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# Jesus Christ and Human Life

A Course of Lenten Sermons

BY

REV. H. G. HUGHES



NEW YORK

JOSEPH F. WAGNER



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## CONTENTS

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	PAGE
I. JESUS CHRIST AND THE MEANING OF LIFE . . . . .	5
II. JESUS CHRIST AND THE EVILS OF LIFE . . . . .	14
III. JESUS CHRIST AND THE ILLUSIONS OF LIFE . . . . .	21
IV. JESUS CHRIST AND THE AFFLICTIONS OF LIFE . . . . .	29
V. JESUS CHRIST AND HOME LIFE . . . . .	35
VI. JESUS CHRIST, OUR TRUE LIFE . . . . .	41



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# JESUS CHRIST AND HUMAN LIFE

## A LENTEN COURSE

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### I. JESUS CHRIST AND THE MEANING OF LIFE

"Thou shalt adore the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."—  
Luke iv, 8.

*SYNOPSIS.*—I. *Need of an aim in life, an explanation of its meaning and purpose; misery in being without it. This need felt and acted upon; hence philosophies and policies.*

II. *Importance of knowing life's true meaning. That it has a meaning proved by our faculties—intellect, will, seeking truth and happiness. Seriousness of life shown by capacities for good, evil, love and hate, happiness and misery. Contrasts; proving that there is an aim, an object; gaining which we live beautiful lives, missing which we live degraded lives.*

III. *What is life's true aim and meaning? Nature teaches us. Who truly lives? He whose noblest part has sway. What do we all seek?—happiness, full, complete, satisfying, lasting.*

IV. *We need to know more than this. How is this happiness to be gained? Who can teach us? Ways in which men seek it. All fail. Is, then, the desire vain? No. Who, then, can teach us this? Only those who know. Who are they? Not philosophers, men of intellectual pursuits, nor aesthetes—only they who have found a philosophy of life that, practised, has never failed. They are the saints. Teaching of St. Ignatius Loyola; We were made for God; all other things made to help us to God. Some day we shall realize this, when we stand at the entrance to eternity. No plan for the betterment of the world can permanently succeed which leaves this out. Teaching of St. Paul.*

V. *From whom did the saints learn the true meaning of life? From "Jesus Christ our Lord." The life of Christ the supreme model; and the supreme revelation of the meaning of life.*

"Thou shalt adore the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." There are few men more to be pitied than those who go through life without any definite aim or purpose; men for whom life seems to have no meaning; who are led hither and thither by the impulses of every moment; men of whom no one can say, nor do they know themselves, what they will do next.

Such men suffer from emptiness of soul, from a void in the heart, the unhappiness of which none can fully realize but those who have experienced it.

Few can endure such an existence, and thus we find that most people *have* some definite purpose in life, and attach to this human

existence of ours some definite meaning, some explanation which, though they may not consciously have thought it out, really directs their conduct.

So imperious in our souls is the need of something to live for, and of some reason for being in this world at all, that the course of human history has largely been guided by men's efforts to follow out those aims which they have conceived to be the proper end and object of existence. Men of culture in every age have studied this question, have endeavored to lay down general principles as to the object of life; and the result of their researches is seen in the various systems of philosophy that they have given to the world.

Men of action have energetically pursued those aims which their view of life has put before them as right and desirable, and have founded States and inaugurated policies and schemes for the practical conduct of social life.

All, without exception, seek and must seek some end in life that they hope will bring them happiness—unless they would endure that heart void of which I have spoken—even though that end be but the fleeting ever-varying objects of momentary desire.

Dear brethren, what our aim in life should be, what meaning we should put upon life, concerns us most deeply, for life is a serious thing.

We are not as the things that have no life; we are not as the brute beasts that do not rise above the desire of animal satisfactions; if we are such we have come woefully short of the proper dignity of our nature. We have noble faculties, we have souls, we have an understanding, an intelligence that ever seeks to come to the knowledge of truth, a *will* that ever aspires to bliss.

How happy we can be and how miserable! Of what extremes of feeling are we capable! How strongly we can love, and how profoundly hate; how beautiful, how noble, a human life can be on the one hand, or how degraded, how unlovely on the other!

Surely this is enough to indicate that there *is* an object, an aim, the attainment of which gives happiness and makes life a splendid thing, the missing of which makes life a dreadful wreck. Surely such possibilities, so different, so contrasted, as the possibilities of nobility and happiness, or of degradation and wretchedness, should make us realize the seriousness of this human life of ours.

Look at that father of a family—that honest, upright man with



the clear eye, the unclouded brow, the firm step, beloved of wife and children, going through life with a high aim, a determined purpose to do well. Look, on the other hand, at that wretched drunkard, that loose-living degraded rake, that false, dishonest scoundrel who dares not look honesty in the face. Compare the manner of their lives and say, is not life a serious thing when it can follow either of these ways?

Look, again, at that good mother—a human providence to her household—loved, revered, surrounded by the sacred affection of husband and children; a copy of the valiant woman of the Book of Proverbs, “Who hath looked well unto the paths of her house, and hath not eaten her bread idle; whose children rose up and called her blessed; her husband, and he praised her . . . whose works praise her in the gates” (Prov. xxxi, 27-31).

And look at that poor, ruined creature who walks the streets by night, clothed with the tawdry finery for which she has exchanged her soul, assuming a miserable show of gaiety, while the fixed smile and unseemly jest hardly can hide the misery of her poor heart. Ask again, is not human life a serious thing when it can go into either of these paths? Has not the one man, the one woman I have pictured to you, gained some object worthy to be gained, fulfilled some aim in life that ought to be fulfilled? Have not the others missed an aim and gone astray from some true purpose in life? Some there are, indeed, in these days, who tell us that the difference between right and wrong, between virtue and vice, is but a matter of social expediency. Such is not the teaching of that higher monitor, the conscience; such is not the lesson taught by the effects of vice or virtue upon the character of those who practise the one or the other.

Brethren, life *has* an aim; life *has* an object; life *has* a meaning—a noble aim, a deep, profound meaning. Those noble faculties that we have, those immense capabilities for good or evil that we possess, were not made for nothing; not for nothing either does failure to reach life’s aim, failure to recognize its purpose and its meaning, bring such misery upon the one who errs.

What, then, is the true aim of life, and what its true significance?

Brethren, our very nature itself, fallen though it is, teaches us the beginnings of life’s lesson. Who is he that truly lives? Is it not he whose noblest part has sway; he whose highest faculties are developed and are fixed on worthy objects; he who has put before

him high ideals and subdues his lower nature to them? *There* is the lesson of life learnt from nature's book.

Again, what is it that we one and all desire? What is it that we seek in every conscious act; what is it that toward which with irresistible impulse we are ever carried? Is it not happiness? It is nothing else. That is what we want; it is to that we aspire. We seek our happiness in many ways, but whatsoever we do is done because we hope by the doing to gain some benefit, to enjoy some sort of happiness.

And, dear brethren, we learn by the experience of life that not any and every kind of happiness will satisfy our souls. Full, complete, perfect and lasting happiness is what our nature craves for and will *ever* crave for as long as God is God. Here, then, is another lesson from nature's teachings about life.

But we need to know more. It is very well to know that we need happiness; that true full life consists in the full activity of all that is noblest within us—but we have not learnt the meaning of life till we have found the path that leads us to the goal; till we have found the object that will satisfy, and forever satisfy the yearnings that we feel. We can not do the sum merely by stating the problem to be solved; we must know how to work it out if we are to find the answer.

And left to ourselves we make mistakes; we solve the problem wrongly. One man takes his happiness in the pleasures of life; another in the beauty of earthly things; one in intellectual pursuits, another in the pursuit of gain. The rich man expends his wealth in the search for happiness, the poor man toils and saves that he may be able to do the same. To the very poor, life often means a struggle for bare existence, and happiness means such poor satisfactions of bodily appetite as are possible to them in their wretched circumstances.

But ask any of these is he fully satisfied; is there nothing that he needs besides? Ask yourselves, are you satisfied—fully, permanently satisfied by anything this world has given you? You must answer "No." We find that when we have attained one object we desire another. When one wish is fulfilled another grows up in us to take its place, nor are we ever completely satisfied for good, or for any length of time; and the reason is to be found in that unquenchable longing within us for happiness that shall be simply perfect, shall be satisfying, shall not be merely passing but shall last.

Is, then, this desire a vain one? Is true happiness—happiness that shall fully and finally satisfy and set at rest every longing of our souls—is it, I say, a delusion, a mirage that ever floats temptingly before our vision and ever eludes our efforts to come up with it?

If so, what vanity is life itself! To what purpose and end are we here if that vehement longing shall never, never be fulfilled? To what purpose is that restless seeking for satisfaction a part of our very nature, and why have we aspirations for a higher, better, nobler life if there is nothing that ever can realize our ideals?

No! We can not believe that human life, with yearnings and aspirations, is such an illusion. A meaning it must have—a goal, an aim, an object that will give to us the happiness we seek, and in which we shall find the fullness of that noble life that our nature itself proclaims we ought to live.

But who shall tell us where this lasting happiness is to be found? Who shall guide us to the object that will give completeness to human life? Who, that is to say, will reveal, fully and clearly, the true meaning of life?

Unless we know why we are here, for what purpose we are made, we must always be going astray and missing the mark. It is all-important for us that we should make no mistake in this matter; for if we do, life for us will be a failure.

To whom, then, shall we go for the answer? Dear brethren, there is one test, and only one, of ability to teach us in regard to this pressing matter. Those who profess to teach us must show evidence that they *know*. And a merely theoretical knowledge will not do; our informants must be those who have proved in their own lives the truth of what they say to us. They must be those who have *found* true happiness and lived the nobler life; they must be those who have risen above the unsatisfying ideals of earth, whose feet are upon the rock, and not upon the shifting quicksand; who can speak with confidence because they have found what we are seeking; who have found some principle, some philosophy of life which makes them serene and happy now, and promises them, without fear of disappointment, the ultimate, complete fulfilment of that desire inherent in us all—for happiness that shall be perfect, satisfying and without end.

Who can come to us with these qualifications and tell us what we so greatly need to know? Can the philosophers? They do

not agree amongst themselves. Can the geniuses of the world? Some of them have been the most unhappy of men. Can those who have given themselves to culture, to intellectual pursuits, to estheticism? They number amongst them some who have given way to the most degrading passions.

Who are they who have found a principle of happiness and nobility of life that has *never failed* one single individual who has carried it out; an explanation of life's meaning that has never misled those who have acted upon it?

You will say, perhaps, that such fortunate beings can not be found in this world of ours; that it is too good to be true. Brethren, it *is* true; there have been and there are such people; people who have found the way of never-ending happiness, beginning in this world and enduring in the world to come; people who have learnt and can teach us the real meaning of human life.

These people are the saints of God.

Listen to a saying of one of God's saints—a saying which, when meditated upon and allowed to penetrate the heart and mind, has led thousands of souls to the perfection of human life. It is simple and almost bald in its expression, but it solves in a word the riddle of life:

“Man was made for this end; that he might praise and reverence the Lord his God, and, serving him, at length be saved.

“All other things on earth were made to help man to reach the object for which he was created.”

Brethren, here is the whole philosophy of life; here is the path to happiness, life's true meaning and the way to salvation.

We were made for God; to know Him, to love Him, to serve Him now, and to be blessed hereafter by the possession of Him forever. Here is the reason why our souls are filled with that continual desire for a happiness which sad experience tells us the world can never give. We may err, and seek the satisfaction of that desire in most unworthy objects; that is an abuse of a thing which is good in itself—for that desire is good, it is placed in us by Him who made us for Himself, and it is the groping of the soul after God for whom it was made; by God, and by God alone, can it ever be fulfilled.

And, dear brethren, some day we shall know this, when earthly things have fallen away from us, and we stand alone at the entrance to eternity. Now, the things of earth seem so real, and the things

of heaven so shadowy and far-off. But in truth it is earthly things that are the shadow, and eternal things the substance; these alone really matter.

No scheme or plan for individual happiness and well-being, nor for social happiness and well-being; no attempt to better the condition of this world or of human life will succeed in the long run if the things of eternity are left out of it, since it is for the things of eternity that we were made.

This is the teaching of those who know, of those who have proved it in their lives; who have found, and helped others to find, the fullest, highest happiness that can be found on earth; a happiness that carries with it the assured and certain hope and expectation of bliss unending in the possession of God's all-satisfying love forever. Hear some words of another saint—that great lover of God, St. Paul. Mark the serene confidence with which he speaks: "I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come; nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, *which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Rom. viii, 38-39).

"Which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"—there we have the root of the matter. For from whom do the saints learn that lesson of the meaning of life which they teach so well to us, the lesson of true happiness, of full abundant life; how to live a human life that shall be noble and grand, and filled with the beauty of holiness, and shall grow into the life of bliss unending? St. Paul has told us. The love of God, which is our true life, is to be found "in Jesus Christ our Lord." He is "the way, and the truth, and the life." The way to follow, the truth to learn, the very life of souls to whom He gives Himself, and whom He vivifies by grace. He lived the one all-perfect human life. The saints, each in his degree, lived perfect lives, because they lived in union with Him, and closely followed Him; and we too, if we would live full lives, lives in which every noble faculty shall reach its highest development; lives that shall not be cramped and stunted by the narrowing influence of merely earthly ideals, we, too, must live by Jesus Christ, possessing the things of earth as if we possessed them not, using them in so far as they help us to God; following Jesus the way of life, learning from Him who will teach the true life, receiving from Him that life-giving grace which He freely offers to us.

The life of Jesus is the supreme model of what a human life should be; the supreme revelation of life's true inner meaning.

What was the principle of the life of Jesus; to what end were all His actions directed? To the salvation of mankind—true! But why did He work this work of salvation; why did He will to save mankind? For nothing else than to give glory to God His Father, and to satisfy the yearnings of love divine. God's glory and God's love—these were the great objects of the life of Jesus Christ. In the stable at Bethlehem, in the holy house at Nazareth, in His journeyings to and fro amongst men, in His bitter sufferings, in His death of shame and in His glorious triumph, and now in His heavenly life, God's love and God's glory were the objects of His human existence. For that same love and glory, too, He lives His eucharistic life here amongst us, giving glory to God and His own true life to us.

"I seek not my own will," He told His disciples, "but the will of Him who sent me." He lived not for Himself, but for God. And of His earthly life St. Paul, quoting the prophetic words of the Psalmist, writes: "Wherefore, when he cometh into the world, he saith: Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou fitted to me. . . . Then said I, behold, I come; in the head of the Book it is written of me that I should do thy will, O God" (Ib. x, 5-7).

The true meaning, then, of human life, taught us by Jesus Christ and proved by all who have faithfully followed Him, is this—that God has made us for Himself and His love; that our true life is to live loving Him; that He and His love alone can satisfy our souls.

"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?" and "this is eternal life—that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." If we go astray from God, that is the loss of our souls, and not the whole world can compensate that loss.

When our divine Lord was tempted by the devil, one of the temptations placed before Him was just that one which assails every child of man—the temptation to forget the true meaning and object of life. "The devil led him onto a high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and he said to him: to thee will I give all this power and the glory of them, for to me they are delivered and to whom I will I give them. If

thou, therefore, wilt adore me, all shall be thine" (S. Luke iv, 6-7). The joy of this world, the glory of this world, the pomp and circumstance of this world—these are things which the devil whispers to us will satisfy us, the things for which we are made; these things he would persuade us constitute the meaning of life. "But Jesus answering said to him," and He says to us—not for these things was man made, for it is written, "thou shalt adore the Lord thy God and him *only* shalt thou serve."

## II. JESUS CHRIST AND THE EVILS OF LIFE

"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?"—Mark viii, 36, 37.

*SYNOPSIS.—I. The universal reign of "law" in nature; the existence of inevitable "natural laws." Man's power over these "natural laws" in virtue of his intellectual faculties. Disastrous effects of any mistake or violation of natural laws. It is the "law" itself that brings the punishment of its violation, in the natural order.*

*II. Analogy with this of the results of violating the moral law. This law known by (a) conscience, and (b) revelation. This violation is what we call mortal sin; its result the ruin of the soul. Hence sin is the great evil of life. Other things are only truly evils inasmuch as they are the results of sinful actions; or lead to sin.*

*III. Fallacy of those who hold out hope of an earthly paradise to be arrived at by evolution or legislation. This does not touch the root of the matter. Religion alone can do this effectively.*

*IV. Hell, as the inevitable result of the violation of the moral law. Hell essentially the loss of God.*

*V. To learn what sin is, we must go to Jesus Christ. Contemplate His human life as all-perfect, and revealing to us God's perfections, and compare with it the life of a sinner. Contemplate Gethsemane; Calvary; the dead Christ in the arms of His sorrowing mother. Take the side of Jesus against sin, the great evil of life.*

The investigation of this universe of which, if we judge by material standards only, our earth forms so inconsiderable a part, reveals to us as everywhere existent the reign of law. Everywhere, from end to end of creation, as far as science has been able to explore it, we find in operation certain great forces—constant, inviolable, unalterable by any but a supernatural intervention; so inevitable is their action that we might well think them due to blind necessity were it not for the clear evidence they carry with them of a Supreme intelligence that originated and directs them.

They permeate the whole of the material creation of God, and their operation is exercised in the minutest details of the great work of His almighty hand. Take, for instance, the forces of attraction and gravitation. By these the innumerable hosts of heavenly bodies are kept each in its own place and guided unerringly in their swift courses through space. It is these forces that keep this earth of ours safe in its yearly path about the sun; that give stability to the everlasting hills and keep the ocean within its bounds, that direct the course of the rivers; and it is these same forces that



poise the dewdrop upon the tenderest blade of grass and float the almost invisible silken thread woven by the most minute of insects. Borrowing a word from human and rational affairs, we term these forces "laws," by reason of their inevitableness and the strict obedience given to them by the irrational part of creation.

Now God has given man a certain power over these great forces, or "laws," of nature. In our intelligence we possess a faculty nobler than all things that are merely material, a faculty that can explore the secrets of nature to a certain extent, and can turn its forces to our own uses and purposes. Look back upon the century that has passed. What wonderful conquests of natural forces has man's intelligence made in that time; on sea and land, above and beneath the surface of the earth; and now has begun the conquest of the air, while that wondrous force called electricity can be directed at man's will whithersoever he desires without the medium of any intervening wire between the sender and receiver!

But how fatal is any mistake made by man in the use of these great forces; how dire the catastrophes that ensue upon any violation of nature's laws! How simply awful, for instance, would be the result of any general carelessness upon one of our great railway systems; how truly terrible, as it is, are the results now of any chance carelessness or error. Such error brings its own dreadful punishment and men shudder when they hear or read of the victims who pay with their lives for the mistake.

And note, dear brethren, that it is these very forces whose rule has been disobeyed, it is these very same laws that have been violated, which, working along their inevitable lines, bring down the punishment.

Undoubtedly God often interferes to prevent these catastrophes in answer to prayer; and by the guardianship of the holy angels who minister to His redeemed prevents these fatal mistakes from being made, or from being made at a moment that would precipitate calamity; but when He wills to permit the error and the calamity that follows upon it, that calamity is due to the laws of nature, the forces of nature following their appointed course.

It does not belong to my subject to point out to you how those who suffer from such action of natural laws are often the gainers thereby in regard to the next life; nor how sometimes those things are a punishment for sin; how, too, they are part of the sad results of man's original fall from grace, by which pain and disease and

death entered into this world. I have brought the subject before you to illustrate what happens as the result of the violation of a higher law than the laws of nature.

For, dear brethren, there is a higher law than those which govern the movements of the material universe; a law still more inevitable and unalterable than they; a law that God himself can not change—the eternal law of right and wrong: and even God can not change it, because that law is in His own divine nature—nay, it is His nature, it is *Himself*, for He Himself is eternal right, eternal justice, eternal holiness, eternal truth, and so the absolute standard and norm of truth and holiness and justice and right.

And you will easily see, dear brethren, that these things—truth and justice and holiness and right—have to do with intelligence and will, and that if God has made creatures possessed of intellect and will, they are bound to know and to follow that supreme eternal standard of truth and of right, which is naught else than God himself. Conscience, even apart from divine revelation, teaches this to every child of man that has reached the use of reason, even though it be but to an elementary degree; for every child knows, by that inner monitor, that certain things are right and certain things wrong, and is aware of a standard of right and wrong that is recognized as binding and external to the human mind.

And just as by investigation of the laws of nature we can see **the inner** meaning of the universe, and descry the real order and harmony that are beneath outward phenomena, however chaotic and disordered they may seem, so, by listening to the voice of conscience and following its commands, we can descry the eternal law of God, a law and rule that we feel to be imperative, revealing a supreme Lawgiver, to whom we feel that we and all others are strictly bound.

And, dear brethren, if we have the teachings of science to enlighten us concerning the great laws and forces of the visible creation, so, too, we have the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, to make clearer and to complete the teachings of conscience, and to guide us when, by reason of our fallen nature, we are in perplexity or doubt as to the straight path of our duty to our God. And to carry the parallel further, just as the violation by accident of the laws of nature inevitably results in disaster, destruction and death; so, if the intelligent creatures of God, not now accidentally, but knowingly and willingly violate the eternal law of right and justice, putting them-

selves consciously out of harmony with that law, that is to say, out of harmony with God, disaster, destruction and ruin of soul and body are the dreadful and irremediable consequence unless God himself intervenes and gives a remedy. That disaster has happened to some of God's creatures. It has happened to the multitude of fallen angels; and in their case it was irreparable. They sinned with such light and knowledge, with such intensity of rebellious wilfulness, that God's dread justice cast them off at once. The disaster happened also to man, to the whole human race, who in the person of Adam were put out of harmony with the eternal law. But man sinned through the suggestions of a crafty tempter, and with less perfection of knowledge; and for him a way of reparation has been found by the divine mercy. Nevertheless, though God in His goodness did not cast us off utterly and finally, as He did the rebel angels, yet because of that fatal act of sin and disobedience, disaster came upon us; sin, misery, death, and all the evils of life entered into the world; and many, alas, who refuse the salvation offered by the love of our heavenly Father and persist in their violation of His holy law to the end, bring upon themselves the inevitable eternal ruin that, if they would, they might have escaped.

Yes, dear brethren, that is the final result of the violation of the eternal law. It is a misreading, a wilful misunderstanding of the meaning of life of which I spoke to you on Sunday last. It is a turning our backs upon that God for whom we were made, who alone can satisfy us; it is an act that, but for God's merciful intervention, would have destroyed us for good and all the first time it was committed; an act that, unrepented of and persisted in, must and will bring about our eternal wreck and ruin. This, then, is *the* great evil of life, and its name is *sin—mortal sin*.

What are all the other things we call evils—sorrow, disease, misery, poverty, death itself; what the ruin and destruction of the universe compared with the ruins of an immortal soul that has lost its way forever? What is a mistake about a natural law with its temporal consequences compared with a wilful violation of God's moral law and its eternal consequences? Those things—those temporal calamities are the afflictions of life of which I am to speak to you on a future occasion. They may be called evils when they lead to sin, and when they are regarded as the consequence of sin, whether of original sin, or of individual and actual sin; but it is their connection with sin that makes them evils. Sin is the supreme

evil, and the cause, either remotely or directly, of all else to which we give the name of evil.

Had it not been for original sin, the afflictions and miseries of life would never have existed. If we could do away with men's actual sins now, the other evils of life would be immeasurably lessened. Take away from the world avarice, ambition, envy, anger, pride and lust, and it would be a different place.

There are those in our days, as there have often been before, who hold out the hope of an earthly paradise, to be arrived at by the gradual evolution of the race, and helped on by political and economic measures. A few years ago they told us that it was at hand; now they say that it will take centuries, perhaps, to realize. But it is to come. The evils of life are to be abolished by a change in the political and material conditions of human society. God forbid that I should speak against any good political measures, or any just economic legislation that should be true reforms and should tend to the betterment of the lot of the downtrodden and oppressed. Such measures, indeed, are often a necessary preliminary to the spiritual betterment of the people; for as a man must live before he can philosophize, so, too, he must be freed from grinding anxiety as to how he shall gain his bread from one day to another before he can think of his soul. But political and economic changes do not go to the root of the matter; they do not deal effectively and completely, nor can they deal effectively or completely, with the real root of all evil, which is sin. Religion—true religion alone can do that; for only true religion can change men's hearts; and only by changing men's hearts can we remove sin. Not a misguided socialism which casts aside religion and leaves it altogether out of account in the proposed reorganization of society—not that, but an enlightened Christian individualism that keeps the middle course between a slavish subjection of all to the State and a proud independence of all community obligations, will lessen the evils of life. I say "lessen," because God has not promised that they shall be altogether done away till the new heavens and the new earth shall come. And the evils of life can be lessened, as they have been in times past and will be again, not by a binding and fettering of men's individuality by State organization, but by their free obedience and willing association in the divine society instituted by Jesus Christ, the Christian Catholic Church, which affords to men the means of grace by which they may attain to the true higher individualism,

to holiness and goodness and the virtue of perfect divine charity, that is the strongest bond that can unite men one to another.

The thought of hell, dear brethren, is an awful one. To some it is a difficulty; to those, that is, who have not the Catholic faith. But we must remember that hell essentially is the loss of God; and that the unrepentant sinner loses God by his own conscious and wholly wilful act; nay, more, he rejects God by his conscious and wilful act. Knowingly and willingly and persistently to the very end he violates the eternal law of right and wrong; and hell is the inevitable consequence. It is not merely a vindictive punishment. It is a mystery to us, because we can not fathom God's nature, and, therefore, can not see sin as God sees it, nor perceive clearly the absoluteness of the opposition between sin and all that God is. But this is not an excuse for persistence in sin; for God has told us plainly what sin will bring us to. Could we see sin as God sees it, we should not be surprised at its involving eternity of punishment, but we should wonder that God could forgive it at all.

If we would learn what an evil sin is, we must go to Jesus Christ. He, the All-merciful, who came to die for sinners, is obliged to denounce against them the awful sentence. "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire." He has warned us in the question, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

In the human life and character of Jesus, the Perfect Man, can be learned what the great evil of mortal sin is in the sight of the almighty God. That life is the most perfect created likeness of the divine perfections. Compare the life and actions of a sinner with the life and actions of Jesus Christ, and you will begin to see the extreme of opposition between sin and all that God is; how God is supreme goodness, justice and purity, while sin is supreme badness, injustice, impurity; yes, and how sin is supreme un-reason; for it is the futile and impotent uprising of the creature against the eternal law of right and wrong that God is, a law that *must* prevail. Kneel with Jesus in Gethsemane, and see what sin did; and learn what it must therefore be, since the horror of it thus laid in the very dust Him who made the heavens and the earth. Stand beneath the Cross of Jesus, and see the most innocent one that ever lived suffering the punishment of the most abandoned and incorrigible of criminals, and remember that sin is so great an evil that the Father thus punished it, demanding that vicarious

penalty from the Son of His love. See the agonized Mother, in speechless, nameless grief, embracing the lifeless body; looking at those glazed eyes that can not answer with the glance of love, those pallid lips that may not part in speech; and know that sin and sin alone of all things that we call evil had power to take that life away. And take consolation, take courage, rouse up your hope and your love, for He who saved the dying thief died also to save you, and offers you now His grace. Take His side against the great evil of life; fight sin in all its forms; fight it in yourselves, fight it in society, and that, under Christ, will be your remedy for all the evils of human life.

## III. JESUS CHRIST AND THE ILLUSIONS OF LIFE

"A man's life doth not consist in the abundance of things which he possesseth."—St. Luke xii, 15.

*SYNOPSIS.—I. What we mean by an "illusion." Illustration from a train. Difference between an illusion and a delusion. An illusion is a misinterpretation of facts.*

*II. Life and this world are facts. They can be misunderstood. Hence illusion—the illusions of life; misinterpretation of the meaning of life. Recapitulation of life's true meaning.*

*III. Attitude of the saints, and of our blessed Lord, to life and the things of the world. They under no illusion. Variety of saints a proof that it is not life's circumstances, but the way we use them, upon which sanctity and salvation depend; and the way we use them depends on our view of life.*

*IV. Parable of the rich fool. Words of St. Ignatius Loyola.*

*V. How we become subject to illusion. How to judge whether we are thus subject.*

I am to speak to you to-day, dear brethren, about the illusions of life. Now by an "illusion" we commonly mean the misinterpretation, by our minds or our senses, of something that really exists, but the true meaning of which we mistake.

An illusion, then, is not the same thing as a "delusion"; for a delusion is the mere invention of our fancy, having no basis in fact, but only in a disordered imagination.

The man who sits in a railway carriage when his train is standing still in a station, and sees another train close to him begin to move, has an almost irresistible impression that it is his own train that has started, and seems to feel a sudden stoppage, and almost a physical shock when the disappearance from sight of the last carriage of the train that really is moving reveals to him the fact that he has been all the time at rest.

His false impression can be corrected by the reflection that he does not feel the customary vibration; but this requires some effort. This is what we call an illusion—an optical illusion. It was a similar illusion that made man think for centuries that the sun and stars revolved about the earth, until other considerations than those suggested by sight taught them better.

But when a man in fever or insanity imagines himself pursued by a furious enemy seeking his life, we have a case of pure delusion, not founded on any actual fact external to the sufferer.

In the case of an illusion, on the contrary, there *are* real and true facts, but they are misinterpreted by the observer. The two trains, in the case I put to you, really exist; the movement exists also, but is attributed for the moment to the wrong train—until the false impression is corrected by further observations.

This human life of ours is a fact; a great fact, an undeniable fact. At the very foundation of all our intellectual and moral ideas lies the fact that we are—that we exist—and that a true and real world is about us. Whatever certain modern philosophers may say, who, in imitation of some of old, have endeavored to cast doubt upon the reality of things, they are themselves obliged in every conscious action of their lives to deny the false philosophy they have arrived at. They have arrived at it only by endeavoring to go behind those first principles of common sense taught us by the light of reason, that God has put in us to be our guide.

Life, then, is a fact; and the world is a fact. They are not delusions. But they are facts which we can misinterpret; facts of which we can miss the true meaning; and from this arise the illusions of life.

Let me recall to you briefly what I said two Sundays ago about the true meaning of human life. We then considered how our nature itself begins to teach us the meaning of life by its undying, never-satisfied longing for happiness—for happiness complete and serene and unending—short of which we can never be permanently content.

We found that only one class of persons can say that they have found the path to such happiness as that; and can, therefore, claim to teach us how and where such happiness is to be found.

Not the votaries of the world, for they have tried all that the world can give and found it wanting. Not even the followers of high and nobler pursuits—of science, of literature, of art—for their lives oftentimes have been unhappy, and their desires have been unsatisfied. One class only—the saints of God—have been serene and happy in the midst of the heaviest trials and sharpest sufferings—happy in this world in full security of having found and entered upon the path that leads to eternal blessedness.

They know the real meaning of human life, having learned it from Jesus Christ, their Master and Teacher; and they not only learned it, but acted upon their knowledge.

Yet, dear brethren, the things of this life, the things of this world were as true and real to the saints as they are to us. The



saints lived in the world; they had to use the things of the world; they had the same bodily needs, the same intellectual needs; the same affections that call so loudly for someone to love; the same desires for human sympathy; the same love of parents and kindred and home. They were not wanting in any of those human qualities that are characteristic of man as man.

Nor, dear brethren, with all reverence be it said—nor was our blessed Lord Himself different in this from ourselves. He was truly man, tried and tempted in all things even as we are—sin apart. He lived a human life; He needed food and raiment and money; His Sacred human Heart was full of love and sympathy for others; and full of intense desire that the love and sympathy of others should be extended to Himself. To Him, as to us, the names of Father, Friend and Home, and above all the name of Mother, were sacred and inexpressibly dear.

But, dear brethren, though He lived in the world, and, having willed to become man, needed and used the things of this world, yet our divine Lord, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, could not be under any illusions in regard to the things of the world; could not mistake their meaning nor their purpose; for His soul lived ever in the bright light of the Beatific Vision—the sight of God—in whom, as man, He saw the very truth and the true meaning of all things else.

Nor were the saints under any illusions in regard to earthly things, for they learned from Jesus Christ the true meaning of life.

It must sometimes be a puzzle, I think, to thoughtful people who have not the happiness of being Catholics, to see what a variety of classes is represented in the Church's calendar of saints. Nor is this a useless consideration for us Catholics ourselves.

To some people outside the Church, a Catholic saint is a person who has got into a strange morbid state of mind, in which he takes a quite different view of life from others; looks upon all things earthly as a snare of the evil one; and tries to escape the snare by cutting himself off, as far as human nature will allow, from all the delights and concerns, and even from the necessities of life.

Is there not also, dear brethren, a temptation for ourselves to look upon the saints too much in this way; to think that they are inhuman, in some way differently constituted from ordinary people, so that the things of this world do not appeal to them as they do to us?

Or at least are we not disposed to think that our circumstances and surroundings make it impossible for us to be like the saints?

It is quite true that sanctity does need special conditions; but those conditions are far more within the person who becomes a saint than without; and the facts I have mentioned, that all classes are represented in the Church's calendar, proves this. There have been the rich and the poor; the obscure and the noble; princes on their thrones; servants and beggars, bishops and priests, monks and nuns, as well as soldiers, sailors, statesmen and merchants; the young as well as the old, the unlearned as well as the learned, philosophers and men of letters as well as those who could neither read nor write; fathers and mothers of families as well as consecrated spouses of Jesus Christ.

It was not, then, the circumstances or surroundings of life, that made all these to be saints, but the *use they made* of these circumstances and surroundings. This is the secret of their sanctity; this is the thing in which, with such variety of earthly conditions, they were all alike; and this is the thing in which we can be like them, apart from special effects of special graces of union with God that they had, and which He grants to whom He will.

The use we make of the things of life—that is the important point in regard to holiness and salvation.

And the use we make of life depends upon the view we take of life. If, like the saints, we take the right view of life, taught us by their example, and taught to them and us by Jesus Christ Our Lord, then, by God's grace, we shall make of life the right use.

In other words, if, like the saints, we can get rid of the illusions of life, get rid of them in our conduct as well as in our thoughts, we shall begin to be like them and like our divine Lord and Master.

The cause of an illusion, like that of the man in the train, is always the failure to grasp all the circumstances of a case. The man in question thinks he is moving because he attends only to what sight tells him; forgetting that sensation does not bear out what sight appears to prove.

And the cause of our illusions in regard to life is the failure to grasp all its circumstances.

We are placed in a universe of things visible and palpable; things which strongly impress our senses. To us the things we can touch and see and hear are so real, that we forget that there are other and deeper realities.

This is true even with regard to unseen realities that are not necessarily supernatural nor spiritual. A man too fond of money, always engrossed in the pursuit of it, comes to forget that there are such things as honor, generosity, kindness, love, sympathy, pity—all of which, though unseen, are realities which we should be sorry to see abolished from the world.

Such a man is under an illusion. A man given up to sensual pleasures may easily come to lose sight of the fact that there are intellectual pleasures, artistic pleasures, far higher and nobler than the things he gives himself to. He, too, is under an illusion.

And a man may be high-minded, noble, elevated in all his tastes; upright and even irreproachable in conduct; and yet not realize that around and beyond this present world is another—a spiritual world, the realm of the supernatural, God's kingdom of grace. This he never thinks of; and he is under an illusion.

It is not that money, nor pleasures of sense, nor intellectual and artistic pursuits are unrealities or *delusions*; it is not that they are useless; it is not that they are always undesirable, nor in all circumstances wrong. Nor are a higher-minded natural nobility or elevation of taste or uprightness of conduct unreal; far less wrong. No; the illusion does not consist in looking upon these things as real or good or useful in their proper place; but in excluding higher things, and making the lower things, good, useful, and even noble though they may be, the end and aim of life.

These things are *not* the end and aim of life; they are not what we were made for.

The illusion consists in forgetting that there are other and higher realities; greater things than they for which we *are* made; forgetting that we were made for heaven, for God and His love, that we are destined to be citizens of the kingdom of grace here and of glory hereafter.

Read that parable of our divine Lord in the twelfth chapter of St. Luke, spoken to illustrate this great truth of which the whole life of Jesus was an exposition. One had said to Him, "Master, speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me." "And He said to them: take heed of all covetousness; for a man's life doth not consist in the abundance of things that he possesseth." Then He spoke a similitude to them—the parable of the rich fool; teaching us by this striking image, and by those that followed, what an illusion we labor under when we think that the things of this world

are all in all; and summing up His teaching in the words, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all those things shall be added to you."

What is this but the teaching put into a few words by St. Ignatius Loyola, that I have quoted on a former occasion: "*Man was made for this end; that he might praise and reverence the Lord His God, and, serving him, at length be saved. All other things on earth were made to help man to reach the object for which he was created.*" This is what the saints realized; and, therefore, they had no illusions in regard to this life.

They saw the beauty of the world, and they admired it and gave thanks to God for it. Who was so great a lover of nature as St. Francis? But he looked beyond the outward form, and saw God within, and the beauty of nature revealed to him more and more of God.

The saints appreciated the friendship of the world; but they loved their friends in God and for God and sanctified their human love with glowing charity divine.

They made use of the riches of this world; but as stewards of God, holding their possessions for those that had need.

In a word they used the things of the world for that purpose for which those things were made—to help them to heaven. Some were called to give up all; they obeyed; others were not so called; still they became saints, for they used the things of earth and all the circumstances of life well; never permitting them to come between their souls and God.

The great illusion of life is to think that earthly good things are all in all; that they can satisfy, that they are the end and object of human existence. There is the illusion. It matters not whether it be the grosser things of earth or the more noble and elevated; the things of the body or the things of the mind; if we make them the supreme object we are like the rich man in the parable, and some day it will be said to us, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." Thy soul, made for God and given to creatures; thy soul, that rejected its only lasting good and now can never, never have it.

I gave you, dear brethren, as an instance of an optical illusion the apparent movement around the earth of the sun and other heavenly bodies. Now we find it convenient in every-day life to keep up that illusion, and to speak as if it were a truth. We talk of the

sun rising and setting, we measure times and seasons by his apparent changes of position as if these were really due to the sun's movements and not to the earth's.

I think that many of us act in this way with regard to the great truth that our blessed Lord so frequently inculcated and which we have been considering to-day. We acknowledge it to be true; but we act as if it were not. In practise we put the world first; as if the world and the things of the world were fixed, eternal, immovable, instead of passing, changeable, temporal. We forget that the fashion of this world passeth away; that Eternity, which was before the world and will be after the world, is the fixed unchangeable state to which we must all come.

If we think that we can get to heaven in this way, that is by putting from us the real truth, and acting as if this world were all, I should call that vain hope more than an illusion; I should call it a delusion indeed, and the greatest of all delusions.

We cannot be saved unless by God's mercy we recognize practically as well as theoretically the truth of this matter. For the illusions of life may be manifested, and are among Christians often manifested in practical conduct; that conduct by which a man denies in act what he believes in his heart and knows to be true.

It is for each of us to examine his own life to see whether this is his own sad case. There are many ways in which we can judge whether it is so or not. For instance, we can judge by our habitual attitude toward sin. Do we really shrink from mortal sin as the greatest evil that can happen to us in life; or do we, like so many, cast lingering, longing, backward glances at forbidden pleasures, even if we do not actually commit the evil that we half desire and perhaps wish were not forbidden? We can judge, too, by the use we make of confession as a real means of improvement or amendment. We can judge by our readiness to profess our faith without shame or human respect; by our promptitude in taking the right side in any public question in which our religious faith is involved. We can judge by our attendance at Mass and the Sacraments—or rather, I should say, by our truly devout use of these great means of grace; by our thorough earnestness about the salvation of our souls. If the result of this self-examination is favorable, we may say that the illusions of life have no serious hold upon our minds.

To conclude, then, dear brethren, the illusions of life are all

those things, whatsoever they may be, that present themselves to us as so desirable, or so important, as to exclude the things of God and of eternal salvation; all things which cause us to lose sight of the true meaning of life, and allure us so to set our hearts upon them that, whatever we profess in the abstract, we live practically as if we thought we were created for the sole enjoyment of those things, and as if we believed that in them true and lasting happiness is to be found.

Anything and everything of this world that presents itself to us in that way is an illusion. It is for us to decide whether we will allow ourselves to be led away by these illusions; and we must lose no time in making the decision. Some of you may have thought that I meant to speak to you to-day of the disappointments of life. Life, indeed, is full of them, but what are they but illusions found out? And if from the disappointments of life we learn true wisdom, they are, in truth, a blessing. It is sad when the young are cut off in the bloom of their fresh youth; sad when early promise is not fulfilled; sad when bright hopes of earthly happiness are blighted; sadder still, perhaps, when ambition fulfilled does not bring the joy that was expected of it. But in heaven youth and age are not, but the full stature of a new life in God; *there* life's so-called failures have triumph; *there* is joy surpassing all that we can hope for or desire; for there, all illusion past, the very Truth Himself shall be revealed to our adoring gaze; and seeing His beauty and His graciousness beyond compare we shall wonder that for a single moment the illusions of this earthly life could have had a hold upon our hearts.

## IV. JESUS CHRIST AND THE AFFLICTIONS OF LIFE

“Wherefore it behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest before God. . . . For in that wherein he himself hath suffered and been tempted, he is able to succor also them that are tempted.”—Heb. ii, 17, 18.

*SYNOPSIS.*—I. *Contrast between the beauty of nature, and the afflictions of mankind. Why is this?*

II. *The world not as God intended it. This suggested by reason, and revealed clearly in Scripture. The original curse. Genesis and St. Paul. Rom. viii, 18-23. Sin the cause of life's afflictions. Exposition of St. Paul's teaching.*

III. *The promised restitution of all things in Christ. II Pet. 10-12; Acts iii, 19-21; Isaiah lxxv, 7.*

IV. *How to treat the afflictions of life.*

When, on some bright, calm day we look down from a commanding position upon a smiling fertile plain, wide-spread beneath us, and see the beauty of the earth that God has made, our hearts are lifted up and we thank God for His good creation. Then, perhaps, we descry the roof and towers of a great city, and our thoughts are carried naturally to the thousands or millions of human beings who spend their lives therein; and the contrast, the sad contrast, between the calm beauty of nature, and the misery of so many millions; the inevitable suffering that is the lot, indeed, of every child of Adam comes into our minds and fills our hearts with sadness.

The question will then irresistibly arise—why is it that this sad contrast exists? Why is it that man is born to sorrow and suffering? What is the explanation of the afflictions of human life?

That these afflictions exist is a fact that is only too true and too evident. There is no one who does not know this by personal experience. Who can say that he has never suffered in some way, greater or less? Who can observe what goes on about him and fail to be painfully struck by the truly vast amount of misery and suffering that exist in the world? The man who does not recognize the afflictions of life must be one who selfishly closes his eyes to the concerns of his neighbors; and he will have to learn, sooner or later, by his own suffering, what affliction and sorrow mean.

Whence, then, do sorrow and affliction come, and what is their explanation?

First, dear brethren, it is clear from Holy Scripture that this

world, and particularly human life, is not what God at first made it, and is not what He intended it to be. Moreover a study of human nature is of itself sufficient to give us an intimation of this fact. With such nobility of nature as man possesses, with such excellent capacities and high ideals, he yet falls below his ideals and fails to realize in action the noble purposes for which his nature and capacities are evidently intended. Does this not show that there has been a great original catastrophe, by which man's nature has been injured and wounded? That it is so, and that all creation is in some manner involved in the catastrophe, is clear from the inspired words of Holy Writ.

"Cursed is the earth," God said to Adam when he had fallen into sin. "Cursed is the earth in thy work; with labor and toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee. . . . In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return."

Man, by falling into sin, has involved the rest of creation in his fall; he has dragged all nature down with him. This is a mysterious truth, dear brethren, but it is a truth most plainly taught in Holy Scripture. There is a close connection between man and the rest of the earthly creation. He is the only rational being that God has placed on this earth; the only one who can give to God reasonable service, who can serve God; that is, freely and with understanding; *choosing* to serve God because he *knows* that this is due to God's supreme excellence. And so man has been called the "High Priest of Nature," who, by his willing and understanding service, gathers up, as it were, and presents to God the praise given to Him by His other works, but given to Him by them without freedom and without understanding. There are many mysteries of nature, as well as of grace and revelation; and it may well be that, could we penetrate more deeply the things, even of nature only, we should be able also to find some intimation of the bond that unites us to the rest of God's creatures. Be this as it may, the connection exists, and is taught by the revealed Word of God. Turn to the eighth chapter of St. Paul's epistle to the Romans, and you will find a passage of wonderful force and beauty on this subject.

St. Paul speaks first of the afflictions of human life, and holds out the hope of future recompense and restitution. He shows how



all creation shares in these afflictions, and can look also for restitution—the “restoration of all things in Christ.”

“I reckon,” he says, “that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us. For the expectation of the creature waiteth for the revelation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him that made it subject in hope. Because the creature also itself shall be delivered, from the servitude of corruption, into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that every creature groaneth and travaileth in pain, even till now. And not only it, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit; even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption of the sons of God, the redemption of our body” (Rom. viii, 18-23).

This is a pregnant passage, dear brethren, and throws great light upon the subject of my present discourse, “Jesus Christ and the Afflictions of Life.” It accounts not only for those many afflictions that we can trace to the actual sins of men, and which we considered in a former sermon on the “Evils of Life”; but it accounts also for the sufferings of animals, for the natural catastrophes and disasters, as well as for the personal sufferings of human beings.

Sin, and nothing else, is at the root of all. Sin spoilt man, and spoilt the world. Original sin began the evil, and man’s obstinate perseverance in sin augments and continues it. The eternal law has been violated and the inevitable consequences follow. It was the firm belief of the Jewish doctors that man’s fall brought all afflictions upon the human race and upon the rest of the earthly creation. “Although all things were created perfect,” says one of them (see “*La Sainte Bible Commentée*,” by L. Cl. Fillion, Paris, 1904, in loco), “they became corrupted when the first man sinned, and they will not return to their primitive condition till the coming of the Messiah.”

“The creature,” says St. Paul, “was made subject to vanity.” By the creature here is meant, not man, but the rest of the earthly creation, both animate and inanimate; and by “vanity” is signified “imperfection.” And it was not willingly; that is, it was by the compulsion of some external force—“by reason of him that made it subject.” These words, “by reason of him that made it subject,” may refer either to God, in that He included all creation under the

curse of man, or to man himself, in that he involved all the rest of earth in his own disgrace. But deliverance, a restitution is to come; for the creature is indeed "made subject to vanity," but "in hope, because the creature also itself—that is, not man merely, but the rest of the creatures—shall be delivered from servitude of corruption." And just as the rest of creation was cursed and spoilt when man fell, so shall it be restored and reinstated in its primitive goodness when man is himself restored and finally saved; for "the creature itself shall be delivered from corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

The same truth of the involving of nature in man's fall, and its final restitution by Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of mankind, is taught in those passages of the Holy Scripture which speak of the new heavens and the new earth that are to be created. "The day of the Lord shall come as a thief," writes St. Peter (II Pet. iii, 10-13), "in which the heavens shall pass away with great violence, and the elements shall be melted with heat, and the earth and the works that are in it shall be burnt up . . . and we look for a new heaven and a new earth, according to his promises, in which justice dwelleth." And the same holy Apostle, in his discourse after the miracle worked at the beautiful gate of the Temple, and recorded in the third chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, says to his hearers, "Be penitent . . . and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out. That when the times of refreshment shall come from the presence of the Lord, and he shall send him who hath preached unto you, Jesus Christ, whom heaven indeed must receive *until the times of the restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of his holy prophets from the beginning of the world*" (Acts iii, 19-21). Thus, again, speaks one of the prophets to whom St. Peter here refers, the great prophet of the Messiah to come, Isaias: "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be in remembrance, and they shall not come upon the heart" (Isaias lxxv, 17); and in a passage in the following chapter Almighty God declares by His mouth: "As the new heavens and the new earth which I will make to stand before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed stand and your name" (Ib. lxxvi, 22).

What a glorious hope for the future! And what a sure hope; for it is the word and the promise of God! Do we not lose sight too much of this future that is before us and before the world?

What is the life of man but a passing shadow compared with that eternity which was, and is, and ever shall be; and in which these promises shall be fulfilled. It is not worth while to endure the short affliction that shall earn so great a reward in the coming day of the Lord?

But more afflictions exist and they are hard to bear, and though life is so short, compared with eternity, yet it seems long to us, and especially when we are in pain and trouble do its hours drag wearily along. And it is with the afflictions of life that we are concerned; to try to learn how we may bear them well and what they mean, and what consolation and teaching our blessed Lord has to give us in the midst of them.

And first, He has borne them Himself. As we walk along the thorny way we can plant our feet in His own footprints, red with blood. Truly "we have not a High Priest who can not have compassion on our infirmities, but one tempted in all things like as we are without sin" (Heb. iv, 15).

And by His suffering and His endurance of the afflictions of human life, He has changed the nature of pain and sorrow, and all earthly woes. But for Him and His consecration of suffering in His own person, it would have been merely a punishment for sin and nothing more. But now it is the road to heaven, the path to eternal glory; it constitutes a likeness to Himself; it purifies and makes holy; it ennobles and strengthens; it is wholesome, though a bitter medicine, for it has distilled into it the saving drops that fell from the Cross on Calvary.

By all means let us strive, with all our power, to diminish the sufferings that exist in the world. Our blessed Lord did this. He relieved pain and suffering wherever He went. But He did not abolish it. Instead of that He left it to be a true blessing to us, if so be that we endure it particularly for His dear sake. He did not abolish it, but He bore it Himself, and He lifts up His holy Cross before our eyes that we may look to that and take courage to endure; since by patient suffering we are made like Him and trained for heaven. "We know," says the Apostle, "that all things"—and if all things, then suffering also—"work together unto good to such as, according to His purpose, are called to be saints. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be made conformable to the image of His Son" (Rom. viii, 29). "And we see Jesus," writes the same great teacher, "who was made a little lower than

the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor" (Heb. ii, 9).

*Sursum Corda!* "Lift up your hearts!" Lift up your eyes to the Cross of Jesus, and lift up your hearts to God. We have the humble and the confident hope that we are among those whom God has called to be one day saints in heaven; and, therefore, we must be made in all things "conformable to the image of His Son." Conformable in suffering here below, if we are to be conformable in glory hereafter. When we have done all we can, and rightly done it, for it is the law of charity to lessen and relieve the afflictions of human life, much inevitable suffering must still remain. Let us endure it with great patience, and help others to endure it with patience—"counting it all joy" when we shall fall into divers tribulations, knowing that this "trying of our faith worketh patience, and patience hath a perfect work," that "we may be perfect and entire, failing in nothing" (St. James i, 2-4).

Thus, and thus alone, dear brethren, can the afflictions of human life be—not done away with—but sweetened, lightened, made more than endurable. Those who think to abolish them by schemes of legislation, by socialism, or any other nostrum, are merely dreamers.

All honor to those who strive to *lessen* them and to relieve them. They are following the example of Jesus Christ Himself. But they must not expect to do what Jesus Christ Himself willed not to do; they must not expect any legislative measures will make a paradise of earth. By all means let us be social reformers, but let us not delude the people by promises that any scheme of human policy can make them perfectly happy. One thing only can do that, and that one thing is the faithful observance of God's holy law, as promulgated by the Catholic Church of Jesus Christ; and it is not by doing away with the afflictions of human life altogether, but by teaching us how to bear them, and how to use them to our unspeakable advantage for eternity, that Jesus Christ and His Church solve the question and offer us the explanation of the sufferings we must all endure.

## V. JESUS CHRIST AND HOME LIFE

"And he went down to Nazareth, and was subject to them."—St. Luke ii, 51.

*SYNOPSIS.—I. From the beginning, by God's ordinance, the family has been the center of the social life of man. Importance of the family to national life shown by experience and history.*

*II. The family also a sacred and holy thing. The holy office of parentage. Family and parentage holy, because images of divine mysteries; for (i) parenthood is a co-operation with the Creator, and (ii) an image of the divine faithfulness which results in the Blessed Trinity; (iii) the family was consecrated by Jesus Christ's own family life; (iv) marriage was made a Sacrament.*

*III. The responsibilities of the father and mother; the family a training-ground for salvation.*

*IV. Exhortation to fathers and mothers as to conduct. Go to the holy house of Nazareth for the example of a Christian home; and for the grace to perform your duties as parents.*

From the day, dear brethren in Jesus Christ, when God Almighty gave to Adam a helpmate in Eve, his wife, the *family* has been the center of the social life of man.

It is because all mankind are descended from that original family constituted by God at the beginning, and of which Adam was the head, that all men are in a true sense brothers, blood relations, children of the same father and mother. From the union of families connected by relationship have grown up the nations, whose truest bond of unity consists not merely in considerations of expediency or mutual help, but in the far closer and more binding tie of blood.

Dear brethren, of what supreme importance is the family! Simple experience tells us that upon the preservation of family life depend the welfare and stability of nations. When family ties become loosened to any considerable extent in a nation, that nation is working to its fall. The binding force that keeps it together is being weakened; the ties that unite man to man are being cut. History has proved this again and again; and history has proved that no other bond of union can supply the place of, or operate with, the same effectiveness as the sacred tie of blood relationship. What is it that keeps us to our country and our kin but that they *are* our country and our kin; because the people of our country are the people of our blood and race?

Conflicting interests we have; many evils are endured by one class in a nation at the hands of another; but we will endure much before we will sever the bond that unites us to the men of our race; few will willingly exile themselves from the land of their birth, and in the eyes of all there is no disaster so supreme, no catastrophe so dreadful as civil war—the spilling by men of the same nation of that blood which all have from a common source.

But the family is not only of supreme importance in national life: it is, and it has been from the beginning a holy, a sacred thing.

Next to priesthood—the office of him who stands in the midst between men and God to offer sacrifice—there is no office so sacred as that of parentage.

Nay, in ancient days, in the earliest religion that God prescribed to men, the father of the family was the priest. And even now is not the proudest title that your own priests bear the sacred name of “Father”?

And parentage and family are then sacred and holy, because they are the living earthly image of great mysteries of God.

What is the office of the parenthood but a co-operation with God in the creation of immortal beings; of beings who are destined to fill the homes of the fallen angels? It is nothing less.

Ah! dear brethren, how inviolable this office ought to be! Is it not truly a kind of sacrilege, a violation of holy things, to violate *in any way* this office and the faculties that to this office *alone* belong?

But there is more. Before the coming of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, men knew not what we now know of the inmost nature of the Godhead; they knew not that in the One Godhead there is a divine society, or divine family of persons—the Adorable Trinity—in whom there are Father, and Son, and the Holy Spirit who is the outcome of the love of both.

The human family, then, is no less than an earthly material image and likeness of that divine and wholly spiritual fruitfulness of the Godhead, by which the Son proceeds from the Father, and the Holy Ghost proceeds from both Father and Son.

Again, when Jesus Christ Our Lord came upon earth, the Incarnate Word of the Father, He has given an added sanctity to family life. He came to save the world: to preach the truth, to found the Church, to give us the holy Sacraments; to offer the great sacrifice and institute the great Sacrament of His Body and Blood that is daily continued on our altars; He came to do a work greater

than the work of creation itself—and with all this before Him, He consecrated some thirty years of His earthly career to the sanctities of family life.

Marriage, that bond already sacred in that it was directly instituted by God Himself; already by God's primitive ordinance hedged about with the defense of absolute indissolubility, Jesus Christ raised to the dignity of a grace-giving Sacrament, a channel of the merits of His precious Blood; and made it a type and a symbol of His union with His immaculate Bride, the Holy Catholic Church.

Brethren, reflect on these truths; truths of Scripture, truths of faith, and you will see what it is that men to-day would touch with impious hands—those men who would enter the sacred precincts of the family, and ruin that holy work of God. You will see, too, what it is that men impiously *do* attack when they legalize and make easy the breaking of the marriage bond: you will see, too, what everyone violates who is unfaithful to this sacred tie, or who misuses those powers which were given to them only for its sake.

And you, fathers and mothers, and you who will be fathers and mothers, think of the responsibilities that attach to this high office of parenthood. Yours is a privilege indeed to bring into this world and to train up citizens, not chiefly for an earthly country, but for God's Church here below, and for the heavenly Jerusalem above.

And where, I ask you, is the training ground? It is, and it only can be in the family. The priest and the school master can help you; but they can not take your place; and unless you lay the foundation in the family life, their efforts are likely to meet with scant or only temporary success.

You have the care of the child in its tenderest years, when this great world is opening upon it, when its mind is receiving its *first* impressions—impressions that will be indelible.

From you, father, that child will learn its standard of life: wo to you and to your child if that standard be not a high and noble one. Remember that your fatherhood is a type of the fatherhood of God, "of whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named" (Eph. iii, 15). Remember that to your child you have to represent God—that he may learn from your faithfulness and justice and strong protection what are the faithfulness and justice and providence of the Father in heaven.

From you, mother, that little one will chiefly learn the great lesson of God's love. You will tell to it the sweet story of Jesus

and Mary; of the holy Childhood; of the Cross; of saints and angels, and God's Holy Church. The enthusiasm of your faith; the warmth of your loving devotion will pass to that child of yours; he will see it in your face; he will detect it in the hushed and awe-struck accents of your voice, and he will catch it from you as he can from no other. If the things of heaven are real to you, they will be real to your child; if in all your life you put God first, he will learn to do the same. Of how many of God's saints we know that the beginning of their sanctity was due to the teachings and example of a truly devout and Christian mother: how many a saint on reaching heaven has gone to seek his mother's happy soul and say, "Mother, it is *you* I have to thank for this."

Oh, my dear brethren, what a truly immense responsibility is this! Immortal souls to make or mar! Think not; again I say it, think not that others can take your place in this. It is the *first years* that matter most; it is the intimate life of *home* that makes the deepest, most lasting impression; and so, dear brethren, a Christian home is a school of salvation, while a wicked home is the very anteroom of hell.

Look well, then, to yourselves, Christian fathers and mothers. What is your conduct; what do your children see in you? What is your mutual love for one another? Fathers, are you tender and considerate to your wives? Mothers, are you a support and a comfort to your husbands? Is your home one to which man and children can turn as to them the sweetest spot on God's earth? All this will deeply affect your children's lives.

Fathers and mothers, what is your conduct toward Almighty God and His Church? What is your frequentation of the Sacraments? Your attendance at Mass? What is your practise with regard to prayers? Do your children ever *see* you pray? Have you in your homes that holy and most beneficial custom of family prayer? What little time it would take, and yet how incalculably good it would be in its effects, to recite the Rosary or the Litany of our blessed Lady every evening in common in your households before the venerated image of the blessed Mother and the holy Child.

Is it, father and mothers, the sad case with you, that the priest must work and strive to get your children to come to Holy Mass and the Sacraments against the evil influences of your own bad example?



Brethren, if your children's feet are set upon the road that leads to destruction by any bad example or neglect of yours, their blood will be upon your heads.

Again, brethren, how do you perform that all-important duty of protecting your children's innocence; of cherishing their budding virtue, of keeping them from the infection of sin, from temptation and from every evil? Do you take care that their companions are such that you can safely intrust your little ones to their care; that nurses and servants are of irreproachable character? Do you see to it that no bad book, or newspaper, or picture comes into your children's hands? Great, indeed, is your task; so great that of yourselves you can not accomplish it. You must rely upon a strength greater than your own; a wisdom higher than of yourselves you can attain. Whither, then, shall you go?

Brethren, there is a name that once was wholly unknown to men, but now is known and revered the world over. It is the name of a little mountain village whose luster now outshines that of the mightiest cities of earth. Nazareth is that name; and if you would learn to be good fathers and mothers, to Nazareth you must go. There, for the years of His hidden life, lived Jesus, with Mary and Joseph, and was subject to them. There we see the supreme model for all time of what a Christian home should be.

It was not a rich home; far from it. Joseph worked at a trade; Mary kept the house; Jesus, their God, was subject to them in childhood's simplicity of docile obedience. What a spirit of joy and peace reigned in that holy house, that most blessed of all earthly homes!

And why? Because God was there. Mary and Joseph lived ever in the presence of their God. Him whom they were privileged to carry in their arms they had long learned to bear in their hearts. Their one aim was to do the will of His heavenly Father and theirs.

In that home was never an angry word, never a murmur of discontent; never an act of harshness; never a dispute. Jesus, though God of heaven and earth, is the perfect model of a child's obedience. Mary and Joseph are the patterns of parent, husband and wife.

Brethren, go there; and learn what your homes should be like. First and foremost learn that *your home must have God in it*. Without that nothing will avail; with that all will be well. It is not hard to tell whether God is in a home or not. You know whether He is in *your* home. If He be there, all else that is necessary for a good

home will follow ; there will be true love of husband and wife ; loving obedience and perfect respect from the children.

Many are the complaints heard in these times about the ill behavior of children. Where is the fault? If homes were always Godly, the conduct of children would seldom be ill.

And not only for an example upon which to mold your home life, but for grace and strength to perform your difficult but noble task you must go to the Holy Family of Nazareth. Jesus is there, the Fount and Giver of all grace ; and think you not that Mary and Joseph will pray for you to Him, that joy and peace and grace divine may abound in your homes, to the blessing of you and your children?

Make these two, dear brethren, the guardians of your home ; the guides and models of your home life as fathers and mothers. Let their holy images be before your eyes in some place in your home where all may see them ; let your daily prayers ascend to them in heaven, that they may pray for you to the Divine Child, and gain you grace to carry out the duties of your sacred office well, that one day you may lead your children and your children's children to His sacred feet.

## VI. JESUS CHRIST, OUR TRUE LIFE

“As the branch can not bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he that abideth in me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit; for without me you can do nothing.”—John xv, 4, 5.

*SYNOPSIS.*—I. *The early Christian symbolism of the vine. Not an accident, but founded on Our Lord's words. It teaches a most important lesson.*

II. *Recapitulation of subjects of this course. All the lessons we have tried to learn on the past five Sundays are summed up in the truth taught in the text. Enlargement upon this in detail.*

III. *Consideration of the simile of the vine and the branches as applied to ourselves as branches of Jesus Christ. How are we to become branches, and abide in the vine? St. Paul's simile of the olive and the engrafting (Rom. xi, 16-18). Application to the vine and ourselves. Points of similarity and of difference in such similes. Explanation of these points in the combined similes of Our Lord and St. Paul.*

IV. *We must abide in Jesus Christ and open our hearts to Him. The test of this. "Keep my commandments." In other words, "Imitation of the Way, the Truth, and the Life."*

V. *How to know and follow Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. One may say, He lived two thousand years ago! He lives now, in heaven, and in His Church.*

VI. *Therefore we must throw ourselves, heart and soul, into the divine Catholic system.*

Were you to visit the holy city of Rome, dear brethren in Jesus Christ, and to go down into those wonderful subterranean cemeteries known to us as catacombs, and would see there crypts and galleries decorated with religious paintings, in which the truths of faith are taught through the sense of sight.

And amongst the earliest of the paintings there to be seen is one of frequent occurrence—The Vine—rich in foliage and laden with fruit. And this is not the result merely of chance; nor a mere copy of the conventional pictures to be found on the walls of heathen houses of the same date, for though it is true that the vine figured largely in such domestic decoration at the beginning of the Christian era, there is clear evidence that amongst Christians it was given quite early a distinctively Christian significance.

This shows, dear brethren, that the first Christians were deeply impressed by the comparison made by our blessed Lord in the words of my text, and that they had learned and appreciated the all-important lesson which He teaches us thereby.

And, in truth, it is a lesson of supreme importance for the right conduct of human life; teaching us how utterly that right conduct depends upon our attitude toward, and our relations with, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master.

I have spoken to you in this Lenten course of Jesus Christ and human life. We have tried together to learn life's true meaning—that we are made for God and can find lasting and true happiness in Him alone. We have seen that the only real evil of life is sin; we have endeavored to grasp the truth that, to look upon the things of this world as if they were all in all and could satisfy the needs of the soul, is the greatest of life's illusions; we have considered how we ought to bear ourselves under the afflictions of life, so as to make them a blessing to our souls and upward steps to heaven; and on Sunday last we meditated upon the Christian home as the training ground for citizens of the heavenly land.

And all these lessons are summed up in the great truth which Our Lord teaches us in the words of the text—that He Himself is our true life, the only true life of individuals, the only true life of society.

In this fact, in this teaching of Jesus Himself, we find the solution to all the problems that human life offers to our minds.

Would we know the meaning of life? He says to us, "Come to me, I am the way, and the truth, and the life—the truth to learn the way to follow, the life to live. I teach you that you are made for God; I show you how to come to God; I give you that divine life of grace which is in Myself."

Would we escape the evils of life, and sin, life's greatest evil of all? Would we do our part in banishing, as far as may be, from earth the many evils that come from the sins of men? He says to us, "Come to me, I have conquered sin, and in my strength you too can conquer sin, in yourselves and society. By spreading the true knowledge of me, through your words and, above all, by force of your example, you can regenerate society through the individual, by making good Christian men and women and true followers of me." Would we escape the illusions of life, learning to use the things of earth so as to gain heaven by their means; making of them not a hindrance, but a help? "Come to me," He says, "and follow the example of my life on earth." Would we have true help and real consolation in affliction? "Hear my words," He says, "that I have spoken to you; 'Come unto me all you that labor and are burdened,

and I will refresh you.'” Would we have homes that shall be like heaven upon earth? “Learn of me,” He cries out, “copy the home that I lived in and blessed when I was on earth; and I will dwell in and will bless your homes also.”

Yes. Would you do all these things? “Come to me,” says Christ, “and I shall tell you that there is *one only way of salvation and happiness and reform*, whether for ourselves individually or for society at large; *you must abide in me.*”

Look, dear brethren, at the spreading branches of the vine; see, too, how fresh and beautiful are the leaves; notice the strength and vigor of the branches; see how, to the furthest extremity where the young shoots are pushing out, all is life and growth, giving promise of abundant fruit. And what is the secret of this vigorous life? It is the vital sap which, drawn up from the parent stem, flows to the newest and most delicate tendrils.

So it will be with you, if you abide in the true vine, Jesus Christ. “I am the vine, you are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit.”

Otherwise, if you abide not in Jesus Christ, you will be as a branch that has withered, because by some accident the lifegiving sap has been cut off from it; a branch that is only fit to be cut off and cast into the fire. “If anyone abide 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.”

How then, dear brethren, are we to become branches of the true vine, and abide in Jesus Christ our life? We are first made branches of Christ in holy Baptism. St. Paul, speaking of the conversion of the Gentiles, says to them in his Epistle to the Romans: “If the root be holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches be broken, and thou, being a wild olive, art ingrafted in them, and art made partaker of the root and of the fatness of the olive tree, boast not against the branches . . . thou bearest not the root, but the root thee” (Rom. xi, 16-18).

St. Paul is here using the olive tree in the same way Our Lord used the similitude of the vine; and as the Apostle tells the Roman Christians that they, from being wild olives, have, by Baptism, been ingrafted upon the true olive tree, and made partakers of the fatness of the root; so it is true of us that we have been ingrafted in the true vine, and are made partakers of the richness of the grace of Jesus Christ.

At our Baptism it was, that the sap of divine life, God's holy grace, began to flow into us from Him. By it, and by it alone, while we are joined to the true vine, and then only, can we bear the rich fruit of Christian virtue and good works.

In every comparison such as this, of the vine and the branches, used by our divine Lord, or that of the ingrafting upon the olive, used by St. Paul—comparisons in which an earthly, material thing is used to illustrate spiritual truths and realities, we come sooner or later to a point where the similarities of the earthly image to the spiritual truth ceases; and often the points of difference which then ensue are no less instructive than the points of resemblance.

Now, combining the image used by our blessed Lord with the idea of grafting used by St. Paul, we shall see that it is so here.

As branches of the true vine we are like the branches of some wild inferior species, for we were born in sin, and children of wrath, but ingrafted in Baptism upon the true vine; made living branches of Jesus Christ, partakers of the fatness of that root. Just as the sap also flows through the branches to the utmost extremities of the whole vine, so does the life of divine grace flow in every soul.

And, moreover, just as the branch must wither and be cut off and cast away, if any obstacle prevents the sap from flowing through it, so too we, if we cease to abide in our divine Lord and thus lose His grace, become withered branches.

But now come points of difference. It does not depend upon the voluntary action of the branches of a vine whether or not they abide in the parent root, but it does depend upon our own voluntary action whether or no we abide in Jesus Christ. By mortal sin we can cut off that life that flows from Him to us.

Again, it does not depend upon the branches of the natural vine how great the abundance or how scanty the supply of the vital sap which flows into them. Not so with us. It does depend in part upon us what abundance of spiritual life we receive from our divine Lord. If we are generous, and open our hearts to Him, He will fill us abundantly with His own life; but if we are cold, and narrow our hearts, we shall not receive the abundance that we might.

We must, then, abide in Him, and open our hearts to Him. And He has told us how we may know whether we are doing this or not.

“In this is my Father glorified; that you bring forth very much

fruit. . . . As the Father hath loved me, I also have loved you. Abide in my love." There, dear brethren, is the secret. "Abide in my love."

And the test, the proof? "If you keep my commandments you shall abide in my love, as I also have kept my father's commandments and do abide in his love" (St. John xv, 8-10). It is the same lesson that our blessed Lord teaches when He says, "If you love me, keep my commandments"; and, in the chapter from which I have just quoted, "You are my friends if you do the things that I command you."

We abide in Jesus Christ by loving Him, and the true proof of our love is in our acts, in the keeping of His commandments; or, in other words, by imitating Him who is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; for He commands us nothing of which He is not Himself the perfect example.

He is the Way we must follow; by the imitation and by coming to the Father through Him, by whose merits, in whose Church, through whose Sacraments, we are brought into closest union with God. He is the Truth from whom we must learn, and whom we must know by the exercise of faith. He is our very Life that we must live, by preserving ever in our souls that holy gift of grace by which we are made like unto Himself.

"But," one may say, "Jesus Christ lived nearly two thousand years ago, and records of Him are comparatively scanty, and men differ very greatly as to His teaching and nature and office. How are we to know of His life; how be sure of His teachings; how obtain His grace?"

Brethren, it is not true to say that Jesus Christ, God-made man, *lived* two thousand years ago. Well-nigh two thousand years have passed since He became incarnate for our salvation; but He lives still; he *lives now*. He is to-day our living, loving Saviour, Lord and friend. He lives in heaven, and He lives and abides in His own true Church. In that one true Church, which is His mystical body, we are ingrafted upon him. Throughout the Church, which lives alone by His own very Spirit, flows the life-giving grace that He won upon the Cross. The Holy Spirit leads her into all truth, by Jesus Christ's own promise that can never fail, and so from her and in her we can both know Jesus and learn how to follow Him; from her and in her, who has the means of grace that He appointed, we can draw the life that comes direct

from Him. If therefore, dear brethren, you would abide in the true vine, and receive abundantly of the fatness thereof, then throw yourselves heart and soul into the Catholic system, for it is His own appointed way. See Jesus Christ in the Church; in the Sacraments; in His Vicar; in His ministers; in every least rite and ceremony that she has instituted in His name. Listen to her voice with docility; be of one mind with her in all things, and you will then be of one mind with Jesus Christ her Lord who lives in her, and in you will the Father be glorified because you will bear very much fruit.









