

"TAKE NOT THY HOLY SPIRIT FROM ME."

The Holy Scripture speaks of a seeking of God's face. "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance"(Ps. 89:15). But the Scripture speaks also of something more intimate, when it comes to a mutual fellowship, when not only the light of God's countenance shines on us, but when also the soul lifts itself up to God. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant" (Ps. 25:14). But with the third round it goes still further, when Almighty God not only makes his face to shine upon us, and admits us to his secret walk, but when he enters into our heart, makes it his temple, and as Holy Spirit dwells in it. "The Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which can not be uttered, and he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints" (Rom. 8:26-27).

This three-fold degree of fellowship should be carefully distinguished. He who stands on the first round of this ladder of fellowship has turned away from the vanities of the world and has accustomed himself to the light that shines from above. He walks no longer in his own light, but in the light of God's countenance. The darkness is past. He knows in whom he believes. And the people that thus walk in the light of the Divine countenance, who enjoy this not merely from time to time, but continuously, the Scripture

pronounces blessed. Then of itself and unconsciously the second round is reached, the entering upon the secret walk with God. Not that the light of God's countenance shines on us all, but in this way, that the soul has become a mirror, from which this light is reflected. That God shines on us, and that the soul shines out toward God. This is the secret of the Lord which is inwardly disclosed to us. But even this is not enough. The intimacy of living near unto God goes still further, enters in still more deeply, and then it comes to this indescribable, this unspeakable, this impenetrable reality that the Lord God unites himself in the Holy Spirit so closely with our spirit, that he is not merely above and around us, but that he is also in us, that he turns into us, makes our heart his dwelling place, and that in our inmost self he speaks to us and we to him.

This highest round is not reached at once. There is progression here, a blessed development and deepening, which is not acquired by all, and in which provisionally, they who have reached it, find themselves only now and then. This is known as their most blessed moments; as a peace of God which comes and goes again, and which, when it is lost, is sought again anew. The break can come from lack of spiritual training. It can come through a superior power from without. But in most cases it comes through sin. The latter was the case with David, and therefore from his desolate and "God-estranged" heart the prayer at once arose: "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 51:11).

When we treat of the Holy Spirit, our finite mind deals with mystery. Human language has

no words for it. Our conception here fails of all analysis. We can believe, we can undergo sensations, we can enjoy, but here on earth, at least, and in our state of sin the deep mystery of the Triune Being of God can not be unveiled to us. We worship Almighty God as our Father who is in heaven. We worship the God of all grace in the Only-begotten Son, whom he gave unto us, whom he sent, and delivered in our behalf. And we worship still more intimately the thrice Holy One in the Holy Ghost, whom we possess as Comforter in our hearts. In whatever direction our thinking and pondering moves, whether to the world round about us, whether in the world of our heart, it is always God whom we meet, it is always in God that our searching gaze finds its point of rest, it is always to God that our worship and devout adoration lift themselves. It is always God who overshadows us, and inwardly fills us with his holy love. One and the self-same God, one glorious and ever-blessed Being, one Omnipotence which carries and knows us.

But it remains a mystery. A mystery which is tender to our heart, rich in blessed enjoyment, ever more intimately revealing itself to the seeking soul, but far transcending all our thinking, all our understanding, all our study and pondering. It is the most real of all realities. It is the one thing that stays by when once the world shall fall away from us, and consciousness shall be darkened in the haziness of death. It is the secret of the Lord at which scorners laugh, which leaves the world cold, awes the sinner and strikes terror at his heart, but which, according to the covenant of peace, is shown to God's child in the

stillness of solitude. It is the Holy Ghost himself who, entering into the heart of God's child, sets the seal upon it of this Triune Mystery.

But for this reason fellowship with the Holy Spirit in us is exceedingly sensitive and tender. Nothing must come in between, or it is gone. It can not withstand anything or it is lost. It can not bear any disturbance, or it has fled. Not that the Holy Spirit withdraws himself and leaves us to ourselves. On the contrary he remains in the heart which he has chosen for his dwelling place. Neither Satan nor the world can expel him from his temple. And this is his Divine love, that dwelling in us, he allows himself to be grieved, to be offended, to be hurt and wounded by our sin, and still continues his stay.

This does not seem to you to be the case. In the hour of transgression, you feel that the Holy Spirit became a stranger to you; that he went far away from you; and that he could scarcely be reached by your earnest supplication. He truly continued to hold tenure in your heart, but in the heart itself a wall of separation was reared between your spirit and the indwelling Holy Ghost. The door of the temple within was locked by your own ego. You descended in your own being to the deeper underground, above which this temple raises itself. In this temple the Holy Ghost was still enthroned, but you had no more access to it. So all fellowship was broken. All secret intercourse was cut off—your sin had wound you round as a spider the fly. And while the Holy Spirit, whom you grieved, in seeking compassion reaches out after you again, you draw yourself back in your own sense of guilt.

And even in such moments, faith that is not understood, continues to shine through. After his deep fall David felt the anxious estrangement. He realized that as long as God looked upon his sin, no restoration of fellowship was possible, and therefore he prayed: "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities" (Ps. 51:9). He became inwardly conscious that his polluted heart was bound to estrange him from God, and therefore he pleaded in such touching and beautiful terms: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." He walked in deep darkness, and so he prayed that the light of God's countenance might pour down its beams again upon him. But though he bruised his guilty head against the wall of separation, in that same striking moment the sense of faith was alive in him, that behind that wall the Holy Ghost still reached out to comfort him, and therefore he prayed not: "Give me back thy Holy Spirit," but altogether differently: "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me."

Thus the soul that is troubled and wretched holds fast to faith. It does not understand this in itself; it does not grasp this; but it feels that grace does not let go, that grace is in God, that God with his grace still operates within, and it only fears that this grace, which is in God himself, might be removed from it. And against this fear the soul prays, supplicates, cries: O God, stay by me, stay in me. Let me not go forever. And this supplication keeps on, in earnestness and in sincerity, until at length in unspeakable compassion the door of the temple opens itself again.

And then the joy of salvation returns; the meeting again between the soul that had deeply grieved the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit who rather than let go the soul of God's child, had allowed himself to be grieved. It is well with him who has experienced this with regard to his own sin. He alone understands what it is to have the Holy Ghost as his Comforter.

“KNOW YE NOT THAT YE ARE THE
TEMPLE OF GOD?”

In prophecy it is said, that God “turned aside to tarry for a night” (Jer. 14:8). This figure is borrowed from the wayfaring man who at sundown turns in to spend the night, and when, in early morning the sun appears above the horizon, he leaves the hospitable inn and pursues his way. Applied to the Holy One of Israel, this means that at times the prophets were aware of the indwelling of the Spirit in the soul; but that it was not permanent, that it was transient, and that soon the God close by had become again a God afar off. By the side of this experience of a God who turns in to tarry for a night, and then leaves the soul again, Jesus puts the promise, that on the day of Pentecost, God the Holy Ghost, shall come to the people of the Lord, and shall not go away, but abide with them forever. St. John, in his Gospel (7:39), states this forcibly, when he says: “The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.” This can not mean, of course, that the Holy Spirit did not as yet exist, but signified that the Holy Ghost