

XXVII.

The Communion of Gifts.

“Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.”—*1 Tim. i. 5.*

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Communion of goods in Jerusalem was a symbol. It typified the communion of the spiritual goods which constituted the real treasure of Jerusalem's saints. The other inhabitants of that city possessed houses, fields, furniture, gold, and silver just as well as the saints, and perhaps in greater abundance. But the latter were to receive riches which neither Jew, Roman, nor Greek possessed, viz., a treasure in heaven. The saints were holy, not in themselves, but through Him who had said, “Now are ye clean through the words which I have spoken unto you.” (*John xv. 3*) The Lord had indeed ascended unto heaven, but only “to receive *gifts for men*; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.” And this treasure was *Christ Himself*.

Speaking of the contribution which was being collected in Macedonia, Achaia, and Corinth for the saints in Jerusalem, the apostle admonishes the Corinthian church to render thanks to God for a gift infinitely greater than the gold which was to be sent to Jerusalem; and it is in this connection that he uses that captivating expression—“*unspeakable gift*”—which we received in the surrender of God's dear Son.

It is, therefore, a mutual possession. Jesus has us, and we have Him. He possesses the saints, and they possess Him. That He possesses them is their only comfort in life and death. But that they also possess Him, as their own heart's treasure, is to them source of all their wealth and luxury. The Catechism confesses, therefore, very correctly that the communion of saints consists first of all in the fact that they are partakers of Him, and then of His gifts.

The gift is not without the Person, nor outside of the Person, nor even before the Person. The saint partakes first of Christ, and from this sacred partnership flows every other blessing. Even as the Head possesses the Body, and the Body possesses the Head, so is this also a mutual possession. Head and Body belong to each other, even tho the Head has this advantage over the Body, that it commands it at will, while the Body must follow the Head wherever it leads. “To follow the Lamb wherever He goeth” is the peculiar mark of this mutual relation.

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But, with the reservation of this essential mark, the possession is absolute. The saints belong to Jesus, just as much because the Father has given and brought them to Him, as that He has bought them, not with gold or silver, but with His own precious blood. And, on the contrary, He belongs to His saints, not because by their own labor they have obtained Him, but as a gift of free grace. The Triune God has ordained the Mediator for His people, to whom He has given and brought Him; and the Mediator having come in the flesh, has given Himself to His people.

Every child of God knows from his own experience that Christ is all his treasure. When Mary Magdalen cries out, "They have taken away my Lord," (John xx. 13) she has lost all the wealth of her soul. The saints stand in the faith and have peace only when, in so far, and as long as they possess Immanuel. He is their One and All. As soon as they find Him, all their poverty is turned into wealth. Without Him they are blind and naked; with Him want and misery make place for riches and abundance. With Him they are set in heaven. And when they depart from this life their hope and lot for eternity depend upon this, whether they possess Him as their souls' Savior, glorious and altogether lovely.

Hence this is the most important: *the great treasure of the saints in Jerusalem was their Lord.* This comprehended all. Every other treasure was theirs only through Him. To possess Him was to possess all that He had obtained for them, even justification and sanctification; all the power given Him of the Father for their assistance and protection; all the wisdom and light, and all the charismata, gifts of grace, received of the Father for distribution among His people.

However, they could not make this partnership available, for their treasure lay beyond their reach; was not in earth, but in heaven. Actually they remained poor and perplexed; rich for the future, but now needy and helpless.

The following illustration will make this clear. An English millionaire, well supplied with bank-notes, in an African village finds himself reduced to beggary. The natives, ignorant of his wealth and not understanding the value of bank-notes, refuse to sell him anything but for their own currency. Hence with all his treasure he is in that distant place poor and destitute. In like manner, being pilgrims, and sojourners in the earth, the saints would be spiritually poor and needy if there were no Comforter, no Go-between, who out of His heavenly treasure could supply all their need during all the days of their pilgrimage. And this Go-between is the Holy Spirit. Of Himself He has nothing. By Himself He could never save a sinner. He never adopted the flesh and blood of children and dwelled among us; never suffered, died, and rose again in their behalf. All that He can do is to pray for them with groans that can not be uttered, and in divine love come and dwell with them. But what the Holy Spirit does not possess Christ possesses, who, in our flesh, rich in His cross-merits, lives with the Father in our behalf.

And from that treasure in Christ the Holy Spirit takes and imparts to the saints, as the money exchanger supplies the English traveler with the native currency. Not only does He give them the spiritual gold and silver as it lies in Christ's treasury, but He converts it into such forms as their present needs and conflicts require. And this is the peculiarly comforting feature of the Holy Spirit's work. He does not scatter this treasure from heaven promiscuously, but brings it home to each of us in a form adapted to meet our every condition and capacity. He does not give strong meat to babes nor milk to adults, but to every spiritual



patient according to the nature of his complaint. Better than the patient himself does He understand the nature of his infirmity, to which as the divine Physician He adapts the remedy.

To the saints of Jerusalem and to those of the present time Christ must be a common possession. As the former had their material property in common—and this the latter should have also, in higher sense, through the works of mercy—so had they and so have we our *spiritual* treasure as a common possession, in the same Immanuel, who enriches all. But the saints being unable rightly to divide their treasure, the Holy Spirit divides it for them. He takes every member's portion as it lies in Christ, marked with His name, especially adapted for his particular need, and distributes it carefully and without mistakes, so that every saint receives his own. And while thus every one partakes of Christ and of His gifts, the one Christ with His treasure is common to all.

In the child we can see something of the Love cultivated by a mutual possession. Love between the parents may have grown cold, but so long as both can say of their little one, She is mine, and "mine" may become "ours," there is hope that the former love may return. In spite of their differences both possess the one child, who with all her love and sweetness belongs to both. And this applies in higher sense to the Christ. In the Church are many saints, and every one says: "Immanuel is *my* Bridegroom." And this individual testimony is turned at last into the general anthem of praise: "Immanuel is *our* Lord." Surely every saint finds in Christ something especially adapted to himself, yet all possess the one Lord and all His treasure. And this is the very power of love which in blessing watches over all. Love may grow cold and in an evil hour be turned into bitterness; but this is only temporarily; love must return. As in the wealth of the mutual possession husband and wife felt their union, so do the saints, considering their mutual possession of Immanuel, feel themselves bound together by Love's overwhelming impression.

"One baptism, one faith, one Lord, one Jesus for every heart," "one Immanuel whom all call precious," and herein alone lies Love's power to keep in unity, and, after temporary separation, to reunite all the saints of God.

And as the communion of goods in Jerusalem was symbol of the saints' mutual possession in Immanuel, so it was also the symbolic indication of their individual obligation, to have the gifts in common possession, by willingly and diligently using them for the highest advantage of the other members.

The Lord imparts "Gifts," "ministrations," and "operations" as St. Paul calls them (1 Cor. xii. 4, 5, 6); adding that all these gifts are of the same Spirit, and these ministrations of the same Lord, and these operations of the God who worketh all in all. And then he shows that it is the duty of the saints to use these gifts, ministrations, and operations not selfishly for one's own glory, but for the Body of the Lord, which is His Church.



And by this God's true children are best known; and they know themselves best in the gracious operation of which they are the subjects. For when the Holy Spirit imparts talents and gifts, the tempter whispers in the ear that it will be for their best advantage to use these gifts for each one's own glory, with their brightness to shine and to make himself a name among men, and in that way the blessing will crown the labor as a matter of course. And alas! many listen to these whisperings and thus defraud the household of faith of their individual gifts, not understanding the meaning of the beehive, which teaches that one can purify honey without eating of it.

And we should not judge too severely; this temptation is much harder than many are willing to acknowledge, especially for the ministers of the Word. The people greatly admire your sermon, praise you for it, talk about it, and carry you upon their shoulders. And by this miserable burning of incense one is intoxicated before he knows it. It is no more the question whether Jesus is satisfied, whether there is a spiritual gain for the glory of His name, but almost exclusively: Did the people like it? How did it affect them? And after a ten-years' ministry under the influence of such evil whisperings, the result can scarcely be anything but the talent buried out of sight, the sacred office desecrated, all spiritual operation suspended, and the minister of the Word little more than a minister to his own glory. And the same evil appears among the laymen. There is a lack of tenderness, of love, of consecration, frequently an abuse of spiritual gifts for the gratifying of the ambitious heart. Oh, we are so fearfully weak and sinful! Surely, every talent would be buried and every good gift spoiled were there no Holy Spirit, who with divine and superior power watches against this evil. For when in the Church the conscience awakes, and talents and gifts are once more emancipated from the yoke of selfish ambition, we see in it not our work, but the Holy Spirit's. Then we do our duty. Then the communion of saints revives. Then the saints are once more ready with gift and talent to serve the Lord and their brethren. But the power which wrought the miracle of Love was not ours, but of the Holy Spirit.



XXVIII.

The Suffering of Love.

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.”—*John xv. 13.*



Love suffers because the spirit of the world antagonizes the Spirit of God. The former is unholy, the latter is holy, not in the sense of mere opposition to the world's spirit, but because He is the absolute Author of all holiness, being God Himself. Hence the conflict.

There is no point along the whole line of the world's life which does not antagonize the Holy Spirit whenever He touches it. Whenever we are tempted by the world and inwardly animated by the Holy Spirit, there is a clash in the conscience: As soon as one member breathes a worldly spirit and another testifies against it in the Spirit of holiness, there is trouble and strife in the family. When in state, school, church, or society a worldly tendency appears and a current from the divine Spirit, there is trouble and strife in one or all. These two oppose each other and can not be reconciled. Compromise is impossible. Either one, the worldly spirit, at last closes our hearts against the Holy Spirit, and then we are lost; or after long conflict the Holy Spirit vanquishes the world's spirit; then the prince of this world finds nothing in us, and our names are written in the gate of the New Jerusalem.

And this causes *love to suffer*. When love increases in our hearts, owing to the Holy Spirit's increasing activity, it must come into conflict with all that pertains to the world's spirit and seeks to maintain itself in the soul.

This is evident more or less in little children. Indulgence is the easiest, but not the best, method of education. The indulgent mother does not love her children, but sacrifices them to her weakness. She finds it easier not to oppose their wrongdoing; thus avoiding tears, contradiction, and ill-will. When they call her “darling mother” it is sweet music to her ear; hence she never looks displeased, and rather than deny them anything she anticipates their desires. So she loves, not them, but herself. Her aim is not their good, or the doing of God's will concerning them and herself; but to save unpleasantness and to insure to *herself* the children's affection. But not so she who loves her children with the Love shed abroad by the Holy Ghost. Actuated by His Love, looking upon them in His light, she seeks their eternal good. To her each child is a patient in need of bitter medicine, which she may not withhold. Her aim is not the gratification of the child's wish, but his highest advantage in the way of life. And this causes conflict; for while the indulgent mother is ever pleased with her children and ever ready to hear men praise them, the other is often tossed between hope and fear, saying, “What will the end be?” Moreover, the time will come when her child, not understanding her love, will resist her, when he will think her lovely only when she indulges him, when he will reward her devotion with angry look and voice and wilful disobedience, when

