

fession with great facility of approach to the confessor, and with as far as possible a choice of confessors. These instructions are of considerable moment. The occasions of moral compulsion, of doubtful or sacriligious Communion may be rare but they are so criminal that the utmost care is required to prevent them. Liberty of conscience and increasing preparation will avoid any slur on this great movement for frequent Communion. These precautions will help all those who communicate to expand under the influence of the holy one whom they receive, and so grow constantly in grace and understanding. The body of Christ is food indeed for the life and growth of the soul.

For these reasons we have consecrated most of the present issue to *Corpus Christi*, that minds and wills may be stirred to devotion with a deepening appreciation of the Sacrament.

NOTE. The *Instructio* referred to was issued by the Congregation of Sacramental Discipline after confirmation by Pope Pius XI on 3rd August, 1938.

GROWTH OF THE SOUL¹

BY

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IN speaking of that personal side that should be in our love and service of God it should be taken for granted that the life of service implies a certain growth in knowledge and love, and the service which after all is only an expression of that knowledge and love should also increase and grow. In all living things there is an ebb and flow and this is found in the spiritual life in very great measure. The growth is not necessarily maintained for long, it has set-backs. It is not necessary that one should notice growth. 'The Kingdom of God cometh not by observation'. We may notice it or we may not. In the lives of the saints from their own words it would seem they were often not conscious of it, did not seem to themselves to have seen any improvement, sometimes quite the reverse. St Francis of Assisi says many things that suggest that he saw no increase in his knowledge or love. So to notice the growth is not necessary to us; that other people should notice it—yes, but that we should—no. It is not ordinarily evident to the individual himself.

The better we are the worse our faults seem to us; to deepen our sanctity is to deepen our detestation of self. The more we are in love with God the worse our sins appear. In our worst moments sin appears little because we are less sensitive, in our best moments we appear to ourselves worse because deepening our sanctity reveals to us more of evil in our lives, not because we are worse but we are more

¹ From a retreat preached in Edinburgh in July, 1932.

sensitive—sensitiveness developed out of goodness. So to notice increase in goodness is not essential; to notice it is probably vanity or complacency.

To grow in holiness is our business but that does not mean we pass through progressive stages—purgative, illuminative, unitive—we have got to keep all three spinning at the same time! A book puts it in logical order, but that is a book, not life. Life means we are backwards and forwards, temptation and then—almost the divine touch of God. Life is unsteadily varied, very different from the mapped-out development of the soul. Love increases till service follows. 'By this shall all men know that you are my disciples'; not religion but the expression of it. Love of one's neighbour is merely the result of religion; not the faith, but the expression of the faith. The essence of religion is love of God, and service of the brethren is the sign of love. We want to develop our lives and express this love in action—in generous service, and it may be that at times we get despairing, discouraged, because we are nothing like perfect.

How does a plant grow? It may blossom well in the country or it may be stunted and never attain its proper shape in a town. In the country its growth is full and gracious; in the town it is at the mercy of smoke and fumes, it can't grow and expand. What does that mean? That a thing depends not on its own character but on conditions. Take two bulbs, plant them and one may be undeveloped because the conditions were not favourable. So one has to take into consideration not only the thing but the conditions under which it has to struggle. These conditions affect the appearance and the life. And this is true of human beings: put them in unhappy conditions and they are stunted; suitable, and they flourish. Feed them on mere richness and they are not nourished; their food must be suitable. You can't get the best out of anything however good unless the conditions are also of the best. And this is true of the soul: you can't get perfection unless the soul is in perfect circumstances. A child in the slums—what chance has it? Another soul nothing like as perfectly endowed but better brought up is so different. Unfair? It would be unfair but that God takes it into consideration. What help the child has, much or little, is due to mere circumstances. God alone can judge justly, because he alone knows how much to take off and how much to put on. God is just—man never, because he is too blind, too ignorant; he should never judge, he doesn't know himself, far less his brother.

It is impudent to judge; look to yourself. You find yourself imperfect. Do you know how much is due to your own fault? You don't know, you can't say, 'It is entirely my own fault'; it is perhaps heredity or something that happened in childhood, not your fault

in any way. Are you entirely responsible? you don't know. You are better—is it your own effort?—the grace of God? you don't know. Who can tell? It makes the attempt to appraise our own value in the sight of God impossible. Are we better or worse?—we don't know. You are hampered and helped more than you know. You are generous, perhaps that is just your own nature, you started like that. Some other one is cantankerous and you blame them, perhaps they can't help it. St Thomas says that physical fitness affects moral life. Fat people are always better tempered. There can be no perfect growth unless the circumstances are perfect—and they never are—it is only perfect on the other side of death. We start with a handicap—original sin. We believe we have a natural inclination to evil, we can no more help it than the stars can help the orbits in which they sail. Only Christ and his Mother are exempt. And so, however we look at it we are flung upon the fact that we don't know, and so we should never be discouraged, or pass judgments—a foolish thing. We must walk delicately, take care; we never know whether we are worthy of good or evil. Foolish to be discouraged; God can keep you from sin. He did his Mother, he often has kept you. Look back and see how you stood on the edge of a precipice, did we ever know there was a precipice? such fools—he kept us. All judgment leave to him. Don't measure your growth or falling back; God doesn't seem to like it. David started numbering his people and God said 'Don't'.

Work while it's daylight and leave the rest to God. This one plants and this one waters, and God gives the increase. Rest more in God and in God's hands. Leave it to him, he has charge of us, and over us broods the Spirit of divine Providence. Be patient and humble under the mighty hand of God—be patient and humble. No eye sees nor ears nor heart of man can conceive the invisible. 'By their fruits you shall know them.' Ah but we can't, foolish—criminal. Never lose heart or courage, get on, learn, love and serve more, you won't know if you do—your neighbours may. God will know. Who would dare shoulder the responsibility of life if he knew in advance? Whatever joy and happiness we saw coming to make the dark paths possible we should be sad, set down, overcast.

God is kind. Live by faith—trust the feel of his hand. We must throw ourselves absolutely on him, whatever the years may bring, *trust*. Haven't you made a mess of many decisions you made? He knows. He knows the cry of your heart. Your ideals, ambitions. Leave all to him. He will judge you. He will surely lead you. You must go to him always, not for what you get but for what you give. Love despises easy things, looks for hard things. Don't bother to make efforts, be content, he knows how you stand, so be content to *know—Love and Serve*.