

et Filii, unius ejusdemque substantiæ tertius in persona, sed unus in gloria. Quem cœlorum regna non capiunt, quia non eum circumscribunt neque claudunt, hodie ad angustum cordis nostri descendit hospitium. Et quis nostrum, fratres dilectissimi, tali se dignum hospite recognoscit? Quis condigna adveniēti exhibeat alimenta? Quum et Angelorum et Archangelorum, et omnium Virtutum cœlestium ipse est vita. Et ideo quia nos impares tali habitatore cognoscimus, ut in nobis locum habitaculi sibimet præparet supplicemus. Amen.

the same nature with them; he is the Third in Person, but One in glory. He, whom the heavens cannot contain,—for they neither confine nor limit him,—is coming down this day to the narrowed dwelling of our heart. Who among us, dearly beloved Brethren, would dare to think himself worthy of such a guest? Who would think himself able to provide an entertainment worthy of Him, who is the Life of the very Angels, and Archangels, and all the heavenly Powers? Since, therefore, we acknowledge that we ourselves cannot provide him a suitable dwelling, let us beseech him to prepare one himself within us. Amen.

THE GIFT OF UNDERSTANDING.

This sixth Gift of the Holy Ghost raises the soul to a still higher state. The first five Gifts all tend to action. The Fear of God keeps man in his right place, for it humbles him; Godliness opens his heart to holy affections; Knowledge enables him to discern the path of salvation from that of perdition; Fortitude arms him for the battle; Counsel directs him in his thoughts and works:—thus gifted, he can act, and pursue his journey with the sure hope of coming at length to his heavenly home. But the Holy Ghost has other favours in store for him. He would give him a foretaste, here below, of the happiness that awaits him in the next life: it will give him confidence, it will encourage him, it will reward his efforts. *Contemplation*,—yes, this is the blissful region thrown open to him, and the Holy Ghost leads him thither by the gift of *Understanding*.

There will be a feeling of surprise and hesitation arising in the minds of many at hearing this word, *Contemplation*. They have been taught to look on Contemplation as an element of the spiritual life which is rarely to be hoped for, and almost impossible for persons who are in the ordinary walks of life. We must begin, then, by telling them, that such an idea is a great and dangerous error, and one that checks the progress of the soul. No:—Contemplation is a state, to which, more or less, the soul of every Christian is called. It does not consist in those extraordinary effects which the Holy Ghost occasionally produces in some privileged souls, and by which he would convince the world of the reality of the supernatural life. It is simply a relation of close intimacy existing between God and a soul that is faithful to him in Action. For such a soul, unless she herself put an obstacle, God reserves two favours: the first is the gift of *Understanding*, which consists in a supernatural light granted to the mind of man.

This light does not remove the sacred obscurity of Faith: but it enlightens the eye of the soul, strengthens her perception, and widens her view of divine things. It dispels clouds, which were occasioned by the previous weakness and ignorance of the soul. The exquisite beauty of the mysteries is now revealed to her, and the truths which hitherto seemed unconnected, now delight her by the sweetness of their harmony. It is not the face-to-face vision which heaven gives, but it is something incomparably brighter than the feeble glimmer of former days, when all was mist and doubt. The eye of her spirit discovers analogies and reasons, which do something more than please,—they bring conviction. The heart opens under the influence of these bright beams, for they feed faith, cherish hope, and give ardour to love. Everything seems new to her. Looking at

the past, and comparing it with the present, she wonders within herself, how it is, that Truth, which is ever the same, has a charm and power over her now which once it had not.

The reading or hearing of the Gospel produces an impression far deeper than formerly: she finds a relish in the words of Jesus, which, in times past, she never experienced. She can understand so much better the object of the institution of the Sacraments. The holy Liturgy, with its magnificent ceremonies and sublime formulas, is to her an anticipation of heaven. She loves to read the Lives of the Saints; she can do so, and never feel a temptation to carp at their sentiments or conduct: she prefers their Writings to all others, and she finds in these communications with the friends of God a special increase of her spiritual good. No matter what may be the duties of her station in life, she has, in this glorious Gift, a light which guides her in each of them. The virtues required from her, however varied they may be, are so regulated, that one is never done to the detriment of another; she knows the harmony that exists between them all, and she never breaks it. She is as far from scrupulosity as from tepidity, and when she commits a fault, she loses no time in repairing it. Sometimes, the Holy Ghost favours her with an interior speaking, which gives her additional light for some special emergency.

The world and its maxims are mere vanities in her estimation; and when necessity obliges her to conform to what is not sinful in either, she does so without setting her heart upon it. Mere natural grandeur or beauty seems unworthy of notice to her whose eye has been opened, by the Holy Spirit, to the divine and eternal. To her, this outward world, which the carnal-minded man loves to his own destruction, has

but one fair side :—it is, that the visible creation, with the impress of God's beauty upon it, can be turned to its Maker's glory. She gives him thanks when she uses it ; she elevates it to the supernatural order, by praising, as did the Royal Prophet, Him who shadowed the likeness of his own beauty on this world of created things, which men so often abuse to their perdition, but which were intended as so many steps to lead us to our God.

The gift of Understanding teaches the Christian a just appreciation of the state of life in which God has placed him. It shows him the wisdom and mercy of those designs of Providence which have, at times, disconcerted his own plans, and led him in a direction the very opposite to his wishes. He sees that had he been left to arrange things according to his own views, he would have gone astray ; whereas now, God has put him in the right place, though the workings of his Fatherly wisdom were, at first, hidden from him. Yes, he is so happy now ! he enjoys such peace of soul ! he knows not how sufficiently to thank his God for having brought him, where he is, without consulting *his* poor fancies ! If such a Christian as this be called upon to give counsel,—if either duty or charity require him to guide others,—he may safely be trusted ; the gift of Understanding teaches him to see the right thing for others as well as for himself. Not that he ever intrudes his counsel upon others, or makes himself adviser-general to all around him ; but if his advice be asked, he gives it, and the advice seems a reflex of the inward light that burns within him.

Such is the gift of Understanding. It is the true light of the soul, and it is weaker or stronger according to the measure of her correspondence with the other Gifts. Its safeguards are humility, restraint over the desires of the heart, and interior recollection.

Dissipation of mind would dim its brightness, or even wholly put out the light. But where duty imposes occupations,—not only busy and frequent, but even distracting,—let the Christian discharge them with a pure intention, and his soul will not lose her recollection. Let him be single-hearted, let him be *little* in his own eyes, and that which God *hides* from the proud and *reveals* to the humble,¹ will be manifested to him and abide with him.

It is evident from all this, that the gift of Understanding is of immense importance to the salvation and sanctification of the soul. It behoves us, therefore, to beg it of the Holy Ghost with all the earnestness of supplication; for we must not forget, that it is obtained rather by the longings of our love, than by any efforts of the intellect. True,—it is the intellect that receives the light; but it is the heart,—the will,—inflamed with love, that wins the radiant Gift. Hence that saying of Isaias: *Unless ye Believe, ye shall not Understand!*² Let us, then, address ourselves to the Holy Spirit in these words of the Psalmist: *Open thou our eyes, and we will consider the wondrous things of thy law! Give us understanding and we shall live!*³ Let us beseech him in these words of the Apostle, wherein he is praying for his Ephesians: let us make his prayer our own: “Give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation, whereby we may have the knowledge of our God! Enlighten the eyes of our heart, that we may know what is the hope of our calling, and what the riches of the glorious inheritance prepared for the Saints!”⁴

¹ St. Luke, x. 21.

² Is. vii. 9; thus quoted from the Septuagint by several of the Greek and Latin Fathers.

³ Ps. cxviii. 10 and 144.

⁴ Eph. i. 17, 18.