

LESSON TWENTY-SEVENTH.

ON THE SACRAMENTALS.

292 Q. What is a sacramental?

A. A sacramental is anything set apart or blessed by the Church to excite good thoughts and to increase devotion, and through these movements of the heart to remit venial sin.

It is not the sacramental itself that gives grace, but the devotion, the love of God, or sorrow for sin that it inspires. For example, a person comes into the church and goes around the stations of the cross. The stations are a sacramental. In looking at one station he sees Our Lord on trial before Pilate; in another he sees Him crowned with thorns; in another, scourged; in another, carrying His cross; in another, crucified; in another, dead and laid in the tomb. Before all these pictures he reflects on the sufferings of Our Saviour, and begins to hate sin, that caused them. Then he thinks of his own sins, and begins to be sorry for them. This sorrow, caused by going around the stations, brings him grace that remits venial sins. When we receive the sacraments we always get the grace of the sacraments when we are rightly disposed; but in using the sacramentals, the more devotion we have the more grace we receive.

“Increase devotion.” If we knelt down before a plain white wall we could not pray with the devotion we would have kneeling before a crucifix. We see the representation of the nails in the hands and feet, the blood on the side, the thorns on the head; and all these must make us think of Our Lord’s terrible sufferings. The picture of a friend hanging before us will often make us think of him when we would otherwise forget him. So also will the pictures of Our Lord and of the saints keep them often in our minds.

* 293 Q. What is the difference between the sacraments and the sacramentals?

A. The difference between the sacraments and the sacramentals is: first, the sacraments were instituted by Jesus Christ and the sacramentals were instituted by the Church; second, the sacraments give grace of themselves when we place no obstacle in the way; the sacramentals excite in us pious dispositions, by means of which we may obtain grace.

The Church can increase or diminish the number of the sacramentals, but not the number of the sacraments.

294 Q. Which is the chief sacramental used in the Church?

A. The chief sacramental used in the Church is the sign of the cross.

295 Q. How do we make the sign of the cross?

A. We make the sign of the cross by putting the right hand to the forehead, then on the breast, and then to the left and right shoulders; saying, In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

It is important to make an exact cross, and to say all the words distinctly. From carelessness and habit some persons do not make the sign of the cross, though they often intend to bless themselves. They put the hand only to the forehead and breast, or forehead and chin, or forehead and shoulders, etc. Some do not even touch the forehead. All these, it is true, are some signs and movements of the hand, but they are not the sign of the cross. Therefore, from childhood form the good habit of blessing yourself correctly, and you will continue to do it properly all your life.

296 Q. Why do we make the sign of the cross?

A. We make the sign of the cross to show that we are Christians and to profess our belief in the chief mysteries of our religion.

The cross is the banner or standard of Christianity, just as the stars and stripes—the flag of the United States—is our civil standard, and shows to what nation we belong.

* 297 Q. How is the sign of the cross a profession of faith in the chief mysteries of our religion?

A. The sign of the cross is a profession of faith in the chief mysteries of our religion because it expresses the mysteries of the Unity and Trinity of God and of the Incarnation and death of Our Lord.

* 298 Q. How does the sign of the cross express the mystery of the Unity and Trinity of God?

A. The words: "In the name" express the Unity of God; the words that follow, "of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" express the mystery of the Trinity.

* 299 Q. How does the sign of the cross express the mystery of the Incarnation and death of Our Lord?

A. The sign of the cross expresses the mystery of the Incarnation by reminding us that the Son of God, having become man, suffered death on the cross.

Besides these chief mysteries, we will find, if we think a little, that the sign of the cross reminds us of many other things. It reminds us of the sin of our first parents, which made the cross necessary; it reminds us of the hatred God bears to sin, when such sufferings were endured to make satisfaction for it; it reminds us of Christ's love, etc.

300 Q. What other sacramental is in very frequent use?

A. Another sacramental in very frequent use is holy water.

301 Q. What is holy water?

A. Holy water is water blessed by the priest with

solemn prayer to beg God's blessing on those who use it, and protection from the power of darkness.

The priest prays that those who use this water may not fall into sin; may be free from the power of the devil and from bodily diseases, etc. Therefore when they do use the water they get the benefit of all these prayers, because the priest says: "If they use it, God grant them all these things."

302 Q. Are there any other sacramentals besides the sign of the cross and holy water?

A. Besides the sign of the cross and holy water there are many other sacramentals, such as blessed candles, ashes, palms, crucifixes, images of the Blessed Virgin and of the saints, rosaries, and scapulars.

"Candles," blessed on the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin (see Butler's *Lives of the Saints*, Feb. 2d, Feast of the Purification). The Church blesses whatever it uses. Some say beautifully that the wax of the candle gathered by the bees from sweet flowers reminds us of Our Lord's pure, human body, and that the flame reminds us of His divinity. Again, candles about the altar remind us of the angels, those bright spirits ever about God's throne; they remind us, too, of the persecution of the Christians in the first ages of the Church, when they had to hear Mass and receive the sacraments in dark places, where lights were necessary that priests and people might see. Again, lights are a beautiful ornament for the altar, and in keeping with holy things. Lights are a sign of joy: hence the very old custom of lighting bonfires to express joy. So we have lights to express our joy at the celebration of the holy Mass. Again, if we wish to honor any great person in the Church or State, we illuminate the city for his reception. So, too, we illuminate our altars and churches for the reception of Our Lord, that we may honor Him when He comes in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and is present at Benediction.

“**Ashes**” are placed on our heads by the priest on Ash Wednesday, while he says: “Remember, man, thou art but dust, and unto dust thou shalt return.” They are a sign of penance, and so we use them at the beginning of Lent.

“**Palms**,” to remind us of Our Lord’s coming in triumph into Jerusalem, when the people out of respect for Him threw palms, and even their garments, beneath His feet on the way, singing His praises and wishing to make Him king. Yet these same people only one week later were among those who crucified Him. Do we not also at times honor Our Lord, call Him our king, and shortly afterwards insult and, as far as we can, injure Him by sin? Do we not say in the Our Father, “Hallowed, or praised, be His name,” and blaspheme it ourselves?

“**Crucifix**,” if it has an image of Our Lord upon it; if not, it is simply a cross, because crucifix means fixed to the cross.

“**Images**”—that is, statues, pictures, etc.

“**Rosaries**,” called also the beads. The rosary or beads is a very old and very beautiful form of prayer. In the beginning pious people, we are told, used to say a certain number of prayers, and keep count of them on a string with knots or beads. However that may be, the rosary, as we now have it, comes down to us from St. Dominic. He instructed the people by it, and converted many heretics. In the rosary beads there are fifty-three small beads on which we say the “Hail Mary” and six large beads on which we say the “Our Father.” In saying the rosary, before saying the “Our Father” on the large beads, we think or meditate for a while on some event in the life of Our Lord, and these events we call mysteries of the rosary. There are fifteen of these events taken in the order in which they occurred in the life of Our Lord; and hence there are fifteen mysteries in the whole rosary. First we have the five *joyful mysteries*. (1) The Annunciation—that is, the angel Gabriel coming to tell the Blessed Virgin that she is to be the mother of God. (2) The Visitation, when the Blessed Virgin went to visit her cousin

St. Elizabeth—the mother of St. John the Baptist, who was six months older than Our Lord. Elizabeth said to her, “Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb;” and the Blessed Virgin answered her in the beautiful words of the Magnificat, that we sing at Vespers while the priest incenses the altar. (3) The Nativity, or birth of Our Lord, which reminds us how He was born in a stable, in poverty and lowliness. (4) The Presentation of the child Jesus in the Temple. According to the law of Moses, the people were obliged to bring the first boy born in every family to the temple in Jerusalem and offer him to God. Then they gave some offering to buy him back, as it were, from God. The Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, who kept all the laws, took Our Lord and offered Him in the temple—although He Himself was the Lord of the temple. Nevertheless others did not know this, and the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph observed the laws, though not bound to do so, that their neighbors might not be scandalized in seeing them neglect these things. They did not know, as she did, that the little infant was the Son of God, and need not keep the law of Moses or any law, because He was the maker of the laws. We should learn from this never to give scandal; and even when we have good excuse for not observing the law, we should observe it for the sake of good example to others; or at least, when we can, we should explain why we do not observe the law. (5) The fifth joyful mystery is the finding of the child Jesus in the temple. All the men and boys, from twelve years of age upward, were obliged, according to the Old Law, to go up to Jerusalem and offer sacrifice on the great feasts. On one of these feasts the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and Our Lord went to Jerusalem. When His parents and their friends were returning home Our Lord was missing. He had not accompanied them from the city. Then the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph went back to Jerusalem and sought Him with great sorrow for three days. At the end of that time they found Him in the temple sitting with the

doctors of the law asking them questions. Our Lord obediently returned with His parents to Nazareth. At thirty years of age He was baptized by John the Baptist in the river Jordan. The baptism of John was not a sacrament, did not give grace of itself; but, like a sacramental, it disposed those who received it to be sorry for their sins and to receive the gift of faith and baptism of Christ. The eighteen years from the time Our Lord went down to Nazareth after being found in the temple till His baptism is called His hidden life, while all that follows His baptism is called His public life. It is very strange that not a single word should be given in the Holy Scriptures about Our Lord during His youth—the very time young men are most anxious to be seen and heard. Our Lord knew all things and could do all things when a young man, and yet for the sake of example He remained silent, living quietly with His parents and doing His daily work for them. Thus you understand what is meant by the five joyful mysteries of the rosary: the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity of Our Lord, the Presentation of the child Jesus in the temple, and the finding of the child Jesus in the temple. You meditate on one of these before each decade (ten) of the beads.

Next in order in the life of Our Lord come the five events called the *sorrowful mysteries*, namely: (1) The agony in the garden, when Our Lord went there to pray on Holy Thursday night, before He was taken prisoner. There the blood came out through His body as perspiration does through ours, and He was in dreadful anguish. The reason of His sorrow and anguish has already been given in the explanation of the Passion. (2) The scourging of Our Lord at the pillar. This also has been explained. What terrible cruelty existed in the world before Christianity! In our times the brute beasts have more protection from cruel treatment than the pagan slaves had then. The Church came to their assistance. It taught that all men are God's children, that slaves as well as masters were redeemed by Jesus Christ and that masters must

be kind **and just** to their slaves. Many converts from **paganism**, through love for Our Lord and this teaching of the Church, granted liberty to their slaves; and thus as civilization spread with the teaching of Christianity, slavery ceased to exist. It was not in the power of the Church, however, to abolish slavery everywhere, but she did it as soon as she could. Even at present she is fighting hard to protect the poor negroes of Africa against it, or at least to moderate its cruelty.

(3) The third sorrowful mystery is the crowning with thorns.

(4) The carriage of the cross to Calvary. It was the common practice to make the prisoner at times carry his cross to the place of execution, and over the cross they printed what he was put to death for. That is the reason they placed over Our Lord's cross I. N. R. I., which are the first letters of four Latin words meaning, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." They pretended by this sign that Our Lord was put to death for calling Himself King of the Jews, and was thus a disturber of the public peace, and an enemy of the Roman emperor under whose power they were. Our Lord did say that He was King of the Jews, but He also said that He was not their earthly but their heavenly king. The real cause of their putting Our Lord to death was the jealousy of the Jewish priests and Pharisees. He rebuked them for their faults, and showed the good, sincere people what hypocrites these men were.

(5) The last of the sorrowful mysteries is the crucifixion. At the foot of the cross our blessed Mother stood on the day of crucifixion, and it must have been a very sad sight for Our Lord. She was without any one to take care of her; for St. Joseph was dead, and her Son was soon to die. Our Lord asked St. John, one of His apostles, to take care of her. St. John was dear to Christ, and on that account is called the beloved disciple. He is known to us as St. John the Evangelist. He was the last of the apostles to die. At one time he was cast into a caldron of boiling oil, but was miraculously saved by God (see Butler's Lives of the Saints, Dec. 27). He lived to be over a hundred years old, and while

on the island of Patmos wrote the Apocalypse or Revelations,—the last book of the New Testament,—containing prophecies of what will happen at the end of the world. The Blessed Virgin lived on earth about eleven years after the ascension of Our Lord. They buried her in a tomb, and tradition tells us that after her burial the angels carried her body to heaven, where she now sits beside her divine Son. This taking of her body to heaven is called the Assumption. This feast was celebrated in the Church from a very early age. A very strong proof of the Assumption is that no persons ever claimed to have any part of the body of the Blessed Virgin as a relic. We have the bodies of some of the apostles, especially St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. James transmitted to us; and certainly if it had been possible the first Christians would have endeavored to get some portion, at least, of the Blessed Virgin's body. Surely St. John, who knew her so well, would have given to the church he established some part of her body as a relic; but since her entire body was taken to heaven, it was never possible.

After the sorrowful mysteries come the five *glorious mysteries*, and they are: (1) The Resurrection of Our Lord; (2) The Ascension of Our Lord; (3) The Coming of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles; (4) The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin; (5) The Coronation of the Blessed Virgin in heaven. All but the last have been explained in foregoing parts of the Catechism. In this last mystery we consider our blessed Lady just after her entrance into heaven, being received by her divine Son, our blessed Lord, and being crowned queen of heaven over all the angels and saints. In saying the rosary we are, as I have told you before, to stop after mentioning the mystery and think over the lesson it teaches, and thus excite ourselves to love and devotion before saying the "Our Father" and "Hail Marys" in honor of it. Generally what we call the beads is only one third of the rosary; that is, we can only say five mysteries on the beads unless we go over them three times. If you say your beads every day you

will say the whole rosary twice a week and have one day to spare.

On Sundays, except the Sundays of Advent and Lent, we should say always the glorious mysteries. You see, the mysteries run in the order in which they happen in Our Lord's life. So on Monday we say the joyful mysteries, on Tuesday the sorrowful, and on Wednesday the glorious. Then we begin again on Thursday the joyful, on Friday the sorrowful, on Saturday the glorious. In Advent we say the joyful, and in Lent the sorrowful mysteries on every day. In Easter-time we always say the glorious mysteries.

I have told you what the letters I. N. R. I. mean; now let me tell you what I. H. S. with a cross over them mean. You often see these letters on altars and on holy things. They are simply an abbreviation for Our Lord's name, "Jesus," as it was first written in Greek letters. Some also take these letters for the first letters of the Latin words that mean: Jesus, Saviour of men. And as the cross is placed over these letters it can signify that He saved them by His death on the cross.

"Scapulars." The scapular is a large broad piece of cloth worn by the monks and priests of some of the religious orders. It extends from the toes in front to the heels behind, and is wide enough to cover the shoulders. It is worn over the cassock or habit. It is called scapular because it rests on the shoulders. The scapular as we wear it is two small pieces of cloth fastened together by two pieces of braid or cord resting on the shoulders. It is made thus in imitation of the large scapular, and is to be worn under our ordinary garments. The brown scapular is called the Scapular of Mount Carmel. It was given, we are told on good authority, to blessed Simon Stock by the Blessed Virgin herself, with wonderful promises in favor of those who wear it. The Church grants many privileges and indulgences to those who wear the scapular.

We wear the scapular to indicate that we place ourselves

under the special protection of the Blessed Virgin. We can tell to what army or nation a soldier belongs by the uniform he wears; so we can consider the scapular as the particular uniform of those who desire to serve the Blessed Virgin in some special manner. This wearing of the brown scapular is therefore a mark of special devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. As it was first introduced among the people by the Carmelite Fathers, or priests of the Order of Mount Carmel, this Scapular is called the Scapular of Mount Carmel. We have also a red scapular in honor of Our Lord's passion; a white one in honor of the Holy Trinity; a blue one in honor of the Immaculate Conception, and a black one in honor of the seven dolors or sorrows of the Blessed Virgin. When all these are joined together (not in one piece, but at the top only) and worn as one, they are called the five scapulars.

The seven dolors are seven chief occasions of sorrow in the life of our blessed Lady. They are: (1) The circumcision of Our Lord, when she saw his blood shed for the first time. (2) Her flight into Egypt to save the life of the little Infant Jesus when Herod was seeking to kill Him. (3) The three days she lost Him in Jerusalem. (4) When she saw Christ carrying His cross. (5) His death. (6) When He was taken down from the cross. (7) When He was laid in the sepulchre. There are beads called seven dolor beads constructed with seven medals bearing representations of these sorrows, and seven beads between each medal and the next. At the medals we meditate on the dolor, and then in its honor say "Hail Marys" on the beads.