

THE GOSPEL IN PARIS:

SERMONS

BY THE

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WITH PERSONAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

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VIII.

THE CHRISTIAN SANCTIFYING HIMSELF FOR HIS BRETHREN.

“And for their sakes I sanctify Myself.”—JOHN xvii. 19.

CONFESS it, brethren; the words I have just read surprise you; you cannot conceive how it is possible that Jesus Christ should sanctify Himself. With the whole of the Christian Church, you believe in the perfect purity of His character; you believe that sin, of which we all bear the fearful marks, has never sullied His life, and that He has manifested the holiness of God in all its fulness. He declares this Himself: “The prince of this world has nothing in Me.” “Which of you convinceth Me of sin?” He says elsewhere. Extraordinary words these, which, if they did not express a real fact, would attest the most monstrous delusion on the part of Him who uttered them. But Jesus is so fully convinced of the perfection of His life, that He presents it as a complete manifestation of God. “He that hath seen Me,” says He, “has seen the Father.” In no human language will a stronger expression be found by which to assert one’s holiness. How, then, can He who affirms so absolutely His possession of Divine holiness speak of sanctifying Himself?

In order to understand these words, we must, first of all, recall to mind the sense which the word sanctification has in the Scriptures. It always signifies the setting apart of a being or of a thing for the service of God. When this word is applied to men, that is, to sinful beings, it necessarily implies the idea of conflict with sin, of a victory to be won over the flesh and the rebellious will, of a continued purification, of a laborious progress towards the right. Now, I understand that, in this sense, we hesitate to apply this word to Jesus. But it is not in this sense that Jesus employs it. Jesus has never ceased to belong wholly to God; everything in Him has been consecrated to the glory of the Father, not only His actions, but His thoughts and His most intimate feelings; the will of the Father has always been His own. But if, in order to consecrate Himself to God, Jesus has never had to combat sin in itself, let us not believe that this fact has rendered His struggle less tragical and less painful. For Jesus does not suffer for Himself alone; He has constituted Himself our representative before God, the new Adam of a new humanity, of a lost humanity which He has come to save. Well, that He may accomplish His mission, that He may offer to God, in the name of guilty man, the complete reparation which His holy law required, Jesus must suffer; He must, according to the words of the apostle, be consecrated to God by suffering. And what suffering? It consists not only in His continual contact with human selfishness and ingratitude, not only in an

apparently unfruitful ministry, in the cruel opposition with which He is welcomed in Galilee as well as in Jerusalem; it consists not only in the cowardly desertion of His apostles, in the denial of Peter or the traitorous kiss of Judas; not only in the crown of thorns and the fearful agony of crucifixion. No; it consists in something more terrible than all this: the only-begotten and well-beloved Son of the Father must know the separation, the sorrow, the anguish, which were reserved for the rebels alone; He must feel Himself rejected of God. That is what awaits Jesus Christ; that is what He must endure before His mission be fully achieved; that is the bloody consecration by which alone He may become the Saviour of mankind. Is it necessary to say that He needed it not for Himself, and that, without Gethsemane and Golgotha, His holiness would have shone forth in immaculate splendour? But because He is love, He accepts this mission; He is willing to receive this baptism of blood, and thus He sanctifies Himself, thus He consecrates Himself to God. Such is the meaning of these words, and if at first they have appeared to you mysterious, the only mystery they contain is that of love.

Jesus, therefore, prepares Himself for the terrible consummation of His ministry. He sees the awful vision of the unutterable woe that awaits Him pass before His eyes; and, as He is the Son of Man, as His flesh falters in presence of suffering and His heart in presence of that unparalleled loneliness, He needs strength and encouragement. Before He descends into the valley of anguish, He climbs for the last time the summits of prayer, and thence, as the Sovereign Shepherd of humanity, He casts a prophetic look upon all those for whom He is about to die. He sees, first of all, the disciples whom He has so deeply loved, and who, up to this time, have not so much as understood His work; He sees them converted by His death, and making of His Cross the instrument of their triumphs. He sees His blood watering the earth, and changing the aridity of the desert into a magnificent harvest of faith, devotion, and love. He sees throughout endless ages souls changed by His Word and vivified by His death; in the mysterious depths of the future He perceives that multitude of every people and tribe and tongue of whom His Cross has made but one family; and you also, brethren, He sees you—you the redeemed of the nineteenth century, uniting, in your turn, with the believers who have preceded you. And when His eye has embraced this sublime spectacle, when He has seen all those for whom He is about to sacrifice Himself for ever united in His redeeming love, Jesus is ready; His soul is armed for the final conflict; He is prepared to descend to Gethsemane and to mount to Calvary.

We now understand all that is implied by these words, “I sanctify Myself for their sakes;” and how solemn they are when uttered by the lips of Jesus, who is about to immolate Himself for the Church! Nevertheless, I believe

that each of us can and must repeat them in his turn; I believe that each Christian must sanctify himself for his brethren. That is what I shall essay to demonstrate; and as the truth in question is one which principally touches our hearts, may God Himself render them adequate to the mission which He expects of us!

Let us, in the first place, set aside the errors which might impede our march.

When I say that we are to sanctify ourselves for our brethren, I do not mean that we are to begin anew the work of Jesus Christ. That work is unique—it is His own; the solemn words which He pronounced upon the cross, “It is finished,” remain true in all ages and to the end of time; and thus the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews understands it when he writes these remarkable words: “For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” All our virtues, all our sorrows, all our sacrifices can never be substituted for the sacrifice of Christ; He alone is the Saviour, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world; to Him alone will be offered the praises of the redeemed in every age; and even those who, following His example, have died for their brethren, far from ascribing to their death and sufferings the least redeeming virtue, have always referred their salvation to Him alone. True, the Bible tells us of many other sorrows than those of Christ; it brings before us many lives consecrated to God; it tells us the names of a multitude of martyrs who have sacrificed themselves for justice; but never does it insinuate that their devotion or their sacrifice has had an atoning power, never does it associate their names with any idea of redemption. What would St. Stephen or St. Paul have said had their sufferings and death been joined to the sacrifice of Calvary, had an expiatory virtue been ascribed to their blood? Do you not hear them revendicate the glory of the Redeemer, and tremble lest their work be confounded or associated with His? They know that Christ’s work is complete, that nothing can be added to His sacrifice, that it is sufficient for time and for eternity.

Secondly, when I say that we are to sanctify ourselves for our brethren, I do not mean that we are to sanctify ourselves in their stead. Christ, you will perhaps say, did sanctify Himself in our stead. Granted. But if Christ suffered, it was not that He might exempt us from the necessity of being holy; it was, on the contrary, that we might become such; for it is written that without sanctification no man shall see the Lord; and Jesus thus completes the words of my text: “For their sakes I sanctify Myself, *that they also may be sanctified.*” To sanctify oneself in the stead of others! At first sight this idea appears very singular, and yet it is one of the most common of the errors with which we have to contend. It rests, above all, upon the view which Roman Catholicism takes of holiness. What, on this point, does Romanism teach? It teaches that there are two kinds of duties—obligatory vir-

tues and virtues of perfection. The man who practises the latter alone attains holiness. To make a good use of one's fortune is an obligatory virtue; to distribute one's fortune to the poor is a virtue of perfection. To live purely in married life is an obligatory virtue; to remain unmarried is a virtue of perfection. To fulfil one's duties in the world is an obligatory virtue; to renounce the world and retire into a convent is a virtue of perfection. In this way the whole system of morals is divided into two classes of duties—some of which are imposed to all, others which are the privilege and glory of superior souls. The great majority being unable to attain the virtues of perfection, fulfil the ordinary duties; but there are, it tells us, nobler and more elevated souls, that sanctify themselves for the rest of mankind. God takes into account their exceptional virtues, their works of supererogation (for thus Romanism calls them); they have done more than was required of them; their virtues are therefore imputed to their brethren; their holiness covers the sin of others.

None will accuse me of having cast an unfavourable light upon this doctrine. Now, you know full well that this idea is one of the most widely spread, and that we very often hear it expressed in popular language. Well, is that idea true? Is it in that sense that we are to sanctify ourselves for our brethren?

I energetically deny it. I deny it in the name of the Scriptures, first of all, in which I find not one line which admits of a similar interpretation. In the Scriptures there are not two systems of morals, that of the perfect and that of the great mass of mankind; there are not two weights in the balance of the Holy God. When the object of a life is the glory of God, that life is holy, were it that of the poorest of working men; when this glory is not its aim, it is reprehensible, were it that of the most brilliant of preachers or of the most glorious of martyrs. Holiness lies not in outward circumstances; it must dwell first of all in the soul. Not only to a few superior minds, but to all men did Jesus say, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

Next observe how low is the idea which this doctrine gives us of holiness. Men tell us that the exceptional virtues of some compensate for the indifference or levity of others, or, in other words, they introduce arithmetical calculations within this sacred domain of the soul. "God," they tell us, "demands of humanity a certain sum of virtue. He cares little who settles the account, so long as the sum is paid in full. If it pleases some generous debtors to pay for the others, God will, nevertheless, be satisfied." Satisfied, you say; but what calculation is this, and who authorises you to ascribe to the God of the Gospel so foolish a process of reasoning? Is God a hireling who can be bought over? Is it a certain sum of virtue that He requires? No; He claims hearts that love Him—hearts converted and sancti-

fied. And if, surrounded by thousands of souls who serve Him faithfully, I alone should persist in any rebellion, think you that the fidelity of others would exempt me from the necessity of being converted and sanctified? Think you that I would be permitted to enter heaven with my impenitent and rebellious spirit? Does not your conscience protest against such a thought? and do you not clearly understand that holiness is not small change, that can be handed from one to the other, and that, as some one justly said, none can be saved by proxy?

Men boast the fruits of this doctrine. They tell us of the enthusiasm which must inevitably seize upon a soul when it sanctifies itself to atone for the sins of others. I admit that devotion is one of the noblest and most powerful incentives to holiness; for we also, though in another sense, believe that a man may pray, struggle, suffer, and die for the salvation of his brethren. But in the idea which I now combat, how suspicious this devotion appears to me! What! here is a man who believes that he has sufficient holiness to dispense his brother with being holy! Here is a man who believes that he can perform, not only his duty, but more than his duty; that he can fulfil, not only the law, but more than the law! Oh, how blind must he be who imagines that he has done all that was required of him! Do you think that truly holy souls can ever be caught in these coarse toils of pride? Do you not think, on the contrary, that the more sanctified they become, the more plainly does their penetrating eye measure the distance which separates them from the end? Is it not from the purest lips that the most touching and heart-felt confessions of misery and sin are heard? Is it not St. Paul who exclaims, "Oh, wretched man that I am!" What then would they have thought had some one spoken to him of the overplus of his holiness or of his supererogatory virtues? Methinks I hear him thundering with his powerful voice against this new pharisaism, overthrowing this fantastical scaffolding, and, upon the ruins of our pride, proclaiming anew the greatness and mercy of God.

Let us, however, if you will, admit these exceptional virtues. Let us suppose that some noble souls, without pride, and in order to save their brethren, impose upon themselves mortifications and sacrifices which were not required of them; in a word, an extraordinary holiness, if holiness ever could be extraordinary. That is one of the sides of the picture, but there is a reverse to the medal. See what happens in countries where Roman Catholicism prevails. Behold that vast multitude of vulgar souls, charmed at being permitted to cast upon some of their fellows the burden of an impossible Holiness, delighted to think that their salvation may thus be achieved by the action of others, and yielding willingly, in view of so grand a result, to the acts of outward adhesion and passive submission which they are instructed to perform. Thus, on the one hand, you have a chosen few on whom men

instinctively cast all that relates to the religious and superior life; for these, complete consecration to God, the life of faith, the search of the invisible realities, the sanctification which is the result of ascetism. On the other hand, you have the great majority of the nation, who pay off their debt towards religion with vain and empty ceremonies, but who live entirely outside of its influence; for these, lay existence, visible realities, ordinary morality. Now it is obvious that a wall of separation will gradually rise between these two societies. The clergy, representing the higher life, will keep itself aloof and retire more and more within its own ideas, within its ridiculous pretensions, within its joyless ascetism, instinctively cursing the movement of modern thought and activity, or looking upon it with mistrust. The mass of the people, casting off all nobler preoccupations, will become more and more fully absorbed in materialism; they will be satisfied with a low-toned morality whose roots will no longer plunge into the soil of the soul; their joys will be unholy; religion will become more and more unfamiliar to them; the most superficial unbelief will call forth their most scandalous applause; and this will be the just punishment of that deplorable doctrine by which the masses believe themselves relieved from the obligation of a personal faith, of a personal holiness, of a personal responsibility! Is all this true? Is this separation imaginary? Is it not visible in the science, politics, and literature of those countries, and even in the family circle, where husband and wife, brother and sister, no longer agree, when God, faith, prayer, and the very principles of the soul's life are in question? If you ask, on the contrary, why in Protestant lands there reigns a far closer and more real unity, notwithstanding apparent diversities, I will answer: Because in these countries there are not two religions, the religion of the clergy and the religion of the people; because there are not two moralities, the morality of the perfect and the morality of the masses; because there are not two lives, the ascetic life of some and the ordinary life of the generality. But also because to all, to great and small, to people and pastors, to learned and ignorant, Christianity is presented as the all-pervading, all-sanctifying, all-elevating principle.

Therefore, with a profound conviction, I affirm that none can sanctify himself in the stead of others, and it is not in this sense that the words of my text are to be taken.

There remains a final error which I must now refute. When I say that we are to sanctify ourselves for our brethren, I do not mean that we are to do so in order to be seen of them. Whoever could have thought of such a thing? you exclaim. Oh! I know quite well that you are no pharisees. You do not wish your lives to be holy in appearance only; you do not wish them to be like whited sepulchres, beautiful outward, but within full of all uncleanness. Hypocrisy horrifies you, but it is not of hypocrisy I accuse you.

This is your temptation. The Gospel tells you that you are to be the witnesses of truth. The desire of bearing testimony to one's faith, of bringing others to share in one's convictions, is one of those which have been most fully developed in our churches. We are, therefore, involuntarily preoccupied by the thought of the influence which we may exercise upon our fellows. What effect produces my life? That is a very natural question. But what is to be feared is that this preoccupation will absorb us too completely, and that reality will give way to appearance. Question your conscience on this point. Have you never done what was right merely for the sake of setting your brethren an example? Have you never avoided sin, or even crime, not so much because crime was hateful to you, as from fear of the scandal which would have followed its perpetration? When you analyse your good works, blot out all the motives, such as the fear of being accused of lukewarmness, the necessity of stimulating others, the desire of proving to the world that the Gospel is powerful, or of raising your own particular Church in the opinion of the world; blot out all these, and then tell us what you have done simply for God. Does this calculation terrify you? Oh! pharisaism is not only at Jerusalem, beneath the long robes and phylacteries of the priests. It is here, in our hearts; there we must pursue and destroy it. Alas! we may sanctify ourselves, not because God is holy, but because there are Christians and worldlings who study us. Thus we may visit the poor, not because we love them, but that men may not accuse us of cold-heartedness. Now, let us not be afraid to say it, the holiness which aims at appearing is not true holiness. God rejects it, for He knows that it is not meant for Him; and men themselves will not be taken in by these appearances, for they instinctively feel that all holiness should be referred to God.

So far we have considered the wrong views which may be taken of the words of our text; let us now see what is its true signification, and how we may sanctify ourselves for our brethren. We may do so in this sense, that whoever sanctifies himself exercises on his fellow-men an influence of incalculable importance.

This may, at first, seem strange to you. We easily understand that a man who accomplishes some act of sacrifice and love thereby acts upon his brethren; but sanctification seems to us an entirely inward fact, which calls forth no echo whatever from the outward world. Now this is a serious error. Nothing is more utterly false than to believe that we act upon others only when we wish to do so either by our words or by visible actions. Besides this voluntary influence there is another which is far more powerful and which is exercised by our everyday life. This influence is silent, I own; but it is none the less important. It has been observed that, in the domain of nature, the most mighty agents are those which act most mildly and imperceptibly. A storm may, at first sight, be taken for the grandest manifestation of

the power of the elements. When the clouds are swept away by an infernal force, when the sea rages in its fury, when the lightning rends the sky and dazzles us, we feel bewildered and crushed. And yet, what is the power of the storm in comparison with that of light, which rises pure and peaceful morn after morn upon our earth? So gentle is its approach that it does not even disturb our slumbers; and yet, beneath the silent influence of its rays, everything is revived, beautified, warmed, and renewed; the world is, as it were, created anew by its power; and should the sun forget to rise tomorrow, our hemisphere would become a vast and icy waste, where death alone would reign in the midst of an eternal winter. So it is in our moral life; beside the wilful and often stormy action of our words, there is the involuntary action of our life. I affirm that of the two the latter is the more powerful, because it is simple and sincere. Of our words, alas! we are the masters; we arrange them at pleasure; by our words we may express faith, tenderness, solicitude, charity But, notwithstanding these passing sounds, our life also renders its silent, trite, and sincere testimony; it is the faithful expression of our moral being, and all our art would fail to turn it from its true signification; it follows us everywhere, whatever we may say to the contrary. I add, that this influence is all the more powerful that it is involuntary. In fact, when men feel that our aim is to act upon them by our books, by our discourses, by our arguments, they instinctively endeavour to guard against our efforts. But, in presence of the silent teaching of our life, their prejudices disappear, their mistrust ceases, and their heart becomes accessible to its influence.

We must not, therefore, suppose that when we sanctify ourselves in secret, in silence, or alone with God, we do not act upon our brethren. Whatever we do, our life is a book which cannot fail one day to be opened, and to impart its lessons to the world. I once saw a madman running at his utmost speed in order to get rid of his shadow; more foolish still is he who thinks he can separate his life from the influence it exercises. Thus the prodigal who loses his soul in unworthy pleasures excuses himself by saying that he injures no man, as if the example of his levity, of his lost and dissipated life, did not exert a terrible power; as if all the good he might have done and has left undone was not to be cast into the balance on the judgment-day. Thus also the egotist excuses himself, and imagines that because he asks nothing of any one, because he has surrounded himself with independence, none have the right to require anything of him; as if selfishness was not a cowardly desertion of charity, and did not bear with it a withering influence. Whatever we do, our conduct tells on others. I have read of a martyr whom the executioners treated with the most revolting cruelty; they first of all cut off his tongue, because it proclaimed the love and mercy of the Lord; then his hands, because they pointed heavenwards;

then they put out his eyes, because they also spoke of joy and hope; and when, bleeding and mutilated, they left him, the inimitable expression of his countenance still testified to the firm confidence which filled his heart. Thus, though we neither speak nor act, we always show to the world what is within us, and even our silence may be eloquent. We can never tell how far extends this involuntary influence. Human lives are so completely intermingled, they are joined by so many imperceptible fibres, they are linked together by so many invisible bonds, that whatever touches them may have an unlimited importance. Just as a powerful commotion may be produced throughout the whole of the human system by the prick of a very fine needle on an almost invisible nerve, so a hidden and insignificant action may produce the most momentous results. This fact is clearly visible in the history of men. A judge falters in an important cause, or simply yields to his apathy at the very moment when all his moral energy was required, and innocent victims are condemned to long years of suffering. . . . Years ago, in the United States of America, an assembly hesitates to settle by an energetic decision the question of slavery, and torrents of blood have not yet effaced the evils which one effort on its part would have stifled in their germ. Each of us has his share of that influence of which those who occupy elevated positions in society appear to possess so great a measure; we can never tell what will be the consequences of a trifling word, of a gesture, of an insignificant action. More than this; though we bury our conduct in silence, though we put forth all our efforts to conceal it from the view of men, we never can tell the influence it may exert in the future. Just as the writer who, yielding to a shameful motive, has coldly consecrated his genius to the production of an impious or immoral book, if later he repent, will have the bitter sorrow of being unable to efface his thoughts (for, like poison, they will have become inoculated in the blood of his generation), so we are incapable of retracting the past; its voice is still heard, its power is still felt. Yes, there may at this very hour be some human being who complains and suffers because, in the past, you have neglected a duty or been guilty of a mean action which you have buried in the depths of silence. This is an application of the mysterious and terrible law of human solidarity, by which whatever we do affects our fellowmen.

I have called this law a terrible law; but, thanks be to God, I may also call it a blessed law. For it has its bright side, that which Jesus Christ brings before us. When we sanctify ourselves, we act upon our brethren. For instance, you have made a sacrifice for God; no one knows of it; no one will ever know what efforts, what sufferings, what tears it has cost you. God alone has seen them. Nevertheless, when the struggle is over, you come to me; few words will be spoken, perhaps, but the peace and the serenity of your appeased conscience will be as an unclouded light which will reach to

the depths of my soul. A virtue will come out of you. Is this an imaginary picture? Can you deny the unequalled power of holiness? Let us make a better use of it in the future. Long had I thought that to convert the world there was but one thing to be done; to organise vast systems, to create powerful societies, to collect funds. Alas! I had forgotten that, to attain this end all the more surely and rapidly, the first and most important thing was to sanctify myself by reforming my life, by humbling my heart, by struggling against the spirit of criticism, bitterness, and injustice, by pitilessly snapping the bonds of sin, by living in such a manner that my life may be examined in the full light of day. What though these struggles are unknown to the world? What though none have witnessed them? Think you they will remain fruitless? Think you that out of this renewed life will not spring forth an influence far more powerful and persuasive than from the feverish activity of an unsanctified mind?

I find in this thought a deep source of encouragement. Truly the work of sanctification seems to us far more difficult to accomplish than the works of charity. Lay before us a career in which devotion and sacrifice will be necessary, in which we shall be enabled to exert a direct influence upon our fellows; this mission allures us. But to sanctify ourselves, to struggle against our natural inclinations, to crucify the flesh with its lusts, to conquer our evil habits, to repress our selfish independence, how ungrateful is this task, and how unimpassioned are our efforts to attain this end! What strength, therefore, shall we not find in the thought that, by sanctifying ourselves, we act upon others, indirectly it may be, but in the most powerful manner, to raise, comfort, and edify them! Ye fathers and mothers! sanctify yourselves for the sake of your children; think that all your words and all your instructions will never have the same peaceful authority as that which one hour's intimate communion with God will stamp upon your brow; reflect that nothing will touch them or fill them with respect as the thought that you are yourselves taught of God. Ye Christians! sanctify yourselves for the Church. Think that all the plans you form for its extension and life, that all your agitation, all your words and actions, will do less for the advancement of the reign of God than the sight of Christianity transforming your heart, and causing those floods of living water of which Jesus tells us in the Gospel to gush out of that barren soil.

Oh! how grand is holiness when viewed in this light! Do you not see the distance which separates this sanctification from the servile terror of the slave who sanctifies himself in fear that he may work out his own salvation, or from the calculations of the hireling who imposes upon himself sacrifice after sacrifice, work after work, and who would pay off his debt to God with his sufferings? How grand and beautiful, on the contrary, does holiness appear when its motive and messenger is love! It is because I love my

brethren that for their sakes I would sanctify myself. I know that in so doing I labour for their good, that I edify them as well as if I spoke to them or gave them palpable proofs of my affection.

Therefore, brethren, your inward struggles, your lowly and repeated sacrifices, your joyfully accepted sufferings, your humiliations patiently endured, are not lost in nothingness. Borne upon the wings of love, all these hidden virtues spread over the world like precious seeds which the wind scatters far and wide.

Thus disappears the feeling of bitterness and vexation which takes possession of you, especially when outward and visible activity is forbidden you. Of what avail are my sufferings? says the sick man who for years has been a prisoner in his lonely chamber. Of what use are my tears? Of what use is my life? says the poor cripple who feels herself useless and a burden to others. To all these I answer, that they have no right to say that their life is useless so long as God leaves them at their post; that they have a Divine education to undergo, and that they have never been more useful to the Church than since they have been sanctified by sorrow. How, you ask, can they serve God and prepare His reign? I could tell you that they have a special mission, that of glorifying God in suffering, and that this mission is most necessary, for nothing more forcibly attests the power of the God of the Gospel than the happiness with which He fills the most joyless life. I might also say that, in their forced inaction, they may commune with God, and that intercession for their brethren, and for the Christian Church at large, is the task which God assigns to them. But I believe there is more even than this; I believe that, in virtue of a real, though mysterious, law, if they have sanctified themselves by suffering, they will act powerfully upon the Church, and that all their brethren will be brought under their influence. Ask me not how this influence will be produced. I cannot tell; but I know that it will be produced. I know that holiness, however silent, ignored, and hidden from sight it be, has an all-pervading fragrance which men cannot fail at some time or other to inhale. What can be more mysterious and more certain than solidarity? Who can tell where it begins or where it ends? Who can appoint its limits to the influence of a soul that sanctifies itself? The Scriptures call the Church the body of Christ. Who would dare to affirm that this is merely a figure? Now, is it not most evident that the state of one of the parts of the body necessarily tells upon the whole? Christians, you who are the members of the body of Christ, when you sanctify yourselves, you act upon the Church, and you labour towards the salvation of your brethren, towards the renewal of humanity.

Let me remind you, before I conclude, of the Divine harmony, in virtue of which nothing in creation can be lost. If men of science have stated that, in physical nature, not one atom is destroyed, but that the same elements

are undergoing constant transformations from age to age, how blessed is the thought that, in the world of souls, nothing will ever be lost, and that the most obscure sacrifice ever serves for the edification of the whole. When Job bitterly mourned at the door of his ruined dwelling, forsaken by his friends, a prey to the most horrible disease, an object of general disgust and terror, did he know that his complaints and prayers, transmitted to posterity, would comfort thousands of souls on every point of the globe? When Mary Magdalene brought her broken heart at the feet of Christ, and there, with her tears, left the shame and dishonour of her past life, did she know how many lost souls, such as hers, would everywhere follow her example?

Let us, therefore, strengthen ourselves for the obscure conflict of holiness, for the cruel humiliations, for the bitter pains, for the sufferings of the body and of the soul. Like our Lord, let us often climb the heights of prayer; from these summits let us behold all those for whom we are called to suffer, and then we shall return amidst the world, more firmly resolved to bear our cross.