

“WITH THEE THERE IS FORGIVENESS,
“THAT THOU MAYEST BE FEARED.”

There is still another way that leads to knowledge of God. It is one that cannot be dealt with save with most delicate care. We mean the awful way that leads through the depths of sin. A single word of Jesus indicates it at once. To Simon the Pharisee he said: “To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little” (Luke 7:47). With this word our Lord places two persons in contrast with each other. On one side the most honorable citizen of Nain, Simon, his host. And on the other side a woman, who was known in the little town as one of ill repute, a public sinner, as was the case. As her sins were many, she had been forgiven more, and consequently she loved more. The virtuous Simon, on the other hand, who had sinned less, was forgiven less, and consequently he loved less.

If love for Christ is one of the richest sources, from which vital knowledge of God flows out towards us, for this woman, the way of deep sin thanks to the larger forgiveness, was the means to attain fuller knowledge of God. He who only strives after book-knowledge of God, can not understand this, and will never be able to put up with this vigorous word of Jesus. He on the other hand who knows from experience that warm, and upbuilding knowledge of God is fed and carried most effectively by love for God, accepts this word of Jesus gratefully, even though it makes him shudder.

The contrast between the dark nature of sin

and holiness is so sharp, that for the moment it takes a violent effort on the part of the soul to understand that a deep way of sin can be one that leads to richer knowledge of God. And it behooves us to treat this aspect of the subject in hand the more humbly, because of those who, even in our land, in a satanic way have misapplied this word of Jesus, at times shamelessly confessing in private: "I gloriously sinned again, after which I had a blessed time of finding." Such satanic sayings are nothing else than a slander on the mercies of our God. But though this horrible abuse of Jesus' word compels utmost carefulness, the heavenly gold that glitters in this word, must not be dimmed. It is and remains true, that greater sin with greater forgiveness can lead to greater love and thereby to a richer knowledge of God.

This word alone offers us the key to the beatitude of the murderer on the cross, and to the promise of Jesus, that presently with himself he would be in Paradise. Fundamentally it is the same as what David wrote in Ps. 130:4. "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." From the forgiveness of sin springs tender attachment in the service of the Lord. Sin, forgiveness, love, and from this love knowledge of God, are the four beads in the one sacred string.

The whole Gospel rests in fact upon this recognition, and the saying of one of the heroes of the faith in earlier days: "Felix culpa," which means that there was something glorious in the fall, can never be entirely ignored. The angels of God have no knowledge of sin, hence

also they know no forgiveness. Hence again they have no knowledge of the tender love which springs from forgiveness received, nor of the richer knowledge of God which is born from this tenderer affection. It is foreign to them, and therefore the apostle writes regarding this mytery that they are desirous "to look into it." Undoubtedly the revelation of the Being and Attributes of God, as it came to us in the mighty work of the Atonement is far richer, far more tender and more striking than the first revelation in Paradise. The grace, mercy and compassion of our God for the Sinner give us a look into the Father heart which apart from sin would never have been possible. The knowledge of God which we receive in and through Christ far exceeds all other knowledge of him. And yet in the Scripture the mission of the Son to this world is motived by sin alone. Every deeply moved utterance of love for God in old and New Testament springs from the thrilling experience of the heart, that the servant and handmaiden of the Lord have been redeemed from sin and delivered from misery. And neither reconciliation and sanctification, nor deliverance from misery would have been thinkable, had not sin engulfed the world. Even now it is frequently seen that the cool sympathy for God on the part of the unconverted differs from the warm attachment to God on the part of the redeemed in that the unconverted always discount sin, while the redeemed always start out from the knowledge of misery, that by reason of the knowledge of sin they may arrive at the knowledge of God.

Love for God apart from sin operates most purely with the angels. And yet, however glorious their love for God may be, it is a different and a lesser love than that of the redeemed sinner for his God and Savior. It is not for us to say, how revelation would have unfolded itself, had not Adam fallen and had not Christ come. This much is certain, the rich knowledge of God's boundless mercies is the highest knowledge of God for us, and this is immediately connected with the loss of Paradise in sin and misery.

This holds true with individuals. Many people who call themselves Christians in these days count little with the knowledge of sin. They were religiously brought up, and have not fallen into open sin. Hence sin does not oppress them, and the need of reconciliation is no longer felt. The Cross addresses them differently. Their Christianity is one of high ideals and good works. The sad result is that they have less and less mystical, tender and cherishing love for God, and that the "Blessed is the man whose sin is covered" (Ps. 32:1) indicates a state of happiness, which is foreign to them.

There are others who have become deeply versed in the knowledge of sin, either through the terrors of the law, or by the fact that God abandoned them to their sin. But at length they came to a halt. A burning thirst after reconciliation took hold of them. And having found the same in their Savior they are now filled with praise and adoration of the mercies of the Lord. Their love for the God of unfathomable compassion is more and more increased.

And according to the greater measure of their sin, they enter into a far richer measure of fellowship with the Father who is in heaven, and of the knowledge of his holy Name. A more brutal outbreak in sin is not at all the necessary background of this experience. As in the case of Luther, a deeper insight into ordinary sin can create an equally burning desire after reconciliation. Of all the apostles St. Paul glories most enthusiastically from the love of the redeemed, because, having persecuted the church of God, he felt himself to be the chief of sinners. And so it still remains true, that he who has fallen deeply into sin, and has come to a full and genuine conversion, has attained the thirst after reconciliation and the gratitude of love for the same, in such a measure of intensity, as to spread in a surprising manner blessings everywhere, even to the extent that at times one can envy him the warmth of his inner life.

Shall we then sin, that grace, and with it love and knowledge of God may increase? Far from it. This question is diabolical. He who propounds it does not love God. He offers God's love an insult in the face. But it does imply, that it is safe for every child of God to look more deeply into the sins of his own heart; not to ignore his secret sins; ever and anon to apply again the full atonement to all the breadth and length of the sins of his heart; and thus to become ever more deeply sensible of how endlessly much there was that needed forgiveness, and that has been forgiven.

There are two ways that here present themselves. One man minimizes his sin. He is offended when he is told of his guilt. He will not hear it said that he is guilty in all sorts of ways. He holds himself erect, and deems himself a saint. This is the way to cover up one's sin, and not to thirst after reconciliation; not to return thanks for reconciliation and love; and consequently to remain far removed from the knowledge of God. But there is also another way. It is that of humbling oneself. In this way the child of God distrusts himself. He is grateful for having sin pointed out to him. He investigates ever more closely his heart, his past, and the present state of his soul. And so there is everytime new need of reconciliation, new joy in forgiveness received, more love for the Merciful One, and an ever deeper entering into the knowledge of God his Savior.

Moreover he who as a Christian man imitates Simon the Pharisee, and esteems himself to be just, can not bear that one who is a "Sinner" is addressed by Jesus. There is the exalted sense of one's own saintliness, which has no place for the compassion shown the prodigal who returns.

But when by a deeper knowledge of our own sin we feel that we ourselves are small, and we refresh ourselves each day with a new draught from the cup of reconciliation, there will awaken in our hearts something of the joy of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth, which is greater than the joy over the ninety and nine who have no need of repentance. For this is the Gospel of Christ.

"I ACKNOWLEDGE MY SIN
UNTO THEE."

Although it is a Divine appointment, for which it behooves us to give thanks, it is nevertheless difficult for us, sinners, to realize that in the end even sin is compelled to become a means of leading us into deeper knowledge of God, and of making the majesty of the Lord to shine upon us more brightly. That as the tempter of men, Satan abuses this appointment of God, that in a heaven-defying way he may mingle sin and religion, does not in the least darken the glory of this appointment. Neither can anyone say, whether, in case Satan first, and after him Adam, had not fallen, the Lord God would have opened another way, unknown to us now, by which to lead us into an equally deep, if not a still more intimate knowledge of his Name and Being.

All these reflections however do not advance us a single step. We have been born in a sinful world. We have to count with it. And this being the case it is meet for us to thank God, that he makes good to come out of evil, and that he uses even sin to enrich the knowledge of his Name and Being in the inner perception of his child. Grace, compassion and mercy, as revelations of Divine love are more profound, than Divine blessing in prosperity and Divine help in time of need. But the knowledge of this grace and compassion can only be known by him, who has tasted the sweets of reconciliation, and who can count himself not only among God's crea-