

Sunday Afternoon Readings

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

XXXII.—FINAL PERSEVERANCE.

One of the first facts that confront a man who is trying to keep in the friendship of God is the weakness and instability of his own will. He has no doubt about God's will, he knows that grace will never be wanting; it is about his own co-operation, about his own continuance in grace that he is distrustful. Now, this distrust, so far from making him displeasing to God, is one of God's greatest mercies towards him. It is intended to establish his life on the stable virtue of humility, for whoever is humbled under the mighty hand of God, watches carefully over himself, works out his salvation with fear and trembling, and is on the sure road to holiness of life. If the fact or failure of our perseverance is known to God alone, there is a compensating fact that is known to us, and this is that God is our Father and our Friend and our Almighty Helper. Hope is one of the divine virtues which we must practise, and there is no place for hope where all is certain, for as St. Paul says: "Hope that is seen, is not hope. For what a man seeth, why doth he hope for it?" But where God's will is certain, and our co-operation uncertain, hope comes in for our comfort.

How then shall we secure this crowning gift of final perseverance which no man can merit? First, there must be an abiding trust in God's patient love. It is the Unchangeable God who gives endurance and vigor to all the works of His hands, and especially to man. But how does God impart this vigor, what means does He place at our disposal to make our election sure? Now, there are some great graces of God which cannot stand alone, but must be supported and kept in vigor by others. Such a grace is final perseverance, which needs the support of the two seemingly opposite virtues of Hope and Patience. Hope is an idealising virtue, lifting our eyes to the stars, while Patience is a common-place virtue, expressing pain and toil, and is concerned with the earth. You think they are opposites; St. Paul did not: "But if we hope for that which we see not, we wait for it with patience."

The surest way to preserve the sturdy virtue of perseverance is to daily watch and tend these two other virtues of Hope and Patience. Fix your eyes upon Heaven, the great prize of life; but remember that you have hands as well as eyes, and that these hands are the instruments of patience, to take up and perform the work that is waiting for you at the dawning of each new day. Your toil must be sustained by hope, like the ploughman's, who grips the plough with strong and firm hands, but sees the sky above him, and hears with joy the skylark's silvery song; your work for Heaven is not a mere plodding for something unseen. You are not a mere dreamer or sentimentalist, living on hope alone; neither is your work grimy and sordid, leading to despair.

Now, with these two virtues properly balanced, each contributing its own share to a Godlike work, you will wisely adopt a fixed rule of life; you must be content with no fitful efforts, acting impulsively in moments of spiritual excitement, and in moments of reaction losing ground and scattering all your merits of the past. You may not like the idea of living by rule while all around you live by impulse, but this dislike of rule comes from the fact that you have not tried it. A rule of life is a very simple thing, since it is a rule for each day and there is not much in a day. Perseverance means spending each day well. Surely there is no reason why a Catholic should not be able to spend one day well. What then is the rule?

First, get up early in the morning, and after offering your heart and the new day to God, kneel down in His presence, and say your morning prayers. Frequently renew your morning offering during the day, especially at the beginning of each new work. Hearken at noon for the Angelus bell, and let it bring you into the company of Jesus and Mary; and when at the close of day, you are about to enter into the mysterious land of sleep, kneel down once more, examine your conscience, ask God's pardon, and invoke His angels to watch over your sleep. There is nothing very difficult about this, yet it will infallibly foster in you the spirit of prayer, and whoever has that spirit will save his soul.

There are some days that will have special duties. There is Saturday, every Saturday if possible, the day for Confession, the day on which in a very special manner you will ask Almighty God to pardon all your sins. For this you will make a serious preparation, not making it a matter of mechanical routine. Another special day is Sunday, which you will consecrate to God. On this day you will hear Mass and instruction on the Christian doctrine, and if possible receive Holy Communion; you will also assist at the evening Benediction, a form of worshipping the Holy Host, which has through the love of her children, become the most popular devotion of the Church.

Finally, you may fall in spite of this simple rule of life, but one fall must not upset your resolution. You must have patience with yourself; Rome was not built in a day, neither was any saint; and through occasional falls Almighty God teaches us that we have no power of ourselves to keep ourselves, and that it is only through Him Who strengtheneth us we have power. If there is natural weakness, there is supernatural strength and our own incapacity should serve, not to make us shirk the good fight, but to warn us where to seek the power and strength we need. I do not say that sin is not a terrible thing, but at the same time I do insist that no matter what the sin may be, no matter how many thousands there may be of

them, God is patiently waiting and longing to welcome back the sinner.

Arise quickly then when you fall, pray to God for more strength in the future, and then, please God, a final day will come when you will see realised in your own crowning the promise of your Saviour:

"Be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee the crown of life. Behold I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. He that shall overcome, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God: and he shall go out no more: and I will write upon him the Name of My God, and the Name of the City of My God, the New Jerusalem which cometh down out of Heaven from My God, and My new Name. To him that shall overcome, I will give to sit with Me in My Throne: as I also have overcome, and am sit down with My Father in His Throne."

THE GOLDEN PRISON.

Weep not for me, when I am gone,
Nor spend thy faithful breath
In grieving o'er the spot or hour
Of all-enshrouding death;

Nor waste in idle praise thy love
On deeds of head or hand,
Which live within the Living Book,
Or else are writ in sand;

But let it be the best of prayers,
That I may find the grace,
To reach the holy house of toil,
The frontier penance-place—

To reach that golden palace bright,
Where souls elect abide,
Waiting their curtain call to heaven,
With angels at their side;

Where hate, nor pride, nor fear torments
The transitory guest,
But in the willing agony
He plunges and is blest.

And as the fainting patriarch gain'd
His needful halt mid-way,
And then refresh'd pursu'd his path,
When up the mount lay.

So pray that, rescued from the storm
Of heaven's eternal ire,
I may lie down, then rise again,
Safe, and yet saved by fire.

—CARDINAL NEWMAN.

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