

Sunday Afternoon Readings

(By RIGHT REV. MGR. POWER for the N.Z. Tablet.)

XXII—PREPARATION FOR HOLY COMMUNION.

Spiritual writers tell us that one Holy Communion should be sufficient to make a saint; yet some of us find that after many and frequent Communion we have not taken even the first step toward sanctity. Now this is not the fault of the Holy Communion, but must be due to a want of co-operation on our part; and this co-operation is lacking because we either ignore, or have never understood what the grace of the Holy Communion is and how it does its work within us. The grace of the Sacrament of the Blessed Eucharist is not good fruit in general, it is a transforming grace and it does its work by bringing about in us a likeness to Christ. There is a mutual abiding in this Sacrament between Christ and the recipient, and this abiding is not inactive, is not a mere inoperative presence. In this Sacrament Christ comes to stir up within us the fervor of actual devotion, to touch the springs of our spiritual activities, to give them a new direction, and lead them along the road His own activities follow. Under the influence of this, the sacramental action, we begin to love the things that Jesus loves, we take up and practise the virtues that characterised His life, we grow into His likeness, our lives become so transformed that they may be said to be the life of Christ. This transformation is precisely the effect of the grace of the Sacrament. Each Sacrament has its own peculiar grace, and this is the grace of the Blessed Eucharist.

Now, if our Communion would produce this effect and we receive the grace of the Sacrament, all the activities must not be on Christ's part, we must do our part too. If the abiding is mutual, the co-operation must be mutual also, we must hold our spiritual powers and activities in close subjection to the activities Our Lord would exercise upon them, we must respond to the tendency He would create, and freely turn in the direction along which His activities tend. Any other course would be to resist the Sacramental grace of the Holy Communion. For this co-operation a previous training is necessary, the presence of Christ must not come upon us unawares, there must be a disposing of the soul for the Sacramental impressions. This is done proximately by our actual preparation on the morning of Holy Communion.

You must weigh well what I am writing here. I do not say that neglect of preparation robs the Holy Communion of all fruit, but I do say, and most emphatically, that the fervor of love which is the actual grace of the Sacrament, will not be attained without this preparation. The grace of this Sacrament is not good fruit in general, but a particular good fruit and of a very special kind. If we bear this well in mind, we may understand why in spite of our frequent Communion we may be making so little real progress in the spiritual life.

It goes without saying that before Communion our souls must be free from mortal sin; we must have these remitted in the

Sacrament of Penance. But this is not enough: we must endeavor to remove all trace of venial sin, for though the presence of venial sin does not make our Communion unworthy, it prevents us from obtaining in full measure the grace of the Sacrament. Therefore, though we may have been to Confession, we should, before Communion, try to make an act of perfect contrition which will take away our venial sins. "Wash me yet more from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sins"; the angels are not pure in Thy presence, and Thou art coming to me as Guest.

Now that the soul is freed from both mortal and venial sins, we must proceed to adorn and beautify it. Christ, Who was born in a stable, would not give Holy Communion to His Apostles in a stable, but only in a room that had been specially swept and adorned. Catholics have ever loved to adorn their churches with flowers and lights, with gold and precious stones, and with all that art and architecture could supply, but virtues, things more beautiful than all earthly ornaments, must be the adornment of the soul into which Christ is about to enter.

What will these virtues be? Any good prayer-book will mention them in the Acts before Communion; but you must be careful to read them in such a way as to make them your own and feel the truth and beauty of what you read. St. Thomas, who is the great writer on the Blessed Sacrament, says that the dispositions required before Communion are "great devotion and reverence." He tells us that he means by devotion a firm will and desire to love and please God, and by reverence, the gift of holy fear which acknowledges the holiness of Jesus and the sinfulness of His servant. These two virtues include, and are intensified by acts of humility, contrition, adoration, desire, love; and a little good-will on our part with sufficient time before and during Mass, will make these acts, as they come from us, most pleasing to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament which we are about to receive. To help us to make these acts an excellent method would be to take the words of the *Domine non sum dignus* and, dividing them into three parts, make a loving little meditation on each.

"Lord." He is my Lord and my God, my Life and my Light, the Ransomer of my soul; now about to be my Guest, He will be in eternity my Rewarder and my Reward exceeding great. O my God, ought I not to love Thee, with a love of preference, because Thou art Infinite Beauty and Sanctity, with a love of gratitude since Thou art my great Benefactor?

"I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof." "O God, be merciful to me a sinner!" In the ancient days, under the Old Law, when the Holy of Holies contained only the Ark of the Covenant, and the High Priest entered only once a year, so great was his fear and that of the people, that a rope was tied round him that his body might

be dragged out if his life was consumed in the awful presence of Thy Majesty. But, not the Ark of the Covenant, but Thou the very God is here inviting me to approach Thee." "How shall I dare to approach, who am conscious to myself of no good on which I could presume? How shall I introduce Thee into my house, who oftentimes offended Thy most blessed countenance? The angels and archangels stand in awe; the saints and the just are afraid; and Thou sayest: Come ye all to Me."

"But say only the word and my soul shall be healed." Ah, yes, my Lord and my God, my soul is sick and infirm, but Thou wilt be my Healer, Thou wilt wash away the stains of worldliness and make me less unworthy. Ah, with what tenderness dost Thou dispose of Thy elect, making their wretched souls and sinful bodies a fit dwelling place for Thyself! I come to Thee, O Lord, not presuming, but only because Thou sayest: "Come to Me all who labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you." With such a preparation we shall be well disposed to receive the Sacramental grace of the Holy Communion, and experience its transforming action in our souls.

The Council of Trent tells us that "we receive all the abundance of God's gifts when we partake of the Eucharist with a heart well-disposed and perfectly prepared." The Decree of Pius X on Daily Communion says: "Whereas the Sacraments of the New Law, though they take effect *ex opere operato*, nevertheless produce a greater effect as the dispositions of the recipient are better; therefore, care is to be taken that Holy Communion be preceded by serious preparation, and followed by a suitable thanksgiving." And Abbot Marmion, after detailing the effects of Holy Communion, says that "these wonderful effects are not wrought in the soul unless it is prepared for the effusion of so many graces. . . . When Our Lord finds a soul thus disposed, given up entirely and unreservedly to His action, He acts in it with His Divine virtue which works marvels of holiness because it meets with no obstacle. The absence of this *dispositio unionis* also explains why some advance so little in perfection, despite frequent Communion. Christ does not find in these souls the supernatural alacrity which would permit Him to act freely in them. Their vanity, self-love, susceptibility, selfishness, jealousy and sensuality prevent the union between them and Christ being made with that intensity, that fulness by which the transformation of the soul is effected and completed."

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