

Can I Keep Pure?

By REV. ROBERT NASH, S.J.

Father McKeogh picked up the letter and read it over a second and a third time. “Father, I’m down again, sunk once more in misery. In spite of your marvellous kindness and advice, here I am back at the old game. It’s no use trying, I fear, so please don’t bother further about me. I’m not worth it. I can’t keep pure, much as I long to, so there’s nothing for it but to settle down to the inevitable. What can a slave do but obey?” “Poor Fred!” thought the priest, and his eyes wandered across the room in the direction of the large crucifix hanging there over his prie-dieu. “Not worth it, indeed! Well, He thinks you are worth-that! He has ‘bothered’ that much about you, and don’t I know well that He is watching your struggles, and that there is infinite mercy and infinite understanding in His eyes?”

VICTORY CERTAIN

It is the devil’s business to chain down his victim, and then to persuade him that the chain cannot be broken. Be it said from the start that no case is hopeless. Temptations there may be, temptations there will be, even fierce temptations; but ultimate victory is assured on the word of Holy Scripture itself. “God is faithful,” writes St. Paul, “Who will not allow you to be tempted beyond that which you are able, but will make also with the temptation issue that you may bear it.” Who knew this better by his own experience than the same apostle? He had to struggle with a humiliating temptation, and three times he cried out to the Lord and implored Him to deliver him. But God would not remove this fierce trial. “My grace is sufficient for thee,” he was told, “for virtue is made perfect in infirmity.” Gallant soldier of Christ that he was, St. Paul kept up the fight for purity against fearful odds. “Unhappy man that I am,” he moaned, almost in despair, “who will deliver me from the body of this death? I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind. To will is present with me, but to do I find not.” But at last deliverance did come. “Blessed be God Who hath given us the victory through Our Lord Jesus Christ!”

Purity is a gift which God loves to bestow. Purity is a treasure which can always be recovered, no matter how deeply it may have been steeped in the mud. The way from guilt, especially from habitual guilt, back to innocence, may be, and probably will be, a wearisome uphill journey. Many times the poor soul will be assailed, many times she will be ready to believe that purity is an idle dream, at least where she is concerned. Purity is precious, a pearl of great price. Like everything else worth having, it costs; but, unlike many other things worth having, it is possible of attainment. Saints have to struggle: sinners have to struggle. To sinners and to saints Christ assures the palm of victory. This paper aims at putting forward a few practical hints which, it is hoped, may encourage the man or woman who knows, indeed, that purity is everything that is lovable and beautiful, but at the same time feels the fascination of the opposite vice. Now, it would seem that many sins of impurity are committed through lack of understanding of the dignity of a human being. A human being, says the Psalmist, is a little less than an angel, and in another place he goes so far as to declare that we are gods, “all of you sons of the Most High.” St. Paul insists on our dignity when he writes that our bodies are temples in which God dwells habitually by grace. “Know you not that your bodies are the temple of God? . . . that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? . . . The temple of God is holy, which you are.” Finally, Our Divine Lord Himself gives us a glimpse of the height to which we have been raised when He teaches us about this same indwelling of God within us. “If any man love Me, My Father will love him and We will come to him, and take up our abode with him.”

TEMPLE AND TABERNACLE

Man’s body, therefore, is God’s temple. By sanctifying grace there is instituted a real presence of God in that temple. Now, we know that when we enter one of our stately temples at the present day we look instinctively, first of all, towards the tabernacle. Men will melt down their gold and silver to beautify the temple, because the temple contains a tabernacle, and the tabernacle is the place where God dwells. In just the same way, the soul of man is a tabernacle. He consists of

body and soul, and if the body be the temple, the soul is the tabernacle in which God takes up His permanent abode. This is no myth. When the little infant is brought to the Baptismal font something happens analogous to what took place long ago, when Our Lord drove the buyers and sellers out of the temple. A usurper has set up his throne in that child's soul. Through no fault of the child, the evil one is in possession; but what a marvel takes place at the moment of Baptism! "Depart, unclean spirit," orders the priest, "from this creature fashioned of God, whom our Lord has deigned to call unto His holy temple, so that he may become a temple of the living God and that the Holy Spirit may dwell in him." The waters of Baptism are now poured on the child's head, and God enters into His temple and takes up His abode in that tabernacle.

IN THE SIGHT OF THE ANGELS

If at this moment the nurse holding that tiny infant could see into its soul, as the angels see, she would drop on her knees in adoration, imagining that an object so beautiful as a soul in sanctifying grace must be God Himself! Into man's soul God has poured a share of His own divine life, so that St. Peter does not hesitate to say that we are sharers of the divine nature. Man is lord of creation. "Thou hast made him a little less than the angels," sings the Psalmist; "Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour, and hast set him over the works of Thy hands." But all this greatness and dignity of man is only a prelude to the eternal destiny awaiting him. The seed of divine life sown in Baptism is to develop. Man is launched out on the great adventure called life, during which he is to grow in love of God and in union with Him. Death will come, then, and ultimately soul and body, tabernacle and temple, are to be rebuilt, re-united, and, beautified a thousandfold, to be received into the everlasting dwellings amongst the mansions in the house of our Father in heaven. That, in briefest outline, is the history of man's greatness.

We know from the Book of Genesis that "God formed man of the slime of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul." Soon after, "the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon Adam, and when he was fast asleep He took one of his ribs and filled up flesh for it. And the Lord God built the rib which He took from Adam into a woman, and brought her to Adam." He is God Almighty exercising a marvellous power which belongs to Him alone-the power of creating. At His omnipotent word land and sea appeared; the heavens, with sun, moon and stars, leaped into being; the vast oceans, the fishes of the sea, the birds of the air, the beasts of the earth-all these God called forth from nothingness, and His order met with instant obedience.

In this way, too, the first man and woman came direct from His creative hand. He might, had He chosen, have continued by a fresh act to create each man and each woman, but, in His love for His children, He preferred actually to share with them His stupendous power of creating. The first man and woman were to be co-creators.

A SACRED TRUST

God wanted sons and daughters to fill the earth, and afterwards to enjoy the ecstatic happiness He had prepared for them in heaven. So He conferred on man and woman the power to help Him in His task. They were to give Him the temple, the human body, and in that temple He would erect the tabernacle, the immortal soul in which He would dwell. And that God-given power, entrusted to Adam and Eve in Paradise, has been passed down to subsequent generations. Man consists of body and soul, temple and tabernacle. From his parents, using the sacred rights and privileges they hold from God, he receives his body, God's temple. His immortal soul, the tabernacle of that temple, God's masterpiece, comes to him direct from the creative hand of God. God Himself sets up that tabernacle in that temple, and, at Baptism, enters into it to take possession. Wondrous love of God, sharing such a sublime privilege with His creatures, that parents should be permitted to co-operate with Him in calling into being a child destined to be His dwelling-place here, and the friend and intimate companion of His angels in eternity!

It is clear that the use of this power entails many responsibilities and hardships for the parents. For the woman there is the discomfort of pregnancy and the anguish of giving birth. For both father and mother there is the hard work generally necessary to feed and educate the children; the constant patience needed; the spirit of self-sacrifice exacted in attending to

the numerous wants of the family. Then, as the children grow up, there is the anxiety to see them well placed in life, to shield them from the seduction of sin; there is worry about the health of their bodies; and not infrequently, too, about the welfare of their souls.

All this pain, all this uncertainty, possible sickness or poverty or hardship, weighty responsibilities—who would face all that and much more in the married state unless there went with it some great reward? And here again Almighty God intervenes. In the hearts of the parents He places a strong mutual love. They are drawn towards each other almost irresistibly, so that life for one without the other seems impossible to live. And that pure, God-implanted love in their hearts finds its fullest expression in the exercise of their power to co-create. So deep and satisfying is this affection that it amply compensates for all the trials and difficulties of married life. It is part of the reward given by the Father in heaven for the faithful fulfilment of a sacred trust.

GUARDED BY GOD'S LAW

Since the power to co-create and the very strong pleasure accompanying it are both given by God, God has surely absolute right to determine the circumstances under which both may be used. And in this matter He leaves men and women in no state of doubt. So sacred is this power that God has forbidden all wilful use of it except in marriage. Deliberately to seek the pleasure accompanying that power outside of marriage, even in the smallest degree, whether when alone or with others, is a mortal sin against God's law. And, even in marriage, it is a mortal sin to seek the pleasure in a manner devised to frustrate God's design in instituting marriage. Now, note, it is not the tendency itself that is sinful—we have just seen that it comes from God. Nor is it stated that feelings are necessarily sinful. Often you cannot help your feelings. You may feel depressed on a dreary day when the clouds are black and the rain is continuous. But you cannot change the weather, no more can you change your feelings. Neither are thoughts about sexual matters of necessity sinful. These thoughts may come to you at most sacred moments, even when you are kneeling at the altar waiting for Holy Communion, and there need not be attaching to them the faintest shadow of sin. For sin lies, not in the tendency, nor in the feelings, nor yet in the thoughts. Sin is in the consent of the will. That is why God's Law is violated in the matter we are discussing, only by a deliberate seeking of sexual gratification outside of marriage. It is very easy to sully sacred things. Pearls must be cast underneath the feet of swine.

CATHOLICS DON'T

Our first practical hint, then, is to have a right understanding of man's dignity and of the law given by God to safeguard that dignity. You will sometimes be told that in this matter the Church is too strict. Notice well, that the Law does not come from the Church merely in the same way, for example, as the law of fasting and abstinence. The law concerning purity comes direct from God Himself. All the Church does—and she has done it for centuries—is fearlessly and consistently to proclaim that that is the Law. She has not made it, and she does not change it, for the simple reason that she has not the power to do so. She received it from God, so that in her teaching she can never yield to mere expediency or to the specious arguments of the "new morality." The sex instinct is good and holy—planted in the human heart by God Himself for a definite purpose. The gratification of the instinct, too, has a very sublime purpose—it is a pleasure granted by God as a reward for the faithful discharge of the duties of married life. Hence, the pleasure is secondary, a means to an end, and to make it an end in itself, or deliberately to seek to do this outside of marriage, is a mortal sin. It is a misuse, in a most serious matter, of a very sacred power. But why do we say that the smallest degree of such deliberate seeking is a mortal sin? The question seems to answer itself. Let a man give way in this matter, even, the smallest degree, and very soon he will find to his bitter sorrow that he has let loose a wild beast in his heart. That beast becomes more and more insatiable. Let small gratifications be lawful, and very soon men and women are swept into a very inferno of vice and passion.

A PITILESS WORLD

That is the atmosphere in which our young boys and girls have to live and preserve inviolate the lily of purity. Not so easy, is it? How can they be helped? By remembering the old adage: Look before you leap! For there is another side to the alluring programme laid out by the world and its votaries. First of all, nothing is more inconsistent than the attitude of the world towards sin and the sinner. The world praises sin, decks out sin in a very attractive garb, persuades a young man or woman that sin is the road to happiness and joy. But let that boy or girl listen, and be drawn into the gutter by the fine promises of the world, and then the world regards with stony eyes the victim it has seduced. The world now, at best, turns on its heel with a sneer for the shame its own counsel has wrought, or at worst it even uses its heel to crush its victim deeper still into the mud. You remember how Judas was deceived by the flattery and the money of the world. But when he had sinned he rushed back with those coins that are now burning in his hands like coals of fire. "I have sinned," he cried, in a voice hoarse with misery and despair. "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood." What a reception he got from the very men who had goaded him on to his sin! They are finished with Judas. They tempted him, it is true; they allured him and paid him, and they managed to persuade him that the money would make him happy. Well, he was fool enough to take their advice; let them bide by it now! "Innocent blood, indeed! That is your own affair," and they laughed him to scorn.

How hard and merciless the world is at the very moment the sinner is hungering for a crumb of sympathy! That harsh treatment is the portion meted out to every sinner. Let a young man or woman listen to the fair promises of the world; let him or her try them out and experience how they turn to ashes at the first touch, and then the world laughs airily and goes off in search of new victims. It would be easy here, did space allow, to draw the contrast with the treatment given by the Church to the sinner. Before the sin, the Church, like a loving anxious mother, will leave nothing undone to shield her child who is in danger of sinning. But let that boy or girl fall into the gutter and at once that tender mother is all love and mercy. She rushes to pick up that child and set his feet once more on the road to purity and happiness. The Church never rejects a truly repentant sinner, for Jesus, her Founder, was the Friend of sinners, and there is not a single instance in the Gospel where He treated a contrite sinner with harshness.

The Church regards you as a living temple of God, in whom He has set up His tabernacle-your immortal soul radiant with the beauty of sanctifying grace. The world looks upon you as a creature of pleasure-seek pleasure where you can and forget that you are God's son; try to imagine that you are little more than a sleek horse or hound. Follow the world's advice, and she rocks with laughter over your mistakes. Consider now what are the results to yourself of the sin of impurity, and what are the results to yourself of a pure life? The answer to these two questions will furnish what we want to propose as our next two helps in the guarding of the tabernacle door.

A DESECRATED TABERNACLE

What does this sin bring to a man or woman? Happiness and joy and peace?

No doubt the world will tell you that these things will result from sin. The poor victim is swept off his feet by passion, and decides, for the time being, at any rate, that nothing matters except this violent spasm of pleasure. And when the thrill has passed, and the sinner is normal once more? Let it be granted that the sin while being actually committed brings with it a kind of ecstasy. That passes by; at once there is a fearful reaction, and the poor sinner is filled with misery, with shame, with remorse, sometimes even with a sense of despair. Have you ever seen a young man sitting with his head between his hands and sobbing like a child, because of the grip this sin has obtained of him? Have you ever heard a young girl in her prime declare that she was "fed-up" with life, with no interest in anything, no energy, no power to concentrate because she has yielded to the allurements of the world and the devil, and thought that sin would give her happiness? Your body is God's temple; your soul is His tabernacle. Commit this hateful sin, and, as you walk home that night, know that the door of that tabernacle has been smashed open; know that God's Presence no longer shines there; know that the temple, your body, has been sullied. You walk home after that sin-a desecrated tabernacle! And if there has been a partner in your guilt, if you have tempted another and drawn another into sin, you have had the hardihood to break open yet

another tabernacle, to expel God from that soul; you have reduced to ruins another temple of the living God.

And now that the thrill is passed and gone, you are as far as ever from being satisfied. The wild beast let loose in your breast clamours more imperiously than ever for further gratification. Let a tiger once taste blood and he becomes mad for more. This is the joy, this the happiness, this the satisfaction the world and passion promised you! God's Law is very sacred, and nowhere, perhaps, do we see such terrible penalties exacted, even in this life, as from those who violate it in this matter.

RUINED TEMPLES

A desecrated tabernacle! Is it necessary to tell how even the temple, too, is reduced to a heap of ruins? Do you know of the unfortunate imbecile little children, the offspring of this hateful sin? Have you ever visited hospitals and seen the shameful diseases impurity has caused? Have you gone into a mental home and reckoned how many men and women have been driven in there, goaded to madness by the repeated excesses of this merciless tyranny? A desecrated tabernacle. A ruined temple. Scorn from the very world which allured to the sin. A sense of being utterly forsaken. Loss of peace. No power to concentrate. A wild beast let loose in the heart. A crushing load of misery pressing upon the soul.

Would that this were an exaggeration of the results of this terrible sin! Would that this were not a fair statement of the results to a poor man or woman who foolishly believes that the way of passion is the way of happiness. "Man when he was in honour did not understand; he hath compared himself to the brute beasts and is become as one of them." Blighted lives, will-power sapped, your finer instincts blunted—all this bears eloquent and sad testimony to the truth of the Psalmist's words. Such a fearful toll to pay for a moment's thrill! Surely a powerful warning to guard the door that leads into the tabernacle! Look before you leap. It is painful to write these things, but it is becoming increasingly important to look them straight in the face. Don't be feather-headed. Don't be led astray by fine promises. Happiness lies not that way. Sin is sweet, granted. Poison, too, is sweet. But in both it is a sweetness too dearly purchased.

GOD IN HIS TABERNACLE

You will never find a sinner who is happy. You will find sinners who are boastful, hilarious, reckless, and they will tell you that they are living their own lives. The truth is that they are slaves. They know it, too, and in their moments of sanity they will admit it. Neither will you ever find a pure man or woman who is unhappy. You will find them poor, but poverty is not unhappiness. You will see them suffer intense pain, but pain has no great terrors for a man who acts up to his conscience. Happier a thousand times is the beggar shivering in his rags at the street corner if his heart be pure, than the millionaire rolling by in his car if he be impure. Far better sickness of the body than leprosy of soul! Far better a living tabernacle in a temple that is sinless, even if it be poverty-stricken, than a desecrated tabernacle in a temple, apparently indeed fair to behold, but in reality reeking with corruption! A poor woman lay in her little cottage, a great sufferer. She had a dreadful cancer on her breast. Was she happy? "There is not a happier woman in the parish, Father. I often think how much worse off I'd be if I had the cancer of mortal sin on my soul!"

COMPANY-KEEPING

Since God's Law is so strict, what, then, about company-keeping? Is company-keeping a sin? We have seen that marriage is holy and sacred: more than that, Our Divine Lord has raised it to the dignity of a sacrament. If marriage be so elevated a thing, if it comes from God, if it is a source of grace to the soul, then the preparation for marriage must also be

** There can be no question here of advocating company-keeping that is indiscriminate—with all and sundry. Company-keeping is envisaged only in so far as it "constitutes the preparation for marriage." From the precautions insisted on in the pages that follow, the reader will easily deduce that there must be a reasonable prospect of marriage not long to be deferred, and that the boy and girl must be of the age and position soon to face the responsibilities of married life. In many cases company-keeping is sinful, and long remains so precisely because these conditions are not present.*

beautiful and holy. Now, company-keeping constitutes this preparation. Clearly, boys and girls must meet and get to know each other. God, of deliberate purpose, has made the sexes attractive to each other. A boy reacts towards a girl in a way that he never would react towards another boy. A girl experiences a sense of pleasure in a boy's company which she does not get when with her girl friends. There is nothing wrong in that. God has wished that to be so. Further, it is God's will, normally, that a day will come when a boy and girl will enter into each other's lives, and into their hearts He will pour a great mutual love. There is nothing wrong in that either. There is nothing to cloak over or be ashamed of in that. God has willed it so. The time has come when He has chosen these two to help in the fulfilment of His divine plan. This great love is His gift. He gives it to them in order to induce them to help Him, and it will reach its climax on the day when they present to Him a temple, and He will erect His tabernacle in that temple. Marriage is thus a vocation, a great sacrament, and, like every other sacrament, it demands before its reception a careful and worthy preparation.

Despite the pagan atmosphere of today there are thousands, thank God, who never swerve from that difficult path, thousands who come to the altar with their hearts as pure as they were on the day of Baptism. How are you going to secure that? Are there any practical hints to strengthen our young people to keep company as God means them to keep it?

First of all, I would ask you to consider that the very worst injury you could inflict on your most deadly enemy would be to make him commit a mortal sin. To drive God out of his soul and to imperil his eternal salvation—what evil could be imagined more terrible? Now, if you love your partner, if there is in your heart the pure, beautiful love implanted by God, not the cheap, selfish passion that so often masquerades as this love—if this holy affection, with its sublime purpose, has been put into your heart for another by God, you don't want to inflict the most terrible injury of all on that other, do you? You don't want to make that other a desecrated tabernacle, do you? Far from it. If you are a girl, God has given you a marvellous power here. You have it in your hands to decide whether you are going to be an angel guardian to your boy, or a pawn in the devil's game to sweep him off his feet. Remember, you are the stronger of the two. God has made you so, and in consequence yours is the greater responsibility. Your boy will succumb more easily than you. It is easier for him to sin than for you. Hence help him to be loyal to Christ. Do not be his mortal enemy, stealing up to the door of his tabernacle, laying siege to it, and ultimately battering it in pieces. The world will tell you: You love each other, therefore indulge in passionate signs of this love, and make sure you go into places where you are free to do so. The Catholic's answer comes readily: No, we are not going to do these things; we are not going into these places, just precisely because we do love each other.

True love proves itself by sacrifice.

Again, if you are a girl (for if our girls are pure our boys will be pure, too), your strength of character will win that boy's affection and admiration, if he is a boy worthy of your love. He will realize that you are a treasure worth having, not a toy to be played with and then cast aside when the whim takes him. Your loyalty to Christ and God's Law may lose you, indeed, a popinjay who is out for "a good time," but have no fear that you will lose a man worthy of your heart's affection. And, even if you were never to marry, to die rather than offend God, especially by mortal sin, is heroism. "I would rather die keeping God's Law than live breaking it," said a fine girl of this type. But it is not God's way to allow Himself to be outdone in generosity. Stand loyal to Him and His Law, and you are safe in entrusting your future to His hands.

WEDDING BELLS

Every boy and girl who are bound to each other by this pure love look forward to the great day when they will place the seal of that love before God's altar on their marriage morning. They will often think about that day and discuss their plans, and tell each other that it is now so many months or so many weeks hence. If there is any day in their whole lives when they want above all to have deep happiness in their hearts, it is that marriage day. If ever they want God's special blessing, it is surely the day when they enter on this sacred and weighty responsibility. And they want that blessing to endure throughout all the years of married life. Especially do they want that blessing to descend on their future children. One has known cases where this consideration has proved an immense help during the period of company-keeping. No

doubt about it, the way to win God's special blessing is sacrifice. Of course, when you love another, there is the strong tendency to satisfy that love to its fullest extent, or to indulge in conduct that would pave the way for such full satisfaction. But you are not going to do it-why? Because we are both offering a sacrifice, an act of self-denial, to God Almighty. And with what object in view? We want that sacrifice to mount up before His throne and to bring down on ourselves and on our children His special blessing. Once again, do not imagine that the generous God is going to allow Himself to be outdone in generosity. You will love each other even more than ever, and the sacrifice you make will bring into your hearts a joy so great that you will scarcely be able to contain it. Even at the moment you make the sacrifice, the reward comes. But that reward is only a foretaste of the joy you will have on your wedding day, when you can look back and see how faithfully you have both guarded the door of the tabernacle when the temptation to break it open was so strong. It is only a prelude to the deep joy that will be yours when you gather your little children lovingly about you and know that you can look straight into their eyes and see reflected there the innocence they have inherited from you. Yes, it was worth while, even though at the time the struggle may have been hard!

On the other hand, if marriages turn out unhappy, what is often the explanation? Is it not that they were preceded by sinful, cheap company-keeping? Even if this culminates in marriage, the seeds have been sown for mutual distrust, and the pair are not long united before that seed begins to produce a plentiful crop of weeds. Familiarity has bred contempt. Love has spent itself at the very time it should be the adornment and the glory of married life. Hence follow abuse, quarrels, distrust, weariness of each other's company. This is the devil's opportunity, and there is no need to specify further how he seizes upon it if purity and self-sacrifice before marriage are rewarded by true joy and happiness in that holy state, sin and laxity before marriage not infrequently produce the miseries that make folk groan and lament and curse the day they met their partner.

IN MARY'S COMPANY

You have been warned not to be too much alone when keeping company. Now, we are going to give even stronger advice. Never be alone! Never? No, never. By that counsel we mean that you should never be in a place where the Mother of God cannot be with you. She is always to be one of the party. You are her children, both of you, and her Son wants you to love each other. Be very simple in your filial love for that Mother, and see to it that your conduct is always such that she can bless and approve. Must you leave Mary Immaculate behind you when you walk into that place? Can you allow these intimacies in her presence? If you say sincerely that you can, then I answer you are company-keeping in the way her divine Son wants you to keep it. But if, with any number of grand reasons to be sure, you know in your heart that you would be filled with confusion if she suddenly joined you and your partner, that there would be shame and a sense of guilt in sight of her Immaculate purity, then be assured-whatever the happy world tells you, whatever arguments you may try to bolster up-be assured that you are wrong, you are offending God. Perhaps you are actually offending Him mortally; if you are not, you are heading straight for mortal sin. The red flag is out, the danger signal is raised; unless you take timely warning you are going to have disaster on the line.

We began these notes with an extract from a letter. It need hardly be said that the extract is fictitious, though everybody knows that many a poor victim of impurity could have written it. All that we have been saying in praise of purity will tend, perhaps, only to discourage such a poor sufferer the more. "I know all that. I wish to God I could be pure. I've tried, but it's beyond me."

BE OF GOOD HEART

It was Father Wm. Doyle who used to say that discouragement is the devil's pet walking-stick. Nowhere does he use it more effectively than when he beats with it a poor man or woman who has contracted the habit of this terrible sin. Now, first of all, let us suppose the worst. Suppose this thing has been going on for years. Suppose you have made Confessions and fallen again, even immediately after Confession. Suppose, then, that you gave up going to the Sacraments, arguing that it was no use receiving them sacrilegiously. Years have gone on in this state, and there comes times in your life when

you think of doing away with yourself in order to end this misery. Add on as many more sad details as you need to fit your own case. Now, looking at all that failure after failure, thinking over the years that have been squandered, of the others you led into sin, of the ruined temples and the desecrated tabernacles, of the unworthy Confessions and Holy Communion—realizing fully the disastrous shipwreck you have made of your life, and perhaps of the lives of others, I tell you that sin can yet be conquered and you can still be fully restored to the peace and happiness of a pure life. It is not going to be easy, but it is possible. More than that, it is certain that God wants to give you this gift, and it is certain that He will give it, if you do your part to receive it.

The first enemy you must attack and slay is depression. If you keep on telling yourself that purity is impossible, when even the saints experience how very difficult it is, your chances of overcoming your habit will sink at once to near zero. What you are losing sight of is that purity is a gift that comes from God, not from yourself. You cannot have even a good thought of yourself, without the grace of God. Still less can you keep God's Law in this matter if you depend on yourself. To say that your will is too weak to accomplish this task is sheer nonsense. Why? Because you are implying that you are different from every other man and woman on the face of the globe. It is impossible for everybody, apart from God's grace. That man is mad who plumes himself on his virtue as though it were his own doing, and his pride will probably soon bring him low. Therefore, do recognize that it is not you who are going to succeed, but you, all weakness indeed, united to the strength of God Himself.

DOCTOR'S ORDERS

You have given up the Sacraments? Let us put forward a little parable. A man visits his doctor and tells him he is in dreadful pain. The doctor examines his patient, and presently smiles cheerfully. He has discovered exactly what the root of the trouble is, and he assures his patient of a complete cure. Only let him take this prescription to a chemist, use it as directed, and the cure is certain. Not a doubt about it. What would you think of the patient if, on coming out of the doctor's house, he tore up the prescription scornfully, flung the small pieces into the waste-paper basket, and went his way murmuring that he could not be bothered with such a remedy? You would, say, of course, that he had no desire to be cured.

Here was an infallible remedy put into his hands, and he will not take it. Doctors cannot always give infallible remedies, but Jesus Christ, the Physician of your soul, has given you such a remedy in His sacraments. When you come to Confession, you have to promise, with great sincerity, that you will not sin again, and that you will step clear of those free proximate occasions of sin, come what may.* If your promise here and now is from your heart, you have made a good Confession. Rise from your knees and face life anew. Your soul is as pure as it was on the day you were baptized. Forget the past and look forward hopefully to the future.

And if, in spite of your firm determination, you fall again? Go again to Confession, and without delay. Do not wait till the end of a month or even a week. Go at the first opportunity. Only God can judge of your guilt in this new lapse. Return quickly to your Father's House. He tells you not to fear Him even if you have to return seventy times seven times. The important point is that you should return. Go to the same priest regularly, and be very candid with him.

JESUS AND I

The devil wants, above all else, to take you on single-handed. That is why he will leave nothing undone to keep you from going to Holy Communion. He knows well that therein lies your strength. Holy Communion means that the strong Christ

** No petition can be validly absolved unless he be determined, with the aid of God's grace, to avoid a free proximate occasion of mortal sin. For example, a man knows that, by going into a certain place, he is morally certain to fall into mortal sin. That place is now for him a proximate occasion of sin. If, moreover, he has no serious reason for going there—e.g., to get his work done—the occasion is also free. Without the firm determination to avoid that place in future, he cannot be validly absolved.*

unites Himself most intimately with your weakness. You say the doctor's patient was foolish to throw away an infallible remedy? Are you less foolish if you refuse to eat this divine Food which would impart to you a strength so great that you would almost begin to wonder if you were the same person? Holy Communion would transform you. What now appears to you so attractive would then be seen in its true colours. You would marvel at the new-found strength by which you are now able to turn away from what is wrong.

It is not you merely who are doing this. You could never have done it of yourself. But your soul is developing strength because it is receiving the food it requires. Keep renewing your purpose of amendment in Confession. Keep building up the strength of your soul by frequent, even daily, Holy Communion, if possible, and your cure is certain. With that programme, give your will to Mary and leave it in her safe keeping. That plan of campaign will succeed, no matter how low you have fallen. You will have to fight.

I SAID "NO"

It is good to use natural helps, too. You want to stiffen that will of yours. Make yourself do without something, at least occasionally. Go without a cigarette sometimes when you want one. Pass by that hoarding once in a while without reading or looking at the advertisements. You are very anxious to see that picture about which your friends are all talking? Turn in and spend half an hour with that sick person instead. Jump promptly out of bed the moment your alarm rings. Every act of self-control, every deliberate saying "no," even in small things, is training your will to say "no" in the matter that is troubling you. It is surprising when you have deliberately said "no" in matters that are quite harmless, how much easier it becomes to say "no" when there is question of something sinful. The schoolmen put it aptly enough. Habit, they tell us, is succession of act.

Try to have a hobby-photography, carpentry, gardening, games. Best of all, do something in the field of what has been named by our late Holy Father, "Catholic Action." Get interested in the St. Vincent de Paul Society and its work; help the Foreign Missions; work up Our Lady's Sodality; do something for the poor; visit the hospitals; spread good literature; become a Legionary of Mary. In a word, shake yourself free of depression and try to do something for others. Your experiences will give you a healthy occupation; they will make you unselfish, thoughtful for others and their many trials and difficulties. When that begins to happen, your own trouble will die a natural death, or at any rate it will cease to be a cause of misery or uneasiness.

Finally, do not look forward too much. Do not say: I have to do this forever, until the end of my life. Say, rather: I am going to Holy Communion to-morrow; therefore, I am keeping right for to-day in preparation. Little by little the days run into weeks and the weeks into months. Each victory sees you stronger. Once again, habit is succession of act.

REPARATION!

Throughout this paper we have kept in view men and women, boys and girls, who have the desire to be pure, even though they may be undergoing a bombardment of temptation, or even though at the moment they may be down in the fight for purity. For all that, their good-will, their desire to live pure lives, has been taken for granted. But everyone knows that there are many who have no such desire, many who, like Herod, have grown so habituated to the gutter that it seems 'to have become part of their natural environment. In these there is no better self. In the appalling words of Scripture God "has given them over to the desires of their heart." "Abandoned to a reprobate sense," they prowl around the world like ravening wolves seeking prey. Such a degradation for a son or a daughter of God! "Man when he was in honour did not understand; he has compared himself to the brute beasts and is become like to them."

When you recall these terrifying truths, and many more of the same kind that need not be put on paper, you can understand the plea wrung from the Sacred Heart. He appeared to St. Margaret Mary, a Visitation nun of Paray-le-Monial, and, pointing to that Heart, He showed her the flames of divine love issuing forth from It on every side. "Behold this Heart, on fire with love for men." Now, if passion has got hold of you, you will not grasp the meaning of these words. You will probably not pay much attention to them, or, if you give them any thought at all, it will be only to dismiss them

with a shrug of the shoulder as a sort of metaphor. But that is where you are wrong. You have allowed sin and selfishness to form a hard crust round about that heart of yours, and the message from the Sacred Heart cannot break through.

But if a ray of that divine fire begins to force an opening in the crust, if purity begins to live again in your heart, it will gradually dawn upon your mind that this marvellous message is no fairy tale, but sober history. The Sacred Heart is, literally, on fire with love for men. And, close on that first fact comes the second—the complaint He made. “In spite of all this, the vast bulk of men do not understand. They repay My love with coldness and indifference, with sacrilege and with ingratitude.” Therefore, does Christ appeal to His servant to make reparation.

THEY HAVE DESPISED ME

It is three hundred years since that complaint and that appeal were spoken by Our Divine Lord, but their echo rings out clear in our day. Christ loves and is not loved, and you, who have read these pages, you are called upon to make reparation. There you have the most compelling motive of all for the practice of holy purity. Thousands of young boys and girls every year kneel before the altar and take upon themselves the solemn obligations of a vow of chastity. Why? Because marriage is wrong? There is nothing wrong with marriage. It is God’s divine institution, a sacrament which brings grace into your soul.

Why, then, renounce it? To stifle love? Not at all, but to pour out that love, undivided, on the love of the Sacred Heart; to make reparation to that Sacred Heart for the men and women who use God’s gift of love against Him, to redeem and save those who use the flesh only to abuse it. It is possible that He will confer on you, too, the supreme compliment of inviting you to give your heart, thus whole and entire, to Him in the Religious State. But if He does not ask that from you, it is certain that His appeal for reparation must meet, in you, with at least some response. “Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord God hath spoken. ‘I have brought up children and have exalted them, but they have despised Me.’”

Perhaps you, too, have “despised” Him and His law. Are you, therefore, to be despondent? Remember the story of the Prodigal Son? He lived riotously, far away from his father’s house. He came to the brink of ruin, and ultimately found himself sitting in the pigsty feeding swine. He might very easily have decided that his case, too, was hopeless. What was the use of trying to patch up his broken life? His misfortunes had not that effect, however. “How many hired servants in my father’s house abound in bread, and here I, the son, am famishing with hunger? I will arise and go back to my Father!” There is the correct conclusion, and the poor beggar of the pig-sty is received with love by a father whose heart has never ceased to long for his return.

Nihil Obstat
F. MOYNIHAN
Censor Deputatus

Imprimatur
✠ D. MANNIX
Archiepiscopus Melbournensis
