

grace, that is, when we commit a mortal sin,) they are restored to us by the Sacrament of Penance.

Let us respectfully consider how the whole work of our salvation and sanctification is marked with the mysterious number of Seven. There are seven principal Virtues which render us dear to our Maker; it is by seven Gifts, that the Holy Ghost leads us to our last end; the seven Sacraments apply to us the merits of the Incarnation and Redemption; it is after seven Weeks from the Pasch, that the Holy Spirit is sent upon the earth, there to establish and maintain the kingdom of God. Can we wonder after this, that Satan should have sacrilegiously mimicked the work of God, striving to destroy, by the seven deadly sins, the creatures whom God would save?

THE GIFT OF FEAR.

Pride is the obstacle to man's virtue and well-being. It is pride that leads us to resist God, to make self our last end, in a word, to work our own ruin. Humility alone can save us from this terrible danger. Who will give us humility? The Holy Ghost; and this, by infusing into us the Gift of the Fear of God.

This holy sentiment is based on the following truths, which are taught us by faith: the sovereign majesty of God, in comparison with whom we are mere nothingness; the infinite sanctity of that God, in whose presence we are but unworthiness and sin; the severe and just judgment we are to go through after death; the danger of falling into sin, which may be our misfortune at any time, if we do not correspond to grace, for although grace be never wanting, yet we have it in our power to resist it.

Man, as the Apostle tells us, must *work out his*

salvation with fear and trembling;¹ but this Fear, which is a gift of the Holy Ghost, is not the base sentiment which goes no further than the dread of eternal punishments. It keeps alive within us an abiding compunction of heart, even though we hope that our sins have long ago been forgiven. It prevents our forgetting that we are sinners, that we are wholly dependent upon God's mercy, and that we are not as yet safe, except *in hope*.²

This Fear of God, therefore, is not a servile fear; on the contrary, it is the source of the noblest sentiments. Inasmuch as it is a filial dread of offending God by sin, it may go hand-in-hand with love. Arising as it does from a reverence for God's infinite majesty and holiness, it puts the creature in his right place, and, as St. Paul says, it contributes to the *perfecting of sanctification*.³ Hence this great Apostle, who had been rapt up to the third heaven, assures us that he was severe in his treatment of himself, *lest he should become a cast-away*.⁴

The spirit of independence and of false liberty which is now-a-days so rife amongst us, is a great enemy to the Fear of God; and one of the miseries of our age is, that there is little Fear of God. Familiarity with God but too frequently usurps the place of that essential basis of the Christian life. The result is, that there is no progress in virtue, such people are a prey to illusion, and the Sacraments, which previously worked so powerfully in their souls, are now well-nigh unproductive. The reason is, that the Gift of Fear has been superseded by a conceited self-complacency. Humility has no further sway; a secret and habitual pride has paralysed the soul: and seeing that these people scout the very idea of *their* ever trembling before the great God of heaven, we

¹ II. Philipp. ii. 12.

² Rom. viii. 24.

³ II. Cor. vii. 1.

⁴ I. Cor. ix. 27.

may well ask them, if they know who God is?

Therefore we beseech thee, O Holy Spirit! keep up within us the Fear of God, which thou didst infuse into our hearts at our Baptism. This saving Fear will ensure our perseverance in virtue, for it will oppose the growth of pride. Let it pierce our soul through and through, and ever abide with us as our safeguard. Let it bring down our haughtiness, and rouse us from tepidity, by its ceaselessly reminding us of the greatness and holiness of him who is our Creator and our Judge.

This holy Fear does not stifle the sentiment of Love; on the contrary, it removes what would be a hindrance to its growth. The heavenly *Powers* see and ardently love their God, their infinite and eternal good; and yet, they tremble before his dread Majesty: *Tremunt Potestates*. And shall we, covered as we are with the wounds of our sins, disfigured by countless imperfections, exposed on every side to snares, obliged to fight with so many enemies,—shall we flatter ourselves that we can do without this strong and filial Fear? and that we need nothing to stimulate us, when we are in those frequent trials—a want of fervour in our will, or of light in our mind? O Holy Spirit! watch over us! Preserve within us thy precious Gift! Teach us how to combine peace and joy of heart with the Fear of our Lord and God, according to those words of the Psalmist: *Serve ye the Lord with fear, and rejoice unto him with trembling!*¹

¹ Ps. ii. 11.