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**CHAPTER 25: 28-46**

For the Catholic Church, God's Revelation is found in Sacred Tradition, understood as God's Revealed Word handed down by the Living Teaching Authority established by Christ in the Church. That includes both Written Tradition (Scripture) and Unwritten Tradition received from Christ and handed down Orally by the Apostles and their Successors. The Church founded by Christ on Peter, and only that Church, has been Empowered by Christ to 'Interpret' His Teaching Authoritatively in His Name.

Scripture is *Inspired*; *Inspiration* really means that God Himself is the Chief Author of the Scriptures. He uses a Human Agent, in so marvelous a way that the Human writes what the Holy Spirit wants him to write, does so without Error, yet the Human Writer is Free, and keeps his own Style of Language. It is only because God is *Transcendent* that He can do this - insure Freedom from Error, while leaving the Human Free. To say He is Transcendent means that He is above and beyond all our Human Classifications and Categories.

Matthew writes his gospel account to give us the view of Jesus as the King. He records Jesus' authority in calling the disciples: "Follow me" (Matthew 4:19), and he also records more than any of the others about Jesus' teaching concerning God's kingdom and heavenly rule.

Considered one of the most important Catholic theologians and Bible commentators, Cornelius à Lapide's, S.J. writings on the Bible, created a Scripture Commentary so complete and scholarly that it was practically the universal commentary in use by Catholics for over 400 years. Fr. Lapide's most excellent commentaries have been widely known for successfully combining piety and practicality. Written during the time of the Counter Reformation, it includes plenty of apologetics. His vast knowledge is only equaled by his piety and holiness.

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### **Continuation of Matthew 25: 28-46**

**Verse 28-** *Take from him the talent, &c.* This, too, is only an emblem. The Lord throws back the charge of avarice, with which the slothful servant accused him. It is as if he said, "Thou seest, O thou slothful servant, that I do not covetously seek this gain for myself, but for my servants. When I take back the talent which I gave to thee, I do not put it away in a chest for myself. I bestow it upon him who used his five talents so well, that he gained five other talents with them. He therefore deserves this talent of yours, or rather mine, as a recompense of his labour and merit."

But besides the emblematic character of these words, they are also partly applicable to the thing signified by the parable. For, in the Day of Judgment, God will actually take away His graces from the reprobate, who have misused them. He often does the same thing even in this life. Indeed, He always takes away from a man the grace which makes him pleasing in the eyes of God, when that man sins mortally, as when, for instance, he, through sloth, neglects to perform some commandment of God,

which is binding under the penalty of mortal sin. But this which is added, *Give it to him that hath ten talents*, is an emblem. It tacitly intimates, —1st That the Saints, who diligently use the grace of God, are worthy of greater grace; and that as to the grace which the unworthy and the slothful possess, it is not seldom, even in this life, transferred from them to the former. Thus it is said in Apoc. iii. 11, “Hold fast that thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” 2d That the Saints in Heaven will rejoice, both on account of their own talents, as well as those of the reprobate. 3d Because God, in Heaven, will bestow all gifts, all endowments and graces, even those which the reprobate have possessed in this world, upon the Blessed. For Beatitude is a state which is perfect by reason of the aggregation of all good, as Boetius says. Understand that these gifts are here spoken of, not as to their number, but as to their kind.

**Verse 29-** *For unto every one that hath, &c. The Arab. is, Unto him that hath shall be given, and shall be added; and from him that hath not shall be taken away that which is with him.*

*To every one that hath.* S. Chrysostom and S. Augustine explain this to mean, all who rightly use their talents. For he, in truth, possesses a talent who rightly uses it. For the idle person, who does not make use of it, does not appear really to have it.

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*But he who hath not*, that is to say, the gain of the talents and the grace acquired by him; *or, he who has not*, in the sense that he does not use his talent, as I have said, *even that which he seemeth to have*, that is, the talent which he has suffered to lie idle, so that he has not so much had it, as seemed to have it, *shall be taken away from him*. After a like fashion saith the comic poet, “The covetous man lacks that which he hath as much as if he had it not.” He hides it in his chest, so that it is the chest which hath it, not himself. The covetous man does not so much possess his gold, as he is possessed and owned by his gold. He is its slave.

From this passage Theologians derive the maxim, that “God is never wanting to him who does his best.” Nor does He refuse to add even more and more grace to him who heartily co-operates with it, even to the final gift of perseverance and glory. How this is to be understood, see Suarez, Vasquez, Bellarmine, and others in their works on *Grace*.

**Verse 31-** *But when the Son of Man, &c. . . . upon the seat of His majesty, as Judge of all, sitting upon a glorious cloud.* Here Christ graphically sets forth the manner and idea of the Last Judgment, that all may imprint it on their minds, and so by the constant remembrance of it, stir themselves up to purity of life and zeal for good works.

The majesty of Christ will appear. 1st By the previous sounding of the awful trumpet of the Archangel, which will be heard throughout all the world. 2d

By the previous lightnings and thunderings, tempest and hail, according to the words in Ps. xcvi. 3. 3d Because Christ shall appear in His glorious body, brighter than the sun, as it is said in Isaiah, "Then shall the moon be ashamed and the sun be confounded, when the Lord of Hosts shall reign," taken in the mystical sense. For there is another and literal interpretation of these words, as I have shown in commenting upon the passage. 4th Because He shall descend from Heaven accompanied by innumerable legions of angels. 5th Because there shall stand before Him in judgment all emperors, pontiffs, kings, prelates, princes, philosophers, orators, and all men and nations whatsoever. 6th. Because He shall judge them not as belonging to others, but as His own Servants. For all men and angels are the Servants of Christ not only as He is God, by the right of creation, but also as He is man, by virtue of the Hypostatic Union with the WORD, and by right of merit. For Christ merited this by His lowly obedience even to the death of the Cross, according to what the Apostle says (*Phil. ii. 7, 8*), "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name which is above every name; that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Though men, indeed, are the servants of Christ by the peculiar right of redemption. For Christ hath redeemed them from death and hell, and bought them with the costly price of His own Blood.

*And all the angels with Him.* Therefore in the Day of Judgment not one angel shall remain in Heaven, but all shall descend at the same time with Christ. They shall accompany Him to do Him honour, as God, and Lord, and Saviour, that they may surround and minister to Him as He is Man. Moreover, it is probable that the angels shall then assume bodies of condensed air, and in them shall appear in glory. For otherwise this glory and power of Christ, as encompassed by the angels, would not be beheld by the wicked, on whose account chiefly it will then be manifested. Nor would that army of angels increase His outward majesty, which is what Christ is here describing. When, therefore, there shall be that innumerable multitude of angels, their many thousands of thousands will fill the higher regions of the air, far and wide, in every direction, yea, the very sky itself, affording the appearance of an infinite army.

It is also exceedingly probable that the devils also will assume bodies, and appear in them, but bodies that are foul, dreadful, and horrible.

**Verse 32-** *And there shall be gathered together before Him all nations*, i.e., all men sprung from Adam, from the first even unto the last, of every family and nation, however fierce and barbarous. Also little ones and infants, although the case and judgment of infants is not here properly treated of, but only that of adults, who by their good or bad works have deserved Heaven or hell Wherefore there will be there very many millions of men, so that the valley of Josaphat could not contain them all. Wherefore God shall at that time turn the Mount of Olives and the other mountains into a plain, that there may be space to hold so many myriads of men. For all the

they neither have nor will have any hope, they will fall into despair, and will have no strength to support their torments. Hence S. Cyprian (*Lib. de Laud. Martyr. cap. 5*), "Paradise flourishes by the witness of God; hell embraces, the eternal fire consumes those who deny it. It is a dreadful place whose name is hell, with a great murmuring and groaning of those that wail, and with flames bursting out through the horrible night of thick darkness."

From what has been said, we may consider and imagine how bitter and how sad must be the future everlasting separation between the lost and the saved,—when the one shall ascend up into Heaven to everlasting, happiness, and the others shall go down into hell to everlasting fire. Never again, to all eternity, shall they behold the Saints—not even their friends, their brothers, or their parents. For there is a great gulf fixed between the two, as Abraham said to the rich glutton. Thou, therefore, who art wise, ascend daily into Heaven, and descend into hell, that from thence thou mayest gain incentives to flee from vice and pursue virtue. Truly does S. Chrysostom say (*Hom. 2 in Epist. 2 ad Thessal.*), "No one who has hell before his eyes will ever fall into hell. No one who despises hell will escape it." We may say with S. Diethelmus, in Ven. Bede's *History of the English*, "I have seen worse and more dreadful things in hell." By this means we shall bravely sustain and overcome all temptations, persecutions, infirmities, and tribulations through fear of the judgment and of hell.

*Life eternal.* By these words is meant the receiving of all health, all strength, all honour, all glory, all pleasure, all joy, and everything that is good. For these are the things which those enjoy who truly live; for to live in hunger, thirst, disease, ignominy, pain, is not so much to live as to die continually.

Now, if he who is convicted of not having given alms shall suffer so great a punishment, says S. Gregory, what shall be the penalty of him who has committed murder or adultery, or who has blasphemed God and His saints?

Every word is emphatic, and reproaches the reprobate with peculiar ingratitude. *I was an hungered*, I, who am your God, your Lord, and your Redeemer, *and ye gave not unto Me*, that which I had given you, *to eat*, not partridges and capons, which ye ate yourselves, but simply bread. "Each circumstance," says S. Chrysostom, "suffices for their condemnation; as the simple nature of the request and the power to grant it: for *bread* is asked; then there is the misery of the petitioner, *poor* and a *beggar*: the greatness of the reward to be obtained, for a *kingdom* is promised: the dread of the punishment, for *hell* is threatened: the dignity of the receiver, for *God* receives, through the hands of the poor: the right which there is to bestow, for it is the highest form of *justice* to render unto God His own. Yet from all these things they were held back by covetousness."

**Verse 45-** *Then He shall answer them, saying, &c.* Learn from hence how greatly to be esteemed are the mean and poor, especially Saints and Religious, whom Christ here calls His own property, as it were. Wherefore S. Francis sharply rebuked one of his Friars for finding fault with a certain beggar, and saying that, perchance, he was proud in his mind, and ordered him to ask his pardon on his knees. And he gave his reason. "My son," he said, "thou hast not sinned against the beggar so much as against Christ. Forasmuch as Christ is offered to us in the person of the poor, as it were in a glass. As often therefore as the poor and infirm meet thee, think of and humbly venerate the poverty and infirmities which Christ deigned to endure for us."

**Verse 46-** *And these shall go; Gr. shall go away, &c ... punishment*, that is, of fire and burning. Whence S. Augustine reads (*Tract. 21, in Joan.*), *into burning*. It means, they shall be burnt in hell, but not burnt up, nor consumed, so as to be annihilated, which the lost will desire.

*Everlasting*, because they have most grievously offended the Eternal God. For mortal sin, because it is an injury against the Infinite God, has in it an infinite wickedness, therefore it deserves an infinite punishment. But, forasmuch as punishment infinite in intensity can neither be given nor yet endured by man, there shall be given to the reprobate a punishment of infinite duration which shall last for ever and ever. The author of the book *on the Spirit and the Soul*, in the works of S. Augustine, forcibly depicts the dreadful nature of this punishment. He says, there is to these miserable beings death without death, end without end, consumption without being consumed. For death also shall always live, and the end shall always be beginning. Death shall destroy, and not annihilate. Pain shall torment, and not put fear to flight. The flame shall burn, but shall not disperse the darkness. For there shall be darkness in the fire, fear in the darkness, and pain in the burning. Thus shall the reprobate be tormented without hope of pardon or mercy, which is the misery of miseries. For if, after as many thousands of years as they had hairs upon their heads, they might hope for an end of their punishment, they would sustain it with far greater ease; but because

reprobate shall stand upon the earth. But the Saints, especially the more eminent ones, such as the Apostles, shall be raised up into the air, where they shall sit as assessors with Christ.

That little children will appear in the Day of Judgment is exceedingly probable, though Durandus denies this (2, *disp.* 33, *quæst.* 3). The reasons that make it probable are:—1st Because Christ is the Judge of all men whatsoever, therefore also of infants. 2d Because infants shall rise again as well as adults, and that "in a perfect man," as the Apostle says (*Eph. iv. 13*), that is, adult age and stature. They will see therefore and know that all men are rising with them, to stand and be judged at the tribunal of Christ. 3d Because many infants have been made Saints and Martyrs by Baptism or martyrdom. Such were the infants who were slain by Herod. These therefore, as well as adults, shall hear from Christ the words, *Come, ye blessed of My Father*. 4th Because the infants who have died in original sin among all nations, for so many thousands of years, will be very many. Lessius thinks that their number will be a thousand millions (*de Perfect. Divin. cap. 22, num. 143*). And these cannot be hid; but rising again, they will appear upon earth. And these too, being separated one from another, shall receive their sentences from Christ. They shall neither be condemned, like the adult reprobate, to the fire of hell; neither shall they be adjudged to Heaven to see God, as the adult elect.

*And He shall separate them.* He compares the elect to *sheep*, because of their innocence, modesty, humility, obedience, and patience; the reprobate to *goats*, because this creature has a fetid smell. It is fierce, immodest, lascivious. It walks in precipitous places. And it is quarrelsome. Such are the wicked. Wherefore under the Old Law goats were wont to be offered as sin-offerings.

There was a type of their separation in the case of those who blessed on Mount Gerizim, and those who cursed on Mount Ebal (*Deut. xxvii.*).

**Verse 33-** *And He shall set the sheep, &c.* For the *right hand* is the symbol of felicity, glory, and victory. The *left*, of unhappiness and disgrace.

**Verse 34-** *Then shall the King say to those on the right hand, &c.* "Come from darkness to light, from slavery to the liberty of the children of God, from labour to perpetual rest, from death unto life, from the society of wicked men to the company of angels, from contest to triumph, from the billows of temptation to the light of glory, and the Heaven of eternal happiness."

In a moving manner does S. Hippolytus, the Martyr, enlarge upon these words (*Tract. de Consummat. Sæculi*), speaking of the different Orders of the Saints. "Come, ye Prophets, who were banished for My Name's sake. Come, ye Patriarchs, who were obedient unto Me before I came into the

world, and who deserved My Kingdom. Come, ye Apostles, partakers of My sufferings, for the sake of the Gospel, when I lived amongst men. Come, ye Martyrs, who confessed Me before tyrants, and endured great torments and sufferings. Come, ye Priests, who offered pure sacrifices unto Me day and night, and immolated day by day My precious Body and Blood. Come, ye Saints, who practised self-denial in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth, who by continence and prayers did service to My Name. Come, ye Virgins, who chose Me for your Bridegroom, and loved not another besides Me, who by martyrdom, and the diligent practice of religion, were united to Me, your immortal and incorruptible Spouse. Come, ye who love the poor and strangers. Come, ye who kept My love, who am Love. Come, ye friends of peace, for I am peace."

Christ judges and rewards the elect before He punishes the reprobate; for it is natural to Christ to reward; it is His strange work to punish.

*The King.* Christ the judge has on His thigh a name written, "King of kings and Lord of lords" (*Apoc.* xix 16).

*Blessed of My Father.* Those whom My Father, whose special attributes are omnipotence, empire, and predestination, "hath blessed with all spiritual benediction in heavenly things" (*Eph.* i. 3),—that is, "whom He loved and predestinated from eternity, justified in time, and now will glorify: to whom He gave grace and perseverance in good works until the end of their lives, and therefore He has now, through Me, given them for their merits the reward of celestial glory." Come therefore, ye Blessed, thrice and again Blessed, whom God loved and predestinated before the world, cleansed and sanctified in the world, and now will magnify after the world, as S. Augustine says in his *Soliloquy*.

Observe: the judgment of Christ will not be performed in a moment of time, as will be the case with the general Resurrection (1 *Cor.* xv. 52), but will occupy some considerable period. For there will be an examination and opening of the conscience of each person, in which Christ will lay open to every man his own and others' deeds by an inward illumination, and will pronounce His own sentence upon each, according to his deserts. And He will cause all to see that this sentence is just and right; and He will not give any opportunity for taking exception or for prevarication. "It will be," says S. Augustine (*de Civit.* xx. 14), "an effect of the Divine power, that every one will have recalled to their memory their deeds, both good and bad. And by a glance of the mind they will be perceived with a marvellous swiftness, so that this knowledge will either accuse or excuse their consciousness." All this will occupy time, though but a very short time. After this will Christ pronounce, as it seems, the general award of eternal felicity, with an audible voice, to all the Saints, when He says, "*Come, ye blessed of My Father,*" &c ; and then will pass sentence upon the reprobate, saying, "*Depart, ye cursed.*"

*Possess ye* (Vulg.); Gr. *κληρονομήσατε*, *inherit* (Eng. vers.). "For if ye are sons, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (*Rom.* viii.). "O of what great glory, of what great blessedness, are those words! He does not say, Receive ye; but, Inherit ye,

darkness, and the fire which shall not be quenched, and the worm which sleepeth not, and the gnashing of teeth." After an interval he adds, "I formed your ears that you should hear the Scriptures, and you applied them to songs of devils, to harps, and jokes. I created your eyes that ye might behold the light of My commandments, and follow them; but ye opened them for adultery, and immodesty, and all uncleanness. I ordained your mouth for the praise and glory of God, and to sing psalms and spiritual songs; but ye applied it for the utterance of revilings, perjuries, and blasphemies. I made your hands, that you should lift them up in prayers and supplications; ye have stretched them out in thefts and murders." And thus he proceeds.

After He has pronounced this sentence, Christ will drive them from Him by means of the demons into hell. Yea, all the elements, together with the heavens, shall rise against them. For, as it is said in Wisdom (vi. 18), "He shall arm the creatures to take vengeance upon His enemies, and the whole world shall fight for Him against the foolish ones. The right aiming thunderbolts shall go forth. The water of the sea shall race against them, and the rivers shall flow together upon them. A spirit of strength shall stand against them, and like a whirlwind shall divide them."

*Prepared for the devil and his angels*, that is, for *their chief prince and his armies*, Arab. From hence it is plain that the fire of hell was primarily, and *per se*, prepared by God for the demons, but as a consequence was prepared for men who imitate the disobedience of the devils. Moreover, this fire was prepared by God from everlasting, after the foreseen sin of Lucifer and the demons. For their God decreed to form it for their punishment. But it was actually made, in time, by God at the commencement of the universe, before the creation of man.

The Syr. instead of *devil* has *accuser*, which is the meaning of the Gr. *διάβολος*, for such is Lucifer, who accuses holy men, and even their just works, before God. Hence in the Acts of S. Montanus and his companions, martyrs, the accuser and criminator of the martyrs is called *diabolus*, because he acted his part before the tribunal of the heathen judges.

**Verses 42, 43-** *For I was an hungered*, &c. The word *for* gives the reason why they are condemned to the fire prepared for the devil, because, that is, they imitated his mercilessness. "For," as Theophylact says, "they who are without compassion are devils." These men are condemned for the omission of the works of mercy, both because every one is bound to the performance of these works when he sees his neighbour in need, as well as because they neglected to expiate their other sins by almsdeeds, according to the saying of Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar, "Redeem thy sins by almsgiving, and thy iniquities by mercy to the poor" (*Dan.* iv. 24, *Vulg.*). Whence S. Augustine asserts that some men cannot be saved without almsgiving.

**Verse 41-** *Then shall He say to those on the left, &c.* Note the antithesis: Christ says to the elect, “Come to Me and to My glory.” But to the reprobate, “Depart from Me, to the devil and hell, because in life ye clave to the devil, and not to Me.” The word *depart* denotes the pain of loss (*pæna damni*), which is the deprivation of the glory of Heaven for ever. But the word *fire* denotes the *pain of sense*; for the fire of hell burns continually, not only the bodies, but the souls of the wicked, and yet does not consume them. This punishment is very dreadful. For to be banished from God, from Christ, from Heaven, from the Saints, from everything that is good, is horrible torment. Wherefore S. Chrysostom (*Paræn. 1, ad Theodor. lapsum*) thinks that the deprivation of the vision of God is a greater torment to the damned than the fire of hell. Others entertain the opposite opinion. Isaiah says, “The wicked shall not behold the glory of the Lord” (xxvi. 10). *Cursed*, those whom God will curse as His enemies. *Into the fire*, therefore there is real fire in hell, and that far fiercer and of a different nature and quality from earthly fire. This is the teaching of S. Ambrose (*in cap. 14, S. Luc.*), S. Jerome (*in Isa. chaps. lxx., lxxvi.*), Damascene (*lib. 4, cap. ult.*).

Moreover, this fire is fed by sulphur, which also God will preserve for ever, that it may continually burn the wicked. This is the fire with which Moses threatened the Jews in Deut. xxxii. 22, “A fire is kindled in My fury, and it shall burn unto the lowest hell.” Hear what S. Chrysostom says, “They shall be thrust into the river and the sea of fire, a sea which can never be crossed, in which the waves of fire rise mountains high. Fire, I say, but not earthly fire, but far more terrible than any here, whose flames fill the great abyss, so that on every hand the fire seems ready to overwhelm, like some immense wild beast. If we cannot describe in language the most bitter torments of that fire and those flames, what shall we say of them? especially when we consider that a man placed for one moment in earthly fire would die; but there they are burnt and suffer, and never will that which is burnt be consumed” (*Hom. 44 in loc.*)

*Everlasting.* Origen, therefore, is in error in thinking that the pains of hell shall cease, and that the wicked shall be delivered out of them on the completion of the Platonic year, that is, after several thousands of years. For the eternity of punishment in hell is here expressed. So Bede, Theophylact, and others *passim*. This will be the awful punishment, which will drive the damned to despair, fury, madness, to blaspheming God, their parents, comrades, and all creatures, because so long as Heaven shall last, so long will there be a hell. It shall last as long as God Himself and the universe shall endure. So long shall the reprobate endure, “and shall be tormented day and night for ages of ages” (*Apoc. xx. 10*). Think of this fire when lust, or ambition, or any other temptation entice thee, and say to thyself, “I will not purchase everlasting fire at the price of a little pleasure.”

S. Hippolytus the Martyr enlarges upon these words of Christ in a very moving manner in his Treatise on *the End of the World*. He introduces Christ as reproaching the wicked for their abuse of His benefits, “It was I who formed you, and ye clave to another. I created the earth, the sea, and all things for your sakes, and you misused them to My dishonour. Depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity, I know you not. Ye have become the workmen of another master, even the devil. With him possess

as though it were your own, your Father’s; as though it were your very own, belonging to you from the beginning.”

*The Kingdom:* the highest Heaven, with all its goods, such as the vision and fruition of God, the society of Saints and Angels.

*From the constitution of the world; Arab. before the constitution of the world.* That is to say, *from eternity*. It means that the whole universe was created by God for the sake of the Blessed, that they may be eternally blessed in Him. Moreover, this glory of the Saints had been prepared and predestinated-1. *From eternity.* For God from eternity determined to create the Saints and the world, that He might bless them in it, and cause them to share in all His goods. 2. *From the creation of the world.* For God created the empyrean and the world for this end, that it might be the seat and kingdom of the Blessed. As S. Chrysostom says (*Hom. 1, in Epist. ad Titum*), “Herein is manifested our dignity, that not just now merely, but from of old, from the very beginning, have we been loved.” And (*Hom. 34, in Gen.*), “Behold the excellence of the goodness of God; how great is the mercy which He hath extended to our race, that before the foundations of the world were laid, He deigned to prepare for us the fruition of the Kingdom of Heaven.”

O how sweetly will this voice of Christ fall upon the ears of the elect! What thanks will they render Him! How will they exult! We cannot doubt but that with the utmost reverence they will prostrate themselves before Him, and gladly confess that it is by His Blood and merits they have been brought to such great felicity. This is plain from the Apocalypse (*chaps. v. and vii.*), where we may hear their doxologies and songs of victory, which in full chorus they sing to God and Christ.

**Verse 35-** *For I was an hungered, &c . . . a stranger, and ye collected Me* (Vulg.), *i e.*, into your houses or other hospices. Observe here that Christ puts one sort of good works, by which the Saints will merit the eternal glory decreed to them by Christ in the judgment, instead of every kind of good works. He only speaks of works of mercy, both because they are, as it were, natural and everywhere at hand, and have to do with every one. For there are very many everywhere who are wretched. As also because the common people make most account of these works, since they themselves are less capable of giving themselves to fasting, prayers, and other lofty things. Further, no one can excuse himself from the performance of them; and, as S. Augustine says, they are most profitable for obtaining the grace of God. Hear S. Basil (*Conc. 4, de Eleemosyn.*), “That bread, which thou holdest back, belongs to the hungry; the naked claims that garment which thou art keeping in thy chest. That shoe which is mouldering away at home is his who is shoeless. Thus thou art wronging just as many as thou dost not help with thy goods whilst thou mayest.” “Blessed,” says David, “is the man that is merciful and lendeth; he guideth

his words with discretion" (*Ps.* cxii. 5); or, as S. Chrysostom reads, "he renders his accounts." As much as to say, "He will render a most excellent account of his life; he will plead successfully his cause before the Supreme Judge." "And indeed," says the same S. Chrysostom, "it must needs be that the soul which is rich in mercy can never be overwhelmed with heavy troubles of the mind." And again, "Uselessly will sins accuse him whom the poor man excuses. And he cannot be *excused* whom the poor man's hunger *accuses*. He will witness a terrible day who shall enter into the judgment without the intercession of the poor. He who lends to a poor man makes the Judge Himself his debtor" (*S. Peter Chrysolog. Serm.* 40).

Moreover, we cannot doubt that many will be saved or condemned because of other virtues and sins of greater importance. For there are numbers who can scarcely practise works of mercy, as paupers, children, Religious, who do and practise greater things, as chastity, obedience, evangelical poverty, contemplation, conversion of others, on account of which they shall obtain greater rewards from Christ, according to His words, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven," &c.

Wherefore it does not appear that Christ will pronounce these words with an audible voice, as He will the sentence itself of salvation or condemnation; but He will reveal them to the heart of each by a sort of spiritual instinct. From this it is plain that the elect are chosen, and have Heaven awarded to them because of their good works. Therefore good works deserve Heaven and heavenly glory. Therefore this glory is given by Christ to the Saints for an inheritance, as it were, as unto sons, and at the same time as a reward, as to those who merit it and are worthy of it. For God does not give the Kingdom to sons whether they be worthy or unworthy, as is often the case among men.

There are six principal corporal works of mercy which Christ here speaks of, viz., to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to take in strangers, to clothe the naked, to visit the sick, to comfort and redeem captives, to which may be added a seventh, to bury the dead, which is commanded in Tobit. There are as many spiritual works of mercy, which Christ here would have us understand under the corporal works. They are as much superior to the corporal works as the soul is superior to the body. They are-to correct sinners, to teach the ignorant, to give good advice to the perplexed, to pray to God for the salvation of our neighbours, to comfort the sorrowful, to bear injuries patiently, and to forgive injuries. Concerning these, see Peter Canisius *in Opere Catechistico*.

**Verse 36- Naked,** &c. This is what Christ said (ix. 13), "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." For mercy is a covering, and, as it were, redeems the faults and miseries of the merciful. Hear S. Augustine (*Serm.* 33, *de Divers.*), "It is written, as water extinguishes fire, so doth alms extinguish sin. Surely to those whom He is about to crown will He attribute alms alone; as though He said, 'It were difficult that, if I should examine and weigh you, and most carefully scrutinise your deeds, I should not find something to condemn you; but go ye into My Kingdom, for I was hungry, and ye fed Me. Ye go into My Kingdom, not because ye have not sinned, but because ye have redeemed your sins by alms.'"

**Verses 37-39- Then shall the righteous say,** expressing their wonder at Christ's liberality towards them, not so much with their lips as in their hearts. *When saw we.* By this word *when* is expressed at once the profound humility and the exultation of the Saints in that they hear their few and poor works made so much of by Christ, as that He should count them as done to Himself, because they were done to the poor for love of Christ.

**Verse 40- And the King shall answer,** &c. ... *one of the least of these.* The word *these* strictly denotes the Apostles, and Religious and Apostolic men similar to them, who shall sit as assessors with Christ as judge. In this world they were accounted *the least* and most abject. And to themselves in their humility they seemed to be the very least of all. Inasmuch as they voluntarily embraced poverty of spirit, they gave themselves up altogether to the cross of Christ and to the preaching of the faith. But in the second place, all poor Christians who, having been born again in baptism, have been by grace made children of God, and therefore brethren of Christ, are denoted by the word *these*. Observe that infidels and the reprobate, though they may have been once brothers of Christ, are not here counted worthy of the name. Still He does not forbid giving them alms. Well says S. Cyprian in his *Treatise on Almsgiving*, "What more could Christ declare unto us? How could He do more to provoke to works of justice and mercy, than by pronouncing that whatever is done to the poor and needy is done to Himself? That he who is not moved by the consideration of his brother in the Church may be moved at least by considering Christ. And that he who does not think of his fellow-servant in labour and need, may at least think of his Master, who stands in the place of him whom he despises."

This was the reason why S. Louis, king of France, was accustomed to distribute food with his own hands to two hundred poor persons on all vigils and festivals, and to wash their feet on Saturdays. He also daily entertained at his own table three poor old men, and afterwards ate what they left. When some persons objected that this was derogatory to the majesty of a king, he made answer, "I revere Christ in the poor, Christ who said, 'What ye do unto the least of Mine, ye do unto Me.'" And he was wont to add, "The poor prepare Heaven for themselves by patience, but the rich by alms and reverence, whereby they love and venerate the poor as the members of Christ." O wise and holy king! Would that kings and princes would follow in his steps!

From these words of Christ S. Francis was wont to encourage his Friars freely to solicit alms. He himself was wont to beg upon the great Festivals. He said that the words of the Psalmist, "Man did eat angels' food," were fulfilled in holy paupers. For that, he said, was angelic food which was asked for the love of God, which, at the suggestion of the angels, was bestowed for the love of God, and which holy poverty collected from door to door.