

will keep my word'. St Gregory says: 'the proof of love lies in the works. Never can the love of God suffer idleness; if it is true love, it does great things. If it refuses to make any effort, then it is not true love.' For the will especially when it is concerned with the end, moves the other powers to their arts: for a man cannot be at peace unless he is doing that which will bring him to his end, particularly if he wills it intensely. When therefore the will is wholly fixed on God, who is the end, it moves all the other powers to carry out the things which lead to him. The will is fixed on God by charity and therefore it is charity which makes us keep the commandments. 'For the charity of Christ presseth us.' (2 Cor. 5, 16.) 'The lamps thereof are fire and flames.' (Canticle of Canticles 8, 6.) Then by obedience man is fittingly prepared to see God. 'By thy commandments (which I have kept, that is to say) I have had understanding.' (Ps. 118, 102.) 'I have had understanding above the ancients.' (Ps. 118, 100.)



SERMON FOR LÆTARE SUNDAY

BY

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Tempus meum nondum advenit.

My time is not yet come.—John 7, 6.

IN the same chapter from which we have drawn the text of our sermon we also read that our Lord said to his brethren: 'Go you up to this festival day: but I go not up to this festival day', a little before he had said these words: 'My time is not yet come, but your time is always ready'.

Today, therefore, we have to consider what is this solemnity or festival day to which our Lord orders his disciples to betake themselves and for which the time is always ready.

There is the perpetual solemnity of eternal life and that life is rightly called *blessed* for it is the truest, the supreme and the final solemnity. There God will show himself, no longer through a veil (*in aenigmate*), but openly, face to face; but this solemnity is not for the present time, whilst we are clothed in our mortal flesh.

There is another solemnity which we are permitted to celebrate even in this life and that solemnity is like a prelude, a foretaste of the eternal solemnity. It consists in the interior enjoyment, the awareness of the divine presence in the soul. This is the time that is always ours; the time to seek God, to sigh after his presence,

to tend towards him, in all our actions, in all our life, in our love and in our will; the time when raising ourselves above self, above all creatures, above all that is not God, we want nothing but him alone, we love nothing but him alone with all our strength.

This time is always ready. All men without exception naturally desire this true happiness of eternal life. There is no one who does not want to be happy: nature demands it. But in order to possess happiness, mere desire is not sufficient. We must seek God, tend towards God and that solely for God's sake.

There are many who aspire with all their strength after this prelude of eternal life and they complain bitterly that it is not granted to them.

If in their prayers or other exercises they do not feel any enjoyment, if they do not taste God's presence, they are discontented, and in disgust they cease to pray, or pray reluctantly; they say they do not feel God and so prayer and devotional practices weary them. This should not be and it is no excuse for being less attentive to exercises of piety or good works. For even though we are not feeling God he does not cease to be close at hand. Was it not in this way that he went up, after the disciples to the festival, but, as we might say, hiding himself, without showing himself?

Then again, there where God is, there also in reality is a festival. And he can never refuse himself, nor remain absent, from the moment that the soul believes in him, seeks him solely, whether he shows himself openly or keeps himself hidden. It matters not the manner of his abiding, as long as he is present there.

And so when we seek God purely, having no other intention but himself in all our actions, when we frequently enter into ourselves to go beyond self, that is the time of which our Lord said 'Your time is always ready'. It is always lawful for us to go up, but as to wishing that God would show himself or would shower upon us his consolations, that time is not always ready. That is his own time and we must let him have the free disposal of it. However that may be, if we seek him solely, if he is the object towards which all our intentions are directed, he is undoubtedly present even though sometimes in a hidden way; in this case we should not go about our devotions or good works with any the less eagerness or joy. If we act in this way we shall surely find him some day. For he is there. He only varies the manifestations of his presence.

It is to arrive at this result and to attain this end that all the rules, works and practices of our Holy Order were instituted, as well as those of all other Congregations. Our holy Constitutions, ordinations of whatever kind, have no other end in claiming our

observance but to teach us to tend towards God alone, solely, so that he can celebrate his espousals within us: they teach us to keep our inmost heart free from all that could be an obstacle to his holy working, to keep it empty of all else so as to give place to God alone. The more religious exercises, rules, observances of any sort conduce to this end, the more all this is praiseworthy, holy and useful. If, on the contrary, our laws do not correspond to this objective, if we are content to obey them for their own sake, then we are like nothing more or less than the Jews of the Synagogue. This people, or, if you like, the law of the Old Testament, had a crowd of statutes and rites, a great number of ceremonies, a quantity of works to be fulfilled, and no end of penal prescriptions; yet nothing of all that was able to bring within reach the joys of the heavenly country. All that the Law prescribed was but a prelude, a preparation for the New Testament. This new Law would open for us the door of heaven which had remained closed for so many thousands of years.

Of a truth, this is how we should look upon all exterior exercises: they are but a way, a preparation for the solemnity celebrated in the interior of the soul. Vainly should we seek in themselves this festival. The Old Testament must be adapted to the New and fulfilled in it: also exterior observances must tend towards this inmost centre and to true purity of heart; without that they are of no use or of very little avail.

It is certain, my dear children, that we have all vowed to God that we would tend towards him with all our will and with all our love; we promised solemnly that we would serve him until death when we left the world to take up the monastic life. All bishops and priests put together could not dispense us from this vow, and, if we are to believe the holy doctors, this vow is much more binding than any oath of any kind administered in law¹. Whence it follows, obviously, that we become guilty of a much graver crime of perjury if we turn voluntarily and deliberately our heart and intention that we have once consecrated to God, always towards creatures, than if we broke an oath before a court of justice.

It was for this motive that our Order was founded, it is also the object of all religious constitutions. Our Blessed Father St Dominic was on his deathbed when the Friars came to beg him to expound to them the object, essence and real basis of the Order he had founded; they asked him at the same time to explain to them what aim he had in framing the rules. (The Friars knew all the

¹ The canon law dealing with dispensation from vows has changed since the fourteenth century when this was written.—Ed.

incidental things but they wanted to know what was the substance. Is it not in this very external sense that we ourselves know our rules and laws?) It was then that the Father, intending to make manifest the main point and essence of his Order, told them that it consisted in a sincere love of God: in deep humility; and in poverty, not only exterior poverty but poverty of spirit and of heart. This then is the basis of our holy religion; to love God with all our hearts and to love nothing outside of him that might be an obstacle to that love; to love also our brethren in religion as ourselves, to show them great affection, while always keeping our souls humble and submissive before God.

The essence of our Order again is the giving up of all property, the ownership of ourselves, of our selfwill, the ownership of any creature; it means being stripped of, detached from all created goods, of anything that can in any way keep God at a distance and put an obstacle between him and ourselves. Only in that way can Almighty God freely and fully take possession of our inmost hearts, of this sublime centre where his image is imprinted and where he finds a dwelling so dear to him, according to this word of Scripture: 'My delights were to be with the children of men'. (Prov. 8, 31.)

That, my dear children, is most certainly the aim, the end and the purpose of our Order. With this same object were founded all other Orders, all religious Congregations, all monasteries, all refuges, all the statutes, rites and ceremonies, all the customs for saintly living, whatever name these foundations may hold, that are recognised and approved by the Church.

All the Constitutions of our Order are established to bring about this end. The nearer they get to it, the more useful they are and the more we should adhere to them with love and follow them with care. It is for this reason and with this object and this intention that we vow ourselves to God more and more and desire to be united to him ever more closely. If we do not love our Order, if we do not keep its rules, we are perjurers, we are violating the fealty given to God. Quite otherwise will it be if, for God's sake, we remain faithful to our Order, if we keep to its basis and its substance as our Blessed Patriarch St Dominic kept to it himself. All other Saints and venerable Founders of Orders alike observed the rules that they established. St Benedict, St Augustine, St Bernard, St Francis saw above all the essence of religious and regular life, and they subordinated to this essence, in view of which everything had been undertaken, all the exterior rites, constitutions and ceremonies.

I conjure you, follow this essential order, if I may call it so.

of this essence of our Order. In other words, seek God from your heart of hearts, with all your love, all your intentions, and apply yourself to everything else whatever it may be, in so far as you find it a means, a real help, to raise yourself up to God.

If you act thus, undoubtedly Almighty God will celebrate in your souls a great and perfect festival. You know that we are obliged to observe a great number of Constitutions and ordinations passed on to us by our Fathers. Whether we like it or not, we are obliged to go to Choir, to read or to chant. Should we not do all this with a glad and festive heart instead of bringing to it a soul that is arid and dried up, heavy as lead, so as not to be excluded from the eternal festival? Doubtless whoever has no mortal sin on his conscience and whose will energetically rejects all that might offend God, keeps the Catholic faith and is consequently able to attain blessedness and be saved; all the same if he desires to experience within himself this holy joy, this festivity in which God makes his sweet presence felt and tasted, he must offer to God a heart that is pure, free and detached from all else. Then alone will he be able to feel God by the joy that this will bring to him, and that is true devotion; to have no other joy, no other pleasure, no other love but in God alone.

Finally, so to adhere to God alone by intention and love, we have received this inestimable favour of being called, guided, attached to the Order of St Dominic, and so it is our duty to adopt its customs. We who were by nature children of wrath, in peril of eternal damnation because of our sins and transgressions, according to that saying of St Augustine's 'Man is born of vile, sordid and corrupt matter, is a tainted soul doomed to die'. See how divine Goodness has drawn us from this corrupt world to make us enter into the holy life of penance. This penitential life we do not owe to our own merits, but it has been given us solely in pure love, by the quite gratuitous mercy of our Lord and God.

But, someone will ask me, what is the essence and the truth of this penitent life: It is nothing else but a real hatred of all things outside of God, a complete and perfect turning to this most pure and real good which is God. The more we set ourselves to that carefully and forcefully, the more we are in the life of penance. Consequently we should unceasingly, from the depths of our being, render most ardent thanksgiving to our Creator. If we are religious, if we have embraced the holy life, we owe it to him and from this vocation, which he has deigned to grant to us, should spring up in our hearts a feeling of great confidence. Have we not every reason to hope that we shall reign eternally with him since

he has already drawn us out of this troubled and false world to unite us to himself, since already, with special tenderness he has made of our souls his privileged friends, his spouses, in admitting them to a most exceptional and intimate familiarity? What more evident sign could we have of his presence in us and his choice of us? Most of us are still in the flower of our youth. That age is ordinarily one of great rebellion, one that will not bear the yoke, one finally that gives itself with all its affections to the world. Yet what do we see? Young people submitting to the will of another, ordering their lives according to rule, following counsels given them, young people who are willing to be tamed and guided, young people, lastly, who have broken away from all creatures to follow their God. Of course, they have not yet much experience of the things of God, but they wait patiently, they wait upon God. How could they do these things were God not present in the depths of their souls secretly and in hiding.

So now, my beloved children, let us all set our hearts upon using all our energies, all our efforts to experience within ourselves this delightful festival, in which God will show himself openly in our inmost souls. As often as we like we can enter into ourselves and there in the midst of the prayers, observances and all the duties imposed upon us by the rule, we shall taste within us a real feast, a true joy in the divine presence.

They will certainly enjoy this feast who are not attached to anything, to any property of their own, except for God's sake. Then is it God himself who becomes the property of such men as they have become themselves the property of God. They have given themselves up for good and God will never forsake them; he will never deprive them of his presence. Is not that the happiest, gladdest and, dare I say, the most festive of all modes of life? We in God, God in us! And that even in this world whilst awaiting the inexpressible happiness of eternity!

May the mercy of God our Saviour grant to all of us this blessedness. Amen.