

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Spiritual Blessings, Our First Desire

“Take courage, son; thy sins are forgiven thee” (Matt., 9:2)

In the Apostles' Creed we acknowledge our belief in the forgiveness of sins. Today's Gospel gives us an example of the forgiveness of sins by the direct power of Christ Himself. The poor man afflicted with paralysis was chiefly concerned with the cure of his bodily ailment. But Our Lord realised that what he needed chiefly was the cure of the ailments of his soul. Consequently the first blessing which Christ conferred on the invalid was the forgiveness of his sins. Then, in order to prove that He did truly possess the divine power to work this deed of mercy, Our Lord cured the sick man of his paralysis and bade him rise and walk.

By granting the sick man health of soul--which he did not ask for--in the first place, Christ emphasised the important truth that spiritual favours are far more desirable than temporal benefits. However extraordinary may be the blessings of the temporal order we receive from God, such as health and financial success, they must be regarded as far inferior in value to spiritual gifts which perfect our soul.

Many Catholics do not seem to realise this important truth. Frequently they pray for temporal favours. If they are unwell they make novenas for the recovery of their health. If they wish to obtain success in business or an increase of salary, they have fervent recourse to prayer. Often however, such Catholics show little concern for the needs of their souls. Some of them may even be living in mortal sin and yet be very much unconcerned. But they ardently desire God's help toward the attaining of the things of the present life.

True Christians are spiritually minded. In their prayers they seek in the first place God's grace. They pray that they will receive strength in temptation, that they will know clearly what is God's will in their regard, that they may be inspired to a greater love of the Blessed Sacrament, that they may have the privilege of receiving the last sacraments when life is drawing to a close. And, if they feel that they may be among those fortunate persons to whom God is offering a vocation to the priesthood or to the religious life they pray for light and guidance and the grace to fulfil the will of God.

Practical Application

While it is not wrong to pray for temporal favours, do not be among those who seem to include nothing else in their petitions to God. Above all, if you fall into mortal sin, ask the grace to rise as soon as possible. When you are in the state of grace, pray daily that you may persevere in God's friendship.