or to endure some other suffering, yet what is this compared to eternity? "The number of the days of men at the most are a hundred years; as a drop of water of the sea are they esteemed: and as a pebble of the sand, so are a few years compared to eternity." What is your life? St. James answers: "It is a vapor which appeared for a little while, and afterwards shall vanish away" (James iv, 15). Our life lasts really only a moment; the past belongs to us no more; and whether the present moment will be succeeded by another, we know not. "My days are nothing" (Job vii, 16). What, then, are the troubles and sufferings of this world? Nothing in comparison to eternity. Our momentary distress and adversity the good God will reward with everlasting joy, if we bear our cross with patience and persevere in the state of grace. But if you sin grievously, to shake off this momentary suffering, then you expose yourself to the danger of having to suffer eternally, if death

should surprise you in your sin. Does not sound reason tell us that of two evils we should choose the lesser? What folly, therefore, if you sin in order to spare yourself momentary and passing suffering. Which is greater, temporal or eternal suffering? We were sentenced to temporal punishment when the Lord said to Adam in paradise: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken" (Gen. iii, 19). This was the sentence of Divine *mercy*. Another and quite different sentence will be pronounced at the end of time. Then the King will say to those gathered upon the left: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire" (Matt. xxv, 41). This is the sentence of the Divine *justice*. It will be the lot of those who will not submit to the sentence of mercy. It was unbearable for them to suffer in this world, and, therefore, they will have to suffer eternally. St. Bernard finds the difference of the two sentences in the little word "till." Adam was told: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the earth." In the sentence of condemnation at the end of the world there will be no "until." The punishment the damned will suffer will not be fixed by time, but by eternity. Depart from Me into everlasting fire! Oh, folly of the sinner, who grievously offends God to escape temporal suffering!

Let us suppose, dear brethren, that God would send an angel to announce to you that you will live for six hundred years. The angel will tell you that if you consent to live the first five years in poverty, distress, tribulation, and suffering, then you shall pass all the remaining years in delight and comfort. On the other hand, you may live the first five years in comfort and pleasure, and shall pass the other 595 years in misery and wretchedness. Who, under such circumstances, would not choose to spend the first five years in deprivation? Now I ask you: What are the few years of life com-

pared to the millions and millions of years of eternity? Is it not folly to refuse to submit to the hardships which a virtuous life involves, when we can gain everlasting bliss thereby? Is there greater folly than to incur eternal damnation for a fleeting enjoyment? Are they fools who bear their cross with patience in order to be saved, or they, who, impatient of sufferings and prohibition, plunge into vice and risk eternal damnation? The world calls blessed those who do not suffer. But the Saviour tells us: "Blessed are the poor, blessed are the mourners, blessed are those who suffer persecution." Remain, therefore, faithful to God, dear brethren, for brief is the suffering, eternal the joy.

(b) Now, then, answer me, you who are revengeful, why will you not give up your enmity? Is it not true that you fear the small humiliation of first holding out your hand to your enemy? You say: What will the people say if I let this offence pass unheeded? They will take me for a coward. But why do you not ask: What will God say if I persevere in enmity, God, who will be my judge, before whose throne I must appear? You do not ask: How will the devil and the damned rejoice when I appear amongst them with this hatred in my heart? They will laugh at your foolishness, because you preferred eternal torment to a slight humiliation. And you, who are in unlawful possession of your neighbor's property. Why do you not give back that which does not rightfully belong to you? Is it not a fact that you fear you would have to limit your expenditure if you would make restitution of the unlawful property? Tell me, do you expect to buy your rescue from hell with this unlawful property? I ask those who intentionally conceal sins in confession: Why do you commit this sacrilege? Why do you profane the holy Sacrament? Alas, you dread the trifling shame connected with the confession of that particular sin. Which is then

the lesser evil, to be put to shame before an individual, only for a moment, or to stand before God and the whole world in ignominy and disgrace for all eternity? I ask others: Why do you not give up the vice of cursing, swearing, and blaspheming? Because you will not use violence to yourself. Wo unto you, if your cursing casts you into eternal despair, where curses and blasphemies will forever be rampant!

Dear brethren, think of eternity when temptation approaches you. This thought will strengthen you in the combat. It will not be difficult to observe the commandments when eternity is before our eyes. The Psalmist says, in the 118th Psalm: "Thy commandment is exceeding broad" (96). Why does he call the Divine law "exceeding broad" when Jesus Christ says: "Narrow is the gate, and strait is the way which leads to life" (Matt. vii, 14). Cardinal Hugo explains that to the Psalmist the way to heaven appears broad, because directly before he had been thinking on eternity. The way to heaven is truly narrow, few there are who walk thereon. Most men find the Divine Commandments too hard. For this reason they rush into the easy road and to ruin. Dear brethren, only momentary is the pleasure which sin affords. Brief is the suffering that oppresses us here below. Let us not be so foolish as to wish to free ourselves by sinning. In eternity, the brief pain of this life which we have borne for love of God will be rewarded with eternal joy, whereas the brief sinful pleasure will be punished with endless torment. Consider this truth, and you will say with the Prophet: "The way is broad." It is difficult and in opposition to your sensual nature to love your enemy; it may be hard to make restitution of unrightful property. But reflect what it means to lose eternal happiness, and to suffer eternal damnation. "I have seen an end of all perfection, thy commandment is exceeding broad." Amen.

IV. PENANCE AND ETERNITY

"For I am ready for scourges."—Ps. xxxvii, 18.

The holy season of Lent is a time of penance. Holy Church calls upon us to "do penance, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matt. iii, 2). Many people become frightened when they hear the word penance. It is true the proper penance must be rigorous, enduring, and earnest; it should be an expiation for our sins and tend to reconcile us to the divine Justice. A half-hearted penance, one that does not crucify the flesh, nor humble the spirit, avails naught. A real, sincere, strict penance is required of us; nevertheless, we need not be afraid of it; for the more severe the penance, the sweeter and more efficacious it will be. Though it may chasten the spirit, crucify the flesh, oppose worldly desires, enforce self-renunciation and denial, yet only such penance is capable of rendering the converted sinner happy, because it restores rest and peace to the conscience, fills the soul with the joy of the Holy Spirit, and will protect us from the Judgment to come. Mary Magdalen experienced this consoling fruit of penance. While yet a sinner, continual warfare raged in her soul. She was tormented by her passions and consumed with remorse of conscience. But heavenly peace and holy joy flooded her soul when she trod the path of rigorous penance. As a penitent she lies humble and contrite at the feet of the divine Saviour. Her heart melted with sorrow and joy when she heard the consoling words from the Lord's lips: "Thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace" (Luke vii, 48, 50). This Divine peace, in which the penitent is made to participate, this peace,

which, according to the words of the holy Apostle, surpasses all understanding, this peace sweeter than all the pleasures of this world, this peace which the world hath not, and cannot give, it alone should suffice to induce the sinner to penance. Because many persons shrink from doing penance, let us to-day consider it in the light of eternity and we shall learn: (1) How foolish he is who will not do penance in this life. (2) How the impenitent are warned of their folly by the testimony of the blessed and of the damned.

I. (a) Reading the lives of the saints, we are amazed at the severe acts of penance which they took upon themselves. Many passed their nights in vigils and prayers, allowing themselves little rest on a hard bed or even on the floor. They fasted, living only on bread and water. They endured heat and cold, denied themselves every convenience, and scourged their bodies most severely. Not content with crucifying their flesh, they humbled their spirit, accepting insults, ridicule and contempt with equanimity, even with joy. They sought humiliation and abasement. They considered it a joy to suffer ignominy for the sake of Jesus. Penitential exercises, such as these, appear to the average man unbearable. But they are not unbearable when considered in the light of eternity. Most rigid penances seemed easy to the Saints in comparison with eternal joy on the one hand, and eternal torments on the other. They were convinced that man must merit heaven by suffering. In order to dwell eternally with Jesus in heaven, they would suffer with Him in life, mindful of the words of the Apostle: "If we be dead with Him, we shall live also with Him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him" (II. Tim. ii, 11, 12). For this reason they proved themselves as servants of God, in patience, in adversity, in distress, in prison, in labor, in fastings. With long suffering, with

sweetness in charity unfeigned, that bore with those who despised, hated, and persecuted them. Rejoicing they served the Lord, through honor and dishonor, through infamy and good name. "In the eyes of the world they had a troubled life, and yet they were even joyful" (II. Cor. vi). Why? Because penance was sweet and easy to them in the thought of eternity. Always bearing about in their bodies their crucified Saviour, in the blessed hope that one day the "life also of Jesus might be made manifest in their bodies" (II. Cor. iv, 10).

They wanted to die with Jesus in order to live with Him in everlasting glory. They said with the Apostle: "Our present tribulation, which is momentary and light, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (II. Cor. iv, 17). They were convinced "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come which shall be revealed to us" (Rom. viii, 18). They rejoiced in ignominy and contempt, for faith told them: "Think not strange the burning heat which is to try you, as if some new thing happened to you, but rejoice, being partakers of the sufferings of Christ, that when His glory shall be revealed you may also be glad with exceeding joy. For if you be reproached for the name of Christ you shall be happy: for that which is of the honor, glory and power of God, and that which is his spirit, resteth upon you" (I. Pet. iv, 12-14), namely, when you suffer and do penance in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will be within you, which is the pledge of our eternal honor and glory.

See, dear brethren, how the Saints did penance because they reflected on eternal happiness. Among them were those who walked in innocence, who never grievously offended God, like St. Aloysius.

What, then, must be required of those who grievously sin? For

them penance is absolutely necessary. You must crucify your flesh, and humble your spirit, you who have sinned, if you would be saved. How am I to do penance, you say? Must I watch and pray whole nights? Must I live on bread and water? Calm yourself, my friend. God demands no extraordinary penitential exercises. Do penance by faithfully and conscientiously performing the duties of holy religion, even at some inconvenience and effort. Recite your morning and night prayers, say grace at meals, attend holy Mass on Sundays and Holy days of obligation, and on other days if you can, observe the fast days. If you do this, you make acts of self-denial; you are performing penitential works. On days of abstinence refrain from eating flesh meat. By fasting and abstinence you will chastise your flesh. Avoid excess in eating and drinking, though your desires may incite you to intemperance. Thus you will practise mortification and renunciation. Avoid dangerous pleasures, such as excite concupiscence and are an occasion for sin. It may cost you some effort, but you will be practising self-denial and sacrifice and do penance. Bear with patience all suffering and adversity which the good God may send you. This will be penance of great merit. Accept your crosses in the spirit of penance; those crosses which your station and position in life may impose upon you. You see how manifold your opportunities are to crucify your flesh and to humble your spirit. If offended by another, humble your spirit and forgive. Forgiveness is penance, because it means a combat against your pride. If ridiculed because you fulfil your duties as a Christian, bear the contempt for the love of the Crucified who also was ridiculed. Such penance will wipe out a multitude of sins. There are a thousand opportunities of doing penance and of faithfully observing the will of God.

In this holy season of Lent there is required a special penance and

humiliation, namely, the confession of your sins. Dear brethren, God requires of you nothing excessively difficult or impossible. But what He does require is necessary in order to participate in His eternal and superabundant glory. What folly, therefore, to fear this small penance, and to lose in consequence the "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, reserved in heaven" for those who do penance.

(b) Should the promise of eternal glory not be sufficiently powerful to move you to penance, then let the threat of eternal torment do it. Penance must be done, whether in this life or in the next. O, folly of the sinner, who lives unrepentant, dies unrepentant, to do penance eternally, when penance will no longer avail him! The sinner has many idle excuses for persevering in frivolity and indifference. The demands of the law of God and the Church appear too severe to him. He gives ear to his sensual nature, that advises him, "Let thy heart be in that which is good, walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thy eyes" (Eccl. 11, 9). This siren song of sensuality charms him to such an extent that he considers it impossible to practise renunciation, self-denial, and penance. Poor man! If a small temporal penance appears so unbearable to you, how will you be able to bear eternal hell fire? The story is related of a delicate young man who entered a religious order of severe rule. A friend tried to make him leave the order, suggesting that on account of his feeble health the youth would hardly be able to stand the severe penitential practise. But the youth answered, "If I am to consider my comfort and avoid the practises of penance in this short term of life, how could I bear to be tortured forever in hell fire. I prefer a brief temporal penance in order to escape an eternal one." Dear brethren, so should you speak to your sensual nature, when it would deter you from the

exercise of reasonable penance. Say to yourself: I find it hard to bear the burn of hot wax from a candle, alas, how would I endure hell fire! Say to yourself: If I can not now endure humiliation and contempt, what would become of me if the devil and the damned in hell would ridicule and mock me for all eternity!

O, folly of the sinner, who in this life will not do penance, so as to escape eternal penance. Even an eternal headache would be unbearable, and yet if the damned were given their choice between a fiery ordeal for a thousand years, or a headache for all eternity, they would prefer the fiery ordeal; they would prefer the hope of a final relief to the despair of eternal suffering. Now, then, if even a headache lasting eternally appears unbearable to us, how can we calmly think of hell fire? It is really inconceivable how anybody could, with this thought in mind, expose himself to such danger by committing, or remaining, in mortal sin.

Once there came to a saint, so it is related, a great sinner, who had never thought of amendment and penance. The saint had compassion on this man's state of soul and promised that he would perform some penitential works for him, provided his visitor would undertake, in return for this favor, to remain lying upon one side in his bed the whole of the following night. "If that is all you wish me to do," said the sinner, laughingly, "that will be easy." That night, remembering his promise, he determined to do as the saint had requested. After less than half an hour he felt a strong inclination to change his position. But he resisted, as he desired to keep his promise. Soon it became quite unbearable to remain longer in this position. It seemed to him that in his whole life he had never been so uncomfortable. Still he remained in his position, until at last he could stand the torture no longer, and he thought, If I cannot bear to lie in an uncomfortable

position for a short while, what, if I had to bear the fire of hell for all eternity?

My dear brethren, recall to mind the punishment that awaits the sinner in the hereafter, and assuredly you will not persevere in grievous sin; you will not delay your contrition and penance; you will cheerfully and in the spirit of penance accept the crosses which the good God may send you; you will be reminded that all the sufferings of this time are trifling compared with the eternal punishment of hell.

II. (a) The sinner who considers penance in the light of eternity should exclaim with the Psalmist: "I am ready for scourging." I will gladly do penance in this world, if only I may be spared in eternity! How foolish I have been to have so long delayed repentance and amendment! To what awful peril have I exposed myself! Certainly it is the height of folly to postpone one's repentance, and then be obliged to repent for all eternity.

If all these considerations are not sufficient to convince the sinner, let him listen to the testimony of the blessed and the damned who testify from their own experience. Come with me, dear brethren, to the gate of the heavenly Jerusalem! Behold there the army of holy patriarchs and prophets. See the choir of the holy apostles, the glorious army of the martyrs, of holy confessors and virgins. "The Lord has wiped the tears from their eyes. And death shall be no more; nor morning; nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more" (Apoc. xxi, 4). Ask these blessed souls about the sufferings which they endured in this world; ask them concerning the martyrdom they underwent, the rigorous works of penance they practised! What will they answer? Their answer will be that which the divine Saviour gave to the Disciples on the road to Emmaus. These

Disciples were discussing the bitter passion and death of their Lord and Master. "And while they talked together of all these things which had happened, it came to pass that Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were held that they should not know him. And he said to them: 'What are these discourses that you hold one with another as you walk?' And the one whose name was Cleophas, answering, said to him: 'Art thou alone a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast thou not known the things that have been done there in these days?' The Saviour—answered: 'What things?' 'What has happened?' " (Luke xxiv, 14). A remarkable question from the lips of the Lord! Dost thou, Oh Lord, no longer remember that they sentenced Thee to the cruel death of the Cross? Have the scourges, the crown of thorns, the toilsome road of the Cross vanished from Thy memory? And the three hours of agony upon the Cross? Hast Thou forgotten Thy death amid the mockery of Thy enemies? How canst Thou then ask: "What has happened?" And yet, dear brethren, this question was not put in vain, for from the lips of the eternal Wisdom proceed no useless words. In this question is concealed a profound mystery. Christ, the Lord, wanted to make known by this question that whatever He had endured appeared now as quite insignificant; that since the Resurrection His sufferings seemed small in comparison with His glory. For this reason He inquired: "What has happened?" as if He thought no longer of the terrible torture He has suffered.

So, too, will the blessed ask, dear brethren, if you inquire about their sufferings, their penitential works, their martyrdoms, endured on this earth. What sufferings? What pains? What persecutions? They say, "We think no more about them in the inexpressible happiness that we enjoy. Of what mortification and penances are you speaking? We think no more about them. They were not to be

compared to the glory and splendor which we now enjoy. The suffering lasted but a moment, but the joy lasts eternally." O, folly of the sinner, who disdains to do a small penance for a short time, and thereby loses heaven for all eternity.

(*b*) I shall lead you now, dear brethren, from the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem to the gates of hell. Enter in spirit into that awful prison, into that exterior darkness where the worm never dies and the fire is not quenched. There you see persons of every walk in life, amongst them many who had received the gift of faith, but the words of the Psalmist have been verified in them: "They are all gone aside; they are become unprofitable together" (Ps. xiii, 3). Gone aside from the path of virtue, turned from the narrow way that led to eternal life. They have become unprofitable as the withered vine branch; therefore, they are cast into the fire that never ceases. There you find no consolation—no hope. Ask them about the comfort, the honors, the pleasures which they enjoyed upon earth. They will say: "What comforts, what pleasures?" The tortures they now endure have wiped out the memory of whatever enjoyments they had on earth. They will say: "We pay dearly for our momentary pleasures. Here we are lying in the pool that seethes with fire and brimstone. Our torture is unspeakable, without hope, without alleviation, without consolation, without end!" They call out to the sinner: "Now you are making merry, you follow the inclinations of your heart and the desires of your eyes. You sin fearlessly. This is what we did when on earth, like you. And you will be doing the same as we are doing now, after you die." There it stands, the damned soul, enveloped in fire, surrounded by demons, burned with pain, devoured by worms! How wretched it looks, how sad, how repelling! Ask this soul: "Why were you damned?" "I was damned," it answers, "because I scoffed at the priest, because

I did not amend my life, because I would not forgive, because I would not make restitution of stolen property, because I was a slave to vice! I was damned because death overtook me in grievous sin, because I died impenitent!" "And how long have you been in hell?" "It seems to me over a hundred thousand years." "And how long have you to remain there?" And with a curse the damned soul shrieks: "For all eternity! Forever and ever!"

Behold, O sinner, how recklessly you behave if you fail to do penance. Take counsel with yourself and ask: "Where am I in reality?" You will be obliged to answer: "I stand between heaven and hell." What is this life other than a narrow path, a straight road, upon which we pass to the shores of eternity. With what care and attention would you not tread if you were obliged to pass across an abyss on a board only a foot wide. Would you shut your eyes? That would not be possible. Why? Because you would be in terror of falling. How then can you be so careless and shut your eyes to the danger of falling into the abyss of hell?

Choose now; it will be either torture with the damned eternally, or life with the saints in eternal joy. Choose now and choose at once! After death there is no longer any choice. Amen.

V. ON THE THRESHOLD OF ETERNITY

"Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the time of affliction come . . . and the spirit return to God who gave it"—EccI. cxxi, 7.

There is a moment in the lives of all men that will decide forever their fate. This is the last conscious moment before death. O awful moment, that decides for us eternal happiness or unhappiness. How important that we should never lose sight of that all-important moment upon which our eternity depends. Listen, therefore, dear brethren, and I shall try and picture vividly to you the grave moment in which you will yield up your spirit; that critical moment, the like of which does not again come in this life or after; that solemn moment which is the end of time and the beginning of eternity; that telling moment, the most important of our lives, in which will be pronounced the irrevocable sentence; that blissful moment for the just, that sinister moment for the unrepentant sinner. The decision rendered at that eventful moment will never be altered throughout eternity. For those who during life earnestly and frequently consider this moment, its terrors will be diminished. The contemplation of that moment, the threshold of eternity, will:

1. Arouse us from indifference.
2. Liberate our hearts from the inordinate love of the things of this world.
3. Incite us to a holy zeal in employing the time of our life for the good of our soul.

I. (a) There are people who are not at all impressed by any thought or consideration of things eternal. But there is hardly anyone who is not impressed by the thought of this last moment on

earth, that moment on which depends a happy or unhappy eternity. We know the parables of the Lord about the wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25). They went forth to meet the bridegroom. The foolish virgins took their lamps, but carelessly forgot the oil. The wise virgins provided oil for their lamps. The wise virgins are a symbol of the zealous Christians who feed the light of faith with the oil of good works. The foolish virgins signify sinners, who, although they wish to be favored by the bridegroom, yet neglect the oil of good works. When the bridegroom was delayed, the virgins slept. At midnight a cry was made: "Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye forth to meet him." The bridegroom means the Judge coming for the particular judgment, at the moment of death. At the cry the wise and the foolish virgins arose. But the awakening availed not the foolish virgins, because they had no oil for their lamps. They are a likeness of the souls who appear before the divine tribunal without good works. The parable says: "At midnight there was a cry made," *i. e.*, at a time least expected the moment of death will approach, and the coming of the Judge will be announced. Midnight is the moment when one day ends and a new day begins. So shall we, when cry of death is made, stand between time and eternity. The time of our life has ended, eternity begins. O, that we may not awaken too late, and not in vain, like the foolish virgins who were not given time to fill their lamps. Listen, therefore, with attention to the cry of the Gospel, announcing the advent of the Judge at the end of your life. God grant that you may not delay to provide the oil, and that you may be ready when the Lord comes. "Rise thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ will enlighten you" (Eph. v, 14).

(*b*) Dear brethren, would the ticking of a clock awaken a sound sleeper? No; but when the moment arrives for which the alarm,

is set, then there is a noise that awakens those in deep sleep. The life of man may be likened to an alarm-clock. The time for awakening is set by God for a moment unknown to us. The tickings of this clock are the numerous infirmities, sufferings, accidents that befall us. They are to remind you, dear Christians, that the time of your life is gradually running down: Yet, how few give heed to this! They have become accustomed to these events of life. They notice not that they are approaching death, having become so used to the tick of the clock that they no longer hear it. But the moment of awakening will come, the time of your death, when the life of your body, like the wheels of the clock, will have run down, when the soul must depart the body and go to its destination, pass into eternity. When this alarm of death calls, you will awaken. But wo to you, if you are then not equipped for the journey which you will undertake. Take care, therefore, to inquire what you may expect when the clock of your life shall have run down. Prepare now for the call of the Lord in that last hour, awaken now from the sleep of tepidity and sin, anticipate the coming of the Judge. Remember, dear brethren, that time will inevitably be there for you some day. The physician and the members of your family will note the approach of death, and they will advise you to prepare your soul. This will be a shocking surprise to those who expected that they had many years to live; terrible news for those who until then have led a life of indifference or of sin. Reflect, dear brethren, upon this situation! Quickly your strength fails, your breathing becomes difficult, your vision is obscured, hands and feet grow cold, cold sweat gathers upon the brow, the senses are dulled, and, finally, that awful moment arrives, that heart-rending moment, when the soul leaves the body, death has come. Who can bear to think of it? Who can remain indifferent at a deathbed scene! Yet there will

come the time when you, my friend, will be prostrated upon your deathbed, and death, the fate of every man, will claim you.

II. (a) Let us imagine, dear brethren, that at the last moment of this life we are placed upon a high rock from which we can see on the one side our lifetime, and upon the other, eternity. What will you think then of your temporal life? It will appear as nothing to you. Brief will appear its seventy or eighty years at that moment, as compared to eternity. What will remain of the years of your life? Nothing! But what of the existence that follows? Eternity without end, eternal glory, or eternal punishment. Can you venture then, on account of a life so insignificant, to put your eternal existence in danger?

(b) Let us suppose further that the evil spirit shows you from the heights of this rock, as he showed the Saviour, the riches and treasures of this world. You have a great liking for these things. The evil one whispers to you: "All these will I give thee if thou wilt forsake God and serve me." Christ, the Lord, however, shows you, on the other side, the land of eternity with unending delights, or never-ending torments. Could you really for earthly gain put your eternity in danger and forfeit your salvation? Do not let the evil spirit impose upon you. What will you think of the vanity of this world when, at the last moment, your eyes will be opened, and you are about to cross the threshold of eternity? What will these things avail you in the hour of death? Can they protect you from the just wrath of the divine Judge? If, at that decisive moment, you are not in the state of sanctifying grace, all the wealth and wisdom of the wide world will not avail you!

(c) How will the sensual pleasures of the world that once fascinated your heart, appear to you when your eye rests upon the land of eternity? You will be as a man who is awakened from a dream.

The Psalmist says: "As the dream of them that awake, O Lord, so in thy city thou shalt bring their image to nothing" (Ps. lxxii, 20). Take note of the words: "As the dream of them that awaken, thou shalt bring their image to nothing." The impression of a dream is deep upon the sleeper, but it vanishes when sleep is past. And so it will be with you, O sinner, at the last moment of your life, if you now give yourself to the vain dreams of sensuality.

(*d*) Let us proceed to the labors and afflictions of this life, how will they appear when you are standing on the brink of eternity. How trivial, indeed, are they! If you carry your crosses for the love of God, you will justly wonder that the good God rewards so little suffering with eternal joy. But if in your life you have shunned the crosses of penance, your conscience will bitterly reproach you, that to avoid a little suffering you have forfeited such great happiness. St. Peter of Alcantara, who had led a penitential life, appeared shortly after his death to another saint and said: "O blessed penance that has brought me to such glory." The just forget all the tribulations they had to undergo in this life when they contemplate the eternal happiness upon which they are entering. When Joseph was set free from the dungeon and became Viceroy of Egypt, he named the first son born to him Manasses and said: "God hath made me forget all my labors" (Gen. xli, 51). The word Manasses means: causing forgetfulness. O all you, who are suffering and afflicted, bear your crosses with patience, and at the last moment of your life you will exclaim with Joseph: "The Lord hath made me forget all my labors."

(*e*) When Pope Leo XI was on his deathbed his confessor said to him: "Your holiness may be confident, for you have the keys of the kingdom of heaven in your hands," to which the Pope answered: "It would be a greater consolation for me had I been charged with

the keys of a monastery during my life." When Philip III, King of Spain, a pious potentate, of whom it was said that throughout his life he never committed a grievous sin, was reminded at the hour of death of his royal honors, he said: "Rather would I have been a poor friar than a king." If, therefore, even the highest honors are considered so little at the moment of death, what can be said of lesser ones? Only the consciousness of having loved and feared God, and nothing else, will inspire us with confidence and hope at the last moment.

III. (a) Dear brethren, let this be a warning to us to despise the vanities of the world. The consideration of the last moment, upon which eternity depends, should incite us to a holy zeal in employing well the time of our life. At that critical moment the time which Divine Mercy has given us to prepare will be concluded. Then will be finished the fruitful years of grace. In this life we are given the heavenly manna of Divine Mercy. But he who does not gather this bread during his life, who does not co-operate with the merciful grace of God to make his election sure, will have squandered his golden opportunities. He who now "sows in spirit," who now leads a spiritual truly Christian life, will then reap eternal life. But he who now sows in the flesh, who is a slave to sin and vice, he will at that moment "reap destruction."

(b) In the Secret Revelation of St. John we read: "And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven clothed with a cloud, and a rainbow upon his head; and his face was as the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire . . . and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot upon the land, . . . he swore by him that liveth forever and ever, that time shall be no more" (Apoc. x, 1). The angel placed one foot upon the sea, and the other upon the earth, because the sea is an image of eternity, and earth the image

of time. Between life and eternity, a picture of the moment of death!

What would you not give at the moment of death for even one hour's grace. But in vain, your time is up. And can you imagine that you will be able to do at the moment of your death that which you will not do now? What can you do when your mind becomes obscured? What, when your senses forsake you, when your sight is extinguished, and your ear is closed to advice. What can you do when your will, so long enslaved to evil desires, has become incapable of forming even one good resolution. How difficult it is to direct our thoughts to serious things even when a slight headache bothers us, and how can you expect to make a good confession, of a life-long series of sins, when sick unto death? The Apostle advises: "Be wise, and redeem the time" (Eph. v, 16). Time ought to be as precious to us as a jewel purchased at an enormous price. "No earthly treasure," says St. Alphonsus, "is of as much value as even a single moment of time." When once death is at hand time can no longer be purchased at any price.

Now, let me ask you, dear brethren, what have you done so far to prepare yourselves for that critical moment upon which your eternity depends? How have you spent your life? You know not when your time will expire. How can you afford to be careless? How can you go on living in sin? Where is your faith, your reason, your common sense, if you do not employ the term of your life in preparation for your death? Be wise in time, and live as if every day might be your last, as in truth it may be. Hate and avoid sin, especially mortal sin. And should you have the misfortune of sinning grievously, let nothing prevent you from going to Confession at the earliest opportunity. Let us take to heart the words of St. Peter to "make sure our election by good works," for thus "an

entrance shall be ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Pet. i, 10, 11). Death makes no distinction between youth and old age. "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the time of affliction come, before the pitcher be crushed at the fountain, before the dust return unto its earth, and the spirit return to God who gave it" (Eccl. xii). Amen.

VI. THE IMPENITENT SINNER ON THE THRESHOLD OF ETERNITY

"The sorrows of death surrounded me, and the torrents of iniquity troubled me."—Ps. xvii, 5.

Once more we will direct our thoughts to that grave moment upon which our eternity depends. We have learned how the consideration of this important subject is well calculated to rouse us from the sleep of indifference. We have seen how this thought of death incites to the employment of the time of life for the good of our souls. It is for this very end that God gives man time in this world so that he may be well prepared to appear before the divine Majesty, adorned with merit and virtue. One of the first things we learned in the Catechism is that God made us to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in the next. "With him that feareth the Lord," says the book of Wisdom, "it shall go well in the latter end, and in the day of his death he shall be blessed" (Eccl. i, 13). But how will the sinner fare who never gave thought to eternity; to whom "the worship of God was an abomination" (Eccl. i, 32). What will he do at that last moment when he stands between time and eternity? What will all his worldly affairs and successes avail him, when he has failed to attend to his chief business, the salvation of his soul? What assistance will he derive from the sinful deeds in which he sought delectation? He will arrive at the threshold of eternity:

1. In fear of the evil one, who drives him to despair.
2. In fear of the multitude and gravity of his sins.
3. In fear of divine Justice.

4. In fear of damnation.

Let us contemplate the fear of the sinner at his death, so as to obtain from this contemplation a wholesome fear of sin and of spiritual sloth.

I. St. John records, in his Secret Revelation, that he heard a loud voice in heaven, saying: "Wo to the earth and to the sea, because the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time" (Rev. xii, 12). Sinners like to persuade themselves that they are safe from death, at least for a long time to come. They avoid all thought of death. The devil, who during their lifetime exerted his flattery to tempt them, will now, in the hour of their death, come in great wrath to wage war upon them. Why is his wrath so great at this hour? He knows that only a short time remains to him to overpower the soul of that dying man. If he wins, the soul will be his for all eternity; if he loses, all his former work has been in vain. The shorter, therefore, the time, the greater his wrath and rage. It is probable, even, that the soul at that fateful moment is attacked not only by one, but by many evil spirits. When the people of Israel marched out of Egypt, Pharaoh assembled his entire army and pursued the people of God. Thus the devil calls upon all the powers of hell when the soul is leaving the body. The temptations will be stronger and more numerous. The evil spirit, who formerly, when the sinner was in good health, and presuming upon the mercy of God, promised him a long life in his career of sin, will now whisper to the dying man: "If even the just man is only with difficulty saved, what can you hope for? There is no mercy for you! He who leads a bad life cannot die a good death!" And, while thus plunging the dying man into despair, the evil spirit will change about and inspire false hopes. "What are you afraid of? You will not die in this illness! You will get

better. Do not let them frighten you! There is plenty of time to confess your sins, to make restitution of unjustly gotten property!" Again, the devil resorts to other tactics. He will incite the poor sick man to impatience, to anger against God. "God is unjust towards you. Here you are in your best years upon a sick-bed, while others no better than you are healthy and well! You did not trouble about God all your life, and He will not bother with you now! Be consistent and show that you are not a coward! Only weaklings want a priest at their deathbed!" So will the devil torment the sick man or woman. It happens not infrequently that at the hour of death an old passion, a deep-rooted sinful habit, a malignant hatred towards our neighbor, or an impure inclination, makes a last powerful attack and puts the soul in extreme peril. Doubts about faith are not infrequent, especially when the mind has been poisoned by the reading of bad books, or through association with scoffers. The devil will suggest: "Be ashamed of your fear! Why trouble now about matters in which you never really believed! There is no God, no Judgment, no heaven, no hell, no immortality!" Alas, how will the poor soul be able to withstand this onslaught, not having prepared itself for it during life, having, on the contrary, consented to every suggestion of the devil? How can it now offer resistance, when all its powers are enfeebled through pains and illness? Fearful is the power in which the evil spirit holds the sinner in the hour of death. During life he has made easy the path of sin. On the deathbed, on the threshold of eternity, however, the devil will paint your sins in the blackest and most horrible tints and cause you such anxiety that you will not know where to turn. Therefore, dear brethren, accustom yourself now to resist temptation. Practice now putting satan to flight, and, assisted by Divine Grace, you will be able to resist his assaults in the hour of death. But

“wo unto the earth and to the sea,” wo to the sinner who meets this struggle unprepared for it! All his life he has allowed the devil to be victorious over him, and little chance he has on his deathbed to conquer a life-long habit.

2. In that solemn moment on which eternity depends, the person who has led a sinful life will not only be worried by evil spirits, but his conscience will present the misdeeds of his past life to his gaze in their true character. While in good health he imagines himself far removed from the divine tribunal; he thinks lightly of his sins; he likes to consider them human weaknesses. Impure thoughts and acts, immodest conversations, seem harmless to him; revenge is to him a matter required by honor. If I forgive this insult, he reasons, I shall be ridiculed by my friends. Gross intemperance in drink is, in his eyes, just hilarity and good fellowship. Frivolous love affairs are the fashion! Yet, how different will these things appear to him in view of death and eternity. Then, for the first time, shall he see what sin is. Now, offenders may smile when their attention is drawn to the gravity of their sins. But wo unto them that drag such incumbrances with them to the threshold of eternity. Then their laughter will be transformed into wailing. Terror will possess their souls when they realize that no time is left to undo the harm.

Holy Scripture says of Esau: “He went his way making little account of having sold his first birthright” (Gen. xxv, 34). But when he discovered that the blessing of Isaac had been bestowed upon his brother Jacob, he realized his loss, and he roared out with a great cry (Gen. xxvii, 34). Why had he thought so little of his privilege when he struck the bargain? Because concupiscence and sensuality had dazzled his reason. Now his deprivation opened his eyes, when all his cries no longer availed him. Little is thought by

some persons of slandering their fellow men. Others seek out the near occasion of sin and think nothing of the wrong they do. Others enter the confessional without proper intention and preparation, make a perfunctory confession without contrition and without good resolutions; they are not in earnest about forgiving their enemies, nor are they resolved to fight that grievously sinful habit, to avoid the near occasion. They leave the confessional much relieved, not, mind you, because they consider themselves free from guilt, but relieved because they are over with it for another year. Alas, the hour will come when their eyes will be opened like Esau's, when they will cry out, but in vain, for their lost privilege. St. Bonaventure says: "So long as the ox stands still, he notices not that he has a rope around his neck and that he is tied, but when he tries to break away he discovers it." And so the sinner notices not the shackles of sin as long as he remains in sin, but he will notice them when he tries to escape from his evil ways. Many are the shocking discoveries the sinful man will make in his last moment, which now he refuses to make. Many sins, now condoned, will then cut deeply into his soul!

3. How the unrepentant must tremble at the thought of Divine Justice! Dear brethren, let us work out our salvation now with fear and trembling, so that we may be spared all solicitude at the instant of death. It is related of a pious prince, who seriously considered the thought of death, that he became grave of mind and avoided all participation in noisy festivities. One day a courtier asked him, "Why is your Highness so disinclined to share our amusements?" Instead of answering, the prince caused an old unsafe chair to be brought, and placed at some height above the floor. A fire was then kindled under the chair, and over it was suspended a sword hung by a thread. The prince invited the

courtier to be seated on the chair and said: "Now rest here peacefully and contented until I shall return." "How can I," exclaimed the youth, "when I am placed in such danger." "Now then, understand," returned the prince, "why my mind is serious. How can I be content to pursue vain amusements when at any moment the support of my life may break. I fear the ever-burning fire of hell below, and above the menacing sword of Justice. How can I be frivolous when such perils threaten me!" This prince, dear brethren, wisely thought of death and eternity in good time, so that at the final moment he had not to be afraid of hell fire, nor of the sword of Divine Justice.

When the giant Goliath came forth from the camp of the Philistines, to challenge the Israelites to single combat, not one of them at first ventured to meet the powerful monster. Finally, the boy David volunteered to fight him. After much hesitation Saul allowed the combat, put his armor upon the boy, covered him with a coat of mail, and girded him with a sword. But David felt embarrassed in this armor. Excellent and strong as the armor was, it did not avail David. He said: "I cannot profit by these weapons because I am not used to them." I warn you brethren, that it will be difficult in the hour of death to clothe your soul with a perfect love of God, to awaken worthy contrition, unless during your lifetime you have become accustomed to these weapons against the devil. An extraordinary grace will be needed, and who can tell whether it will be given!

4. The last hour, finally, will find him, who has led a frivolous and unrepentant life, in the agony of fear at the uncertainty of his ultimate fate. Even saints have trembled at that thought. How will the sinner bear it? His death is at hand; it will be followed either by eternal joy or eternal suffering. Which will it be? The sinner knows that he has gravely failed, that his confessions have

been careless, his good resolutions insincere. Now, at the moment of death, what distress and anxiety! Weakened by worry and fear, the sick man enters upon the contest with satan. Behold, upon one hand heaven, upon the other, hell; here the Angels, there the damned! They watch your combat and await the issue. To lose or to win in this combat means either to be eternally the devil's own, or God's own in heaven. What a fearful struggle!

Dear brethren, may these considerations on eternity and on the critical moment on which it depends induce all of us to make use of our time. If inexorable death were to cut you down this instant, would you have reasonable hope of being saved? God forbid that the dreadful misfortune of an unprepared death should happen to any of us, and yet sudden deaths happen every day. Accidents, treacherous diseases, claim their victims without warning. You cannot venture to delay your account with God. Who knows when his time will come? Cast yourself into the arms of Divine Mercy while the gates of grace and pardon are still open! Approach the confessional and say with your whole heart: "O, my God, I heartily repent of having sinned against Thee, because Thou art infinitely holy, good and loving! O, my God, I firmly intend with Thy grace never more to sin! I would rather die than offend Thee again so grievously! I will avoid the occasion of sin. I will confess my sins sincerely, perform the imposed penance, and endeavor to lead a good life, repairing the scandal I have given. My Jesus, I have sinned. But now I will love Thee above all things, so that when my soul is called from this earth it may be found worthy of Thy Kingdom." Amen.

VII. THE JUDGMENT FROM THE CROSS

SERMON FOR GOOD FRIDAY

"Now is the Judgment of the World."—John xii, 31.

Shortly before His Passion our divine Saviour said to the people: "Now is the Judgment of the world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself" (John xii, 31-33). St. John adds: "Now this he said, signifying what death he should die." Of this prophecy of the Lord two things have been fulfilled. As the Lord hung upon the Cross He drew all things unto Him. The truth began to triumph. Jews and pagans were moved to worship the Son of God, hanging upon the Cross. The power of the Cross converted the people. The prince of the world, namely the devil, was cast out. His power was broken. It was a hard blow to the devil who until then had been lord of the world. What about the other words of the Saviour, "Now is the judgment of the world?" Was the world judged at the death of Jesus? Are we not told that this will take place at the end of time? If the Saviour had said: Now the moment has come when the world will judge its Saviour, these words might easily be understood, for the world did hold judgment upon its God and sentenced Him to death. The words of the Redeemer mean the judgment at the end of the world will be the confirmation and final execution of the sentence that Jesus Christ has already passed upon the world from the Cross. Yes, the world is already judged. All that remains is to have the judgment solemnly announced and proclaimed at the end of time. Let us contemplate

this truth on this day, devoted to the divine Victim on the Cross of Calvary.

When the day of judgment shall have arrived, there will appear the sign of the Son of Man in the clouds. Then the Son of Man will come for judgment. "And every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him" (Apoc. i, 7). The godless will realize that the day of retribution has arrived. They will lament and say to the mountains: "Fall upon us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the lamb. For the great day of their wrath has come: and who shall be able to stand?" (Apoc. vi, 16, 17). The sun will be darkened, the earth will tremble, the elements will be in confusion; the dead will rise from their graves. "When these things begin to come to pass," said the Lord to His disciples, and, therewith, to all devout believing Christians, "lift up your hearts, fear not," for then your redemption is at hand, "the eternal day of your everlasting glory and happiness approaches" (Luke xxi). It will benefit our immortal souls to give our close consideration to this subject.

I. (a) At the end of time, "the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the heaven." What sign is this? The holy fathers declare that it is the Cross of Christ. "And then shall all the tribes of the earth moan" (Matt. xxiv, 30), meaning many peoples will lament who have lived as enemies of the Cross of Christ. The Cross, which to the righteous is the sign of Redemption, will cause anguish to the ungodly and will proclaim their punishment. They will realize that their lives have been in opposition to the Cross. They have refused to bear the sweet yoke of the Lord, they have trodden it under foot by their vicious lives. They have scorned and blasphemed the holy Cross. The way of the Cross was not for them. They walked upon the broad road of sin. The holy Cross will reproach them

with their faithlessness and ingratitude. As Moses divided the Red Sea with his staff, so will Christ the Lord with the sceptre of the Cross separate the reprobate from the just.

(b) This sign of the Son of Man will appear at the end of the world for the second time. It first appeared on Calvary. Ever since this sign has been visible. From its first appearance it has been a bitter reproach to the sinner, and has passed sentence of damnation upon the impenitent world. The Cross is the symbol of suffering, of renunciation, of humiliation, of penance. It reproaches those who complain of suffering and contradiction. It reproaches those who, instead of practising renunciation, give free reign to sensual pleasure. It reproaches those who resent humiliation; those who harbor hatred and revenge in their hearts. It reproaches you, if you instead of doing penance add sin upon sin to those of the past.

Can you bear the sight of the Cross if your daily life is opposed to it? O, dear brethren, let us not be enemies of the holy Cross, that it may not pass the sentence of condemnation also upon us. Let us bear patiently the cross which divine Providence lays upon us, then the Cross of Christ will not reproach us, but pass upon us the sentence of mercy.

(c) St. Paul writes, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians: "We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Gentiles foolishness" (I. Cor. i, 23). The words of the Apostle, addressed to the Jews and Gentiles of his time, apply even to the world of to-day. The Crucified, the Cross, the Religion of the Cross, are to many persons a scandal. Their lives and actions do not correspond to the tenets of this Cross, they refuse to accept the Christian truth. Hence the hatred of the Cross, not so much among the heathen, not only among fanatic writers who seek to obscure the light of heaven; no, even among those with whom we are daily

thrown together. The sign of the Son of Man has been a judgment of damnation for the children of darkness. The separation of the good from the wicked was begun upon Calvary; it still continues, and will be concluded at the last judgment. Few on Mount Calvary saw in the Cross the sign of salvation. Many turned away from it in contempt and horror. Few are, even to-day, the faithful adherents of the holy Cross. For very many it is an object of scorn and derision. The Cross of Christ is separating the elect from the impious. Now is the judgment of the world! "Many are called, but few are chosen."

II. (a) On the day of judgment the godless will be filled with terror, when they see the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. Their fear will be without bounds when they behold the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven. His countenance will crush them. They will then recognize that He is the King who will judge the world. They will behold Him in the "armor of zeal," equipped "for the revenge on his enemies." Like lightning they will see Him descend "in the breast-plate of justice" with the "invincible shield of equity," with "the helmet of true judgment," with the "spear of His severe wrath" (Wis. v, 18). Despair will seize upon them when this King of heaven and earth shall proceed to pronounce against them the final verdict. And yet, dear brethren, this verdict is not a new one, it is the one proclaimed from the Cross on Golgotha.

(b) Upon the Cross, Christ the Lord was victim and judge. The judgment of the world had begun. Now is the judgment of the world! As Judge, Christ upon the Cross passed sentence upon the good, the pious, the penitent, and, likewise, sentence upon the impenitent. It was not by chance that Christ upon the Cross was acclaimed King. It was ordained by divine Providence, so says St. Augustine, that Pilate, even against the wishes of the Jews,

placed above the head of the dying Saviour the inscription "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (John xix, 19). It was to signify that the Crucified had the royal privilege to judge, and He did judge. The Gospel expressly speaks of the Son of God as King: "And the King shall say to them that shall be on his left hand, 'Depart from me ye cursed,' etc." (Matt. xxv, 41).

(c) Before His Passion even the Lord frequently threatened the wicked world. "Wo to you, O avaricious rich." "Wo to you hypocrites." He threatened the unrepentant with damnation. He repeated this verdict upon the Cross, and sealed it with His Blood. He did not pronounce it with His lips, yet His entire being was eloquent. His torn and tortured body proclaimed: Wo to you unchaste man, on account of your sins wounds cover my whole body! And yet you continue in your crimes and make of your body a vessel of voluptuousness. Wo to you intemperate! For your revelries I suffer excruciating thirst, and you persevere in vice and my suffering is in vain for you. Wo to the proud! For you I die upon the pillory of shame. Even my garments are taken by my enemies, and you will not give of your abundance unto the poor. Wo to you slanderers! On your account I endure calumnies and revilings. Wo to all you who scorn my commandments! And thus sentence is passed upon all sinners.

(d) We understand now why the Saviour, upon the road to Golgotha, said to the weeping women: "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." Those tears, shed in sympathy with their suffering Saviour, one should think were pleasing to God. And yet, these tears are bidden to cease. It is tears for ourselves, sorrow over our sins, which are of merit. He who at sight of the suffering Son of God experiences lively sorrow for his sins, who at sight of the penance of the innocent Lamb of God feels im-

pelled to do penance to amend his life, he may confidently await the day of his redemption. His will not be the sentence of condemnation, but the sentence of grace and of life. The King will say to him: "Come ye blessed of my father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mass. xxv, 34). And did not the same Lord pass a similar sentence upon the Cross? "Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in Paradise" (Luke, xxiii, 43). Merciful judgment was also passed upon the centurion, who struck his breast and confessed in contrition: "Indeed this was the Son of God" (Matt. xxvii, 54). A gracious sentence such as this is spoken from the Cross also upon us, if we, for love of the suffering Saviour, repent of our sins. Do you understand now, dear brethren, that the judgment of the world was begun on the Cross? When appearing for the second time the Lord will only solemnly confirm and proclaim before the whole world the sentence already pronounced from the Cross. Now is the judgment of this world!

III. (a) St. John, speaking of the second advent of the Divine Judge, says: "Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him. And all the tribes of the earth shall bewail themselves because of him" (Apoc. i, 7). They that pierced Him, who are they? The soldiers that crucified Jesus were not really those that pierced Him, they were hirelings and did what they were told. It was sin that pierced the Lord. "He was wounded for our iniquities" (Is. liii, 5). The contrite sinner, who is sincerely converted, has nothing to fear. Those wounds are for him the source of grace and mercy. But impenitent sinners will weep and bewail, because, as St. Paul says, their obduracy has crucified Him afresh (Heb. vi, 6). At sight of these sacred wounds their consciences will be plunged in confusion and distress. The

sight of the crucified King, shining in celestial radiance, will confuse them to such an extent that they will fall into the depths of despair. Those sacred wounds will be a bitter reproach to them, reminding them of their monstrous ingratitude and neglect of God. The Saviour may say to them: Behold O sinner, your iniquities have pierced these wounds, yet I have not condemned you for this reason. My Blood has not cried out for vengeance, but for grace. The Blood from these wounds was to have washed you clean from every stain. But in your impenitence you scorned it. I have offered you grace, but you rejected it. What answer can the ungodly make? They will be silent, there will be nothing but despair left to them. They must acknowledge: We are damned through our own fault.

(b) The wounds of the Saviour reproached the ungodly from the Cross. This they do to this day and will do so until the last day. On Golgotha only few listened to this voice of reproach. The majority of Jews and pagans, who witnessed the Saviour's death, turned away their gaze from those wounds, which might have been the source of their salvation. And so it is to our day. Many sinners are converted by attentively contemplating the image of the Crucified, by letting those wounds speak to their hearts. Others fear to glance at the crucifix, lest their conscience might be disturbed. But the day will come when they, too, will have to contemplate those wounds, but that day will bring despair to them in place of mercy. Now is the judgment of the world! If the world now refuses to listen to the voice of the Judge, it will one day be compelled to do so. Then it will cry out: "Fall upon us, ye mountains, and cover us, ye hills, from the face of Him that sits upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall stand it!"

IV. (a) The last day is also the day of wrath, the day of vengeance, the day ordained for the punishment of iniquities. So was the day, upon which the Son of God bled upon the Cross, the day of vengeance; for with the death of Jesus the judgment of the world was begun. Now is the judgment of the world! God had before that day avenged Himself upon sinners. Adam and Eve had been driven from the Garden of Eden. The flood had destroyed all flesh with the exception of Noe and those with him in the Ark. Fire from heaven had wiped out Sodom and Gomorrha. But sin is so frightful an evil, so terrible an offense against God, that such chastisements as these were not sufficient to appease His wrath. In expiation for the sins of the world it was necessary that the Son of God should suffer and die, in order to make full satisfaction to Divine Justice. The Son of God alone could offer up a suitable sacrifice of expiation to the Infinite Majesty. That the vengeance of God might not strike us, the only begotten Son of God took upon Himself our iniquities. Behold the mystery of love, the mystery of justice! For love of us the Father sacrifices His only begotten Son to suffering and death. For love of us the Son of God takes our sins upon Himself, in order to atone for them in our mortal flesh, and thus appease Divine Justice. Sin is something so terrible that the Father must strike at His only begotten Son, because He became like unto men, although Himself no sinner. "For we have not a high priest, who cannot have compassion on our infirmities; but one tempted in all things like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. iv, 15). On the day on Calvary the judgment of the world began; for this is the day of vengeance, the day upon which sin will be revenged upon the innocent Lamb. "For the day of vengeance is in my heart" (Is. lxxiii, 4), says the Lord, namely, the day is ordained upon which the Divine Majesty will be avenged in me, for the sins of the world. This

day sin is avenged upon the Son of God. This day is the day of vengeance!

(b) Divine Justice upon the last day will avenge itself upon the impenitent sinner, who, in his heedlessness and unbelief, will not benefit by the satisfaction of Christ. Through penance we render ourselves partakers in the satisfaction of Christ. But woe to the man who dies unrepentant, burdened with grievous sin! The Saviour has suffered in vain for him, his sins have not been taken away, because he has trifled with grace. The vengeance of Divine Justice will be discharged upon him in its entire severity and rigor. Hence, the Saviour said: "For if in the green wood they do these things; what shall be done in the dry?" (Luke xxiii, 31). If sin is so avenged in Me, who am indeed no sinner, but only become like unto sinners, and have assumed the punishment of sin, what will be done to those who appear before the judgment seat of God really burdened with sin? Now is the judgment of the world!

From the Cross the Divine Judge passed sentence upon the ungodly and unbelieving. If this sentence is not to be passed upon us likewise, dear brethren, we must separate ourselves from the unrighteous world; we must not do homage to its principles, nor imitate its vicious ways; we must have nothing in common with the idle frivolities of the world, we must be free from the degeneracy of the children of darkness. Even if on account of our position we have to associate with the impious, it should be said of us, what St. John said of Jesus Christ: "He was separated from sinners" (Heb. vii, 26). The divine Saviour did associate with sinners, but He had nothing in common with their sins. We must even love sinners and pray for them, but we can have nothing in common with their sins. We must endeavor to benefit by the satisfaction and merits of Christ, through frequent and worthy reception of the holy

Sacraments, through devout attendance at the holy Sacrifice of the Mass. If we do this, then from the Cross there will be passed upon us the sentence of grace and mercy, and this sentence will find its solemn confirmation on the last day when the Lord shall appear to judge the living and the dead. Then we need not fear when the sign of the Son of Man shall appear in the heavens, when the Lord shall come upon the clouds of heaven. "Look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption is at hand" (Luke xxi, 28). Amen.

