

Simon Peter

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Simon Peter's history is deeply instructive, and portrays, in the main, that of every Christian, from the first step in acquaintance with Christ to the state — alas! so rarely attained or maintained — in which the Holy Ghost can without hindrance show forth His power. During this interval the full energy of grace is unfolded, bringing the soul into the knowledge of Christ and of Christian privileges. We see also the breaking down of soul necessary to enable the believer, after having lost confidence in self, to realize his privileges and follow the Lord in the path marked out by Him.

Peter's history in the word of God divides itself naturally into two parts, one of which we find in the gospels, and the other in the Acts of the Apostles. The first part corresponds with the truths

mentioned above; the second — at which, God willing, we shall look later on — is filled (though not without failure on the part of the instrument) with the activity of the Holy Ghost in the ministry of Peter, and with that divine power which sustains him as a witness for Christ amidst obstacles and conflict.

"I am a sinful man."

Luke 5: 1-11.

The way in which Peter comes in contact with the Lord in Luke's gospel is worthy of note.* Simon's wife's mother (Luke 4: 38, 39) was taken with a great fever which rendered her helpless. Jesus heals her and fits her to serve Him. It is often thus that the soul meets Christ for the first time. It comes in contact with Him by means of *the blessings bestowed by Him on others*. When the moment comes for Him to reveal Himself to our own hearts, we find that He is not altogether a stranger. The Lord uses this preparatory knowledge to shorten the work by which our consciences are awakened to a sense of sin, and our hearts to a sense of grace. In this gospel Simon Peter knew Jesus from having seen Him at work in his house.

*I purposely omit noting what is of interest in Peter's first interview with the Lord in the other gospels. In John's gospel (John 1: 42, 43), for instance, Peter knows Him through the instrumentality of his brother Andrew, who had already found in Him the Christ.

The son of Jonas was a fisherman by trade; he possessed what was requisite for catching fish — a boat and nets. He had used them to obtain what he wanted, and had worked all night for this purpose, but without any result. Thus the natural man employs his faculties, and the means placed at his disposal, to obtain something which will fill and satisfy his heart; but it is in vain, the net remains empty. His labour yields nothing which can answer to the deep need of his soul. The night passes, and the day is about to dawn when even as a fisherman he will no longer be able to labour in pursuit of happiness. Simon and his companions, having taken nothing, quit their boats and wash their nets. They set about washing them, for they had taken up nothing but the mud from the bottom of the sea, and when this is done they will recommence fishing. Is it not thus with a man of the world? His labours to attain a desired end are renewed every day without success.

But when man's powerlessness has been made evident Jesus appears, seemingly otherwise occupied than with Peter. He teaches the *multitudes*, but in the midst of His ministry His heart is with Simon, and He does not lose sight of him. Entering into one of the ships which was Simon's, He prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. He *separates* Peter with Himself from the crowd, and thus he hears all the Lord says. Jesus had been no stranger to him previous to this; now he listens to His word, and his position of isolation with Him only contributes to render him the more attentive. Still, from verse 5 we may infer that the conviction of the authority of the Word was all that he retained.

After this we find the Lord more specially occupied with Peter. "Launch out into the deep," said He, "and let down your nets for a draught." Peter had done that all night; but up to this it was by the will of man, now it is at the word of the Lord. Peter believes this word, and submits to it. The first result of God's word is to produce faith, and faith accepts its authority and obeys. The Lord has spoken; that is enough for faith. But Jesus addresses Peter in a yet more powerful way, and shows him in whose presence he is, thus reaching his conscience. He, the Creator who disposes of everything, collects the fishes in broad daylight, when there had been none at night, and fills Peter's nets with them. He fills the

human vessels with blessings such as they are unable to contain without breaking, and which surpass the needs of the disciple. His companions arrive with a second ship, which sinks likewise, so abundant are the riches given by the Lord of glory.

Peter sees (v. 8) all this blessing; but it places him for the first time, as he is, in the presence of Him who is its Source and Administrator. Thus it is not only the word of Jesus which strikes him, but Jesus Himself, and the glory of His person. A revolution takes place in his soul. The blessing, instead of producing joy, causes conviction of sin and fear, because it brings him into the presence of the Lord of glory. On the other hand, the sense of his condition, whilst giving him the terrible certainty that Jehovah ought to repulse him, yet casts him at the feet of Jesus as his only resource. Similarly in Psalm 130: 1-4 we see the soul calling for succour from the One whom it has offended. If He marks iniquities it is all over with it; it is lost if the question of sins is not settled. *But the God who has been sinned against pardons.* God is known in His love.

It is blessed for the sinner to know his real condition, the judgment which is his due, and the holiness of the Lord. "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man." Peter judges himself to be a sinner, and unfit for the presence of God. He trembles before His holiness and righteousness. As yet he only knows half instinctively what grace is, and is ignorant how God can be just in justifying him that believeth in Jesus; but he is at His feet, and he does not flee away, because if there is any hope it is there. As long as he was occupied in washing his nets he knew neither God nor himself; but now he knows both, and it is a remarkable thing that he does not judge what he has *done*, but *what he is*. Many souls acknowledge that they have to repent of their guilty acts and judge them, but they have not been brought to see the source of these acts. Underneath the sins there is "a sinful man." The sense of God's presence opens our eyes, shows us what we are, and makes us see that our only refuge is with the One who could condemn us.

Fear had laid hold of Peter, but the Lord never allows fear to exist in His presence. He speaks and banishes the fear, because He is the Lord of grace. He allows everything else to remain — weakening in no wise the effects of the work in the soul — but He *removes the fear*. "Depart from me." No, the Lord will never depart. He says, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" — if I had not met thee to save thee I could not save others by thy instrumentality. He does more than make Simon Peter happy; He bestows a fresh blessing on him, promising him *service*; so that, instead of remaining a sinner, Peter becomes a servant, able to leave all and follow Jesus.

Peter going to Jesus on the water.

Matthew 14: 22-33.

Jesus had just satisfied the poor in Israel with bread, according to the prophecy in Psalm 132: 15, fulfilling His character of Messiah in the midst of a people who did not receive Him. After having done them good, He had sent away the multitudes, separating Himself in figure from Israel, whom He was about to abandon for a time. Evening being come, the Lord had gone up *alone* into a mountain apart to pray. Then the *night* had come for the twelve whom Jesus had constrained to get into a ship. His connection with the people was over, but He had a remnant for Himself who were sailing to the other shore. The disciples were sore troubled, alone during those hours of darkness on the tempestuous sea, when in the fourth watch of the night, towards three o'clock in the morning, the Lord set out to go to them. His coming was the signal for the renewal of His relations with those whom He will again call His people. He came to them on the angry sea amidst difficulties which were nothing to His blessed

feet, but which were *their* pathway for learning to know Him. It is thus that He will make use of "Jacob's trouble." It is a touching scene, and one from which we Christians can draw a moral lesson, though what concerns us more personally is the scene which takes place between Jesus and Peter.

Peter's first act had been to cast himself at Jesus' knees, acknowledging his sinful condition; the second, to set out to meet Him. One cannot insist too strongly on this point.* To go forth to meet the Saviour follows conversion, and precedes service. Peter having as yet only the *promise* of being made a fisher of men, was already impelled to go to meet Him. He turned to look at the One who descended from the mountain-top, and this was but the beginning of the glorious revelations he was to receive as to the person of Christ. Dear reader, have you gone out to meet Him? If you have not done so since your conversion, you are not yet beyond the knowledge of salvation, and you cannot pretend to the deeper acquaintance with Christ which was Peter's later on, if first of all the Saviour from heaven has not become your object, and filled you with the desire to go to Him.

*We only give here the individual application of this passage, which, properly speaking, completes the general picture in chapter 14, by marking the position of the Church leaving Judaism to go forth to meet Christ, by faith in His word, and the eyes fixed on Him when apparently there was no way.

Peter's knowledge at first is very superficial. "Lord, if it be Thou," he says. But it suffices for the start. Everything depends for him on the identity of the person, and if it be He, His word is sufficient to make Peter quit the ship: "Bid me come unto Thee on the water." It was a serious thing to leave the place of apparent security to walk where there was no way, but, as I said, the word of Christ sufficed him. He knew its power. At His word he had let go the net; at His word he sets forth. It enables him to walk on the water even as it had brought him to know the Saviour. "Bid me come unto Thee." In asking this favour Peter had no thought of making an experiment, or showing off his cleverness in overcoming obstacles; what he wanted was to go to Him. Christ attracted him, and for the moment he thought not of wind or waves. If the natural heart ignores the path which leads to Christ, faith finds a way amidst difficulties of all kinds, in the night as in the storm, and makes use of them to get nearer to the Lord. Faith quits the boat, the only apparent shelter, not esteeming it to be the true place of safety, and, according to a remarkable saying of one of the ancient philosophers, "embarks on a divine word" to reach Jesus, whose presence is worth more to him than getting to the other shore.

We often begin well; the first faith and the first love, the simplicity of a heart filled by an object, sustains us, and then, alas! we allow the eye to be diverted from its object. Satan had sought to trouble the disciples by making them afraid of Jesus (v. 26), but they soon learnt from His lips to be of good cheer. Then the enemy alarms Peter with difficulties. What folly to listen to him; for do not difficulties lead us to Christ? Poor unbelieving creatures that we are! In our trials, as in our needs, the only thing we forget is the very thing we ought not to lose sight of — divine power. In the preceding scene (v. 17) the disciples had not forgotten to count their loaves and fishes, nor to reckon the resources of the villages, but they had not counted on the Lord's presence. Peter also, after having set forth, began to think of the violence of the wind, and to look back on his own strength, forgetting that he had before him a power of attraction stronger than the polar magnet which would infallibly bring him to Jesus. And he begins to sink.

Who has not, like Peter, been on the point of sinking? Have not the Church and individuals shared the same fate? But a cry bursts from the lips of the disciple, "Lord, save me;" not "Depart from me," for the believer knows the Saviour, and that His character is to save. Peter calls for help just as he is on the point of attaining his object, and Jesus has only to stretch forth His hand to draw him to

Himself. *One moment* more of faith, and the disciple would not have sunk. Shall we still doubt, dear readers? We may with regard to many things, but never of Christ. Let us trust Him who is able to save us to the end; for the storm will not cease until the Lord and His own are definitively united.

Personal Acquaintance with Christ.

Matthew 16: 13-23.

Peter had learnt to know the Lord as the One who could meet his needs, as a Saviour for his sins, and for his weakness. Now he had to learn something deeper and more marvellous — what the Lord was in Himself.

It is always so; the believer advances step by step in the knowledge of Christ. Still it was not by his faithfulness that Peter acquired this new blessing, but by the faithfulness of God, who had separated him from men to give him such a revelation. It was the Father, not flesh and blood, who had revealed these things to him. (v. 17.) Introduced by the Father to the centre of blessing, Peter was set in the presence of the living God. He recognized in the Son of man Christ, the object of all the promises, and to whom all the counsels of God were attached, but this Christ was the Son of the *living God*. He was not only the Man born into the world whom God had declared His Son in saying, "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee;" but He was the Son of the living God. He possessed a power of life which belonged to God only, and all the fulness of which was found in Christ.

Those from whom Peter had been separated for the reception of this glorious revelation were utterly ignorant of the majesty of Jesus. For them He was only Joseph's son, or, at the most, one of the prophets. They found themselves in the presence of this majesty which was unknown to them; for there must be a revelation from the Father for that. Henceforth Peter knew the Saviour in His personal glory, the source and centre of every blessing; moreover, Simon son of Jonas was pronounced "blessed" by Jesus Himself. Heaven was opened to him, and he possessed happiness with which nothing could compare.*

*I would here remark that this paper does not deal with the way in which Peter laid hold of the things revealed to him, but of the scope of these revelations. In reality Peter and his companions only understood and enjoyed these things after the gift of the Holy Spirit.

But the Father could not reveal the personal glory of His Son to Simon without *the Son* revealing how this glory was connected with the individual and collective blessing of the redeemed. "And I say also unto thee." Christ also made known to him what flowed from His character as Son of the living God.

First, "Thou art Peter;" as the Father has revealed My name to thee, I will make known to thee thine own. Individually and collectively (*i.e.*, together with all believers) thou hast a place in the edifice which is to be founded on this revelation.

Secondly, the foundation of this edifice being henceforth *known* (it was to be *laid* later in the declaration of the Son of God with power, fruit of the resurrection from amongst the dead), the Lord declares that He will *build* on Himself this Church of which Peter is a living stone. "I will build *My* Church." It was to be the Church of Christ, to belong to Him, the object of His interest and affection. For us it is an accomplished fact; the Church exists and belongs to Him.

And you, dear readers, do you share in some measure the interest and the thoughts of Christ for

His Church? There are, thank God, Christian hearts which enter into them, if feebly, and which, in spite of its ruin, are capable of comprehending its beauty, because they see it as the Saviour sees it, and estimate it at the price with which He acquired it, saying, as the Spirit of old said of Israel, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither seen perverseness in Israel."

This foundation, a Christ risen and exalted in heaven, gives to the Church a *heavenly character*. Built, without doubt, on earth, her foundation is in heaven, *beyond the gates of hades*. She is there already. The power of death, destroyed by a risen Christ who holds the keys of death and of hades, cannot and never shall prevail against her.

Thirdly, in virtue of this declaration, a new dispensation was to be inaugurated. Israel was to be replaced by the kingdom of heaven, of which Peter was to have the keys; he was to be called to introduce Jews and Gentiles into a new sphere of blessing on earth. In virtue of the revelation of the Son of the living God, there was to be, in this world, a ground on which there would be a *profession* of belonging to Him. Peter was to be, as we shall see in the Acts, the instrument for the introduction into this blessed profession. He would have, so to speak, the external and internal administration of the kingdom, the keys, and the power to bind and loose. Personal acquaintance with Christ opens Peter's eyes to every circle of blessing; he is placed in the centre of blessing, which is Christ, to contemplate the immense domain depending on it. Israel's connection with an earthly Messiah was over. (v. 20.) Later on this relationship will be renewed, but from this moment the Lord revealed to His disciples a total change in their hopes and position, which from being earthly were to become heavenly.

What glorious truths and precious privileges were contained in the revelation made to Peter! But here we find a new and unexpected revelation; these privileges are consequent on the death of Christ, which acquired them for us; and in order to have them, we must accept the cross. "From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples, how that He must . . . suffer many things . . . and be killed, and be raised again the third day." (v. 21.) Peter could not accept the fact that Christ must needs undergo such reproach. Could He not accomplish His glorious ends without dying? The disciple took his Master aside, and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee." There was natural affection for Christ in this speech, but it also showed that Peter had not understood or appreciated the revelation imparted to him, and which is only ours at this price. More than this, his words denoted that he would not have such a degradation either for a Christ who promised him such advantages, or for himself who with the twelve formed the retinue of the Messiah.

But if in some measure we perceive the human motives which actuated Peter in rebuking Jesus, he did not suspect that Satan was making use of him to endeavour to put a stumbling-block in Christ's pathway. Satan's most dangerous instruments are believers who, possessing the truth, and perhaps enjoying it, yet fear the reproach and enmity of the world.

To shun the cross is to deny Christianity, and it is the tendency of all our hearts naturally. Our intercourse with the world proves it only too well. It tolerates us when we venture to speak of future events, or of those truths which do not touch the very sources of Christianity; but if we speak of the cross, and the blood of Christ, it despises us. We do not like that, for we want to escape reproach, and so we deserve the Lord's severe rebuke.

What a humiliation for Peter to fall from the height of such revelations, to be convicted of playing the part of the *enemy* towards Christ! He, who had confessed the Son of the living God, who was a future living stone of the Church, who was invested with the authority of the kingdom, had to hear it said to him by the Master whom he loved, "Get thee behind Me, Satan."

But what folly too it was to come and rebuke the Son of the living God, and suggest to Him what

He had to do. Ah! Peter little knew himself or Him whom the Father had just revealed to him.

The whole of this account unveils what the flesh is in the believer, seen in its best light, and with its best intentions. It shrinks from reproach, it is an offence to Christ, and Satan can be identified with it. After having been brought into the presence of the living God, Peter learns that his natural thoughts are not on the things of God, but on those of *men*. This word says all; the things of men are those over which Satan has the upper hand. Man and Satan are in perfect unison.

"Come after me;'

Matthew 16: 24-28.

The disciples are here called to come after Christ. In order to come after Him there must be the two things which we have had in the preceding chapter — personal acquaintance with Christ, and the knowledge of the cross. Peter had received the first, and he shunned the second. But the cross alone removes every hindrance to following Christ. It is our starting-point, our first step in the Christian pathway; for the believer cannot take a single step unless he starts from the foot of the cross. This upsets all our natural thoughts, all the religious teaching of the day, which amounts to this: Take the first step towards Christ, give up your sins, consecrate yourself to God, and His grace will help you. God never framed such language, as the outset of Peter's history proves. Scripture teaches us that God has taken the first step towards man, and that this first step led the Saviour to the cross, by which alone man can begin to be pleasing to Him.

Such then is our starting-point for following Him. Let us see under what conditions we can walk in this path. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself." Most Christians translate the words thus, "We must give up certain sins and lusts." The Word tells us we must deny *ourselves*. This we can only do in the power of the new man, for the old man cannot put off itself. There must be a new man in order to be able to put off the old, and say, "I am crucified with Christ; and I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." The flesh has no more rights or place for the new man; he reckons himself dead. The consequence is that only the Christian can give up all. What are fleshly habits and lusts to the new man? For remark, it is no question of making an effort over oneself to get rid of one's chains. What delivers us is the knowledge of a judgment passed on us at the cross, and of the new place of a man in Christ. The struggle between the two natures follows. To deny oneself is to do what Christ has done, only to us in a different way; for in Him there was no old man to judge. He walked in the absolute power of the new man; for He was, like the heifer, without spot, upon which never came yoke. (Numbers 19.) But Christ as man had a perfect will. He gave it up entirely. He said, "Not My will, but Thine be done." Christ had rights, and He gave them up. He had all power, and He was crucified in weakness. Having entered the scene surrendering Himself, He left it with the same absolute surrender, consummated in the gift of His own life.

"And take up his cross." This is the consequence of self-surrender. He who has completely given up self would find no attraction in what the world offers him, but rather a subject of grief. Christ met temptations, not with indifference, but in suffering. "He hath suffered, being tempted." Thousands of Christians think they are bearing their cross when they are tried, or when the hand of God presses on them in discipline. This is not the cross. Notice the words, "*Take up* his cross." It is not *receiving* afflictions from God's hand, but taking up of one's own will - *willingly*, I might say - the burden of suffering that the world offers. This burden is the more real and heavy, inasmuch as in following Christ we walk more in the power of the new man, who, having no link down here, finds nothing in the world

but enmity against the Saviour, and against that which is born of God.

"And follow Me." Following is consequent on the two preceding conditions. To follow Him is to imitate Him. To imitate Him is to form our acts and thoughts by Him.

These three things are necessary to coming after Him. Where is the power to realize them? Peter deluded himself as to this in Luke 22: 33. He thought that this power lay in his good intentions and resolutions, in his love for the Saviour. How many Christians think the same. They would readily say, "Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death." But this power is not of man (we shall take up this subject later on); it is essentially connected with two things, the gift of the Holy Ghost — the power from on high for our walk, and the loss of all confidence in the flesh. Simon Peter learnt with Satan, by a fall, to mistrust himself; Paul with God by acquaintance with Christ in glory. When Peter is thoroughly broken, the Lord says to him definitely, "Follow Me." (John 21: 19.) And the disciple, following Jesus, sets forth, through death, to reach Christ in glory.

Brethren, let us follow Him to the end. We shall have the present blessed reward of learning here below to know Him in glory, as we shall see in chapter 17 of our gospel.

Beholding Christ in Glory.

Matthew 17: 1-8; Luke 9: 28-34; 2 Peter 1: 16-19.

We have reached a new event in the spiritual life of Peter. Having learnt that blessing could only be acquired by the death and resurrection of Christ, he and his two companions were privileged to behold from this earth the Lord Jesus coming in glory. They were favoured to see where the painful pathway closes which begins at the cross, and to enjoy the vision. It left a deep impression on Peter's spirit, and later on he learnt its full meaning. In chapter 1 of his second epistle, after placing before the saints the conditions of entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, remembering the transfiguration, he explains to them in what the kingdom consists: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount." (2 Peter 1: 16-18.)

All the truths which referred to the kingdom were summed up in the Person of Christ. It was *His power and coming*; His majesty was seen; *honour and glory* were given to Him there by God the Father from the heart of the excellent glory. It was above all Christ who filled the scene of the transfiguration. The disciples had to learn here below who this Christ was who had been speaking to them of His humiliation and cross. Peter needed to know Him, not only as Son of the living God, dispenser of all heavenly blessings to His own, but as a man declared the beloved Son of the Father in glory. He had to behold Him as the *centre of this glory*, a Man from whom not only every blessing flowed, as in Matthew 16, but to whom all honour and glory were given as the unique Object of earth and heaven. A supreme voice sounded in his ears which declared that all *the affections and thoughts* of God were centred on this Man. Outside Him there remained nothing. When the voice had said, "Hear Him," they saw no man save Jesus only; and if He had been taken from them, heaven itself would have lost for them its chief blessedness.

The second truth revealed to Peter on the mount was, that men, subject to the same infirmities as

we are, were associated with the Son of man in His glory. It was a remarkable fact that Moses and Elias each failed in their responsibility, and were cut off without having pursued to its close the path of faith. The blessing belonging to it was taken from them; at any rate, it was for Elias in his prophetic office. (1 Kings 19: 16.) It was worthy of note that these two men were very great, for they represented the law and the prophets in the eyes of the disciples. However, Moses struck the rock twice, forgetting to sanctify the Lord in the midst of the people; and he had to die on Mount Nebo within sight of the promised land. Elijah lay down under a juniper-tree, requesting to die; and then pleaded against Israel before God, and had to deliver up his office of prophet, anointing another in his room. What marvellous grace which sets them nevertheless in the same glory as Jesus — glory *due* to Christ, and *conferred* on His own in virtue of His work! Moses and Elias do not adore here; they *talk with Him*; a sign of perfect *intimacy*. The subject of their discourse was His death. The glory is the result of His death, and His death is the subject of their intercourse in glory.

In the third place, Peter had on the holy mount a complete vision of all that *constitutes* the kingdom — a glorious Christ, saints raised or changed, appearing with Him in glory; earthly saints associated in this blessed scene, all well-known prophetic truths, which I merely touch in passing, and of which the apostle could say, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." (2 Peter 1: 19.)

The Father's House.

Luke 9: 34-36.

We have seen the disciples permitted to enjoy the glory of Christ before the moment of His manifestation. They did not then understand the bearing of the scene which later on served to support their apostolic authority. Not having been called to behold it from this point of view, we only know it on their testimony; but we also are in present possession of a scene of glory, for it is said, "*We all*, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3: 18.)

However, the holy mount is not only the scene of the future vision, or the present contemplation of the glory, but it gives the disciples a *near* portion with Christ. Peter, who a few days previously had incurred the Lord's displeasure, is brought by grace with his companions where man had never before entered. A cloud overshadowed the disciples, and they entered into it with Jesus. For a Jew it was a terrible thing. How could they do anything but fear to penetrate into the cloud which was the sign of Jehovah's presence? How not tremble at the remembrance that even the high priest, in order that he might not die when he went into the sanctuary of God, had to envelop himself with a cloud of incense? But the disciples might be reassured; the cloud was no longer for them the abode of Israel's Jehovah, but the *Father's* house. The presence of Christ with them in the cloud was the means of revealing to them the name of Him who dwelt therein. They became companions not only of the Son of man in His glory, like Moses and Elias, but of the Son in the Father's house. To dwell in the glory is indeed a future blessing which not even one of the saints fallen asleep has yet attained; to dwell in the Father's house is a present as well as a future portion. If I can say in speaking of the future, "I *will* dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (Psalm 23: 6), I can just as well cry in speaking of the present, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord *all the days of my life*, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple." (Psalm 27: 4.) The prodigal

son was brought into the Father's house when he was converted; clad in the best robe, and standing in the dignity of a son, he was there given to share in all the Father's possessions, and in the joy which He had in communicating them to him. This house is the *secret abode of communion*. Many things attracted the gaze of the disciples at the transfiguration; the face of Christ shining as the sun; His raiment white as the light; Moses and Elias, two celebrated men, appearing in glory. There was none of this in the cloud. Like Paul, caught up into paradise, the disciples *saw* nothing, for Moses and Elias disappeared; but it was in order that the disciples might give undivided attention to a *word* in which all the mind of God is summed up.

Peter forgot the pre-eminence of Christ as long as he saw Moses and Elias. He said, "Let us make three tabernacles." He wanted to put the law and the prophets on a level with Christ by associating them with Him; and there are many Christians who unconsciously do the same. Poor Peter! How unworthy he showed himself of the vision! His language, his sleep, and his fear, betrayed the state of his soul, and the more the perfection of Jesus shone out, the more Peter's imperfections were multiplied. We find it so at every turn, until he has fully judged himself. The Spirit gives him power, the flesh deprives him of it; the Spirit enlightens his understanding, the flesh shows its ignorance, above all, concerning the cross; the Spirit directs his gaze to the glory of the kingdom, the flesh lowers this glory to the level of failing man. The same thing comes out in the scene of the tribute money, at the supper, in Gethsemane, and in the court of the high priest, until Peter learns what the flesh is, and receives power from on high.

The excellent glory, far from repelling the disciples, attracted them to Christ, and set them at His feet as disciples, saying to them, "Hear Him." Thus Peter, with the rest, was brought to enjoy the thoughts of the Father towards the Son of His love, and the Father's house was the scene of this revelation. The disciples, as we have said, heard one word, the brief expression of what the presence of the Son called forth from the Father's lips, but it is a word which lets us into the secret of His heart: "This is My beloved Son: hear Him."

Such is our present blessing. We have been allowed to share the secret of the Father. He has brought us now into intimacy with Him which cannot be exceeded even in the eternal state, although, of course, it will be more perfectly enjoyed. We shall there see all the display of Christ's glory, and we shall be seen in this glory; but now we are the depositaries of the Father's thoughts revealing the Son, the Father revealed by the Son. "When the voice was past, Jesus was found alone." As we listen to this voice we shall learn more and more what the Father is to Him and to us.

Relationship with the Son.

Matthew 17: 24-27.

Peter had seen on the mount men associated with Christ in the kingdom glory; then, entering into the cloud, he had been permitted to hear the expression of the Father's delight in His beloved Son. Here in the scene of the tribute money the Lord associates Peter with Himself, not in future glory, nor in present heavenly enjoyment, but down here on the earth as a son of God, walking in the consciousness of his dignity as a son.

When the Lord showed to the disciples His companions in glory there came a moment when they disappeared, making room for Jesus only, so that the glory of Christ, more excellent than that of Moses, might be recognized as pre-eminent; but when the Lord associates Peter with Himself as son He sets him and keeps him in the same relationship as Himself to the Father. Three sentences give expression

to this blessed relationship: "Then are the *children* free;" "Lest *we* should offend them;" and, "Give unto them *for Me and thee*."

How little we realize and appreciate this. To be a son of God, in the same relationship to Him as Jesus is as Man, would be incredible and impossible were it not affirmed to us by God. At the same time let us hasten to add that Christ is Son of God under two aspects. As the only begotten Son in the bosom of the Father He has a relationship which is not and never will be ours; but as *Man* He is called Son of God (Ps. 2; Luke 1: 35), and sets us in this relationship, with this difference only between Him and us, that it belongs to Him in virtue of His personal dignity and worth (when Jesus comes into the world God greets Him with these words, "*Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee*"), while we are sons solely in virtue of His work. But it is marvellous to think that our relationship is absolutely the same as His. "*My Father, and your Father; My God, and your God.*" "Ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, *Abba, Father.*" (Compare Mark 14: 36.) "Heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ."

But, alas! here as elsewhere poor Peter's wretched heart is laid bare. When he said, "Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee." his thoughts were human; that is to say, Satanic. As if Jesus could have contemplated self-preservation. On the mount Peter did not know what he said. (Luke 9: 33.) It was ignorance, seeking to make a present out of a future scene. One might compare Peter's words, "It is good for us to be here," with those of Christians in our day who look for the reign of Christ on earth by the gospel during the present economy. Besides, in his ignorance he brought in another authority alongside of Christ; and, as I have already stated, it was like multitudes of Christians who mix law and grace — grace being what saves us, and the law our rule of life. Peter's earthly thoughts were an offence to Christ, and He rebuked him severely; but on the mount God in grace meets his ignorance (what condescension!) by setting Christ before him as the only One to whom he should listen.

In the scene of the tribute money we find Peter anxious to claim for his Master the character of a zealous Jew. This is somewhat similar to the attempt often made nowadays of accommodating Christ to the religion of a world which has rejected Him, in order that He may be accepted, acknowledged, and honoured. Peter did not wish Jesus to be treated as a stranger in the official system, nor that He should seem to separate Himself from it. The Lord showed him that He walked before God, and not before a system. If Christ was thenceforth a stranger to the Jewish system, it was that the latter was *estranged from God*; whereas Jesus was a Son before God. More than this, the Lord of the temple ought not to pay tribute for the temple. He the Creator, who had all power over creation, could not be compared to the creature. He to whom even a fish from the depths of the sea brought tribute ought not to pay tribute.

When man is delivered over to himself how miserable are his best thoughts concerning Christ. Thus the Lord in His communications is never able to recognize Peter's intelligence, except in the case where he received a direct revelation from the Father which flesh and blood could not have taught him. But, as we have said, the folly of the disciple is met by grace. The Sovereign accepts this position of humiliation which was not His by right so as not to offend them. He does not combat a system abandoned by God, though not yet judged. He who was already in reality rejected would not offend those who had rejected Him. Though a Son, He yet accepts the place of dependence given Him. Moreover, He will not, by refusing to pay tribute, humiliate and belie His poor disciple before the world. What condescension!

He does more than this. In His answer He reveals to Peter his association with Christ as Son of the sovereign God. On the mount the disciples had received the revelation of the Father concerning the

Son; here Jesus reveals to Peter a marvellous family relationship. They are both sons of God; but Peter is a son only in virtue of the fact that Christ humbled Himself to save us. Such blessings are present ones. On the mount three poor fishermen, sunk in fear, sleep, and ignorance, were called to enter into the Father's house to hear His expression of delight in His Son; here at Capernaum we see a poor, weak disciple whose human zeal to honour Christ has the effect of lowering Him, called as he was to walk with Him always in humility, yet also in the consciousness of the dignity of a son of God.

Washing of the Feet and Communion.

John 13.

A fresh aspect of the character of Christ and His work is revealed to Peter at the supper — His service in connection with communion. On the holy mount Peter had been brought into the actual scene of this communion, and had heard the Father's expression of delight in His Son; but he had to learn what was necessary in order to enjoy this communion, or maintain it, or be restored to it if lost. We may, like the disciple in Matthew 17, enjoy some measure of intercourse with God, without real communion with Him. Communion is being in *thought and heart one with the, Father, and with the Son*. The Lord explains it in our chapter when He says to Peter, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." (v. 8.) Have we part with Christ unreservedly in His estimate of things, His thoughts and affections? Have we God's judgment concerning man, the world, sin? Have we His thoughts as to the work of Christ, and the value of His blood? Have we the same affections as the Son for the Father, and the Father for the Son — common enjoyment with God as to the perfection of Christ, common thoughts with the Son concerning the Father to glorify Him, to please Him, to do His will, to trust in Him, to enjoy to the full His presence?*

*It may be added that "part with Christ" is in the new place on which He was entering — a place, too, made for believers through redemption. — Ed.

Alas! when it comes to realizing these things we are indeed forced to own that we know but little of such communion; for in reality the moments spent in heavenly communion are, as it were, submerged in the rest of our Christian life. And yet there is nothing to hinder its being continual; for we have the eternal life which brings us into it. (1 John 1.) But if our communion is so feeble, let us not be content with our measure of it, and, on the other hand, let us not be discouraged. God has made provision for all our failures and short-comings in the advocacy of Christ, and by washing of the feet, which is the counterpart.

The basis of this service is the love which has been manifested once, but not exhausted, at the cross; for it remains, and will remain, the same to the end. "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." (John 13: 1.) It was not enough for the Lord to save us; His love would purify us from all defilement; and it is for this that He takes the place of a servant. Nothing can stop or hinder this service for His own. He girds Himself to wash the disciples' feet at the very moment of Judas' betrayal of Him. (John 13: 2.) The possession of all things, His own dignity as coming from God and going to God, do not deter Him either from this service; on the contrary, He makes use of His power, in humbling Himself to serve His beloved ones. Such is His love manifested in the washing of the feet.

The priesthood of Christ itself has many functions. Not to speak of its necessity for making propitiation (Heb. 2: 17), we see it in exercise for the succour of those who are tempted (Heb. 2: 18), and to enable us to draw nigh to the throne of grace. (Heb. 4: 16.) We see it in activity for us that we

may have part with the Lord where He is, and recover communion when we have lost it through sin. This is advocacy properly speaking. (1 John 2 and John 13.) Exercised in our favour advocacy has two sides — the Father's and ours. Christ intercedes for us with the Father, and He brings us succour from Him when we have soiled our feet on the pathway.*

*It may be doubted if the distinction between priesthood and advocacy is here sufficiently observed; and whether the object of feet-washing is, as in the next sentence, "to help us." It surely is restoration to communion, if defilement is contracted through sin. — Ed.

In connection with communion we find in this chapter the Advocate coming in to *help us*; but when Jesus says later on to Peter, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Luke 22: 32), it is advocacy in exercise *with the Father* for the disciple's restoration. Here we see the Lord placing us in contact with the Word (the water of purification), which He applies Himself by the Spirit to our consciences and our walk, in order to give us, not a future, but a present part with Him. "If I wash thee not, thou *hast* no part with Me." This is what we see with many blessed details in the type of the red heifer. (Num. 19.)*

*See the paper on "The Red Heifer," *Christian Friend*, 1888.

But Peter as yet understood nothing of Christ's service so presented to him, and was unable to enter into what would thereby have been his part. Two things were lacking, expressed in these two words: "What I do thou *knowest not* now; but thou shalt know hereafter" (v. 7); and, "Whither I go, thou *canst* not follow Me now; but thou shalt follow Me afterwards." (v. 36.) These two things were knowledge and power.

Peter had real affection for the Lord; but this affection could not preserve him from the gravest of falls. He lacked what was indispensable — knowledge — as was proved in the hitherto most striking acts of his life. When he said (Matthew 16: 22), "Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee," it was his affection which spoke; and yet at this very moment Peter was a Satan, who, for want of knowing the heart of Christ, dared to think that the God of love would consent to save Himself. When on the mount' he said, "Let us make here three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias," it was again his affection for Jesus; but the knowledge of the glory of His person was totally lacking, although with his eyes he beheld the manifestation of it. He put divine grace on a level with the "law" which "came by Moses" to condemn, and prophecy which announced judgment. In the scene of the tribute money, Peter's "Yes," in answer to the question, "Doth not your Master pay?" denotes once more affection for his Master, whom he thought to honour in the presence of his compatriots, but without the least knowledge of the dignity of Him who was God, Creator, Lord of the temple, Son of the Sovereign on His throne. In one sense knowledge precedes affection; for in reality it is no other than the apprehension by the Holy Spirit of the work, the love, and the person of Christ. It follows it too, for affection for Christ is the best way of growing in His acquaintance. In the chapter before us, Peter's words, "Thou shalt never wash my feet," denote again his affection, joined to a sense of the dignity of Christ, but also ignorance of the Saviour's love, which found its satisfaction in devoted service. Then, when the Lord says to him, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me," he asks to have not only his feet washed, but also his hands and his head. Truly this was affection for Christ, for he esteemed it most precious to have part with Him; but this affection was accompanied by complete ignorance of the work which had already accomplished purification once for all.

*I say "accomplished" because from John 13 to the end of 17 the Lord is seen as if on the other side of the cross, His hour being come to depart out of this world to the Father.

The secret of our intercourse with our brethren is also found in this knowledge of the work and

the love of Christ. As the Lord had loved them (v. 34), the disciples were to love one another; as He had washed their feet, they were to wash one another's feet. (v. 14.) And here let us observe in passing, that when we are in need ourselves of feet washing in order to be restored, it is not the moment for us to attempt to wash our brethren's feet. The man himself must be clean who would sprinkle the water of purification on one who had been defiled by a dead body. (Numbers 19.) If we lack vigilance in our walk, we lose not only the communion consequent upon it, but the great privilege of intercessional service towards others.

As we said before, the second thing which Peter lacked was power. Humanly speaking, he was characterized by an energy which led him to face difficulties, but which, being energy of the flesh, did not enable him to overcome them. "I will follow Thee." "I will lay down my life for Thee." "I will not forsake Thee." Such is his usual language. It was always affection, but without divine power, and an affection which did not hinder the disciple from denying his Master. What was lacking was the power of the Spirit, which is exactly contrary to that of the flesh, and which is only displayed in the measure in which the flesh is judged. For its full manifestation there must be the sense of utter powerlessness.

Peter could not have either this knowledge or power previous to the death and resurrection of Christ, or before the gift of the Holy Spirit; but what he had to pass through when he was not yet in possession of these two things was profitable to him, and is, and will be so, to others. In the Acts of the Apostles Peter's career completely changes. Knowledge of Christ, power, self-forgetfulness, blessed service for others, are met with at every step. Old things are passed away, and we have the new career of a new man.

Peter enters into Temptation.

Luke 22: 31-62.

Peter had learnt (John 13) what was necessary in order to have communion with the Lord. Recalling the blessings which had been unfolded to him since the beginning of his career, it would seem as if the circle were complete, and there remained nothing more to learn. But there was one thing without which all these blessings would be of no effect — the knowledge of and judgment of the flesh, and of its absolute incapacity before God; and this we have in Luke 22: 31. Satan had desired to have the poor disciples that he might sift them as wheat. As in Job's case, the enemy had presented himself before God to accuse them. Availing himself of the moment favourable to his designs, when the Lord would be taken away from them, and they would be externally unprotected, he had asked to put them into the sieve, in the certainty that nothing would remain which God could accept. In this way he thought to wrest them from Christ, but he was mistaken. No doubt nothing of *man* would remain in the sieve; but what *God* had wrought in the disciples must remain. In his enmity Satan forgot that if he had all power over the flesh, he had none with regard to God and what came from Him. God granted his request because He had purposes of grace and love towards Peter and the disciples, as He had of old towards Job. Peter was to be left in the enemy's hands that he might learn himself. Such dealing was needful for his blessing.

It was otherwise with Saul of Tarsus, who during his first interview with Christ on the way to Damascus learnt what the flesh was. However painful it was, he had the happiness of learning it with God, and had not to come back again to it. From the first he could say, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing;" and also, We who "have no confidence in the flesh." Until he met Christ, his natural character in its full development had been plainly manifested in its fruits.

Circumstances had proved that his flesh was animated without cause or reason by the most terrible enmity against Christ that it was possible to see. His conscience — and he had a great deal, for he said, "I verily thought with myself that *I ought to do many things* contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" had constituted him an implacable enemy of Jesus. Peter, as we have often said, had a sincere love for the Lord. If there were anything capable of hindering the flesh from acting, and of keeping him, it was that. Yet his love for Christ only produced self-confidence. Even with Paul, who had learnt his lesson, the flesh sought later on to make communion with God a means of his being puffed up, and he needed an angel of Satan to keep him from falling; just as Peter needed a fall and Satan's sieve to open his eyes.

But if the enemy had displayed his activity, Christ had been at work before him, and had anticipated the moment of the sifting. "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (v. 32.) He had interceded for Peter even before anything had passed in his conscience. The first priestly act, that which regards God, had taken place unknown to Peter, and in view of his fall, which had not yet occurred. The second act came after the fall, when "the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter" (v. 61), and reached his conscience. One look from Christ was the starting-point of all the blessings which followed, recalling his heart to the love which had been in exercise to prevent his falling; and assuring him that this love, inexhaustible in its supply, was not changed by his unfaithfulness, and at length, reaching his conscience, caused him to shed bitter tears of repentance in presence of such grace.

Then only, when truly restored, would Peter be able to strengthen his brethren (v. 32), and to deal with the hearts and consciences of others. Ministry can only be exercised in self-judgment. All that Peter had previously learnt could not have qualified him to be used in blessing to others. What fitted him for this was the knowledge of grace, starting with what he had had to pass through as to his own utter unworthiness.

The Lord now (v. 33) allowed Peter's self-confidence to be plainly manifested. "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death." "*I am ready.*" This was the flesh, ready to face everything. The flesh even when warned is *always* self-confident. If it had had even one atom of strength, the Lord's solemn warning should have hindered it from falling. But now the moment came when Peter, left to his own resources (vv. 35-38), accompanied the Lord to Gethsemane, and the Master was left alone. Not one of His disciples could watch one hour with Him. "Watch and pray," said He, "that ye enter not into temptation." (Matt. 26: 41.) "Watch and pray," that was what Jesus did. If Peter had listened (he slept in presence of temptation as he had done in presence of the glory) he would have been on his guard against the temptation, and in dependence on God, and he would not have entered into it. To enter into temptation as a man in the flesh was to succumb to it. Christ alone could *enter* into it and come out divinely victorious, obtaining the victory in dependence. He could have used His power to deliver Himself. At the sight of Him His enemies went backward and fell to the ground. He could have asked for legions of angels; but He submits, endures the treachery of Judas, yields all His rights (and what rights!) into the hands of men, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, without a protestation or murmur. Peter did not watch or pray. He entered into temptation, and succumbed at once. He drew the sword with impatience to defend himself, and shed blood instead of accompanying the Saviour to be struck like Him. He followed afar off, and entered into the high priest's court. The flesh could take him thus far, but then all its strength came to nought at the word of a servant.

The Sepulchre.

John 20: 1-18.

Some women and the beloved disciple had been present during the last scene at the cross. Before bowing His head and yielding up His spirit, the Lord had uttered the words, "It is finished," which conveyed an infinite scope of blessing to the hearts of the disciples, who were thus assured that divine love had taken pity on their state, and had provided for it at all cost. It is finished. Such a work left nothing more to be done. The cross could no longer hold its victim. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were God's chosen instruments for giving the Saviour a place with the rich in His death, and the passage preceding that which we have now read takes us up to that moment.

It was not indeed all, to know a love which had brought the Lord down to death for them; there remained a capital point to be learnt. What did the sepulchre contain? What had death done with the Saviour? or else, What had the Saviour done with death? If the grave had held Him, His work was vain, and not one of those for whom He had given Himself was acquitted or justified. Mary found the sepulchre open. Peter and John ascertained that it was empty. Peter went in and saw. The attributes of death were there, testifying by their presence that death had been unable to hold its prey, and that, without struggle or conflict, the victory over it had been peaceful. The napkin was wrapped together in a place by itself, as one does with a garment when preparing to go out. The "It is finished" was proved. The love which had undertaken the work had completed it; and the disciples, who as yet knew not the Scripture, were convinced by the testimony of their eyes. They believed, and went away again unto their own home with the *knowledge* of a work thenceforth completed.*

*Peter seems to have been less convinced than John. (Luke 24: 12.)

This was a great step no doubt, but, shame be to these two disciples, it was little in comparison to what a poor, ignorant woman found at the sepulchre. Mary Magdalene — witness in person of the love of Christ who had delivered her from the seven devils — loved the Lord with an affection which sprang from the greatness of His love, and which far exceeded her intelligence. Happy woman after all; for while the intelligence of Peter and John could be engaged and satisfied with a work, Mary's affection could not be; she needed more, she wanted the *Person* who was her object. Peter who had gone into the sepulchre had seen only the linen clothes and the napkin; Mary seeking a Person, as she wept stooped down into the sepulchre and saw the angels. The linen clothes had sufficed for the disciples, but the angels were not enough for Mary. Even in their presence, and without awaiting their answer, she turned back; for she wants her Lord. At first her utter ignorance of the things that were to come to pass hindered her from recognizing Him; but Jesus said to her, "Mary" — one single word, "Mary."

Was it surprising that there should be a link of affection from Mary to Jesus, that the Saviour in the perfection of His person should win all the thoughts and love of a failing, ignorant creature, and above all when she had been the object of such goodness and such a deliverance? But that there should be a link of affection from Jesus to Mary — that was the wonderful thing. Amongst thousands of thousands He knew her by name as His sheep. He remembered the most wretched. She said unto Him, "Master." He replies, not, "Go to my *servants*," but, "Go to my *brethren*, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." Mary's affection clinging to Christ received a revelation greater than all those which Peter had had up to this. Love which is set on His person becomes the depository of further knowledge. Knowing only His work the disciples had gone away again to their own home; Mary Magdalene with love which clung to His person had learnt at the Saviour's feet the most glorious results of His sacrifice. This is why Peter and John are so in the shade

in this scene; a weak woman in all the modesty of her position outstrips them. Their feet were swift, no doubt, to lead them to the sepulchre. Mary was the first to know the path which leads straight to the Father, and, retracing her steps with this marvellous revelation, to carry the message to the disciples. H. R.

Service and Food.

John 21: 1-14.

We have in this passage some instruction with regard to the service and food of the Lord's servants, which we will examine in detail.

After Peter's many experiences, it would seem as if he were henceforth qualified for service. He went forth, followed by six other disciples, to fish in the Sea of Tiberias. What characterized this undertaking was that Peter took the initiative himself of setting to work to obtain the results of his labour. It was in vain, and the night waned before he and his companions had seen their efforts crowned with any success. Peter employed the same means as on a corresponding occasion, previous to his conversion. How often when God entrusts us with active service we set about it like men in the flesh, and our work is barren. It is important to understand that in ministry, all, *absolutely all*, must be of God, and nothing of man.

The scene changed as soon as Jesus stood on the shore; His presence ushered in the dawn of a day of blessing. *His presence* was what was most needed. As long as they had toiled without Him, their efforts were fruitless. It was daybreak when this scene took place. There is *a special moment* determined of God for service, and the disciples, unmindful of it, had lost their time during the whole night. They found the fish the right side of the ship, in a special place only known to Jesus, and Peter had to trust to this knowledge before, his activity could be crowned with success. The disciples cast their net at *His word*, having nothing else to depend on, and they captured one hundred and fifty-three great fishes; their fishing in this place closed with a number determined and known only by the Lord. From this moment they had something else to do; they brought the result of their labour to Jesus. (v. 10.) They did not fish for themselves or for others, but *for the Lord alone*.

Oh that our hearts, dear servants of Christ, might all learn this lesson! When, where, with whom, by whom, and for whom, are we working? Does our life consist in one long night of human activity directed by the will of man? or is it like an aurora illuminated by the Lord's presence? and do we see our nets filled because we work in dependence on Him?

As to the food, Jesus stood on the shore and said, "Children, have ye any meat? They answered Him, No." Doubtless they thought that this stranger, whom they had not yet recognised, was in need of food. But the question forced them to avow that until now all their labour had given nothing to Christ. Then came the words, "Cast the net" It was as if He said to them, "If you would give me something, you must receive it from me." From that moment John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, could no longer be mistaken; for to him the Lord was One who gave, and to whom nothing was given.

Here another point comes out; the disciples themselves had nothing to eat. Labour does not feed, it causes hunger. Even fruitful labour, a miraculous catch of fish, left the disciples a prey to hunger. How many souls there are in the present day of activity who remain barren, in spite of their work, because they delude themselves as to the profit accruing to their spiritual life from their activity! It was not on the sea amidst all the surrounding effort and agitation, but on the shore where all was still, that

the disciples heard the Lord saying unto them, "Come and dine." The meal was not prepared with fish taken from their net, but provided by the Lord Himself, who distributed it to them. They fed on the result of Christ's work, what He alone had done for them.*

*I do not mean this in any way as a typical explanation of this scene. Others have entered upon it in this way, and I can only refer the reader to their writings.

May it be so with us, beloved. When we have brought the result of our service to the Lord that He may do as He thinks best with it, let us sit down, invited by Him to feed on Him in the retirement of the shore. Let us return not only for others, but above all for ourselves, to the holy Word which reveals Christ. Having eaten, Peter was led on a step farther in his service, and enabled to feed the lambs and sheep of the Lord.

The Soul Restored.

John 21: 15-19.

Having fed and satisfied all His disciples, testifying thus to a love which made no distinction between them, the Lord took Peter apart with Himself, and asked him, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" Peter loved the Lord. Now, there was a disciple who loved Him, I do not say more, but better than Peter. Whilst the latter was occupied in His service, John was occupied with the Lord. He never calls himself the disciple who loved Jesus, but the disciple "*whom Jesus loved.*" What seemed wonderful to him to record was that Jesus should love such an one as he, and he does not weary of repeating it.

Jonathan loved David as his own soul, and yet did not sacrifice his position for him. Abigail's love, which more resembled that of John, was but the sense of its being possible for her to be loved by such a man, she who was but "a servant to wash the feet of the servants of her lord."

John, like Mary Magdalene, was occupied with the person and the love of Christ; therefore he was prompt in recognising Jesus, and did not, like Peter, need some one to tell him, "It is the Lord." Peter, with all the impetuosity of his nature, cast himself into the sea to get to Jesus and show *his* affection. John is satisfied to be the object of Jesus' love.

"Lovest thou me more than these?" Peter had said that he loved Him more, and yet had denied Him. The Lord takes him, so to speak, by the hand, and leads him back to the spot whence his fall originated — confidence in his own strength and in his love for Christ. Three times during the Saviour's last interviews with His disciples Peter clearly manifests his state of soul. "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." (Matthew 26: 33.) "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death." (Luke 22: 33.) And, "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake." (John 13: 37.) The Lord takes up these three words, beginning with the first: "Though all men shall be offended." "Lovest thou me more than these?" All, alas! had forsaken Him, but Peter only had denied Him, and can therefore no longer rely on his love compared to that of others. Thus humbled, he appeals, not to his feelings, but to the Saviour's knowledge. He *knew*. "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee." He does not add, "More than these;" for he compares himself with Christ, and in humility he esteems others better than himself.

Then Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." Pastoral care for young souls springs from humility, together with love for the Lord. Where the Lord finds these things in His people He can trust them with this service. Other gifts are perhaps not so absolutely connected with the inner state; but one cannot

really take up the needs of tender souls without self-abnegation and much love, not only for them, but for Christ.

"Feed *my* lambs." This one word shows us what they are for Jesus, and the value of what the Lord confides to Peter. They are His property. The heart of Christ had not changed in regard to Simon, and He entrusted him with what He loved at his first step in the painful pathway leading to restoration. Peter's heart was broken, but sustained by Christ in the breaking. Jesus did not probe it three times to give him an answer only at the third; He gave it already at the first. What delicate affection and care in the discipline! If the three questions had been put without the encouragement of a promise with each, Peter's heart, distressed by his failure, would have been overwhelmed with sorrow; but the promise sustained him each time under the stroke intended to break him down. It was like the burning bush, which grace prevented from being consumed. Jesus probed Peter three times; he had denied Jesus three times. The last time nothing remained but what the Lord had produced and could approve. Sorrow was there too, no doubt, but joined to the certainty that the love which was the fruit of His love, though buried to the eyes of all by manifestations of the flesh, the all-seeing eye of Christ was alone able to discern. "Lord, Thou *knowest all things*; thou knowest that I love thee." After the second and third questions the care of the sheep and the feeding of the *whole* flock were confided to Peter. It was when, through grace, he had seen himself, and been obliged to appeal to the Lord to discover what he gave up discovering in himself — it was then that he found himself possessed of full and unreserved blessing.

"Follow me."

John 21: 18, 19.

Peter, trusting in himself, had said: "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death." (Luke 22: 33.) When he had been broken down in soul the Lord could teach him: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest." At the beginning of his career he disposed, so to speak, of his own strength (the girdle is what strengthens a man's loins*). Self-confidence was the result; he went whither he would, and walked thus in independence. "But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." At the close of his career, when his natural strength would have been weakened by old age, he would depend on another for strength, and would consent to be guided by others who would lead him where perhaps his will would never have led him, "into prison, and to death." The thing would take place, but not with man's strength; it would be realized in the weakness of old age. "This spake He, signifying by what death he should glorify God." God would be glorified in this complete breaking down of man, when, old, weak, and led by others against his wishes, he might seem to have become a useless vessel. How habitually our judgment is wrong as to what suits and honours God. When, smitten in our bodies, perhaps even in our intellect, we are set aside by men, when feeling our uselessness, we might be tempted to say with the world, that we are no longer good for anything, God declares that we are of use to Him. Up to this the disciple, with all his energy, had often dishonoured instead of glorifying the Lord. Now he is about to grow old and weak and to die, and in view of his death God says, "This is what glorifies me." In order that this glory should be realized, there must be broken, dependent vessels which have no strength but God's.

*It is interesting to see in the Word that we are girded for the walk (Ex. 12: 11), for service (Luke 12: 35), and for conflict. (Eph. 6: 14.)

It was then that Jesus said, "Follow me." He replies to what Peter had said before, "Why cannot I

follow thee now?" (John 13: 37.) Henceforth he would be able to follow Him.

"Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on His breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?" (v. 20.) Three things here characterized the beloved disciple. He was *the object of Christ's love*, and he knew it; he had confidence in Christ alone, and his attitude during supper showed that he enjoyed an intimacy of communion with the Father which others did not. There is no more simple motive for following Jesus than this, His love, which we know attracts us after Him, wins our confidence naturally, and brings us into communion with the Lord. Peter was now allowed to follow the Lord step by step unto death. His experiences of self, previous to being restored (Luke 22: 32), were over; he had lost confidence in self, gained confidence in Christ, and he entered now on the blessed pathway, in which he was going to learn the realization of dependence unto death. I say "was going to learn," for dependence is not learnt in a day, however deep the work wrought in the soul may be. "When thou shalt be old," said the Lord. Peter had to be tried even to death, and there, as with his Master, would be found the crowning of a life called to glorify God. John had another mission; he was not called to follow the path of Christ in a violent death, but to remain figuratively until the Lord come, present during the decline and ruin of the Church, and with her at the coming in power of the Lord, the picture of which the disciples had seen on the holy mount in connection with the kingdom. But John also follows the Lord. He had not the same need, as Peter, of a command or encouragement to follow Him; love attracted him.

In following the Lord, Peter did not need to be occupied with others. "What is that to thee? Follow thou me." The moment one turns round, one ceases following, and one pauses. It is a serious thing. To follow, there must be unity of thought and a single eye. Peter could not be occupied with John and Christ at the same time. In order to follow the Lord closely, He must have taken possession of us so powerfully, that we belong no longer to ourselves. That is the only means of self-denial and of boldly taking up our cross. We count Jesus alone worthy of being followed down here, even at the cost of a life of suffering. The disciples had followed in two ways, before and after the cross. In the first chapter of John, Jesus said to Philip, "Follow me." In the last chapter He says to Peter, "Follow me." In the first case, before the cross, the disciples had abandoned all to follow Him, for they had faith in Him; but in presence of Calvary their steps halt, and they all flee. Peter went on the last, and followed afar off, but we have seen how it ended.

After the cross the pathway interrupted recommences, but the disciples thenceforth follow a risen, heavenly Christ, who imprints His character on their walk, and it becomes heavenly. Before the cross, the multitude could follow, though it might be from quite other motives and feelings to the disciples; after the cross, the world can do so no longer; for it necessitates the death of the old man and the power of the Spirit, two things which only the believer finds in the death and resurrection of Christ.

May God give us deeper and sustained and increasing energy to follow Him. It is in following Him who has left us an example that we should follow in His steps (1 Peter 2: 21) that we become ensamples to others. Our privilege is to possess in Him a model Man, walking on earth in absolute perfection, and sanctified in heaven for us; but, let me repeat, it is in following Him that we become ensamples to our brethren. The apostle Paul said, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample." (Phil. 3: 17.) Paul, in pointing to himself as one to be *followed*, had no desire to substitute himself for Jesus; but he showed the example of a man who, having no object but this blessed Person, had set forth to follow Him, pressing forward to win Him in glory. Thus Paul's individuality did not hide the Lord from his brethren, but, on the contrary, showed Him forth as the only object worthy of being followed and attained.

