

What is a Meeting of the Assembly?

Heb. 11: 11, 12; Matt. 18: 15-20; 1 Cor. 14: 23-33.

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The Assembly.

Before answering the above question, it is well to recall briefly what the Assembly is according to the Word.

The Assembly, or Church, is composed of all the redeemed of the present dispensation — from Pentecost to the Lord's return. In this sense all the saints of this dispensation, whether they are still here below when the Lord comes or have been gathered to Himself before His coming, form part of it; but generally the Word of God considers the Assembly as being composed of all the members of Christ present on the earth at a given moment.

The Assembly is the Bride of Christ, whom He has loved, for whom He has given Himself, "that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church." But the Assembly is also shown to us under two other characters, especially with reference to the subject that is now before us.

Firstly, the Church is the body of Christ. This body was formed at Pentecost (Acts 2). At that time the Lord Jesus, having ascended to heaven and being seated at the right hand of the Father, consequent on the work of redemption, sent down the Spirit that He had received (Acts 2: 33), *to unite together all the redeemed upon the earth in one body together with Him, their glorified Head in heaven*. At Pentecost there remained yet one entire side of this *mystery* to be revealed, which constitutes the special service of the apostle Paul, namely, that the "Gentiles" were to be "fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph. 3: 6). Acts 2 presents to us the Assembly under its Jewish aspect, so to speak, according to the allusion that is made in Psalm 22: 22; nevertheless, it is the Assembly. That which was accomplished at Pentecost by the gift of the Holy Spirit remains, and will remain unto the coming of the Lord. Baptized by one Spirit into one body here below, all believers are eternally united by this one Spirit to their heavenly Head for the final gathering together to be with Himself in the glory. This unity — "one body and one Spirit" (Eph. 4: 4) — exists to-day as at the beginning; it is indestructible, and ruin cannot reach it.

Besides the principle of the Assembly — that is to say, the unity of the body of Christ — the Person of the Lord is the centre of it (later on we shall insist on the immense importance of this fact), and the Holy Spirit the agent of His working. He acts by means of the gifts bestowed by the risen Lord on the Church (Eph. 4), or distributed by the Spirit as it pleases Him (1 Cor. 12). The *expression* of this

gathering on earth is the *table of the Lord*. It is there that, besides the memorial of His death, the unity of the body is proclaimed (1 Cor. 10: 16, 17).

Secondly, in connection with the descent of the Holy Spirit to the earth, the Assembly is also considered as the House of God here below, as a habitation of God by the Spirit. In the first mention that is made of the Church (Matt. 16), it is as a building, and not as a body. When Peter, to whom it had been revealed by the Father, had declared that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord announced to him that on that rock He would build His Assembly, and that the gates of hell (Hades) would not prevail against it. This building was constituted by the descent of the Holy Spirit after that *the Son of the living God* had been declared "Son of God with power" by the resurrection (Rom. 1: 4). It continues, and will only be completed at His coming, when that which He has built will be translated into heaven to be the city of God, the New Jerusalem, the Temple to which it now grows (Eph. 11: 21). This house is composed of living stones who are built on Him Who is the foundation, "the chief corner-stone." Such a work is perfect, because it is the work of Christ, the Son of the living God. It is as unalterable as the formation of the one body here below.

Just as with the body, the building is also considered as composed of all the redeemed in the whole world at a given moment. "In whom," it is said to the Ephesians, "ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 11: 22).

On the other hand, the Assembly is not only considered as built by the Lord, but also as *entrusted* to man's responsibility for its edification (1 Cor. 3), and here we see everything has failed; the Church has become "like a great house where there are vessels to honour and to dishonour" (2 Tim. 2: 20). If the manifestation of the unity of the body on earth has failed, and if none can recognize this unity in the manner in which the Assembly presents itself to-day to the eyes of the world, it is because other materials have entered into the building of the house besides living stones, and in this outward respect the house has been ruined.

THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY.

At Pentecost the Assembly, the whole Assembly, was gathered at Jerusalem. The work having extended, it was not possible to continue to be thus gathered "in one place" (Acts 2: 44). Everywhere *local meetings* were formed, as we see in the Acts and in the Epistles, *but each of them* was the representation of the whole, the one body — "Ye are Christ's body" (New Trans.) (1 Cor. 12: 27). It was the Assembly of God in that locality; it was inseparable from "all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (1 Cor. 1: 2). The Assembly in a locality comprised all the redeemed who dwelt in that locality. Such was the Assembly of God at Corinth, at Antioch, at Jerusalem, at Ephesus, and at all other places. *The mind of God* as to the local Assembly is, therefore, that it embraces all the redeemed of a locality, and that it represents in the eyes of God, and ought to represent to the eyes of the world, the entire Assembly. This fact is of all importance with respect to the question that we have asked at the beginning of this paper, for it is precisely with the local Assembly that we shall have to occupy ourselves. We cannot insist too strongly on this fact: there is only one principle of gathering according to the Word — that of the unity of the body of Christ. All local Assemblies which are not gathered on the recognition of the whole body of Christ can only be sectarian.

The Word of God *supposes*, in Matthew 18 and 2 Timothy, and in many other passages, that the ruin of the edifice confided to man's responsibility would change the primitive appearance of the gathering of the saints here below, but it supplies a resource of efficacy at all times and in every

circumstance. This resource consists in the presence of the Lord Jesus in the midst of two or three gathered to His name (Matt. 18: 20). It never contemplates that the principle of gathering should be modified on any account whatever. There is one body and one Spirit, and we ought always "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4: 3).

Thus, when we speak today of a local Assembly *it might only consist of two or three gathered unto the name of Christ and in recognition of the one body* in the midst of hundreds of other Christians who have an unscriptural ground of gathering; but these few would have the privilege of being the *representation* of the whole Assembly on earth, at the same time having the responsibility of this representation, and the authority of the Lord would be attached to their Assembly acts.

The passage in Matthew 18: 15-20, which presents to us the practical bearing and exercise of the great truth of the Assembly announced in Matthew 16, shows us the working of that Assembly, were it composed of only two or three. It is gathered to His name, and He is in the midst of it; and so it has His authority for administration; and what it decides as gathered, He being present, and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, is ratified in heaven. In this important passage the Lord even provides for personal difficulties between two brothers. With reference to himself (verses 8 and 9), the believer must know no pity; he must cut off and pluck out. If it is a question of his brother, the wrong doubtless cannot be tolerated, but he must act in grace and with much patience. If he who has sinned against his brother will not listen to him, nor to the witnesses brought by him, the matter is brought before *the assembly*, of which both form part, and it intervenes without appeal. The Assembly speaks, and is not heard: then all the means hitherto employed being exhausted, the injured brother should consider him who has sinned against him "as an heathen man and a publican." The Assembly possesses here the competence to decide without appeal in an *individual* matter.

This seventeenth verse in no way speaks of discipline exercised by the Assembly and of the putting away of the wicked person. Such is not the signification nor the object of the passage. "Let him be unto *thee*," *it* says, not "Let him be unto you." It is necessary to look at 1 Corinthians 5, and not here, to find the example of the putting away of a wicked person by the Assembly.

The intervention of a local Assembly in an individual question naturally leads to a second point contained in verse 18, "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." The Lord, Who had given authority to the apostle Peter in view of the administration of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18: 19), shows here that the authority is now in the Assembly resting on His presence in their midst, and this in view of its administration. In apostolic times, when the Church was founded, the two authorities existed together, without one taking the place of the other, as we can see in the case of the incestuous person at Corinth (1 Cor. 5: 4-5). Since the departure of the apostles there is no longer this individual authority to commit to Satan; but the authority given by the presence of the Lord to the act of two or three gathered to His name remains until His coming.

The Assembly has therefore a duty, that of receiving or putting away. Its decisions are ratified in heaven. Its judicial authority has its source *entirely* in the fact that the Lord is in the midst and that it also possesses the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is very important to notice that the twentieth verse, "there am I in the midst of them," refers equally to verse 18 as to verse 19, of which we shall speak later. The power remains, were it only in the midst of two or three gathered to His name on the ground of the Assembly, *because* He is there personally.

THE ASSEMBLY MEETING.

We have just seen what the Assembly is, and also a local Assembly according to the Word. We can now reply to the question which forms the title of our paper. But first let us say what a meeting of the Assembly is not.

Christians may gather for a useful and blessed purpose without being gathered on the ground of the Assembly. A father may gather his family, a master his household, a brother young people to meditate on the Word or study the Scriptures. Elder brethren may assemble for the same end. A brother, gifted of the Lord as an evangelist or teacher, may exercise his ministry before an audience convoked to this end, whether it be in the meeting-room of the Assembly or elsewhere; this same brother may have it on his heart to expound a subject or a portion of the Word consecutively in a series of lectures; and with the consent of the Assembly; these meetings might perhaps take place during the week on the ordinary meeting day. The Assembly would attend these addresses, of which the responsibility rests upon him who exercises his gift; it would profit by them; there would be light granted, effects produced by the Holy Spirit on the conscience; he who thought he did not need such help would suffer loss; but none of the cases that we have just enumerated are Assembly meetings.

An Assembly meeting is gathered *according to the principle of the Assembly* as such. "When ye *come together in the church,*" says the apostle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11: 18). Further, the Assembly, actually gathered *around the Lord* Who is in the midst of it, is entirely dependent on Him and on the Holy Spirit acting in its midst. When the redeemed understand what the Assembly, the Church, is for the heart of Christ and in the eyes of God, they naturally seek to realize this immense blessing, and have the joy of finding the Lord personally present in the midst of them, according to His promise. This presence is not bodily, as when He stood in the midst of His disciples after His resurrection, but it is none the less *real*. It is a *personal and spiritual* presence. Observe that although His own are gathered "to His name" (Matt. 18: 20), His presence is personal. He says, "*There am I in the midst of them,*" and also, "*In the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee*" (Ps. 22: 22). He does not say, "My Spirit is there," "My Spirit will praise Thee" "My redeemed will praise Thee by the Spirit" — all of which are true — but "I am there," "I will praise Thee," which goes much further.

The mere number is not of importance. His presence is the same; be they three thousand, as at the beginning, or three as in a time of ruin. *His presence in the midst of His own* constitutes the altogether peculiar blessing of an Assembly meeting.

This leads us to the different characters which constitute an Assembly meeting.

1. — The first meeting of the Assembly is for *worship*.
2. — The second meeting of the Assembly is for *prayer* (Matt. 18: 19, 20).
3. — The third meeting of the Assembly is an "open meeting."

THE WORSHIP MEETING.

The first meeting of the Assembly is for worship.

In a general sense, worship is the collective adoration rendered to God for what He is in Himself — for what He is and has: done on our behalf. Worship is of supreme importance in the eyes of the Father and of the Son. "The hour cometh," said the Lord, "and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for *the Father seeketh such* to worship Him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4: 23, 24).

Worship is the first thing realized by Christians who have understood what the Assembly is, for it supposes persons united in one body by one Spirit. Worship takes place in the presence of God the Father and around the Lamb. When one takes this place, one thinks of all that the Son is to the Father, and of all that Christ is for God (Rev. 5: 9), of the fact that God has been perfectly glorified here below in the life and in the death of Jesus. But all this work, which, as well as its Author, forms the delight of the Father, has been accomplished on our behalf; We are able in a measure to appreciate its extent, because we are the objects thereof. Thanksgiving, then, mingles in worship with adoration of the Father and the Son. The Lord Himself is the centre of worship as regards praise. He Himself has gathered us together; He takes His place in our midst. His personal presence in worship has such importance that without it there can be no praise worthy of the name. He says: "In the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee" (Ps. 22: 22). How does He praise? By using the voice of the Assembly as gathered around Himself. It is unquestionable that this can only be *by His Spirit and by our mouths*, but it is equally true that it is *He* who praises. Praise is expressed in this psalm towards the God of love Who saves and delivers; but it is Christ Himself Who has been delivered from death. "Thou hast heard *Me* from the horns of the unicorns." He only can know the extent of this salvation and can celebrate it in an adequate manner. But this deliverance is as much *for us* as the work which made Jesus to descend into death.

His praises, then, should also be ours; only Christ by His Spirit expresses it with a fullness which is not limited by our appreciation of it. Christ, from having been on the horns of the unicorns, knows perfectly what God is in deliverance and what is the greatness of the deliverance. We know it but very imperfectly; but our infirmity finds consolation and encouragement in the thought that praise ascends as a sweet odour in the presence of God the Father, because the Lord Who reveals it to us is the centre of it, the Leader, and He Who expresses it. Without doubt, our moral condition can grieve the Holy Spirit and hinder Him from giving full expression to the praise, but it is none the less true that God is its source (as we read: "My praise shall be of" — rather from — "*Thee* in the great congregation" (Ps. 22: 25)), that the Lord is the centre of it, and that it is expressed by the Holy Spirit.

We find a second feature of worship in 1 Corinthians 10 and 1 Corinthians 11. The Lord's Supper is presented there as *the visible centre of the Assembly gathered at the table of the Lord, the Lord Himself being the invisible centre.*

This meeting, with which *worship* in its highest expression is connected, is pre-eminently an Assembly meeting, and it is considered as such in 1 Corinthians 11, where we find these words which we have previously quoted: "When ye come together in assembly" (verse 18, New Trans.); and, again, "Despise ye the Church of God" (verse 22), words which clearly show the character of the meeting of the Assembly at the table of the Lord. This subject is too well known for us to dwell on longer. It is more necessary, perhaps, to remark that if generally worship be connected with the Lord's Supper, that in no way excludes a meeting of the Assembly *for worship without the breaking of bread*, different from that on the first day of the week, when the Assembly is gathered at the table of the Lord to *break bread* (Acts 20: 7). Often have brethren thus gathered together experienced such happy and blessed worship as finds its expression in those words: "In the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee."

THE PRAYER MEETING.

The next form of Assembly meeting is that *for prayer*, mentioned in Matthew 18: 19, 20.* In verse 18 the Lord had said to His disciples: "I say unto you . . ." In verse 19 He adds, "Again I say unto you . . ." Joining these two subjects in verse 20, whilst distinguishing the one from the other, "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching *anything that they shall ask*, it shall be

done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, *here am I in the midst of them.*" Thus the presence of the Lord is as much assured in a meeting of the Assembly for prayer as for worship.

*One can rightly see in the exercise of reception or putting away in verse 18 of this chapter an Assembly meeting. We only mention it here because it is habitually connected with worship where souls are received or are put away. But one ought to meet more frequently with an Assembly meeting for *humiliation*. It is implied in 1 Corinthians 5: 2. When a sin is discovered in the Assembly and necessitates the exclusion of the guilty person, the Assembly ought to express grief and humble itself about the sin, making it its own before the Lord. The putting away can be pronounced by the Assembly in this meeting for humiliation, which gives great solemnity to the act.

From a practical point of view it is of all importance to understand this. A meeting for prayer has an altogether special character, as special as that of a worship meeting. A brother might perhaps have some plausible reason for absenting himself from the exercise of such and such ministry, but none can ever have a reason for not being present at a meeting of the Assembly for prayer, *for the Lord is there*, personally present in the midst of His own. If our hearts appreciate this privilege, that will not happen which only too often takes place, that in a large gathering only five or six feel constrained to come together for prayer. Should we leave Him, the Lord, to present Himself alone, where all the Assembly should be gathered? Without doubt, according to His promise, He is none the less present in the midst of two or three. But what a slight to His person on the part of the Assembly when it might be otherwise! O that we might feel more profoundly our responsibility in this matter!

From whence comes the feebleness of the petitions in our prayer meeting? From whence come the distressing silences? From whence come the vain repetitions, the hackneyed requests presented without conviction and invariably formed after the same model? Does not all this arise from the fact that His presence in the midst of the Assembly is not realized? If it were otherwise, there would be as much power in the prayers as in worship. Without doubt the one differs from the other. In the latter it is praise, in the former requests which ascend to God, but in both the thought of the saints, expressed by the Holy Spirit, is directed by the Lord. Praise is more elevated than supplication; both are perfect in the mouth of the Lord Jesus: "When He cried unto Him, He heard" (Ps. 22: 24).

Let us notice that prayers are not absent from the heavenly scene as long as there are suffering saints still on the earth. The twenty-four elders fall on their faces before the Lamb, having every one of them harps (praise), and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints (Rev. 5: 8). Thus the elders act in both these ways. It is the heavenly "meeting of the Assembly," with the Lamb slain as centre, visible to the eyes of all in the midst of the throne (which He is not to-day), a meeting of the heavenly Assembly for worship and to present the prayers of the saints.

THE OPEN MEETING.

The third Assembly meeting is for edification, and is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14.

To grasp the importance of this chapter it is well to remark that, after the introduction of the epistle (1 Cor. 1 and 1 Cor. 2), the organization of the Assembly as *the house of God* under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is treated of from the third to the tenth chapter. 1 Corinthians 10: 1-13 speaks of the privileges and responsibility of the Christian profession. 1 Corinthians 10: 14 - 1 Corinthians 14. show us the order of the Assembly in regard to the unity of the body of Christ. The Spirit produces this unity; the Supper is the expression of it (1 Cor. 10 and 11).

In 1 Corinthians 12 we find that "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body," and that "we have been all made to drink into one Spirit." This *unity* accords with the *diversity* of the gifts administered by the Holy Spirit. Each gift has its place in the action of the Assembly. The ministrations rendered by the gifts are exercised under the authority of the Lord and for Him. The doctrine of the gifts of the Spirit is also explained in detail in this passage; then, in verse 28, we have, so to speak, the great gifts placed by God in the Assembly.

In 1 Corinthians 14 the apostle shows us *the ministration*, and *the exercise of the gifts in the Assembly meeting*, after having in 1 Corinthians 13 introduced *love* as the motive for their use and exercise. This being established, let us return to our third Assembly meeting. First of all, it is an Assembly meeting, and nothing else. It is the Assembly gathered as such around the Lord: "*If, therefore, the whole Church be come together,*" it is said in verse 23, using the same expression as in 1 Corinthians 11: 20, when speaking of the Lord's Supper (*epi to auto*), together, in the same place. It is the technical term for the gathering together from a practical point of view (also see verses 4, 5, 12, 19, 26, 28, 33, 34, 35).

But the object is not now confined to worship or prayer; it is *edification*: "He that prophesieth speaketh unto men *to edification*"; "He that prophesieth edifieth the Church" (verses 3 and 4); "That the Church may receive *edifying*" (verse. 5); "Seek that ye may excel to the *edifying* of the Church" (verse 12).

The Assembly, then, is gathered in this case as for the Lord's Supper, in the unity of the Spirit, and having Christ personally present with them; but that which takes place is that blessing is *poured out by the Lord on His Assembly* instead of ascending to God by Him. It is under His authority that the spiritual gifts are dispensed to His own for their edification.

We have already stated that there may be an exercise of gift in other places than the Assembly, without even speaking of the evangelist who addresses himself to the world, but this is not at all what is spoken of here. We are gathered "in assembly," the Lord being present and the centre; we wait on Him to receive, by His Spirit, that which conduces to the edification of His Church. The fact of His presence lends? particular character to the gifts in the Assembly meeting. It is a question of the edification of the Assembly, that is to say, of the body. Each may have something to give (verse 26).

It is not exactly abiding gifts which are exercised at this time, though a foundation gift (Eph. 2: 20) as prophecy be present. Neither teaching nor tongues are excluded, but we see the working of the body entrusted to all or each, to meet the need according to the operations of the Spirit and the will of the Lord, Who is in the midst of the Assembly in view of its edification and of its real needs known to Him, for He watches over His own and purifies His Assembly by speaking to it ("by the Word" Eph. 5: 26).

On this occasion the scene which unfolds itself is full of blessing. One finds great liberty united with great dependence. A brother rises and prophesies. In our days prophecy, without doubt, differs from that in 1 Corinthians 14, in that the Word of God being complete, there can be no *new* revelations of His mind; but the *communication* of the mind of God remains. All the brethren are deemed able to prophesy, for we may again remark that it is not a question of something constant or continuous: "When ye come together *every one of you* hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying" (verse 26). The *exercise* of the gift of prophecy appears here as a momentary communication of the mind of God, Who works by one or another. " Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge. If anything be revealed to

another that-sitteth by, let I the first hold his peace. For ye may *all* prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all be comforted" (verses 29-31). This does not mean that in the course of a single Assembly meeting all *ought* to prophesy, although they may have the capacity, for the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets (verse 32). We see, on the contrary, that the Holy Spirit confines, in view of order, the exercise of prophecy to two or three, "for God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (verse 33)

All this activity is thus exercised richly in its diversity, and results in great blessing for souls. They come to *seek the Lord*. He is there, and it is in this spiritual activity that His presence makes itself felt.

There are different causes for our incapacity to hold Assembly meetings having the character we have just spoken of. Let us consider, in the first place, the fact that brethren do not realize as they do in worship that the Lord is personally present, and that one can confide as perfectly in His presence for the edification of the Assembly as for worship and prayer. The difference between that which passes in our spirit when we go to a worship meeting or to an "open" meeting for edification is the proof of it. In going to a meeting for the breaking of bread, we are peaceful, and without preoccupation as to what will pass there, or as to the action that may take place, because we go to seek and to find the presence of the Lord. But if it is an edification meeting, we ask ourselves with some anxiety, *Who will* be there? *Who* will take part? Is this because we do not go there to seek *His* presence?

It is also want of faith and of confidence in Him which hinders the exercise of the gifts for edification. You will say to me, "No; but I mistrust myself." Undeceive yourself. If you had no confidence in the flesh you would let the Lord act, and He could speak by you, so as to express His mind according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

There is another, and without doubt the principal hindrance to this third form of Assembly meeting. That which is lacking is the being *nourished by His Word*, by *the whole Word of God*. One feels oppressed in spirit in stating how much the reading of *the Old Testament* is neglected. It forms but a small portion of the habitual meditation of the saints; how little even is known of the whole scope of God's mind as revealed in the New Testament! Without this nourishment there is no growth, no progress, no capacity to become an instrument for edification. We are not able to edify others if not edified ourselves. Further, one cannot be in *habitual communion* with the Lord without this nourishment, and without this communion edification is not possible.

Let us remark again that the working of an Assembly meeting for edification such as that in 1 Corinthians 14 supposes that the Assembly, and in particular all the brothers, are walking in this communion and the piety which accompanies it. The Word always presents things to us in connection with the normal state of Christians. This speaks to our consciences.

Is it not very humiliating for us to be obliged to admit that by our failure, by our want of communion with the Lord, we hinder the manifestation of His presence and the action of the Spirit in our Assembly meetings?

Let us now see what takes place when the Assembly is thus gathered for edification, in the unity of the Spirit, having the Lord personally *present*. The effects are not only felt by those within, but also by *those without*.

Order was far from reigning in the Assembly at Corinth. The Corinthians were still little children, carnal, taking advantage of their gifts, and above all of their miraculous gifts, in order to exalt

themselves in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. Thus for them to speak with tongues surpassed every other gift, and they abused it, speaking all together in a manner unintelligible, because they did not care about being understood. The apostle re-establishes order according to God.

Two classes of persons are noted as coming to the Assembly when gathered, the unlearned and the unbelieving. The unlearned, in the sense that the Spirit here attaches to this word, are those that have not knowledge (compare verse 16); the unbelieving are those who have no relation with God by faith. How many are there not to-day, in Christendom, of these simple ones who scarcely know the Scriptures, and who have no idea of what the Assembly is!

The Corinthians might have raised the following objections to what the apostle says: It is in view of these unbelievers we give such a place to tongues in the Assembly, for they are "a sign to them that believe not" (verse 22). The apostle did not forbid speaking with tongues in the Assembly meeting (verse 26), for every action of the Spirit has its place there, and who can limit the Lord? But He puts a limit to their use. They were not to speak all together, God not being a God of disorder, but each in *his turn*, the prophets *at the most three*: and the tongues not without an interpreter. If it were otherwise, the unlearned and the unbeliever, "would they not say that ye are mad," thus scorning and condemning the Assembly? They would cry out, "These people, instead of speaking to mutual and intelligent edification among themselves, speak things which they do not understand" (compare verse 19).

But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever should come into such a meeting, a blessed work will take place in his soul, a work of power, the result of the action of the Holy Spirit in the Assembly: "He is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest." He sees this liberty of the Spirit for edification: he feels also that there is something there that he has never seen or known before, as, let us remember, it is not a gospel meeting, but one for edification.

The unlearned (alas! in the day in which we live, perhaps a Christian) says: "I did not know these things; in what condition, then, is my soul? What veil was blinding it, that I should have remained until now a stranger to the thoughts of God in His Word, that the presence of the Holy Ghost thus revealed should be to such an extent unknown to me? How have I lived till now, indifferent to such blessings?" Thus he is "convinced of all . . . judged of all." That which secretly directed his heart is brought into the light, for he has to do with an invisible Person, acting by these visible instruments, with a Person of whom it is said, "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in *His sight*: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4: 13). It is the same with the unbeliever. By means of Christians he finds himself in relation with God in the person of Christ, Who is the centre of His Assembly: "And so, falling down on his face, he will do homage to God, and *confess that God is amongst you of a truth*," that is to say, *in the Assembly as a whole* (see New Translation).

There is not even in these spectators any thought of admiration for individuals, of attraction towards those who exercise their-gift, of attachment to him who speaks. Why? Because they have found themselves brought directly into God's presence. They fall down and say, "God Himself is there." Indeed, *He is there in the person of Christ*.

This Assembly meeting offers then a double blessing; first, the Assembly realizes the presence of the Lord and the *moral* power which flows from it for the edification of His beloved Church; then, those who are without learn to know themselves, to judge themselves, and to know the Lord in the light of His presence.

We have already referred to the difficulty of realizing this third Assembly meeting in the present state of things, accompanied as it is by such general spiritual weakness. It is far *easier* to let the

permanent gifts that the Lord has placed in His Assembly have all the responsibility of action. They are given "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4: 12). However precious their ministry may be, to wait on them for action exercises the conscience and the responsibility of the saints much less than the obligation to come and seek the Lord in the Assembly. In this latter alternative one can no longer rest on the gift, slipping little by little into the clerical spirit which has made so many ravages in the Assemblies. Let us esteem them very highly in love, because of their work, those who labour amongst us; but let us hold fast this truth — that the Assembly meetings have a special importance for the blessing of the dear children of God.

When hearts have enjoyed this blessing they remember it as a special happiness. There are favoured times in the Christian's life when souls are brought into an uninterrupted and undistracted intercourse with the Lord and His Word. Under these conditions an "open" meeting is a thing which flows naturally from its source. Souls having been in communion with the Lord, His presence can be realized. If, then, the effect is not more often produced, it is, as we have already said, because there is not more *habitual and daily communion with Him and His Word*. Our hearts ought to long for these things; for we should certainly come to seek the Lord in the Assembly, and He would respond to the confidence of His own, and to their sincere desire to enjoy His presence by an abundant activity of His Spirit.

Of what importance would such a realization be in gatherings where there was no distinct gift, but where there was true piety and an active Christian life!

May God give us to understand and to realize much better the true character of Assembly meetings for worship, for prayer, and for edification.