

Sunday Afternoon Readings

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

XXVI.—COMPLAINT OF JESUS FROM THE TABERNACLE.

Since the dawn of human history ingratitude has been made the subject of universal censure and contempt. Orators of every age have inveighed against it, poets have crystallised its utter shamelessness in enduring verse, and satirists in every tongue have held it up to withering scorn. Humanity stands by gratitude, for it is an instinct of every upright heart. It is a hymn of praise, echoing from the frank and noble soul, and making return for that first and beneficent love which it keeps enshrined in the sweet halls of memory.

How sad then is the complaint of Jesus, Who looks for gratitude in the beloved soul and finds it not! He has set up His Tabernacle in the midst of men, like a tower in a fertile vineyard; from behind the veil that hides Him, He seems to be ever saying: "What is there that I ought to do more to My vineyard that I have not done?" But for answer He receives for the most part only the silence of ingratitude and contempt. Hear His own words addressed to St. Margaret Mary:

"Behold this Heart which has loved men so much. . . In return I receive only ingratitude, contempt, and coldness in this Sacrament of love. But what pains Me most is that even hearts that are consecrated to Me do treat Me so. This it is which cuts Me to the quick more than anything I have suffered in My Passion."

Ingratitude is the keenest of the indignities offered to Him, and He breaks through His sacramental silence to make this known.

From every Tabernacle in this country He looks out and sees the most awful sins multiplied in His presence. The horrid cities of the plain have been rebuilt, and the fetor of their crimes is the incense that goes up night and day before His sacramental throne. But worse than this is the ingratitude of Catholics, who will not take sides with Him, and help Him to roll back this tide of infamy: who will not, in atonement, multiply acts of love in themselves, and lead others to profess the same love. Alas, it but too often happens that Catholics are found to identify themselves with the world, and prefer worldliness to His cause. Such as these gradually but surely withdraw from the service of God, and find such happiness as they ambition, down where the black flag of Satan waves.

O Jesus, preserve some small remnant of us from the foul leprosy of ingratitude that we may act the part of the comforting Angel of Gethsemane! Many of us in our tender years consecrated ourselves to Thee in the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart. The rules were easy, and the acts and aspirations demanded little, but simple and easy though they were, our fidelity to them stood, as they still stand, as a tower of de-

fence between Thy sacramental presence and the sins that would insult Thee.

But there is another side to this love and worship of the Sacred Heart, it has a double blessing; for while it is a reparation made to Jesus, it enriches our own lives and fills our own souls with every good for which they yearn. In this present crisis of the world's malady we hear everywhere the imperious cry of the toiler for human rights, and with it mingles the agonising cry of the poor for bread; but should fortunate circumstances arise to give the toiler his rights and the poor man his bread, they will find themselves as far away from happiness as they were before. Not on bread alone doth man live. So true is this that even the rationalist forgets his atheistic mechanism to justify the warning of the Saviour. Robert Blatchford, the notorious atheist, writes in the *Clarion*:

"Let us beware lest we lose our souls. . . There is a hunger of the soul as well as a hunger of the stomach. . . Human beings want more than wages. They want life. . . Man cannot live by bread alone. A mere labor programme will not save our souls. A religion of mere economics will not save the people."

But the sorry substitute which, in spite of his fine writing, Mr. Blatchford has to offer, must leave the famishing of death still upon the soul. And so we Catholics turn away from blind leaders, and wearied from hard labor and much anxiety, we knock at the door of the tabernacle, at His door Who said: "Come to Me all ye that labor," and we receive from the riches of His heart a delicious Food to satisfy the craving of our hungry souls:

"Heart of Jesus, comb of honey
From the cleft of Calvary's rock,
Sweetness coming from the Strong One,
Dripping from the greenwood stock;
Famishing of death is on us;
Feed, oh, feed Thy hungry flock!"

And there is a thirst from which the heart suffers that cannot be slaked at muddy pools. To satisfy this the atheist points to a desert where there is no water, and the mania of the poor thirsty souls becomes only more acute. But the soul of the Catholic turns to the rich fountains of the Sacred Heart, and quenches his thirst on sweeter juices than flowed through the vineyards of Engeddi:

"Heart of Jesus, golden chalice
Brimming with the ruddy Wine,
Trodden in the press of fury,
Purest juice of truest vine,
From the vineyards of Engeddi
Quench this thirsty heart of mine."

And the heart needs fragrance just as much as food and drink. The compelling cares of human life and the damp and mildew of the world tend to make it sordid and bitter; and if some aromatic spices wafted from a blessed shore, are not daily blown through its opened portals, it becomes a danger and a menace to the soul. But while those who know not the real constituents of life and the essential issues of human existence, sail to the spicy shores of some earthly Araby for Sabeian odors, the Catholic turns to the Heart of Jesus, and is refreshed by its rosy fragrance.

"Heart of Jesus! Rose of Sharon,
Glistening with the dew of tears,
All among the thorny prickles
Lo, Thy blood-stained head appears!
Spread Thy fragrance all around us,
Sweetly lulling all our fears.

Finally, despite his best endeavors, the poor Catholic will be wounded now and again in the battle of life, but he will not pour into his gaping wounds the quack medicines of every self-appointed practitioner in an age of quackery; this would be but to excite the malady and bring on mortification and corruption. He knows the vial of precious spikenard and the alabaster vase of ointment, and the place where the Great Physician dwells; and he uncovers the hard sores of his poor soul before the tabernacle, and healing virtue flows upon them from the Sacred Heart of Jesus:

"Heart of Jesus! broken vial
Full of precious spikenard!
Alabaster vase of ointment,
See, our souls are sore and hard.
Let Thy healing virtue touch them,
And from sin's corruption guard."

It is the mission of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament to keep us from all evil, to chasten and make sweet and fragrant even this mortal flesh of ours, and to flood our souls with every pure delight. When the Eucharistic Banquet was first spread in the Upper Chamber on Holy Thursday, the Beloved Disciple, at that feast of love, leaned his head upon the Heart of Jesus, and from that day down to this, every devout soul that comes to Him in this Banquet is made rich with the love that is the life of that same Sacred Heart.

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