

XXI.

The Holy Spirit.

MARCH 2, 1856.

WHAT a blessing it is, my dearly beloved, if we understood it aright, to receive this bread and wine which the Lord himself gives us, present though absent, and more present, being absent, than if He were really present: "This is my body which was broken for you, this is my blood which was shed for you." Henceforth it is by a close union with the Lord, it is by the possession of His body and blood, that we are called to do His work. It is in His bruised body and in His shed blood that we are called to suffer all the anguish and all the pains of the flesh; and, renewed by the Holy Spirit in Him who calls us to His eternal fellowship by present and visible communion, we have for the work of Jesus the strength of Jesus, the grace of Jesus, and the Divine nature of which we have been made partakers in Jesus by the promises of faith. Alas! we are men of little faith! What a spectacle should we exhibit to the world if we were men of great faith—of faith capable of exciting, like that of the centurion, the admiration or astonishment of the Lord himself!—a faith which, in laying hold of Jesus Christ, would in Him lay hold of eternal life, and all the treasures of grace laid up in this merciful Saviour!

We were occupied some days ago, my dear friends, in considering the sentiments in which the Christian may rest when he arrives at that moment to which we were then alluding, and when, drawing towards the end of his career, he says to the Lord, in his feeble measure, "I have finished the work thou gavest me to do" (he can say it if indeed he has been faithful in his feeble measure)—we were considering, I say, the power and the truth of this Word by which the Lord has revealed himself to us, and with which, day after day, He feeds our souls, so that it is like a perpetual communion, in which we live by the life of Jesus Christ and accomplish the work of Jesus Christ. But let us not forget, and let us learn from the declarations of the Word of God, as well as from the humbling experience of our own life, that this Word, though so powerful and so Divine that it made Job exclaim, "How forcible are right words," is powerful only when applied to our souls by that same Spirit who inscribed it in the pages of the book, who wrought in the heart of Isaiah, of Jeremiah, of St. Paul, and of St. John, and who, having chosen them for instruments, guided them to secure for all the generations of the human race, without fear of error, the everlasting truth. This Word must be written again in our hearts, and be, as it were, engraven in them by this same Spirit, without which it has neither life nor efficacy. We might read the Holy Scriptures for years without deriving any real blessing from them, and we should be astonished to see them have so little effect, and their power so little verified in our own experience, if the Holy Spirit did not explain and apply them, by coming to dwell in us. Now, this Spirit, which applies the Word of God to us and explains it, is the same Spirit that must perform in us all the rest. The work of the Father who has saved us

freely, the work of the Son who has redeemed us by His blood, are vain without the work of the Holy Spirit who opens our heart to believe in the Father and the Son, and to put in practice this Word of life.

Man—the heart of man—is represented in Scripture; where all is grand, infinite, eternal, as a theatre which attracts the attention of the holy angels, and of the Lord himself, and in which there is a continual struggle between the powers of hell and the powers of heaven; and this is only a repetition of the great struggle of these same powers in the whole life, both inward and outward, of our Lord Jesus Christ, out of which He came forth completely victorious, and has made us capable, in Him who has loved us, of being more than conquerors in our turn. Thus we are either the servants and depositaries of the spirit of darkness, or the servants, the blessed servants, and rich depositaries of the Spirit of light and life; and it is for us to choose the one by our unbelief, or the other by our faith; for it is written, “See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil.” But there is this difference, well worthy of the mercy of God, that while the spirit of Satan, however ingenious it may be in soliciting admittance into our hearts through all its avenues, is never able to unite itself so completely to our spirit as to be one with it, the Spirit of God deigns to penetrate into us, and to be so completely united with us, that we become the temples of the Holy Spirit, and that, being filled with the Spirit of Jesus Christ, we are made capable of doing the work that He did, and even greater, as He said himself when He gave the promise of the Holy Spirit, “He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do.” Thus Jesus declares to His disciples that, for the sake of the Spirit which they are to expect, it is better for them that He should go away: “It is expedient for you that I go away.” O my Saviour! how often have I wished to have Thee near me like Peter and John, and to be able to approach Thee, to commune with Thee, and to consult Thee! But Thou hast thyself declared that there is a gift so precious that, in order to secure it, it is better for me Thou shouldst go away; and this gift Thou hast granted me by the Holy Spirit.

But where are those who know and who appreciate the gift of the Holy Spirit? One thing we know, that God vouchsafes to the true Church, in our days, the grace to feel how little it has appreciated and possessed this life-giving spirit, which is none other than God himself coming to dwell in us; and to make all things new, this Spirit to whom nothing is impossible. Happy he who believes without doubt! If I have to overcome a strong temptation, it is not I who can overcome it—it is the Spirit of God that I invoke by prayer. If I have to bear excruciating pains unbearable for the flesh, it is not I that have to bear them—it is the Spirit of God that I invoke by prayer. If I put on that spirit of love, so contrary to our natural egotism, it is not to me that belongs this all-powerful love—it is the Spirit of God vouchsafed to me through prayer. And so it is with all the rest. Hence, in order to doubt that we can, by the Holy Spirit, accomplish the work to which we are called, we must begin by doubting, first, the faithfulness of God in His promises, and then His power to accomplish them. Oh, my friends, said a dying Christian, even in our best days our

eyes are only half open; and I apply this especially to the Divine perfections and power of the Holy Spirit, for if our eyes were open to see and to appreciate them, would there be amongst us so much sighing, so much complaining? and should we not always be seen filled with the power of fellowship with Christ for the accomplishment of our work? Consider, my friends, the place that the Holy Spirit occupies in the Scriptures, in the promises of the Old Testament, in the promises of Jesus Christ to His apostles; the way in which He leads us from the Gospels to the Acts, and the immense change He works in the apostles themselves, to show to all the disciples of all generations what He is capable of doing in all ages. The Holy Spirit is the great promise of the New Testament, and is, as it were, the crowning gift of the whole. Chosen and elect of the Father, redeemed by the Son, if we, being filled by the Holy Spirit, are living His life, then, and only then, are we put in possession of our inheritance, till we receive, in a better world, and under a more serene sky, the fulness of this inheritance, disencumbered of all the infirmities of the flesh and of earth, and become so completely the temples of the Holy Spirit, that our bodies themselves are called glorious and spiritual bodies.

And now may this body of dust and sin soon fall away, to give place to that glorious and spiritual body in which we shall accomplish the will of God as perfectly as Jesus Christ himself, and shall know, by the light of the Holy Spirit, what are the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit ! We shall know them by the enjoyment of them, and especially because we shall have learned to love, as we have been loved from all eternity !