

THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY AND EVIL

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The mystery of iniquity is already at work. — 2 Thess., 2,7.

We enter this world with a cry, and we leave it with a sigh. Human ills have plagued the world since the primeval fall of our first parents. Sorrow and suffering seem to be the lot of all: no one is exempt. Much has been said and written about the mystery of evil, but no one has ever solved its mystery; and no remedy has ever been devised whereby to evade these apparent evils. We, however, do find much consolation in sorrow and suffering, in sickness and in death, when these are properly evaluated in the light of our Christian faith.

There are two schools of thought on the method of solving the social problems that forever plague us. Our Christian viewpoint is so completely at variance with that of the unbeliever that the two can never become reconciled. The Christian, for example, draws for himself a vast circle which represents God. Within this immense orbit we behold numerous smaller orbits such as the sun, the moon, the earth and the constellations, all moving in orderly fashion within that one vast orbit which governs them.

Now, confining ourselves to the one orbit we call earth, we discover three forms of life; namely, the mineral, the vegetable and the animal life. We know them as the mineral, the vegetable and the animal kingdoms. Each confines its respective activities within its specified sphere, and all seem to be governed by a set form of rules we call the natural law. All three, like those in all the other orbits, move about harmoniously, without friction or confusion, indicating that a mastermind governs and directs them. This motivating or directing force we call God.

There is, however, one startling exception to this world-harmony. It is man, the crown of God's creation, who finds himself in constant difficulties, in pain and suffering, always disturbed in his quest for peace and happiness. For the solution of his problems, the Christian looks to God, while the unbeliever seeks it in man himself. This divergence of opinion makes matters so complicated and so confusing.

Here is how the unbeliever approaches the problems of life. Instead of placing himself within the immense circle we call God, and towards Whom all things should gravitate, the unbeliever takes the orbit of the world and draws a heavy circle around himself. He makes man the centre of all traction, and claims for himself the right and power to attain happiness without the aid of superior forces. He rejects any and every law coming from a Supreme Being. He declares man a law unto himself. Instead of a natural or divine law, he declares that man is governed by the law of custom or convenience called "mores". Unlike our concept of Christian morals of right and wrong, this school rejects all recognised standards of moral conduct, standards of what ought and what ought not to be done. In the words of Saint Paul: "They have changed the glory of the incorruptible God for an image made like to corruptible man" (Rom., 1, 23). The Christian looks upon all creation as a means to glorify God, with man ultimately finding his supreme happiness in union with God in heaven. But the unbeliever contends that man must seek his supreme happiness here on earth, with nothing to look forward to when life terminates. In the latter case the mystery of suffering remains still unsolved, and its enigma grows still more perplexing.

From ignoring God, it naturally follows that the unbeliever discards the voice of conscience as a sanction for right social living. And with the laws of God and the voice of conscience discarded, there remains only the strong arm of the policeman to enforce man's own laws of custom or convenience. Coercion, then, becomes the only remaining means of social control or government. This leads us back to the law of the jungle, a rule by force, violence and deception. We need only recall the brutal and bestial tortures resorted to by inhuman dictators under Communism, Nazism and Fascism in recent years. In the words of Pope Pius XI: "For the first time in history we are witnessing a struggle, cold-blooded in purpose and mapped out to the last detail, between man and `all that is called God.' It is a propaganda so truly diabolical that the world has perhaps never witnessed its like before." It is an open declaration of war by the Mystical Body of Satan against the Mystical Body of Christ.

Heretofore enemies of Christianity attacked usually one or another of God's teachings. But now the defiance is hurled at God Himself. We, as Christians, still retain our belief in God's laws and revelations to direct us; our conscience to guide and admonish us; and reason to govern us. Thus fortified, we can still draw consolation from our sufferings, knowing that they are but means in the divine plan to detach us from things of earth and thus become more attached to the things that are eternal. But that great multitude which lacks all these consolations is truly engulfed in a world of despair. We may still cling to the hope of our reward in Heaven, but those deprived of all Christian principles and ideals find no consolation in a dark and dreary world steeped in the mystery of iniquity.

And a mystery of iniquity it is, indeed! In the course of our series of discourses we shall demonstrate that this mystery of iniquity is a mystery, both in the sense that it is something secret and hidden, and in the sense that it is beyond human comprehension. Holy Writ speaks of a "kingdom", and calls Satan "the prince of this world", whose opposition is directed toward the Kingdom of God. He operates through force and deception. He is aided in his machinations by an organized society called the "world" or "the kingdom of this world". In our combat against these sinister forces we have many powerful spiritual weapons in prayer and the Sacraments, a truth which we shall also point out in subsequent discourses. Therefore, from the very beginning, in all our trials and sufferings let us constantly keep this in mind: in the words of Saint Paul, "the mystery of iniquity is already at work". It is a battle growing more intense and vicious as time wears on between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan over the most precious of all God's creation; namely, man and the souls of men.

*For, since that from his glory in the skies,
Th'apostate angel fell
Burning with envy ever more he tries
To draw our souls in hell.*

"Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the Principalities and the Powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness on high"

— Eph., 6, 12.

The existence of evil has ever been a perplexing subject for human discussion. The history of the human race is one of pain, sorrow and trials in this vale of mists and shadows. In the words of the poet:

*Nothing begins and nothing ends,
That is not paid with moan;
For we are born in other's pain,
And perish in our own.*

From the cradle to the grave, man finds himself thwarted in many ways. He must submit to physical weakness, dissolution and decay. He often endures mental agony, anxiety and remorse. He feels the full development of his latent powers forever hampered by these and similar afflictions.

Again, man experiences many internal conflicts. His human nature stands midway between the purely spiritual and the wholly material order. He is allied to the Angels because of his spiritual soul, and akin to the irrational creatures because of his material body over which reason strives to exercise dominion. He observes a lack of harmony between nature and conscience. His human nature seems constantly prone to the things which his conscience disapproves. The very elements, the powers of the universe, seem to be at war with one another. He observes the convulsions on land and sea through earthquakes, hurricanes and cyclones. The history of nations and individuals is one of unceasing wars and conflicts. Confronted with such an irrefutable array of facts, man has forever sought to fathom the basic causes for all these evils so prevalent on this earth.

The unbeliever, forever trying to explain all things through natural causes, points to the existence of evil as another

proof for his denial of a personal God. For such, evil is merely another aspect of the continuous change and development of the universe, always striving towards higher perfection and the elimination of moral evil. In the words of Nietzsche, their prophet, we find it stated that evil is purely relative, moral evil is but transitory, and man in his present state is an animal not yet properly adapted to his environments.

As Christians, we approach the problem of evil from a different angle. We trace the history of the human race back through the centuries to its very cradle. From the revealed Word we learn that man, endowed with understanding and free will, was originally the crown of God's creation; that he was placed in the Garden of Paradise with the promise from His Maker that if he remained faithful he would enjoy a life of unceasing happiness here on earth, and eternal bliss in the world beyond. In the words of Saint Augustine: "Man lived in Paradise as he would, so long as he would have what God had ordered. He lived enjoying the Good whereby he was good; he lived without any want, having it in his power so to live always. There was the tree of life to prevent the wasting away of old age. Nothing of corruption in his body or from his body, caused any annoyance to any of his senses. There was no fear of disease within him nor of any blow from without. Perfect soundness of his flesh; entire tranquillity in his soul. There was no breath of sadness nor any folly of mirth, but true joy perpetuated from God. 'Charity from a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned' (I Tim. 1, 5) set him on fire with love of God. His mind and body kept watch in harmony together. The keeping of the commandments cost him no trouble."

The first man, then, possessed a body completely subject to his soul. His senses obeyed the behests of reason, and his reason and free will were in perfect accord with the laws of God. Adam was wholly immune from the concupiscence of the flesh; and thus, without labor or effort, he was perfectly obedient to his Creator. And his joy and happiness consisted in doing homage to God, in admiring His wisdom and goodness as displayed by the splendours of the garden of delights.

But meanwhile a rebellion had gone on within the very gates of heaven. Lucifer, the "Lightbearer", with his followers had rebelled and were cast out of heaven. He came to establish the Kingdom of Satan on earth. From his little catechism, every child knows the story of the fall of Adam and Eve. By the unbeliever, the story of the forbidden fruit is met with ridicule. But the object, like the fruit of the tree, might be trivial; it was the test of loyalty that mattered. Is there anything more sacred in the eyes of a soldier than a soldier's loyalty to the flag of his country? In itself it is but a few yards of coloured cloth, intrinsically worth a trifling sum of money; yet, to the soldier it represents the honour of his country, the safety of his home and hearth. Therefore, a soldier will sacrifice his very life rather than see his country's flag fall into the hands of the enemy. And he is honoured as a hero, a martyr for home and country. For Adam the tree and the fruit were a test, a symbol of his loyalty and obedience to his God. At that fateful moment, as representative of the human race, Adam lost all the prerogatives that had been promised to him and his posterity. "By one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death, and so death passed upon all men in whom all have sinned" (Rom. 5, 12). All other physical evils are comprised in this supreme evil, death. For they all lead up to it and are all, in their several ways, contributory causes of death.

Here, in brief, we have the origin of the Kingdom of Satan versus the Kingdom of God here upon earth. With the primeval fall, a vital change came over our first parents, and subsequently over their progeny, affecting alike their soul and their body. "As a tree struck by the fiery blast of the storm stands shivered, shattered and charred, a memorial of the fury of the elements, so was the first man, the first sinner stricken, and stripped of the fair vesture of grace that had hitherto drawn on him the complacency of God Himself." In the words of Milton, the poet,

*Of man's first disobedience and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world and all our woes,
With loss of Eden . . .*

It is the most calamitous and far-reaching catastrophe that has ever befallen the human race. It has caused convulsions that have continued down through the centuries, and will continue until the end of time. Henceforth the powers of evil are forever arrayed against the powers of good. And every personal sin of ours adds further fuel to the struggle.

"Consider him who endureth such opposition, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. Therefore brace up the hands that hang down, and the tottering knees" —Heb. 12; 3, 12.

Since the fall of our first parents a pall of sorrow and gloom has descended upon the human race. The whole world was struck with a blight and seared when man, the crown of creation, endowed with understanding and free will, turned from the Creator in favour of His creatures. The gravity of this original sin can be measured only by its effects. To be born, to suffer the first transgression of man's will against God, and to die has been the common lot of man ever since. The revolt of man's body against the spirit followed. Let us stress this fact and always remember it whenever we dwell on sin and suffering. It is the condition of the world as we enter it. As a member of the human race we inherit it. Our personal sins later in life may intensify our personal sufferings, but the initial or primary cause of our suffering is not of our making.

Many people believe that our personal sins are the sole cause of all our sufferings; that through our own transgressions we have incurred God's disfavour and are being punished. This is not wholly correct; only a secondary or added reason for suffering. Take, for example, our Divine Saviour who came to redeem us. He suffered as no other man has ever suffered. His sinless body was subject to hunger, cold, thirst; He suffered in body and in mind; from His friends and from His persecutors alike; from Gethsemani to Golgotha His sufferings were so great that, in the words of the prophet, He could cry out: "Whose sorrows can be compared to My sorrow?" He suffered to the very last drop of blood for us. Truly, then, do we speak of Him as the Man of Sorrows.

A close second to Jesus is His Blessed Mother Mary. She was the Immaculate Queen and Mother. Yes, the moment she unfalteringly answered the Angel, "Be it done unto me according to thy word," she made a pact with the mystery of suffering. She was still to be told the significance of the name of her Son, Jesus; but she already knew through the prophet Isaias what the word "Saviour" implied. And as the years wore on, she was to learn still more piercingly the meaning of her role as Mother of a God Crucified. "Eve was a sinful motherless - mother of men; Mary was the sinless Virgin-Mother among the members of a sinful race. Like her Divine Son, the Man of Sorrows, the Queen of Martyrs, the Woman wrapped in silence — the silence of a sorrowing heart."

"Whom the Lord loveth, he chastiseth" (Prov. 3, 12). We, His servants, can be no greater than the Master. Therefore, Jesus and Mary show us the way to suffer, the meaning of suffering, and the purpose of suffering. The highest and the lowest of God's creatures, the richest and the poorest must accept suffering as a portion of their atonement for a fallen race. Every faculty of man entered into the first transgression. First came the sense of hearing and seeing that appealed to the pride of intellect as the tempter made his approach; then followed the sense of touch, of taste and smell to influence the will in the transgression. All these faculties, all these senses, become purified through suffering.

The story of Job demonstrates this. Even Satan questioned Job's goodness and steadfastness if he would be subjected to the trials and tribulations that the less fortunate were heir to. Therefore, God permitted Job to be tried in the crucible. First he lost his wealth. Then followed one catastrophe after another in close succession. He lost his oxen and his sheep; then his servants, his sons and daughters; then followed an attack of ulcers from head to foot, making it impossible to reside with others in the same house; his wife became very upset, and his friends repudiated him as one cursed by God. Did Job murmur? Did he lose faith in his God? No, indeed, but he interpreted all his afflictions correctly. Internal peace of soul meant more to him than all his possessions. His humble reply was: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, naked will I return thither. The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Again: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth, and I shall be clothed again in my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God. This, my hope, is laid up in my bosom."

Therefore, as with holy Job, many people may judge rashly when they attribute all sufferings and trials as due to personal sins. We find a striking example in the blind man who was brought to Jesus. Jesus was asked by spectators what personal sins, or what sins of his parents, were the cause of his affliction. Immediately Jesus answered: "Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents, but the works of God were to be made manifest in him" (John 9, 3). In other words, since the fall of man the whole world has become a vale of tears. Now God, in His divine providence, is utilizing all the sufferings

of an estranged and blighted world for His own ultimate purpose and the salvation of a redeemed race. We call it the mystery of evil, and when afflictions confront us we can do no better than exclaim: "*O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments and how unsearchable His ways!*" (Rom. 11, 33-34; Wisdom, 9, 13; Is., 11, 13; I Cor., 2, 16).

But in spite of this vale of tears, there still remains one great consolation that surpasses all suffering and sorrow. It is this: We are not an abandoned people; on God's own authoritative word, we still have a chance to regain our lost glory. It is true that through the primeval fall man was deprived of all supernatural and preternatural prerogatives which were free gifts from the beginning of creation. But in spite of man's disobedience and infidelity, God did not take from man his greatest prerogatives; namely, his understanding and free will, Free will still sets a royal crown upon the head of every rational being, even after the fall. "God made man from the beginning, and left him in the hand of his own counsel" (Ecclus. 15, 14). Freedom is a sequel to the spirituality of the soul. By it, and by it alone, we are still able to perform meritorious acts, so that there remains a link, like that between cause and effect, between the good we accomplish and the incomprehensible reward now promised to us by the Redeemer. But we must henceforth regain this reward through pain and suffering. This is the divine plan for all mankind since the fall. In the exercise of our weakened, yet free will, God has added His commandments and precepts to guide us, and His graces and Sacraments to strengthen us so that our free choice may be made in favour of the good. Therefore, in the words of Holy Writ: "*Before man is life and death, good and evil, that which he shall choose shall be given him, for the wisdom of God is great*" (Ecclus., 15, 18-19).

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"We are receiving what our deeds deserved"—Luke, 23, 41.

No matter from what angle we study the condition of man, we come to the inevitable conclusion that ages ago he engaged in a terrific battle and lost. History testifies that man carries about with him the scars of that primeval conflict. He is like a bird with a broken wing preventing him from soaring as in days of yore. He sees the better things of life before him, but frequently follows the baser instincts. Remorse follows and his conscience begins to prick. Then, in the words of the repentant thief on the cross, we admit: "We are receiving what our deeds deserved"; or, putting it in another way: "we indeed suffer for our sins." We conclude therefore, that under prevailing conditions, suffering is not only wholesome, but a real necessity.

There is, however, another school of thought that reasons otherwise. The modern world loathes the very thought of suffering. In our so-called enlightened age man seeks comfort, ease, luxury and wealth without suffering. Every new invention promises to make life more pleasant and more comfortable by alleviating pain and drudgery. In short, man aims to rectify and regain through his natural powers what primeval man has lost through his fall from grace with his Maker. He aims to accomplish this in absolute defiance of a God whom he refuses to recognise. He violates and defies God's commandments and refuses to admit that it is a sin to do so. Here man defiantly poses his own will against God's will.

Pride is the mother of all evil, says Holy Writ. Intellectual pride is one of the prevailing sins of our day; that pride of intellect which caused such havoc in Paradise, and even in the very outer-courts of heaven! This mad rush of people to worship at the shrine of the intellect and to fortify self with degrees of learning is much akin to the destructive race for armaments, witnessed not long ago among the nations of the earth, which ended with the most destructive war in all human history. No, neither physical prowess nor arid intellectualism will ever save us or bring lasting happiness back into the heart of a bleeding world; neither will affluence nor prosperity which only confirms rebellious man in his defiance. But adversity, affliction and suffering have a sobering effect. They give a sinful man moments for more serious thought. He then finds himself facing the realities of life. And if he is courageous enough, he may learn a wholesome lesson from the repentant thief. He may recall the story of the good thief who, instead of being allowed to roam at large and multiply his sins, was apprehended and condemned to death, the epitome of all suffering. But the good thief's suffering proved the most precious of all blessings. His eyes met the eyes of the dying Saviour, and the Master melts the icicles about his heart. He admits his guilt to the reprobate on the left, saying: "We are receiving what our deeds deserved."

And for such as are surfeited with intellectual pride, I would suggest for their consideration the story of the sufferings

that converted the persecuting Paul into the fiery Apostle Paul. He had participated in the martyrdom of the disciple Stephen in Jerusalem, but when he was proudly on his way to persecute the Christians in Damascus, God struck him from his steed. Blinded, he heard a voice saying: "Saul, Saul. why dost thou persecute Me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goad" (Acts, 9, 4-5). Every proud and sinful man should remember his reply: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me do?" and then wait for the Lord to speak. God hates sin, but He loves even the sinner with an everlasting love. And if suffering leads a repentant sinner to cry out with King David, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, have mercy on me," then the Lord will speak, saying: "This man is a chosen vessel to Me, to carry My name among nations . . . For I will show him how much he must suffer for My name" (Acts 9, 16).

More or less, we are all sinners in the sight of God. This fact should prompt us to look upon sufferings as a means to atone for our own personal transgressions. If we do, we will then master the mystery of pain and suffering in our own lives. Like Saint Paul, we will then use these salutary means to demonstrate our love for the Man of Sorrows, and glory in Christ and Him Crucified. We will then embrace suffering, conscious of its necessity and its nobility; it will then become our greatest boon in this vale of tears, and a definite guarantee of an eternal glory that is to come.

Therefore, press on, and reach the goal, And gain the prize, and wear the crown; Faint not, for to the steadfast soul

"Come wealth, and honour, and renown.

To thine own self be true, and keep

Thy mind from sloth, thy heart from soil.

Press on, and thou shalt surely reap

A heavenly harvest for thy toil."

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to Myself" —John 12, 32.

We must know and understand the meaning of suffering in order to understand the Gospel of Christ. We must live the way of suffering to know the heart of Christ. And once inflamed by the fire of that furnace of divine love, we will understand the purpose and the goal of personal suffering in our own lives. In this light must we interpret the words of the Saviour: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to Myself."

Through the Cross of Christ all suffering has become spiritualised and, with our proper disposition, supernaturalised, it becomes the vehicle in the designs of God through which we regain our lost glory. That is why Christians speak rather of crosses than of suffering. This is especially true of the Saints of God. They understand the affinity between pain and pearls. They look upon suffering as a test of their love for God. The manner in which they bear these trials and tribulations through life serves as a criterion by which they determine to what degree their will conforms to the holy will of God. And we should apply the same criterion to our own wills, to our own lives, under the stress of trials and suffering.

But the modern world thinks and acts otherwise. The world seeks wreaths of roses, not of thorns. Yes, the world loves victory, but to fight for it, suffer for it and die for it, is repulsive to the sensibilities of many. We are living in a world of luxury and ease, which pampers the whims of the body, but completely neglects the soul that vivifies that body. The time and money spent for cosmetics and beauty treatments indicate this modern trend. The extreme height of folly is reached when we hear of some noted actress regularly indulging in semi-barbaric baths of milk and cream. What do we spend per person annually for the spread of the Faith and what do we spend per person annually for luxuries such as cosmetics, tobacco, movies and alcoholic beverages?

Where then, lies the remedy? The remedy lies in our will. Will-power supersedes physical strength and intellectual supremacy. And will-power, be it noted, comes from opposition, from sorrow, from suffering. This is true even in the natural order of things. Here I am reminded of the story of a boy, who had ambitions to become a great track-man. His brother was already known as a fast racer. One night, when they were both sleeping peacefully, a fire suddenly broke out. The older boy died as a result of the fire, and the younger lad's feet were horribly burnt and mangled. But he never gave up his dream of becoming a champion runner. Operation after operation was performed. And now, for a number of years,

he has been known as the fastest human beings on legs.

In the literary field we have similar examples of what will-power can do and accomplish over seemingly unsurmountable obstacles. Take, for example, the beautiful and inspiring writing of Saint Paul while lying in prison; of Saint John the Apostle, while in exile on the desolate island of Patmos; of Dante who, while in exile, gave us the immortal Divina Comedia: of Robert Louis Stevenson who, though broken in health, yet survived to give us his inspiring description of Peter Damian, the leper martyr, as well as many other works. These and many others have taught us this: "He who loses wealth loses much; he who loses a friend loses more; but he who loses courage loses all; and courage grows best among the thorns and briars of adversity."

Here lies the secret of the Saints: they apply the same rule to spiritual matters. Their infallible rule is, as ours should be, that the human will be continuously in accord with the divine. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all things to Myself." But that means crosses and sufferings nobly borne. Too many desire heaven, but do not see the necessity of relinquishing the earth. They want heaven without the Cross, even though the Apostle Paul reminds us that "all those who would live piously in the Lord must suffer." And elsewhere (Ecclesiasticus) we read: "Great labour is created for all men, and a heavy yoke is upon the children of Adam, from the day of their birth until the day of their burial into the mother of all". That is why so many Saints, like the lovely Saint Teresa, wished "to suffer or to die" or, like Saint Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, "to suffer, not to die."

Let us also remember that when the Saints speak of suffering, they do not necessarily mean extraordinary happenings. Everything that occurs is grist for the mill in their estimation. "To those who love God all things work together unto good." With most of them, as with us, as a matter of common experience, our warfare is mostly with dwarfs and not with giants. In the journey of life it is through the small hazards, the little spiritual combats, that the soul is developed and made capable for greater deeds of valour. That is why the Saints had a predilection for small, unseen acts of mortification and of suffering. A kind word spoken, an uncharitable remark left unsaid, a dislike speedily conquered, our daily tasks well done, no matter what our walk of life may be — herein lies the gateway to the stars, which become the forget-me-nots of the Angels. Therefore, in conclusion, let me say with the poet:

*Count each affliction, whether light or grave,
God's messenger sent down to thee; do thou
With courtesy receive him; rise and bow;
And, ere his shadow pass thy threshold, crave
Permission first his heavenly feet to lave;
Then lay before him all thou hast, allow
No cloud or passion to usurp thy brow,
Or mar thy hospitality; no wave
Of mortal tumult to obliterate
Thy soul's marmorial calmness. Grief should be
Like joy, majestic, cleansing, raising, making free;
Strong to consume small troubles, to commend
Great thoughts, grave thoughts, thoughts lasting to the end.*

With Ecclesiastical Approval.
Sydney, 14-5-1963,
