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Sullivan, Walter
Our Lord's design
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OUR LORD'S DESIGN FOR HAPPINESS



Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven
• Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land • Blessed
are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted • Blessed are they
that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill •
Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy • Blessed are
the clean of heart: for they shall see God • Blessed are the peace-
makers: for they shall be called the children of God • Blessed are
they that suffer persecution for justice' sake: for theirs is the kingdom
of heaven • Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and perse-
cute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake.

BY WALTER SULLIVAN, C.S.P.

J. M. J.
S. A. G.

Joseph J. Olen
A. M. D. G.

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WALTER SULLIVAN, C.S.P.



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OUR LORD'S DESIGN FOR HAPPINESS

I

BLESSED ARE THE POOR OF SPIRIT FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Whence is Happiness Bred, in the Heart or in the Head?

An eager young journalist once interviewed Hilaire Belloc in a Boston hotel, and asked him for his rule for achieving happiness. "I have none," said Belloc. "You can't be happy. Don't try. Cut it out. Make up your mind to be miserable."

Emerson warns us that "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds," and it is reassuring that Belloc was not consistently morose. In one of his essays he finds occasion to comment on Lord Chesterfield's injunction against loud and rollicking laughter. He says, "Personally, I'll laugh as loudly as I please, and Lord Chesterfield can put that into his pipe and smoke it."

Where to Begin

It soon becomes apparent in reading the Scriptures and the best Christian writers that while life on earth is undoubtedly a warfare, it can be none the less a moderately happy state of belligerency. What Chesterton said about the Irish in his *Ballad of the White Horse* has a kind of universal application:

"The great gaels of Ireland
Are the men whom God made mad
For all their wars are merry
And all their songs are sad."

While singing the blues in this valley of tears, man still goes questing for happiness. More marvelous still, he finds it, not complete and perfect, but at least in some measure. It is certainly no part of Catholic teaching that we should be distrustful of happiness. But in Christ's plan happiness becomes compatible with and even dependent upon the gracious acceptance of such things as poverty.

What Is Poverty of Spirit?

St. Luke is at times disposed to be briefer and more pointed than St. Matthew. St. Luke says, "Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." And later, "Woe to you that are rich: for you have your consolation."

Remember that in the Beatitudes Our Lord was concerned to overthrow the prejudices of Israel. Moses employed material images to impress a worldly-minded, sense-bound people. He stimulated them by picturing the earthly rewards of righteousness. Despite the spirit of charity that is reflected in the Law, there is also evident a scorn of poverty. It even resulted at times in harshness toward the poor, the sick, and the unfortunate, who were dismissed as sinners receiving just recompense for their iniquities. In the First Beatitude Our Saviour dispels these gross misconceptions by a few simple, dynamic and hauntingly beautiful words: Blessed are the poor in spirit.

The essential concern of this Beatitude is with the interior disposition. So while wealth may be potentially dangerous, it is none the less compatible with poverty of spirit. Wealth also has potentiality for the exercise of virtue.

Physical Poverty

Mere physical poverty, the mere fact of being poor does not of itself make a man virtuous, and it might even be conducive to vice. Just as we endeavor to soothe pains, heal disease, subdue vice, we must try to remedy abject poverty. There is a thesis in fundamental ethics which states: Man has a right to the material goods of this life, and in case of extreme need, this right takes precedence over other rights. It is no part of Christ's teaching that we should advocate and encourage poverty that has a dehumanizing effect and breeds unwholesome living and savage criminality.

A man can be poor yet unreasonably proud and viciously mean; and, a man may have wealth and still be poor in spirit. St. Thomas, ever realistic, advances this sensible proposition: "Those who would live virtuously need to avoid abundance of riches and beggary, in so far as these are occasions of sin, since abundance of riches is an occasion for being proud; and beggary is an occasion for thieving and lying and even perjury."

Still — It's Passing Strange

Making all the qualifications that the context of the Beatitudes and the entire message of the Gospel demand, this Beatitude remains passing strange. It becomes immediately obvious that the wealthy occupy no preferred position in questing for Christian happiness. The kingdom of heaven will not be

knocked down to the highest bidder. And if God, in all reverence, may be said to have a price, that price consists in offering Him loving service, and not in offering Him an accumulation of material wealth—which is already His anyhow.

A Necessary Corrective

We are continually being informed—daily, from dawn to dusk and far into the night, that our deliverance is at hand. Freedom from germs, ugliness, drudgery, boredom, depression, sleeplessness is offered for a price, payable in easy installments. So that one is almost tempted to believe that happiness is a commodity that can be purchased.

Relaxing music is obtainable for our listening pleasure. Delicious canned foods are readily obtainable. These foods are delectable and teasing to the appetite. For an upset stomach we have an abundance of quick and painless remedies. If we are fidgety or even troubled with a bad conscience we may gain sweet oblivion through a gentle, non-habit forming sedative. Yet the simple, benighted Eskimo is said to be better adjusted than the average sophisticated city dweller. Does this mean we should migrate to Alaska, travel by dog sled, and exist on raw meat in a smelly igloo? No, but it does mean that we should try to place things in proper perspective.

Self Denial

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare draws a revolting picture of Mark Antony living riotously in Egypt; drunk, sensual, luxury loving. This in bitter contrast to Antony the once able soldier who taught his men to endure privations by his own courageous example.

Meditating on the First Beatitude, we must burn into our consciousness the remarkable fact that somehow the poor, the underprivileged, the submerged classes, have the ingredients available for true greatness—for holiness and sanctity. Christ issued no special call to scions of vast wealth and social privilege. Poverty, labor, suffering were His instruments of salvation. Better housing, high education, healthy sanitation, a fine golf club and paved roads are excellent things. They are God's creatures in fact—good in their kind, and certainly not to be despised. But Our Lord proclaimed the remarkable truth that happiness was yet available despite a lack of such things.

St. Francis of Assisi wedded to poverty was somehow the freest and happiest man of his time.

Indifference

Early in his *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius warns that we should be constantly on guard lest through motives of love or fear we act against the voice of duty. Hence we must not be booby-trapped by inordinate attachment to things. This means that we do not personally desire health rather than sickness, honor rather than dishonor, nor a long life rather than a short one. We gain mastery of self that we may be servants of God. As St. Paul says, "I consider all things as refuse that I may gain Christ." Again St. Paul tells us that all sin consists in "the love of the creature more than the Creator."

The man who is poor in spirit is essentially a free man, liberated from the bondage to creatures. His mind is clear, and he is not imprisoned by luxury or possessions or refined vice. His heart is glad. Verily, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

II

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK FOR THEY SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH

The Basic Lesson

If you could preach but once, what would your message be? If you could teach but once, what would be the substance of your lesson? Chesterton, asked for an essay entitled "If I could Preach but Once," wrote a convincing article on Humility. He was on solid ground and had the support of the best of all authorities.

The Wisest Counsellor

Our Divine Savior was the greatest teacher that ever lived, the keenest spiritual advisor, the most discerning psychologist, the wisest counsellor. Deliberately and specifically He called attention to Himself as a teacher who would instruct us in an all-important lesson, a lesson basic to happiness and essential for harmonious adjustment to life and for any spiritual advancement. Close your text books of psychology, forget your lectures on character formation and self-improvement, and listen with

unbiased, receptive mind to the clear, simple, imperative prescription of the Savior. "Learn of Me for I am meek and humble of heart." There you have a rule of thumb remarkably simple, wondrously profound and universally effective. Christ Himself guarantees it. It will not fail; it's bound to work.

Under the Weather?

Yet there are some who claim (and not entirely without evidence) that the very words "meekness" and "humility" have acquired a questionable and an unpleasant connotation, and can engender embarrassment. Describe a man as brave, generous, loyal, truthful, wise, and you very definitely speak favorably of him. Characterize him as meek and humble, and such epithets might be regarded as hardly complimentary—dubious at best. To some minds the words "meekness" and "humility" connote a type of character that is mousey, spineless, lacking in principle and devoid of courage—agreeable perhaps and quite harmless, but wishy-washy.

Virtue Never Despicable

But Our Lord was no advocate of cowardice and weakness when He instructed us to be meek and humble, if we would be His disciples. Christ taught meekness and He practiced it, and "when He was reviled, He did not revile."

Those dim bulbs who adopt a pose of sophisticated boredom, arrogance and sullen rudeness betray their lamentable ignorance of human nature.

The dull-witted and the spiritually proud may disdain and neglect meekness and humility. But set this down. They will never succeed in living happily. Pride and conceit wins no friends and impresses few people. While the snob, the proud, the arrogant, make themselves wearisome and insufferable, the humble man makes friends and the meek is received with kindness.

But — Remember!

The gentleness and forbearance we associate with meekness are a result of action by the Holy Spirit, and indicate strength, vigor and trust in God. Meekness has no affiliation with servile fear, especially the fear of opposition or contradiction.

The Book of Numbers tells us that "Moses was a man exceeding meek." But he was fearless also, and stood up to the

tyrannical Pharaoh, and did not even hesitate to kill an Egyptian who was guilty of afflicting the Hebrews.

It is not the meek and humble man that is tormented by an inferiority complex. For the humble man accepts objective truth gratefully, and attempts neither to deny his shortcomings nor to exaggerate his abilities. The meek man does not fawn upon the wealthy nor tremble before the powerful, any more than he would so much as dream of frightening those subject to him. He has no abject terror of failing, nor does he take a childish delight in the magnitude of his achievements. His constant meditation is the truth of the Church's prayer in the Sequence for Pentecost: "Where Thou art not, man hath not. Every holy deed and thought comes from Thy Divinity."

Personal Charm

The man who cultivates meekness and humility is, taken all in all, rather a pleasant, affable fellow, a bit retiring perhaps, but normal, and singularly free from the abominable compulsion to dominate. Actually he is well equipped for the warfare of life. He is not touchy, and does not sulk or explode when criticized. There is little danger that he will bleed to death even when he receives undeserved blame. He controls the sharpness of his tongue, and conquers his inclination to recount his achievement, for he is aware that details of victory, while delightful to self, can be dull, flat, stale and wearisome to others. He even keeps a tight reign on his temper, does not speak in anger, and never indulges in ridiculous tantrums.

No Counterfeits

Since meekness and humility are so innately attractive and naturally disarming, an alert and active mind might be tempted to cultivate these virtues, as one might cultivate good manners, neatness, or good speech. Thus a man eager for advancement and desirous of popularity and social acceptability might practice modesty and unobtrusiveness, and endeavor to ingratiate himself by winning disavowal of his talents and achievements.

The braggart is clumsy and awkward and wanting in social grace. But humility and meekness are not qualities that one may assume, as a character in a Greek play wearing a mask. Such an endeavor is all too likely to result in some type of oily spiritual Uriah Heep, protesting virtue to accomplish selfish purposes. And alas, in vain.

"Seems"

When Gertrude, the Queen, takes her son, Hamlet, to task for seeming so dejected and sad over his father's sudden death, Hamlet makes a very pointed rejoinder:

"Seems Madam! Nay, it is; I know not 'seems.'
'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good Mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspirations of forc'd breath,
No, nor the fruitful river of the eye,
Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
Together with all forms, modes, shows of grief,
That can denote me truly; these indeed seem,
For they are actions that a man might play;
But I have that within me which passeth show;
These but the trappings and the suits of woe."

So, too, with the virtues of meekness and humility. One must really have them. It is idle to pretend.

Half Way to Heaven

Meekness is a supernatural virtue related to temperance, since it assists to self mastery and restraint of anger. It is related to fortitude, because it engenders patience and tolerance with the failings of others. And it includes charity, since it implies forgiveness of injuries and kindness even toward our enemies. Indeed, those who are truly meek not only possess the earth, they are half way to heaven as well.

III**BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN,
FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED****Self**

Whittaker Chambers in his epic, *I Was a Witness*, insists that "each of us hangs always upon the cross of himself. And when you know this is true of every man, woman and child on earth, you will be wise."

Selfishness

Spiritual writers in all ages have never ceased warning us about self, and the conquering of selfishness by self-abnegation. Chambers appears to have blundered upon an ancient truth, seeing it for the first time, and accepting it as a sort of new

and shattering discovery. But it is healthy to see an old truth in the bright light of a brand new revelation. It is disquieting to regard any truth as being tired and antiquated.

Anyhow, Chambers has stated the problem well. Self, the ego, I; there lies the terror. There is the torment. And to allay the pangs of consciousness and to forget about self, men take drugs, get drunk, practice yoga, seek absorption into a state of nirvana, and in final despair commit suicide.

Eradicate the I

Man experiences wholesome release of tension and knows real joy when he succeeds in escaping from self. The difficulty that confronts us: how to get rid of the "I." Well, one way is simply to strike it out. Draw an "I" and then strike it out, thus: ✕, and you have made yourself a cross. The fact of the matter is that the cross is our only hope.

El Camino Real

Thomas à Kempis knew a few things about the problem of self, and many things about the cross. In his stimulating and consoling spiritual and literary masterpiece *The Following of Christ*, he entitles a complete chapter "The Royal Road of the Holy Cross." The thesis of à Kempis is easy enough to state, but somewhat more difficult to carry out. He demonstrates patiently and repeatedly that the conquest of self is accomplished only by the willing acceptance of the cross. At first one may demur at the burden, but à Kempis pictures the cross as a burden that is productive of special peace and interior tranquillity. Actually à Kempis is an eminently practical man. He advocates accepting graciously that which no man has ever been able to escape. "If thou carry the cross willingly, it will carry thee, and bring thee to thy desired end, namely, to that place where there will be an end of suffering, though here there will be no end.

"If thou carry it unwillingly, thou makest it a burden to thee, and loadest thyself the more, and nevertheless thou must bear it. If thou fling away one cross, without doubt thou wilt find another, and perhaps a heavier.

"To bear the cross, to love the cross, to chastise the body and bring it under subjection; to fly honors, to love to suffer insults, to despise oneself and wish to be despised; to bear all adversities and losses, and to desire no prosperity in this world;—all this is not according to man's natural inclination.

“But if thou confidest in the Lord, strength will be given thee from heaven, and the world and the flesh shall be made subject to thee.”

The Uses of Adversity

When Our Lord said “Blessed are they that mourn,” He was not sponsoring a cult of pessimism. He was no advocate of calculated melancholy and induced torment. He never taught His disciples to be deliberately sad. Quite the contrary. He instructed them in joy, in gladness; and He warned them against sour, lugubrious faces—even when doing penance. He reconciled suffering with joy, because He dignified it by clothing it with purpose. The Crucifixion unrelated to Redemption and to Easter and the Resurrection is merely a frightening study in horror and misery and human cruelty. So, too, individual crosses graciously received may become redemptive and salvific, liberating the soul from the tyranny of egotism and selfishness.

Retribution and Compensation

George Eliot, in *The Mill on the Floss* draws an exquisite picture of the heroine, Maggie Tulliver. She was a young girl who had chanced upon a copy of *The Following of Christ*, and proceeded to abide by the precepts of à Kempis. Her life was disciplined and austere. She was tan, trim, clear-eyed, restrained, dominated by a sense of purpose and quiet joy in living. Her life of austerity and self-denial served only to heighten her dignity and enhance her beauty.

Self-love, unlike self-knowledge, is destructive, and in the end, it breeds a sort of nausea even in its practitioners. Oscar Wilde was moved to write, “Where sorrow is there is holy ground. Some day people will realize what this means. They will know nothing of life until they do. . . . I took pleasure where it pleased me and passed on. I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character, and that what one has done in the secret chamber one has some day to cry aloud from the housetops. I ceased to be lord of myself. I was no longer captain of my soul, and did not know it. I allowed pleasure to dominate me, and ended in horrible disgrace. But I find hidden away somewhere in my nature something that tells me that nothing in the world is meaningless, and suffering least of all. Sorrow marries us to God. Out of sorrow has the world been built, and at the birth of a child or a star there is pain.”

Competition — for What?

In the jungle of our competitive society in which money appears to be the generally accepted standard of success, there is a maddening compulsion to achieve material prosperity. In the scramble some develop ulcers and heart conditions. Others suffer nervous breakdowns and a variety of neuroses. Many give up and acknowledge defeat, and in the end, all die.

While the Christian is expected to be as valiant as the next in the hard struggle for existence, he should have a pervading sense of purpose that makes his life meaningful and robs it of its essential misery.

God Made Man — Why?

Occasionally he might be even moved to ask: What is a man for? To amass a fortune? To gain power? To be widely popular? No! Man's purpose is essentially holiness and sanctity; to become Christ-like. To this end St. Ignatius proposes the "third mode of humility": "For the better imitation of Christ and more actual likeness to Him, I wish and choose rather poverty with Christ poor, than riches; reproaches, with Christ laden with reproaches, than honors; and I desire to be accounted a good-for-nothing and a fool for Christ's sake."

The "third mode of humility" may appear extreme. Actually, St. Ignatius was hardly an extremist. But if one hesitates to choose poverty and reproaches, one might at least condition himself to their graceful and purposeful acceptance when they come unsought.

If a man is prepared to accept with deep inward resignation the pain and sorrow of life that he cannot escape anyhow, he will understand the consoling wisdom of the third Beatitude: Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

IV

BLESSED ARE THEY THAT HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER JUSTICE FOR THEY SHALL HAVE THEIR FILL

Civil War

The first three Beatitudes counsel poverty of spirit, meekness and penance. In them Our Lord instructs us forthrightly in the necessity of tidying up the rubble-dump of our own disordered nature. He indicates that for moderate happiness now

and eternal hereafter we must divest ourselves of inordinate attachments. We must liberate ourselves from the thralldom to things, to creatures, and persist in our relentless struggle to remain free men. Excessive desire for wealth, extravagant pride of race, undisciplined lust for power are insidious disturbers of the peace. Then, too, the incessant quest for mere human cleverness and the satisfaction of wanton curiosity can become a veritable disease. And the restless craving for pleasure can end in an unhealthy and joyless compulsion that allows no rest and bestows no happiness.

All these appetites, if left unchecked, can become formidable enemies. They can infect the blood stream and corrupt our whole nature. How can they be checked and contained, these vigorous appetites? Our Lord gives the prescription in the first three Beatitudes. Just as quinine is a specific for combating malaria, poverty of spirit, meekness and mourning are effective against the unwholesome and corrupting love of self, power and pleasure.

New Slant on Life

We have indicated previously, and we repeat now, that the Beatitudes represent the fundamental law of the Kingdom of Heaven. They epitomize the very substance of Christian perfection, and to abide by them requires the constant help and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. That point we need hardly belabor. For surely it is immediately obvious that no amount of ingenuity and contriving, no mere human imagination no matter how original could have produced the Beatitudes. Search history and you find nothing to match them. They are liberal, revolutionary, radical. They simply turn our customary ways of thinking upside down. There you have Our Lord's plan. Original, refreshingly different. But will this system actually work?

The Test

The testing of the system comes in a special way with the Fourth Beatitude. Our Lord says, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after justice." Now we know that if a man exercises properly, eats nourishing food, avoids narcotics and poisonous drugs, he will normally have good health, and with it a vigorous appetite. So, too, if the spiritual menu of poverty, meekness and penance are salutary, and if the restraint of excessive love of money, power and pleasure constitute a wholesome supernatural diet, then the result should be spiritual well-being, and

an appetite for justice. The question is this: After practicing meekness, poverty of spirit, and penance, are we exhausted—just plain “beat”—or do we enjoy exhilarating spiritual health and a hunger for divine things? The first three Beatitudes should not be enervating and detrimental to our spiritual health. They should build us up, invigorate us, and make us hungry and thirsty for justice. If poverty degrades us, and meekness weakens us, and mourning wearies us, then Our Lord's prescription is all wrong. The Fourth Beatitude then is a sort of test.

The Reaches of Justice

We must not be too narrow in our interpretation of the Beatitudes. They are broad and they are deep. They are at once far-reaching and profound. They have an understandable tendency to overlap, because of the spiritual perfection they both engender and presuppose.

Justice, then, means the honorable fulfillment of our duties to society and to each other. But it also means, and especially means, the proper discharge of our obligations toward God. St. Thomas rightly includes the practice of religion as a division of Justice. The man who admits that he never attends church, neglects to pray and offers no worship to God, and then boasts that he is as good as or even better than those who do, is not only a braggart, but an ignorant braggart as well. He could not speak more foolishly were he to stick out his chest and shout, “I am a cheat, never pay my debts and avoid my obligations, but I am just as good, or perhaps better, than one who abides by the laws of justice.” Nonsense. A dishonest man is a rogue. And a man who fails to give due worship to God is failing in justice. He is dishonest and guilty of a particularly obnoxious type of roguery. Not infrequently he attacks hypocrites, but practices a not too subtle hypocrisy himself.

Obstinacy of Hunger and Thirst

Our Lord uses a violent metaphor when He speaks of hungering and thirsting for justice. These two appetites are associated with self-preservation, which is the first law of nature, more basic and insistent even than sex. Prisoners of war inform us that, living on the verge of starvation, their constant preoccupation, their every present thinking and dreaming was concerned with food. In their desperation some of them ate food crawling with maggots and soup made from tomato vines.

In England during the war, soldiers were known to pay as much as ten pounds for a bottle of scotch whiskey. A stupid, extravagant luxury one may say. Yes indeed! But consider what men will do when tortured by the pangs of hunger and maddened by thirst. Hence in the Fourth Beatitude Our Lord was not speaking of the justice of the respected citizens who avoid wanton destruction of property, pay their bills, and stay out of the hands of the police. Or, let us say, He was speaking of that—and much more!

Negative Thinking

Our Lord was definitely not referring in the Fourth Beatitude to the dedicated crank nor to the embittered professional agitator who resents his supposedly hard lot not nearly so much as the irritating fact that others seem to be even better off than he. So he wallows in bitterness, rants against present injustice, rekindles past enmities, exults in strife and class hatred, revels in discord and hardens his heart to overtures of peace.

Class Warfare

The Communists have frequently been able to prevail because they are skillful in engineering malicious hatred. In China they stirred up the peasants to loot the homes of the landlords, before they burned them. But slyly, the Communists allowed the fire to destroy also the dwellings of the peasants, who then were easy prey to the Communist agents provocateurs.

Significantly enough, the Communists denying God have placed all the emphasis upon the Second Commandment: Love of Neighbor. And in their consuming love of neighbor, the Communists would compel all to be happy. So they systematically and ruthlessly impose their plan of happiness. And in imposing a system dedicated to the betterment of the human race and the extension of the fuller life, they have without hesitation resorted to vilification, murder, displacement of persons and wanton destruction. Never has the world suffered so much. Promising happiness in a program of denial of God, denial of property, and love of their fellow man, the Communists have sown with the salt of tears every land where their malice and bitterness and lies have prevailed.

Spiritual Maturity

In its proper sequence, the justice of the Fourth Beatitude refers first to our relationship to God, and then to our fellow man.

Spiritual writers remind us that all, not only priests and religious, but laymen as well, have a duty, a real obligation of tending toward perfection. The expression itself "tending to perfection" has a sanctimonious aura about it, and while it is a traditional expression, it induces discouragement in some and stimulates downright hostility in others.

For the average Christian, tending toward perfection involves living in the state of grace, striving to make progress in the spiritual life, and exercising oneself from time to time in the evangelical counsels. One must be in the state of grace for successful living, for without it, one just does not have the capacity to live in heaven. But spiritual writers contend that in the state of fallen nature, one cannot for long remain in the state of grace without striving to make progress spiritually, and occasionally practicing some of the evangelical counsels.

As Jacques Maritain points out in his unpretentious little book *Prayer and Intelligence*, "The lowest degree of divine love is to love nothing more than God, nothing contrary to God, nothing as much as God."

Prayer offers to those devoted to it a certain spiritual participation in the life of the counsels. The life of prayer demands purity of heart, which is a sort of spiritual chastity. It demands detachment, which is spiritual poverty, and abandonment to Providence, which is like spiritual obedience.

Growth Development

Love of justice implies love of God, and presupposes striving for perfection. This means realizing our highest potentialities, making something of ourselves, growing up and abandoning spiritual baby talk and the attitude toward God of a juvenile delinquent. We recognize God as our Father, and we seek to know Him better and love Him more.

Clear Vision

Thomas à Becket, in *Murder in the Cathedral*, reviews his immature approaches to life by enumerating the things that captivated him:

“Thirty years ago, I searched all the ways
 That lead to pleasure, advancement and praise,
 Delight in sense, in learning and in thought,
 Music and philosophy, curiosity,
 The purple bullfinch in the lilac tree,
 The tiltyard skill, the strategy of chess,
 Love in the garden, singing to the instrument
 Were all things equally desirable.”

But eventually St. Thomas of Canterbury grew up spiritually. When we grow up spiritually we see things right, and we search for God. That's what the spiritual writers mean by striving for perfection.

Love of Fellow Man

The love of God will naturally overflow into the practical love of justice for our neighbor. According to our means, readily and eagerly we satisfy his hunger, quench his thirst, and furnish clothes and shelter. If he is a captive behind the Iron Curtain we endeavor to ransom him. We visit him when ill and respect his body, the temple of the Holy Spirit, when he is dead. We steadfastly pursue the love of God, and the service of man. We grow not weary in well doing. This is hunger and thirst for justice.

V

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY

Hill-billy Objection

There is one objection still being made against the Catholic Church, which in our psychological age is particularly unreal and mid-Victorian, and just a little amusing. It is the objection to the Catholic practice of going to Confession. Substantially the grievance might be stated thus: “Confession is morbid and antiquated, and whereas it might be imposed in the Middle Ages, it is an insufferable burden today, and a practice not to be tolerated.” Actually, Confession is more widely practiced today than it ever was in the Middle Ages, and not only in the Catholic Church, but outside. Take a hurried look at the Confession Magazines and the Autobiographies that reveal intimate secrets and transgressions. Reflect on the confessions made to psychiatrists, counsellors, judges, and professional listeners.

Think of the innumerable accounts of misery and misdeeds poured out to taxi drivers, insurance men, garbage collectors and casual acquaintances. No, the problem today is hardly confessing. It is getting someone to listen.

Someone to Listen

But in the Catholic Church the priest will continue to listen to the penitent and to give absolution, because the Church of Christ is the extension of the Incarnation. The Church is Christ, living in the world today. When Christ was on earth He forgave sins; and He said to His Apostles: "The things that I have done you also shall do." So Christ exercises His mercy today in the Sacrament of Penance.

Scandalous Lives

Sometimes those outside the Church appear to be scandalized by the Church's attitude toward sinners. Not infrequently it happens that a criminal facing death asks for a priest, and at times, after a life of crime and degradation, an infamous public enemy is received into the Church. The Church does not demur, but rejoices that the prodigal has come home. Why? Because the Church must be faithful to the Mission of Christ, which was to save sinners. Just as Christ did not reject the plea of the good thief, so must His Church never deny mercy to the penitent sinner.

The Catholic Church and Society

John Dewey once remarked that theologians theorize and debate, but the practical men run the world. Yet for those particularly interested in practical results, the Church can point to a vast number of agencies of social mercy that originated in the Church. Schools, hospitals, orphanages, homes for the aged have been the constant preoccupation of the Church of Christ. These institutions for human welfare reflect the practical fulfillment of Our Saviour's teaching to love our neighbor and to show mercy.

Mercy of God

In Portia's famous speech on Mercy in the *Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare shows himself to be an accurate theologian. Portia says of mercy:

"Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown;
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,

The attribute of awe and majesty,
 Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
 But mercy is above this sceptred sway,
 It is enthroned in the heart of kings,
 It is an attribute to God Himself,
 And earthly power doth then show likest God's
 When mercy seasons justice."

It is interesting that mercy is referred to as an attribute. Strictly speaking we should not say that God has mercy, as if it were something added to Him for His completion. Rather we should say that God is mercy. Human mercy is a reflection of the Infinite Mercy of God. So when Christ enjoined "Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect," He was implicitly enjoining the practice of mercy.

Christian Mercy

Hence mercy ought to be reflected in the life of every follower of Christ. And it is manifested heroically in those eminently successful disciples of His—the saints. St. Paul was a man of peace and an advocate of mercy toward the wayward. He was a discerning psychologist and he understood how unruly, weak and sluggish human nature can be. "The good that I would I do not; and the evil that I would not that I do," he wrote.

But St. Paul, despite his abounding sympathy, was never sentimental nor irresponsible. He could object without being objectionable, and he could disagree without being disagreeable, but his words were strong and his principles clear, and he let his mercy season justice but never defeat it. Thus he warns pointedly and bluntly so that his readers would not misinterpret: "Make no mistake, no fornicator, nor idolator, no adulterer, no pervert, no homosexualist, no thief, no slave of avarice, no drunkard, no addict of abusive language, no miser will inherit the kingdom of God."

St. Paul wasn't saying that such people were doomed. He said only that they were doomed unless they repented. He did not encourage complacency in sin, but he never left a man void of hope, for St. Paul was ever conscious of God as "The Father of Mercies" and as the "God who is rich in mercy."

Love of Neighbor

In the Mass of the North American martyrs, the Post-Communion prayer is especially beautiful and conducive to a bit of

salutary soul-searching. This is the prayer: "Grant O God all powerful, that strengthened by the bread of the strong, we may bear each other's burdens, and cherish each other in word and in fact; even as the blessed martyrs Isaac, John, and their associates, fortified by the same Eucharistic bread, did not so much as hesitate to give up their lives for their flock."

Isaac and John of the prayer are two French Jesuits, who along with seven others were murdered by the very Indians they cherished and came to help.

Love of Enemies

These Jesuits were intrepid woodsmen and explorers with an amazing sense of terrain. Bancroft says that these adventure-some men of God were "to preach the gospel one thousand miles in the interior, five years before John Eliot addressed the Indians six miles from Boston Harbor."

A later Jesuit, Père Marquette, wrote to his mother back in Laon, an amusing letter, admitting that the liking for stewed dog was "an acquired taste."

The fact of the matter is that these men suffered hunger, fatigue, flies, vermin and Indian brutality. And they did it joyfully for the love of Christ. Touchiness, sensitivity, a desire for revenge—of such things they were singularly free.

Mercy — Mercy

In the Leonine Sacramentary there is a Fifth Century prayer that has Twentieth Century application: "O God, if thou shouldst determine to render to us what we deserve, we must sooner perish than endure our deserved punishment; we therefore pray Thee mercifully to forgive our wanderings, and that we may be able to be converted to Thy Commandments, do Thou go before us with abundant mercy."

And at even an earlier date St. Augustine offers this wisdom: "There are many kinds of alms the giving of which helps us to obtain pardon for our sins; but none is greater than that by which we forgive from our hearts a sin that someone has committed against us."

Our Lord's teaching on mercy may be difficult, but it is always clear and it never varies: "Judge not and you shall not be judged." "Forgive and it shall be forgiven you again." "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

VI

**BLESSED ARE THE PURE OF HEART,
FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD****Hebrew Psychology**

Hebrew psychology regarded the heart as the seat of reason and will, and Our Lord, in speaking to the Jews, naturally employed terms that were familiar to them. Hence the pure of heart are those who are free from duplicity. They see clearly and not with defective vision. They see things as they truly are.

The Unknown God

St. Paul saw things aright, but he experienced painful difficulty in communicating his vision to the mentally tired, jaded, and unreceptive Athenians who heard him preach his famous sermon *The Unknown God* in the Areopagus. He told them that he preached the God whom they worshiped without knowing it: "For in Him we live, and move and have our being." They were singularly unimpressed. Only Dionysius and Damaris believed.

The Psalms

St. Paul was repeating a truth lyrically proclaimed in the Psalms: "The heavens show forth the glory of God and the earth declareth His handiwork."

And so for the psalmist, all of creation was a reflection of His beauty and eloquent of His power and glory. Father Basil Doyle of the Paulist Fathers renders a famous canticle of praise thus:

"Bless the Lord all you his works;
Sound His praises to the skies;
Sing them everlastingly.
Bless the Lord, sun, moon and stars;
Dew and shower, bless the Lord.
Frost and cold and ice and snow,
Nights and days, all bless the Lord.
Hills and mountains, growing things,
Seas and fountains, flowing streams,
All you creatures of the deep
Join together, bless the Lord."

God's Signature

If a man were to contend in the face of obvious facts, that the Empire State Building was produced by mere chance—by some fortuitous concourse of atoms, he would probably be regarded as yet another victim of marijuana. His wild theorizing would be ridiculed as the ravings of a mad man and summarily dismissed.

Strangely, there are some men who would treat as beneath contempt any speculation that would attribute a building or a machine to chance; and yet they ridiculously believe or pretend to believe, that the whole vast universe came into being without a Creator.

St. Paul would hardly treat these stuffy rationalists with amiable indulgence. At least he manifested no large forbearance toward the godless Romans. God's signature was written upon all things that are, and they were responsible if they refused to read it. "For the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, His eternal power also and divinity: So that they are inexcusable, because that, when they knew God, they have not glorified Him as God, or given thanks; but became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened. For professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."

No Empty World

Philosophers remind us that God is the archetypal cause of all things that are. God in creating the world, might be likened to an artist producing a work of sublime art. Unlike human artists, God had nothing from which to copy, and so, He copied from Himself. All created things are, consequently, a reflection, weak and imperfect, of the beauty and magnificence and power of God. To the rightly attuned, all things speak of the presence of God. Sunlight and laughter, music and starry heavens, the littleness of children and the wonder of an aged smile.

The Poet Speaks

The Philosophers may be more precise, but the poet makes one more deeply aware. Thus, in *The Ballad of the White Horse*, Chesterton causes King Alfred to break into laughter and song as he realizes the unobtrusive generosity of God, Our Father:

“And well may God with the serving folk
Cast His dreadful lot.
Is not He too a servant,
And is not He forgot?

For was not God my gardener
And silent like a slave;
That opened oaks on the uplands
Or thicket in graveyard gave?

Did not a great gray servant
Of all my sires and me
Build this pavilion of the pines
And herd the fowl and fill the vines,
And labor and pass and leave no signs
Save mercy and mystery?

For God is a great servant,
And rose before the day,
From some primordial slumber torn;
But all we living later born
Sleep on and rise after the morn
And the Lord has passed away.”

A Bit of Theology

In the *Idea of a University*, Newman patiently and reverently presents an absorbing and beautiful notion of God. “He created all things out of nothing, and preserves them every moment, and could destroy them as easily as He made them. . . . He is ever present in His works, one by one, and confronts everything He has made by His particular and most loving Providence, and manifests Himself to each according to its needs. . . .

“[God is] a Being who, though the highest, yet in the work of creation, conservation, government, retribution, makes Himself, as it were, the minister and servant of all; who, though inhabiting eternity, allows Himself to take an interest, and to have a sympathy, in matters of space and time, The laws of the universe, the principles of truth, the relation of one thing to another, their qualities and virtues, the order and harmony of the whole, all that exists, is from Him.

From Him has been every movement which has convulsed and re-fashioned the surface of the earth. The ever-teeming, inexhaustible swarms of animalculae, the myriads of motes invisible to the naked eye are His. His are the tribes and families of birds and beasts, their graceful forms, their wild gestures, and their passionate cries.

“To Him must be ascribed the rich endowments of the intellect, the irradiation of genius, the imagination of the poet, the sagacity of the politician. The old saws of nations, the majestic precepts of philosophy, the luminous maxims of law, the oracles of individual wisdom, the traditionary rules of truth, justice, and religion, even though imbedded in corruption, or alloyed with the pride of the world, betoken His original agency and His long-suffering presence.”

The Hymn of Praise

“In the beginning God made heaven and earth” we are told in the opening lines of Genesis, and the signature of the Maker is discernible in all things that are.

The Duke living in the Forest of Arden in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, describes the exciting life he lives, in which he “Finds tongues in trees, books in running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything.”

William Cullen Bryant in *Thanatopsis* describes the various voices of nature ever whispering to us: “To him who in the love of nature holds Communion with her visible forms, she speaks a various language.”

On the occasion of Pentecost, the astonished hearers who listened to the various tongues which the Apostles spoke, cried out in incredible wonder. “We have heard them speak in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” So today, the world itself is pentecostal, and eloquent of the majesty and the mercy of God. Life itself to the sensitive Catholic should constantly be a Pentecost and an Epiphany—a revelation. We must open our eyes, spiritually, and see things clearly and without fuzzy vision. So, to the pure in heart, adventure lies everywhere.

His Blood upon the Rose

Joseph Plunkett in a poem, referring to Our Lord, has a clarity of vision that we might try to capture.

“I see His blood upon the rose
 And in the stars the glory of His eyes,
 His Body gleams amid eternal snows,
 His tears fall from the skies.

I see His face in every flower;
 The thunder and the singing of the birds
 Are but his voice—and carven by His power
 Rocks are His written words.

All pathways by His feet are worn,
 His strong heart stirs the ever-beating sea,
 His crown of thorns is twined with every thorn,
 His cross is every tree."

The Catholic Church and Right Vision

It is no joy to live in an empty world, much less a hostile one. It is much more reassuring, as Blake tells it:

"To see a world in grain of sand
 And heaven in a wild flower.
 Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
 And eternity in an hour."

And this vision Our Lord promised when He said, "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God."

And the Church of Christ aids us in gaining this right perspective, as no other institution can, nor was founded to do. As Hilaire Belloc so brilliantly replied to one critic:

"For what is the Catholic Church? It is that within which is right order; outside, the puerilities and the despairs. It is the possession of perspective in the survey of the world. It is a grasp upon reality. Here alone is promise, and here alone a foundation.

"Those of us who boast so stable an endowment make no claim thereby to personal grace; we are not saved thereby alone. But we are of so glorious a company that we receive support, and have communion. The Mother of God is also ours. Our dead are with us. Even in these our earthly miseries we always hear the distant something of an eternal music, and smell a native air. There is a standard set for us whereto our whole selves respond, which is that of an inherited and endless life, quite full, in our own country."

VII

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF GOD

"The Beat Generation"

Dante's *Inferno*, one of the greatest masterpieces of world literature, is not always tranquilizing. But it is awe-inspiring, exciting and a wholesome corrective to the climate of contemporary boredom.

Recently a poet accused of using obscene and dirty words was defended on the ground that he is a part of "the beat generation." His poetry is an angry howl of protest, an expression of anxiety, despair and nihilism. He has put ugly words into it because that's what it's about; the ugliness of the modern world. To omit them, he claims, would be to falsify his views." Well now, fancy that!

Something to Escape

Someone has wisely remarked that even the news of the possibility of damnation is good news. And strangely enough, Dante, using ugly words to describe the reality of Hell, is in the tradition of the peace-bringer. But, the modern poet using dirty words to portray the emptiness of life with no heaven and no hell, is merely a dull prophet of boredom and despair. He is a sower of frustration and a disturber of the peace.

Retribution

In Canto XXVIII of the *Inferno*, Dante takes a long look at the *Eighth Circle*, where the Sowers of Discord endure their horrible punishment. They are hacked and torn for eternity by a law of just retribution. During life they fomented religious, political and fraternal discord and thus rent asunder the unity and harmony intended by God; so in Hell they are themselves butchered and sundered.

Punishment of Trouble-Makers

Of course Dante, working his huge and awful canvas depicted, as an object lesson for us, only the most hideous and monstrous peace destroyers. But the picture he paints, revolting and terrifying, is a salutary warning of the wickedness of malicious trouble making. Stirring up trouble, enkindling hatred, engineering unrest and strife are evil things, and not to be taken lightly.

The Children of God

It is a relief to escape from the depth of sulphuric degradation of the *Inferno* to the wholesome atmosphere of the Mount, where Our Lord instructs us in the positive beauty and unfailing reward of peacemaking. Christ was Himself the Prince of Peace and the Supreme Peacemaker. His Gospel is rest-bestowing,

and affords comfort and balm to the torn heart. Read the Scriptures, and notice how the doctrine of peace recurs as a veritable refrain: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you."

Peace Treaty — The Conditions

Our Lord goes on to warn us, however, that His is a qualified and conditioned peace. "Not as the world gives," He specifies. Even the angels in their exultation did not forget to indicate the conditions: "Peace to men of Good Will." And when is the will of man good? Only when it conforms to the will of God. Christ said, "In the head of the book it is written of Me that I come to do Thy will." So with us, too, our purpose in life and the condition of our peace is that we do God's will. And we acknowledge this every time we say "Thy will be done" in the Lord's Prayer. We can hardly be a source of peace to others if we ourselves are rebels and outlaws and hostile to God's law.

Peace through the Medium of War

Because peace must be based upon God's law to be righteous, just and enduring, a difficulty becomes immediately apparent. There are those who demand unconditional peace, based upon their own terms. And presumably one may fabricate an uneasy peace of sorts by the simple expedient of yielding to the enemy's terms. Just as a man need have no trouble with temptations if he simply yield to them, so, too, a man need have no trouble with any enemy provided he grant his demands.

But if a man yield to his temptations the price may be exorbitant, involving loss of personal integrity, disgrace, and ultimate damnation. Likewise, to surrender to an enemy may mean a loss of honor, liberty, possessions and freedom of conscience.

Peace with Justice

Hence it becomes clear that an unjust, dishonorable peace, with its consequent abandonment of principle, has but a specious glitter and a false charm. Right and honorable peace is bought at the price of eternal vigilance, constant preparedness, and a willingness to fight, to suffer and to die if necessary for justice. History testifies that anything other than a flabby and spineless peace is purchased at the cost of an occasional skirmish, and at

times a prolonged war. But remember this is a war in behalf of honor and righteousness, and a warrior in this instance is essentially a peace seeker, if not actually a peacemaker.

St. Paul — Man of Peace

After St. Paul was converted and took to the highways of the Roman Empire preaching his message of peace, he was greeted with cold and sometimes brutal hostility. Beaten with rods, stoned and left for dead, ship-wrecked, imprisoned, foot-sore, hungry, lonely and utterly exhausted, he still carried on, preaching his message of peace. It was the Gospel of Christ, and Christ crucified. Paul was moved to proclaim, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel." Unfortunately, there are those today who are.

Ashamed of the Gospel?

A man received into the Church at the age of 65, when asked why he delayed so long, replied, "Nobody ever asked me!" His wife boasted, "I never mentioned religion to him!" One wonders why? Was she afraid of causing unpleasantness, of being rebuffed, of being stoned, or of being beaten with rods and imprisoned? The Apostles were men of peace, and carried their wonderful message of peace to the ends of the earth, but they shrank from the compromised religious peace of the pussy-footers who will not endeavor to spread the saving truth of Christ lest they give offense. Christ died for the salvation of men, and it is shameful in the name of a shabby peace, not to spread the teachings of His Church.

Patience, Patience

But while forthright in witnessing the teachings of Christ and His Church, one may still be a peacemaker and a bearer of sympathetic understanding.

St. Paul persecuted the Church, St. Peter betrayed Christ, St. Thomas doubted Him, St. Mark lost heart, St. Augustine delayed his conversion, but by God's grace they won through in the end. So today the Church of Christ has sympathy and patience with the sinner and the unbeliever, trusting that one day they shall know the truth, and the truth shall make them free from entangling and paralyzing vice and befogging and blinding error.

VIII
**BLESSED ARE THEY THAT SUFFER PERSECUTION
FOR JUSTICE SAKE, FOR THEIRS IS
THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN**

It Says Here

The world today does not suffer from a dearth of books on how to be happy. Psychiatrists, and a wide variety of head shrinkers, maintain a flourishing traffic in happiness. Even drug companies and distilleries have embarked upon the rewarding business of dispensing felicity, and you may consume it in tablet form or drink it from a bottle. But somehow nervous breakdowns continue and our mental hospitals remain crowded.

Thus Said the Lord

The Beatitudes have a compelling fascination about them because they constitute such a violent switch from the ordinary way of thinking. They certainly upset the generally accepted mode of rationalizing in the contemporary jungle in which we live. Heaven and earth and peace of mind are promised on such odd terms! The terms: poverty, meekness, penance, and even persecution. The bidders and spectators at this fantastic auction may disagree about the terms of the bargain. Some may say, "ridiculous." Others may call them exorbitant, unrealistic, impossible. But all will agree, they most definitely are different.

The World Advises: "Get Rich"

From the age of eighteen until at least sixty-five, the chief concern of most men is "getting ahead." This means various things: getting rich, becoming independent, obtaining remunerative employment. Generally it involves accumulating money, a lot of it, even in the teeth of competition. Sometimes by shady methods. A popular play contains the audience-pleasing lines: "It's sad to be old, but to be old and poor is unendurable." Now, it has already been remarked that wealth is not incompatible with poverty of spirit. But the love of wealth certainly is. As a matter of fact, Scripture warns that "The love of money is the root of all evil."

"Be Aggressive"

Christ's promise of the earth to the meek is just a little difficult to reconcile with the aggressive formula that the shrewd business men and politicians recommend for possessing the earth.

"Take Pleasure Where You Find It"

Penance and mourning not only countenanced, but actually extolled in Christ's system, seem hardly the avenue that leads to worldly enjoyment and delight.

"Be Practical"

Hungering after justice and seeking spiritual perfection interferes with the progress of a man in financial matters and in advancing his prestige in the world of affairs.

"Wink at Wickedness"

Cleanness of heart is fine, but men battle in a sordid world and so must fight with the weapons that are indicated.

"Dog Eat Dog"

Don't be unnecessarily obnoxious and quarrelsome to no purpose. Be affable and congenial—it pays off. But remember life today is simply a jungle: "Get the other fellow before he gets you!"

"Stay with the Crowd"

Persecutions may have been endurable in the Roman Empire, but one wonders why the martyrs suffered death rather than offer a bit of incense to the pagan gods. One must be ready to compromise. Avoid persecution, of course. Don't be stuffy. If right interferes with your happiness and prosperity, forget about what is right. These generally are the practical (not necessarily the theoretical) maxims which the world approves.

Interwovenness of Virtue

The Beatitudes, as we have seen, overlap and repeat, because they all presuppose a high state of spiritual discernment. They furnish a foretaste of heavenly joy, and are realized not by mere human contriving, but by the help of the Holy Spirit.

It is not easy to say which is most difficult, which most consoling. They do not start easy and get gradually more difficult. Actually they begin and end on the identical note: "Blessed are the poor in spirit," Our Lord begins, and "Blessed are they that suffer persecution," He concludes. The reward promised in both cases is the same: "For theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

But Persecution!

But, from a human point of view, the Eighth Beatitude seems to do particular violence to our natural disposition. It is similar to those two difficult spiritual works of mercy. One of which bids us to "bear wrongs patiently," and the other "forgive offenses willingly." What we must not neglect is the fact that forgiveness and patience under the burden of our crosses, while difficult, is not impossible, and above all it is salutary and peace giving. The Beatitudes very obviously impose demands, not, however, unreasonable demands.

Persecution Complex

The English philosopher Hobbes claims that war is the natural state of man. If he had said that strife and contention seems to be the natural state of some men, he would be merely enunciating a truism that one can hardly deny. A few men are psychological freaks; they are masochists and receive a perverted thrill out of taking a beating. But besides the masochists there are some men who delight in trouble, and they stir it up for themselves and others. They appear to enjoy friction and bickering of all kinds. They complain and whine and whimper. If persecuted they cry out, if left in peace they are frustrated.

The Itch

People of this type are as irritating as an itch, difficult to ignore, and maddening to endure. Since all things pass away, so will the whiners and whimperers and petty trouble makers. But of course, a new generation will be born. But that will be the problem of a future generation. Meantime, all might pray to endure trials gracefully and not with puerile whimperings.

For Justice Sake

When Our Lord spoke of suffering persecution, He naturally did not mean persecution of our own making, He meant persecution let loose by a hostile world. In the First Beatitude we are warned against the seduction of creatures—the good things, and the "good Joes" of the world. In the Eighth Beatitude the "good Joes" turn against us to destroy us not by their blandishments but by their brutal power.

Consider the praise given to Catholic education. "Produces good citizens. No traitors from Catholic schools," the politi-

cians say. Prominent business men, eager for the refining influence of the nuns, send their lovely daughters to Catholic schools. But when the chips are down, some of these same people will turn and try to destroy our schools.

The Eighth Beatitude does not forbid us to take wise and effective means to defeat the enemies of justice. What it does forbid is that we yield to them, in the face of persecution, and permit them to prevail. As one of the early Church writers said of the Pagans, "They may not fear us, neither are we afraid of them."

Blood of Martyrs, Seed of the Church

St. Peter, big man that he was, seems to have been almost inordinately sensitive to criticism. Charged by a servant maid with being a follower of Christ, he warmed his hands by the fire and denied his Master. Yet later on, this same man, influenced by the Holy Spirit, told the enemies of Christ to their teeth, "It is better to obey God than men." Finally he suffered crucifixion in the cause of justice.

St. Stephen confounded his adversaries in debate, and in their hatred they stoned him to death. Yet St. Stephen, dying, prayed for his murderers. St. Augustine contends that if St. Stephen had not prayed, St. Paul would not have been converted. St. Paul in his turn, endured persecution such as few have known, and yet thought himself privileged to suffer for Christ, saying, "I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation."

St. Lawrence joked during his ordeal, and remarked to the pagan governor, "I am roasted enough on this side; now turn me over to the other." And St. Thomas More was in a gay mood as he approached his death, saying, "Help me up; as for coming down, I can shift for myself."

Persecution has come, and quite surely will continue to come to the Church of Christ. In the end, the Church will prevail, for Christ has promised, "I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world."

So, too, it is almost inescapable that from time to time, from Communists, from Atheists, from various enemies, the servants and followers of Our Saviour will be persecuted. In that day, let them have courage. Grace will be forthcoming. The Holy Spirit will bestow fortitude and peace. The promise of Christ will not be foresworn: Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice sake.

