

XXIII.

The Trinity

MARCH 16, 1856.

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."—Rom. viii. 12-17.

HOLY WRIT is prudent even in its silence—you would in vain seek in it for the word Trinity to express the doctrine upon which I desire to say a few words, if God grants me sufficient strength. Why this omission? because the word Trinity gives us the idea of something speculative, while, on the contrary, this doctrine, which was later, and very appropriately called in human theology by the name of Trinity, is most practical and most tender, because it is the exact expression of the love of God, whether we view it in the relation in which He stands towards humanity, or in the reciprocal relations between the persons of the Godhead. The mainspring of our salvation is in the love of God; "We love him because He first loved us"; "God is love." This love was manifested towards us in the work of our salvation; and it is not only in the work of our salvation that it is made known to us, but as existing from all eternity in the bosom of God, and constituting his everlasting felicity before it became ours, and that of all his faithful creatures. If we wish to understand the manner in which the love of God acts towards his poor lost creatures, to give them that everlasting life they have forfeited by their works, we have only to observe the simple historical order in which God communicated his revelations and inspired the writings of His apostles, after having inspired those of the prophets. Thus we find, first, the God of the Old Testament, then the God of the Gospels, and the God of the Epistles and of the gospel prophecies.

In the Old Testament we learn what ought to be sufficient to fill our hearts with joy. O my God! manifest Thy strength in my weakness. We learn that though quite unworthy of His love, yet God has loved us. We deserved that He should have condemned us a thousand thousand times; and if any one were not convinced of this, he has only to read again the books of the prophets, and particularly of Ezekiel; they are full of this terrible doctrine of the judgments of God which the Israelites had drawn down upon themselves by their evil doings, but which they did not deserve more than the rest of the human race, whose history we see in theirs as in a mirror. But instead of declaring himself hostile to us, God declares himself in our favour, and we learn, that where we had to expect only the weight of His wrath, we find the riches of His grace. The Almighty God who created the heavens and the earth, the builder of the visible and invisible world, is altogether for us; all His will is to save us; and whoso-

ever will enter into His designs, confess his sins, and submit to His grace, will obtain everlasting life as if he had never sinned; or rather, he will possess it having sinned, but having been reconciled, and with a new perception of the mercy that is in God. It is thus that God reveals himself to us in the Old Testament; so that, removing the heavy weight of Divine wrath, Divine love everywhere appears. The same prophets who denounce the most terrible judgments cannot long sustain this language, and always conclude with words of mercy. This is seen, in a very remarkable way, in the prophet Micah, who, in his few short pages, develops, with an admirable fulness, the plan of condemnation, of prophecy, and of salvation, in the assurance of which he finally rests.

Then come the evangelists, foretold by the prophets. Here God draws a step nearer to us; and not content with having declared, as from a distance, that He is favourable to us, draws close to us, to live with us—as one of us; Son of man, taken from among men, though Son of God; and after having been for us, He is with us, close to us, like a friend and a brother, with whom, according to the 55th Psalm, we can “take sweet counsel.” Then God appears under a still more tender and encouraging aspect than we had seen Him as represented in the Old Testament, especially when this Friend, this Brother, completely reveals to us the doctrines of Divine justice and Divine mercy, by dying upon the cross for us, and thus blotting out our sins. But, at the same time that this tender connexion between God and us unfolds itself, another connexion appears in the bosom of God himself; and we learn that He who redeems us is the Son of Him who will save us, and that there is between God, as He reveals himself in the Old Testament, and God as He appears in the gospels, the touching connection of Father and Son—connection that we cannot fathom, but in which we discern something at the same time ineffably tender and mysterious. And observe, that these two connections cannot be separated, and that we shall never understand what God is for us in Jesus Christ, if we have not a perception of what Jesus Christ is for God. There is, moreover, something here that must not escape our attention. We can only understand the spirit of love in its plenitude if we consider it as a spirit of sacrifice. Now, in God it does not seem possible that sacrifice could exist; for how could we take a single moment from His everlasting felicity? But, in the person of His Son, the Lord of Lords gives us an example of sacrifice. Here we see that the only begotten Son of the Father is at the same time the “man of sorrows;” and that there, where “the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth bodily,” the unspeakable immensity of the suffering of which humanity is capable, but of which it is capable only if united in the Divinity, manifests itself to our astonished and grateful gaze. And here we see clearly, that this truly affecting doctrine must completely disappear, if the Son is not one with the Father, and that the awakening of our lively gratitude towards the Lord Jesus Christ wholly depends upon His being truly the Son of God—that is to say, God, as He truly is the Son of man—that is to say, man.

Then follow the epistles and the gospel prophecy; and how does that open? By the descent of the Holy Spirit, who lays the foundation of the Church, shedding His influence over it. This is the third and last step, for we cannot

imagine any beyond this, that God takes toward His poor fallen creatures. He was with His creatures, and now He comes to dwell in His creatures, and thus becomes so completely one with us, that He converts these poor bodies, born of the dust and become the slaves of sin, into the temples of His Spirit, the dwellings of God, wherein He delights to rest. The Holy Spirit—that is to say, God—after having been for us in the Old Testament, and with us in the gospels, comes to dwell in us; and this is the highest manifestation of Divine love, which cannot be satisfied until He has made himself one with us, and has come to dwell in us, “He in us, and we in Him.” And here again remark, my dear friends, that all the power and value of this doctrine of life disappear, if the Holy Spirit, instead of being God himself, were but an emanation of God, an agency of God, a gift of God. This would be only reminding us of what we already well knew by the Old Testament and by the gospels, of the power and grace that God can and will impart to us; while the Holy Spirit, such as He reveals himself in the epistles and in the latter part of the New Testament, and in the promises of Jesus Christ to His disciples, being God himself—is the power of God which strengthens us—is the peace of God which comforts us—is the holiness by which God delivers us from evil—is the life of God throbbing in our hearts. Oh! who can measure and comprehend the immensity of the progress made between the last chapter of the gospel and the first chapter of the Acts, and fully understand the admirable order followed in the plan of revelation, and of the heavenly gifts in the three parts of the Holy Scriptures of which we have just taken such a hasty survey—hasty, alas! as regards the subject, though too long for the feebleness of the speaker! I can only just point out this admirable view. The relations of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to man correspond with the relations of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in God, and the love manifesting itself to save us, is the expression of the love that has dwelt eternally in God. Ah! how touching and profound does this doctrine then become! It is the groundwork of the gospel, and those who reject it as a doctrine purely speculative and theological, have never understood anything about it. It is the strength of our heart—it is the joy of our soul—it is the life of our life—it is the very foundation of revealed truth.

I am obliged to stop here, and leave to your own meditations the things that I would have added. I will only recall to your minds, in concluding, what I have often said in the pulpit, but which some of you may not have heard, and which admirably sums up all this doctrine. One of the Fathers says—“We have in the Old Testament God for us, in the gospels God with us, and in the Acts and the epistles, God in us.” It is this, God for you, with you, and in you; it is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit that I desire for you, as well as for myself, for life and for death, with a heart devoted to you in Jesus Christ.