

pain to me: I felt I must die under it, so intolerable was the grief. And then came more words that only added to my grief . . . *My service of you*, he said, *was no make-belief*; and then: *I felt for you, but not from afar*. At this my mortal pain and grief but grew the greater . . . and whilst I pondered deeply on the words, *I felt for you but not from afar*, he said, *I am more intimately in your soul than is your soul to itself.*'



POINT OF VIEW

THE SAINTS OR GOD

WHEN at the Last Supper our Lord proclaimed to the first Christian saints, his disciples—and to all mankind, potential saints—‘I am the vine; you the branches’, (John 15, 5), he made clear simply and briefly what is our actual source and quality of being, in that the quality of the vine-root—the source—is also the quality of the branch that comes forth from it, the same life sap, differing in degree but of similar essence; St John puts it this way: ‘In this we know that we abide in him and he in us: because he hath given us of his spirit’. (1 John 4, 13).

Christ also told us what is our basic function and purpose when he said, ‘He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit’; thus, since the fruit is qualified by the nature of its source—in this case the Holy Spirit—it is apparent that we, the branches, are expected to bear much spiritual fruit, as represented by what we express, manifest, and give out in our lives as nourishment for such as partake of it, or are affected by it. St Ambrose describes it neatly in his *Book on Holy Joseph* when—speaking of those lavishly fruit-bearing branches, the saints—he says: ‘The lives of the saints are a model for the lives of the rest of men . . . following in their footsteps we may tread, as it were, that path of innocence which is opened to us by their virtue’.

However, the words of our Lord already quoted indicate that our ability to fulfil our ordained function of spiritual fruit bearing is conditional, for he also said 'He that *abideth* in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit', thereby emphasising the need for such as aspire to spiritual fulfilment—sanctity—to maintain steady uninterrupted contact with him, our divine Source, the need for us to abide consciously in him and thus render ourselves living expressions of spiritual principle . . . or at least strive to do so, for humanity is still in the shadow of original sin, but it is only shadow since our Lord redeemed us from its domination and gave us freewill and capacity to cast off its illusory shackles and become spiritually fruit-bearing branches of the Vine to become saints.

Not only the Apostles but all those other souls whom we reverence as saints were responsive to this teaching of our Lord. How many inspiring examples of their spiritual fruit-bearing we have received from his—and our—blessed Mother and the lesser saints, our dedicated brothers and sisters in the Mystical Body of Christ! These holy agents of God are ever offering us guidance and example whereby even the least of us who are receptive to it may be brought to realise our own potential sanctity and inspired to strive for its fulfilment, fulfilment of our sublime destiny as spiritual beings made in the image and likeness of God, living—and *giving*—by spirit while yet having temporary being in a state and world of matter, though not of it; free souls no longer hypnotised nor enslaved by 'the wisdom of the flesh which is death' (Romans 8, 6).

It is little wonder that we reverence these saintly guides; little wonder that we have confidence in their intercessory power when bringing before Omnipotent Love such of our petitions as have for their objective that which is for our highest good, or the good of another; and it is not surprising that we are profoundly affected by the fact that God sometimes uses them as channels of inspiring revelation to mankind. But it is for their spiritually-quickenning example and fellowship that we owe the most, for its inspiring urge to walk with them as brothers on that 'path of innocence which is opened to us by their virtue'; for they know—and want

us to know—that it is the one path to sanctity, God's ultimate goal for all his souls; they appreciate our devotion, our confidence in them, but they would not have our excessive worship, they would shrink from our adoration for, as all true Christians, that would mean putting the creature on a level with—or even before—the Creator, and would be a source of distress to these saintly friends and helpers.

However, it would be futile to deny that in some parts of the world this error is practised by large numbers of the less thoughtful among the faithful who direct their devotion—and their confidence—to the saints *rather* than to God in any of his Triune aspects, and while prayer for intercession is abundantly addressed to all the good saints when addressed to the greatest saint of them all, our blessed Mother, it is sometimes qualified by expressions that might be taken as belief in her divinity.

It would be hard to conjecture whether this condition may have developed from a misunderstanding of the true nature of intercession as being the sole means of getting petition through to God or from the unfortunate and not uncommon misconception of him who is Omnipotent Love as some sort of unapproachable, vague and stern Principal ever ready to mete out punishment. A further possible reason may lie in the indulgence, by many of the less informed among the faithful, in the dramatic and sentimental which may more easily be applied to the saints than to their austere concept of Deity and which tends to render them ready victims to the error of superstition, especially as inspired by the many pseudo-revelations of our times.

That the condition does exist in some parts of the globe is an obvious fact, nor does it always predominate among the illiterate, though it may do so among such as pay insufficient attention to doctrine and are liturgically ignorant. Among 'cradle' Catholics these latter are rather numerous, while in the average convert there is usually an understanding and practice of doctrine together with application of the liturgy.

Such difference between the understanding and practice of the average convert and that of the lifelong Catholic may well be due to the fact that the convert who embraces the Faith usually does so when reasonably mature and mentally

developed, and he does so from conviction born of careful study and absorbed competent instruction, while on the other hand the lifelong Catholic receives the gift without much effort on his own part, accepting it on authority and by faith while yet too immature to think it out to the point of intellectual conviction as well as that of faith; thus easily come by he may be inclined to practise his religion somewhat automatically and to regard it as a matter of course, thereby failing to develop a conscious realisation of the basic Truth it not only embodies but is. This somewhat matter-of-course attitude in regard to the Faith seems to apply in intensified form to Holy Scripture, as is evidenced by a noticeable reluctance to study it, though enjoined by the Church to do so.

The not-inconsiderable number of pseudo-revelations, including some of possibly Satanic origin, already referred to, may well constitute one of the factors most obstructive to spiritual apprehension, apprehension which knows that only God is divine, and that to him alone is due man's laudic homage. Printed propaganda relative to unauthentic revelation and apparitions, rejected by ecclesiastical authority, is being widely circulated in some countries by private and superstitious individuals. I have before me a paper dealing with the Pfaffenhofen 'apparition' which provides a good example of this; our gentle Mother is herein presented as claiming to be the soul's only approach to God, as well as claiming to be both prophet and the greatest of all light-bearers.

There could be no better way to close this article than by quoting some words of wisdom which the great St Paul wrote to Timothy, words which have particular application to its subject matter and which run thus: 'There shall come a time when they will not endure sound doctrine; but according to their own desires they will heap to themselves teachers having itching ears . . . and will indeed turn away their hearing from the truth, but will be turned unto fables.'

(2 Timothy 4, 3, 4.)

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