

power of the world that aims at keeping us far distant from God.

The benediction also at the close of public worship might easily be composed by each preacher for himself. That this is not the case, that in the benediction at least a fixed form has been maintained, is a gain to be thankfully acknowledged. Now the preacher can put nothing into it of himself. He is forgotten thereby, but just because he steps into the background, the benediction affects us as a gentle dew of grace which comes to us from God.

“AS IN HEAVEN.”

For the soul “to be near unto God” implies, that we lift up ourselves with mind and heart from our everyday surroundings into the sphere of the Divine Majesty. This is what, in language of Scripture, the *Sursum Corda* has become, namely: the impulse to lift up soul and mind unto God and to appear in the audience-chamber of his holiness. In his infinite compassion God truly comes down to us, to dwell with us, and with his rod and staff to comfort us. This by itself brings God near to us, but by no means always brings our soul near unto God. The seeking love of God can for long times be near unto our heart, and can even be within it, while the heart is unconscious of it. An infant can be carried by God’s nearness, and have no sense whatever of the Divine Majesty. In conditions of sickness, which darken our consciousness of self, God’s nearness to his child is not removed. Even when in dying

our consciousness fails us, the nearness of God continues to support the soul, which he has called unto himself.

But however closely these two are allied, they must always be carefully distinguished. Whether God is near unto us, and whether we are near unto God, is not the same. And in behalf of the latter, not of the former, it is exceedingly important that our mind be not too closely chained to the world of visible things, but that we should understand the sacred art of turning our mental perception from this world into that which is around God's throne.

The soul first learns this in prayer. And it is noteworthy that in the short form of the Our Father, Jesus repeatedly directs our thoughts to the invisible world. At once in the address: "Our Father, who art in heaven." According to the Heidelberg catechism, this means that we should not think of God in an earthly way. And this is correct, provided it is properly taken not as a sound, as a word or as a term whereby to express something supermundane, but as an effort of the soul, by which, at the very beginning of the prayer, to free itself from the embrace of earthly interests and to enter into the high and holy spheres that surround the throne of God. The prayer: "Thy kingdom come," carries the same effect, since that kingdom can not be anything else than the kingdom of heaven. Hence the petition implies, that the powers of the kingdom of heaven ought to permeate our life ever more strongly.

Fellowship with life around God's throne, however, is most clearly expressed in the third peti-

tion: Thy will be done on earth among us as in heaven among thy angels. Here the reference to heaven is immediate. Here both the similarity and the difference of life on earth and life in heaven is simultaneously shown. Here Jesus urges us that in prayer, and in seeking the nearness of God, we should acquaint ourselves with the world of angels and of the redeemed, in order by our relationship with their world, to strengthen our approach to God. Jesus urges us even so strongly in prayer to bring our souls into contact with the invisible world, that in the last petition he makes us sensible of the inworking that goes out upon us from the head of the fallen angels. "Deliver us from the evil," is the petition which reminds us that evil, that sin which springs up in our heart, is fed and inspired by a higher power from the invisible world, and that God alone can deliver us from this deadly inworking. Is it then too much to say, that in this brief prayer of six petitions, Jesus leads us out from the earthly sphere of visible things, and unveils to the sense of our soul clearly and strongly the reality of the invisible world? And all for the sake that we might the more fully and the more intimately enjoy "to be near unto God."

In Scripture, this communion with spirits from the invisible world, is shown in more than one instance to be inseparable from nearness unto God. Only think of the vision call of Isaiah and of the Revelations on Patmos. Isaiah not only saw the Lord upon the throne, but also the Seraphim around it, and he heard the "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts," which with other music rang through the arches of heaven. On

Patmos it was the same. There, too, the seer's eye beheld the holy One, and also the Cherubim who reveal God's majesty, and what is more, from "the elders," i. e. from the circles of the blest, he heard the hymn of praise: "Thou, Lord, art worthy to receive glory and honor and power!"

And so throughout the entire Scripture there runs a golden line of heavenly light, which brings the prayers and the hymns of praise of God's people into fellowship with the songs of praise of angels and the redeemed. It is not only that the angels and the blest in unapproachable light, and we on earth in our twilight, sing praises to the Trinity, but that there is a connection between the voices of angels and the tongues of men. Indeed, sometimes it seems that we on earth but echo what is sung around God's throne in heaven, and that our heart only finds rest when there is holy accord and blessed harmony between created spirits above and the creature that on earth thirsts after the nearness of God.

But this presents the question whether this indispensable fellowship with God's angels and the redeemed around the heavenly throne has not been too much lost from sight in our circles. That we should be on our guard against abuse in this matter, is self-evident. Idolatry has not improbably arisen from this search after intercourse with the world of spirits. Even within the church of Christ the search after this fellowship has all too frequently drawn souls away from the nearness of God, rather than introduced them into his holy presence. Dealings of the soul, if we may so express ourselves, with angels and the blest, have tempted anxious souls all too often

to introduce intermediary persons between our soul and God, to whom to look for help rather than to God. It is plain, therefore, that for the sake of correcting this abuse, safety was sought in sobriety, and that with holy enthusiasm it was undertaken not to allow oneself to be drawn away in his prayer by anything, not even by angels, from God himself and from immediate communion with God. But it can not be denied that by exaggeration this carefulness has led to the other extreme. For is it not a fact, that in the prayers of the church, in prayer at home, and in personal supplication, the spirit-world is almost entirely ignored, and that thereby all such prayer has become antagonistic to the note which Jesus himself has struck in the Our Father?

In the Our Father, Jesus brings our soul again and again in touch with this higher world of spirits, while from our prayer this communion has almost entirely died away. For the sake of avoiding the abuse of one extreme, one can easily and of itself pass over into the other extreme, and this is bound to injure the life of our soul. He who dies, knows that he will not find God and the Savior alone by themselves, but he will find them surrounded by a world of saints. Not a Father alone, but a Fatherhouse, and in that Fatherhouse the many mansions, and in those mansions, with God's angels, the saints that have gone before.

And though we speak of this world of glory as of the world above, because we can not think of it otherwise than as being far exalted above this guilty earth, we well know that this distinction is not a separation, and that already here on earth

communion with that world is possible. When the Psalmist would praise God, he calls upon the angels to praise and bless the Lord (Ps. 103). There is an host of the Lord that encampeth round about them that fear God. Not only Satan, the head of fallen angels, but good angels, too, are in communication with our soul. And in moments of blessed elevation of spirit the soul has been conscious of the nearness of the good spirits of God, and it has seemed that they made us feel in a more tender and more intimate way the nearness of our God.

We undergo the same inworking for good or for evil from men. One evil-minded person in your environment can draw your soul away from God, estrange every utterance of life from God, and throw you back into your earthly, sinful shallowness. On the other hand, one devoted child of God in your midst can effect the exclusion of every unholy suggestion from conversation, the opening up of the soul, and the closer approach to God.

Such is the case here. He who accustoms himself to enter into the life of the holy world of God's angels, and already here on earth admits the company of the saints into the circle of the perceptions of his own soul will thereby not only banish evil, but will himself attain a holier mood, will feel himself supported in praise and prayer, and will encounter far less difficulty in raising himself from his earthly life to the nearness of his God.

We were not created for solitariness. The moment when, deserted of all, you have to fight your fight alone, you feel that something un-

natural has come upon you. Not alone, but "With all the saints," we will come to the knowledge of our God, and if in eternity it will be the wonderful exaltation of life together with all angels and all saints to glorify God forever, why, then, should we forsake and neglect the glorious power which already here on earth can unfold in our prayer, if by anticipation we live already here in the blessed communion, which awaits us up yonder. With all God's saints we are one body in Christ, as our head, but on earth we taste little of the fellowship of the whole body of the Lord. On the other hand, communion with saints and God's angels is continually open to us. Blessed is he who not only enjoys this in his own soul, but also knows how to inspire thereby the nearness of his God.

"STRIVING AGAINST SIN."

One who in mature years, and in his right mind, does not strive from time to time against some sin or other, can scarcely be imagined. The human heart is an impenetrable riddle. Even with sneak thieves and drunkards we are often amazed at a coy tenderness that shows disgust with one or more sins, which in better circles are altogether too frequently given free passage. But repression of some striking sin, in the case of oneself or of others, is by no means always yet what the apostle calls the struggle against sin. Everything here depends on what occasions the struggle against this or that sin. One will resist such a sin from concern about his health. This is often preponderant with respect to sensual sin. Another