

X.

Sin.

DECEMBER 16, 1855.

MY dear friends, this communion places before us the remembrance of the profoundest joy that was ever known. But we must not forget, that as Jesus Christ's path to glory and to the resurrection was by the cross, this joy can be experienced only by those who have begun by feeling the bitterness of sin, and is proportioned to the intensity with which we have felt this bitterness. Oh, my friends, what is sin? Who among us can understand all the guilt, all the bitterness of it, the terrible judgments that follow, and the absolute necessity of being completely washed and purified from it, to be able to enjoy a moment of repose? It seems to me that it belongs to those who live continually plunged in suffering, and who are thus constantly called upon to meditate upon the mystery of a God full of love, who sends His children affliction upon affliction—it seems to me that it belongs especially to them to meditate upon the depths of sin.

I never knew a man who, so far as man can judge, was more advanced in true and solid Christian piety—that which unites purity of faith with a spirit of humility and charity—than François Gonthier of Nyon. Well, this man, whom one might have expected to be the subject of all the consolations of God, was the object of the bitterest dispensations. He lost successively an only son, a wife tenderly beloved, and a daughter twelve years old, who alone recalled the memory of his lost treasures. Thus bereaved, the hand of God made his solitude still greater, by taking away a much-loved sister, and afterwards a niece twenty years old, in whom were concentrated all his affections. And I do not name all he had lost. Add to all this a state of health so debilitated, that he said to me one day, “Do you know how I compose my books? As the juice is drawn from an orange-peel, by repeated pressure, till at length it comes drop by drop.” His weakness was excessive, and he suffered almost continually. Both pain and debility went on increasing till the end of his life. When I reflect upon an existence like this, I cannot help saying, What is sin? I know it may be said that a man like Gonthier is chosen—and it is assuredly his greatest consolation, because it is his nearest resemblance to Jesus Christ—that his afflictions may edify the Church, by the patience and meekness with which they are borne. But yet God would not have sent a Gonthier all this suffering only for the good of others. We must not confound the creature and the Creator, for in that case God would make man a saviour. When Jesus Christ was smitten, it was for the sins of man; but when one of us is smitten, the measure of suffering is never greater than his own sins have deserved, because sin has deserved much more than we suffer, more even than we can conceive of suffering. This the Scriptures, and more especially the Psalms, teach us at every page. David cannot mention the subject of his afflictions without adverting, as it were, un-awares, to that of his sins. This may be particularly remarked in perusing the

thirty-eighth Psalm, in which his sufferings and his sins are so blended, that we can scarcely distinguish between them. What, then, must sin be? How horrible in the sight of God! What is the punishment that it requires? What ransom can atone for it?

Then consider sin in an ordinary Christian, one who has never risen to the elevated Christian standard of a Gonthier; one who passes through life without dishonouring his profession, but who has never felt the bitterness of sin; one who has afflictions, because every one has them, but who has not known how to change his afflictions into crosses, and unite them to that of his Saviour. And see all there is in the heart of such a Christian, who may, however, be sincere; see all there is of latent sin, of hidden corruption, of secret infection, which, if the heart were suddenly laid open before us, would inspire us with dreadful horror, provided we were capable of feeling the horror of sin; that is to say, if we were capable of knowing all the holiness of the law of God, and all the holiness this awful law requires. And then consider sin in men of the world, who are plunged in sin; who, ever since they came into the world, have drunk it in like water; who breathe it like the air; who are inwardly composed of sin; whose minds are so completely enveloped in sin, that no ray of vivifying, salutary, sanctifying light has ever crossed them. What an abyss, what a sepulchre, what a sight for the eyes of God, are men, thousands, millions of men, spread over the whole world in whom nothing is to be found but this frightful sin, of which they have at most but a vague feeling, which now and then is sent to them by God, to beseech them to turn to Him, but who still remain in this dreadful and abominable state before Him! Sin in the best Christians, sin in the Church, sin in the world,—oh, my friends, what misery! What is sin?

This is what Jesus Christ saw when He came down from heaven to save us. We did not know it, but He knew it. We did not feel it, but He felt it for us, and this it was that gave Him strength to bear the anguish of the cross, the sufferings of Gethsemane, the combat in the desert, and all the humiliation which preceded it, and which, as it were, formed His whole life. And now, the sufferings that He endured for us must become our standard of the enormity of sin in His sight, and the depth of the abyss from which He drew us. Not one of us has any idea—no, my friends, not one of us has any idea—of what sin is. Not one of us knows what sin is, because not one of us fully knows the Saviour, or His sufferings, or His love. Oh, my friends, now that we have partaken of this blood shed for us, and this body broken for us, let us learn what sin is, and what is the peril of our souls, that we may take refuge in Jesus, and seek in Him what He alone can give. Let us be assured that we can learn this only in the Holy Scriptures. Our own personal meditations will never reveal to us what sin is; and, here I particularly feel the necessity and the reality of the inspiration and Divine authority of the Scriptures, because we should never have learned to know what sin is, unless we learned it from obedience to an outward authority superior to us, independent of our secret feelings, upon which we ought certainly to meditate with study and fervent prayers. But enlightened truth comes from above, is given by the Spirit of God, speaking with the au-

thority of God himself; for we must begin by believing the horror that sin ought to inspire, before we are capable of feeling it.

Well, my friends, let us then cast ourselves into the Saviour's arms. Shall the sufferings and sorrows of this world keep us back? Can we find time to consider them, when the salvation of our souls is the question? Let us go to Jesus with a feeling of pro-found humiliation, but with unlimited confidence in Him, who has suffered all and accomplished all for us. Oh, what ineffable sweetness to be able to repose in peace at the foot of the cross! I begin to understand the extent of my misery; but I embrace my Saviour's cross. All I want is His grace, His righteousness alone, without any mixture of my works. My works! they could only condemn me; but, ransomed by Him, washed in His blood, who has made atonement for my sins, I lay hold of His cross, and rest upon the sacrifice of my Saviour alone

And then let us speak of the Saviour to those who know Him not. With such a disease, which differs from all other diseases, in that it is the only real evil, and the root of all the others, and with such a remedy in our hands, which differs from those of the earth, in that it alone is sure and infallible, can we pass through life and the world, associating with our families, our neighbours, our friends, without speaking to them of sin and of Jesus Christ, who is their Saviour and ours? Let us lay hold of the cross, and proclaim the cross. Let us die in embracing it, let us die in proclaiming it, and our death will be the commencement of life, and God will be glorified in our body whether by life or by death, and especially by the blood and by the redemption of the Lamb of God. This is what I pray God for every one of you, as I do for myself, in the love of Christ, which I implore Him to increase in us! Amen.