

DAY 3.

Of the Institution of the Worshipful and most August Sacrament.

WHEN our Lord Jesus had instructed His disciples in true humility, both by word and example, and the time of His Passion was close at hand, He desired to teach them and all of us another of His virtues, not less necessary for our salvation than the one already spoken of; that is to say, perfect love. These two virtues He left us as His testament for an everlasting remembrance, desiring to impress them on our inmost hearts, for in them lies our whole salvation, and without them we cannot be saved. No, even if we had nothing else, these alone would suffice. Hear, now, what our most gracious Lord said to His disciples: “My little children, a new commandment I give to you;” as if He would say: “Many lessons and numerous commandments you have from Me. But now, a new commandment I give to you, the highest, indeed, of all commandments, and the compendium of all My teachings; and this is, that you love one another as I have loved you; that as I lay down My life for you, so also you should love one another unto death, and help one another; as I have loved him who betrayed Me, and have prayed for them who have brought Me to the cross, so you should also love your enemies, and do good to them, by lending loving help to all who persecute you, and bring evil upon you.” This new commandment of love our Lord Jesus taught, not only by word, but also by deed. And when He desired to make known to us that we were His true sons, and that out of His eternal love He bore us in His bosom, and that from everlasting we had been in Him, and, as it were, in our origin, had rested in Him from all eternity; and that no earthly father had ever embraced us with such exceeding love as that with which He had embraced us. Then it was that, as a most faithful father, He left us His most august testament, and bestowed upon us that excellent good, which is nobler and better than heaven and earth, even His own most sacred Body for food, and for our drink His most precious Blood. O wonderful mystery! O most high Sacrament! Oh, all of you, as many as

love God, come, make ready, behold, wonder, marvel, praise, announce and magnify the Name of the Lord. For so great, so marvelous a work our Lord has worked in us, that whoever desires to look into it with his inward understanding, can only shrivel up in spirit, and faint away in mind, and lose all power for exceeding great astonishment. And even if a man desire, according to the poor little measure of his human frailty, and by the help of God's grace, to look through and search the depth of this love by means of his reason and understanding, as far, namely, as God grants out of love to allow him to do this, yet will his heart melt away, and burn, and glow with the flame and fire of love. For, although it was a great and wonderful work that God Almighty lowered Himself to take upon the nature of man, and to clothe Himself with the sackcloth of our mortality, yet this work leaves all His other works far behind. For, in the former work, He took upon Himself, indeed, our manhood, but in this work, joined and united with His Manhood, He poured out upon us His own Godhead, so that we receive It within ourselves. In the former He took on Him our manhood, in the latter, we are clothed with His Godhead.

As the food taken by man passes into his substance, and becomes of one nature with man, whoever worthily receives this Food, is made one thing with our Lord by grace. And as our Lord said according to St Augustine, we change not this divine Food into our substance, but rather are changed in substance and transformed by it into Himself, and thus are made deiform, and of one nature with Him. Now this is the way by which we put on Christ, as the apostle admonished. Who can ever reach, by any act of the understanding, unto this infinite abyss of deepest love, which God has willed to make known to us in this sublime and wonderful Sacrament? And this, indeed, He did at the end of His life, that it might be, as it were, the sum, and compendium, and everlasting remembrance of all His works. Moreover, although it was at the last supper that He first instituted this Sacrament, and gave It to man to take, yet It included within Itself the whole Christ, God Incarnate. For in this Sacrament He had His true Body, and His living soul, and He was Very God; and these three we receive in this Sacrament. Where is the heart that will not glow with burning love, and be stirred and

moved to devotion, when it considered with what exceeding love He, the King of glory, the Lord of majesty, was consumed for us vile creatures, who are but dust and ashes, in whom He found nothing but frailty, and sin, and want? Yet of such He can say: “My delights are to be with the children of men.” Can He lift us higher than by setting up His own temple within us? Can He love us more than by lowering Himself to become the food of His own creatures? He is the highest and most perfect Good, with which no other good can be compared, and which can never fail; and because His fatherly and loving Heart could think of nothing better, nothing higher, He gave us Himself, so as to prove to us His bountiful goodness, and the deep love of His Heart. Bountiful altogether is the gift, when He gave Himself, but how much more bountiful when He gave Himself in this way! For He gave Himself to be our father, and brother, and companion, and food, and ransom, and mediator, and advocate. Lastly, He will give us Himself for our everlasting reward, and will so satiate us in Himself, that He will be to us all that we can desire.

This is not all, for over and above all this bountiful goodness, He is ever ready to come into our hearts, and to bestow upon us all the merits of His Incarnation, and Life and Passion. He said through His prophet: “You shall call and the Lord will hear you. You shall cry aloud, and He shall say, ‘ here I am.’” And He Himself said: “If any man loves Me, My Father will love him, and We will come and make our dwelling with him.” Look, O my soul! to your dignity, and rejoice exceedingly in your God, Who had lifted you up from the dung-hill of your sins, that you may be the dwelling-place of the Adorable Trinity, you who were formerly the devil’s slave.

Nor was it enough for this most ardent Lover to show us such exceeding love. More deeply still must He lower and submit Himself unto us. He will not wait until He is invited and desired by us: He came Himself first, and knocked, and prayed for us to let Him in. Hear what He said in the book of the Revelation: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man opens up to Me, I will enter in, and

eat with him, and he with Me.” O blessed and happy soul, that listened to his Lord’s knock, that watched, and with longing waited for His coming, so as not only straightaway to open to her Lord and Bridegroom, but even with her lamp burning, and full of oil, to go out to meet Him, and to take Him back with her, saying: “Let my Beloved come into His garden!”

Oh! how great the happiness to receive Him, as He came back from the heavenly marriage-feast, drunk with wine, full of grace and truth, coming forth from His Father’s most pleasant Bosom, all delightful and full of comfort, flowing with spiritual delights, ready to give His loving bride the kiss of peace which He Himself had received from His Father. Oh! what a happiness to eat with Him, Who gave Himself for food! Who, I ask, could ever have cast himself down, or so raised us up? Heaven and earth are filled with the glory of His divine Majesty, and yet He does not refuse to be handled, and taken and eaten by us worthless worms of earth. The heaven of heavens is not large enough to contain His greatness, and He told us that it is His delight to be with us, who lie hidden in the filthy homes of earth.

Oh! Who’s spirit will not marvel with exceeding wonder? Whose heart will not melt away at the burning fire of this unspeakable love? How could He have given us surer proof of His burning love for us? It is a small thing to Him to send His holy angels to honor and visit us, but that He, the King of angels, should come to His own servants, that He should visit the sick, and comfort the weak, and lift up the fallen, and console the desolate, and give heart to them who despair, and instruct them who doubt, and call back those that wander, and refresh them that hunger, and give warmth to them that are lukewarm; in a word, that He should heal all our lethargy, and all our sins, and this not by any strange medicine, but by His own precious Body and Blood! O wonderful mystery, O most high Sacrament, O unspeakable love, O unheard of bounty, in which the Giver is Himself the Gift, the servant eats his Lord, the creature receives his Maker, the minister is commanded to sit at the table of

the most high King, and is filled to overflowing with divine food; in which man is fed with the Bread of angels, the Father distributed the Body of His only Begotten, and gave His friends to drink, in all abundance, of the precious Blood of His dear Son! Who has ever heard of a greater or more lavish bounty? Where is the understanding that can look into and grasp the mysteries of this wonderful Sacrament? What more could God have done for us? How could He have more closely joined to us His most high Godhead, than to become our food, and to incorporate us wholly into Himself? For as bodily food, when taken by man, falls down softly into his inward parts, and nourishes all his members, and at length passes into his substance, so, in like manner, Christ let Himself sink down into our souls, in order to fill us wholly with Himself, and He drew all our powers into Himself. And if He meets our souls which are worthily made ready, so as to enable Him freely to accomplish within us His own pleasant work, then, too, according to the Scriptures, He builds up and destroys, He kills and gives life, He tears up and plants, He darkens and gives light. For He is that Lamb, whom St. John saw sitting on the throne of heaven, and making all things new. Even as He once made our souls, when before they had no being, to His own image and likeness, so also He renewed and marvelously reformed them according to the same likeness, which in us have become defiled and broken. Thus, too, you may hear Him say by the mouth of one of His prophets: "I Myself will feed My sheep, and I will make them lie down. That which have perished I will seek; that which have been cast away I will bring back; that which is broken I will bind together; that which is weak I will strengthen."

Oh! who can grasp in mind, or who is able to discover in thought, all the marvels, and all the happiness, which this divine Food works in the soul that worthily receives It? Oh! how pure, how holy, and, above all, how divine such a man straightway becomes by means of this Food? For if the nature of the elements is such as, after the manner of their author, to consume all things, and make them like themselves, and change them into their own substance, how much more will this most noble Food, which is God Himself, consume whatever in man is vicious, or carnal, or sensual, and

cause to spring up and encourage all virtue and all good; and, most of all, will at last transform the whole man into Itself, and unite him with Itself, and, so far as is possible for a creature, make him of one essence with God, and like Him. While this is being done, that is to say, while man is being conformed and made like unto this Food, he also becomes wholly enlivened in spirit, for he receives the Bread of Life, so that now he may say with the apostle: "I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me." He is made, in like manner, wholly angelic and heavenly, for he has eaten of the Bread of angels, and of their food. Lastly, he is made all divine, inasmuch as he has received God Himself, Who has so filled him, and, so to speak, deified his powers, that he can no longer seek, or desire, or meditate upon, or love anything, save only God, while to do God's will, and whatever God's love requires, is enough for him. What, then, can be lacking for us, when we have partaken of this most noble Food? O merciful God! what more could You have done for us, or what have You done? Even if you had brooded with all Your power and all Your wisdom upon this one thing, namely, how to bestow upon man some great gift, and to show to him some striking proof of Your exceeding love, yet so far as my understanding can grasp, no nobler, or higher, or more useful, or more saving gift You could have lavished upon us. For You have poured out upon us the whole treasure of Your grace. You have opened to us Your fatherly Heart, and allowed the veins of Your exceeding love to flow in all abundance over us. Openly You have made known to us with what great love for us You burn and are wounded. And because You no longer could hide this blessed wound, and burning fire, the flame broke forth, and You allowed man to feel the force of Your love, giving to him Your most sacred Body for food, and Your precious Blood for drink, that so man, looking upon the immensity of this love, might, in his turn, be inflamed and wounded by love, and, at the same time, by its sublimity, might be inwardly forced and admonished to repay it in some way, and satisfy its longings.

See here, how marvelous and unheard of the meeting and the union of the Divine Wisdom with our nature have been. It took from us our weakness, and our mortal manhood, and bestowed upon us Its

own adorable Godhead. It could find no more suitable or pleasant way, than to leave Itself to us under the appearance of food and drink.

O power of God, to be ever praised, that under the appearance of a little bread could give His own high Godhead, could give His own perfect Body and holy Soul unto all men, equally and wholly to be their food, which, while wholly received by every man, yet remained in Itself whole and incorrupt! O marvelous wisdom of God, that instituted this subtle and saving means of salvation for us, and decreed it! O incomprehensible goodness of God, that for the sake of our salvation has perfected such sublime works of love! O saving Food, through which the children of men pass into the children of God, and humanity is absorbed that God may remain! O longed-for, sacred, and adorable Bread, that refreshes the mind, not the belly; that strengthens the heart, not weighs down the body; that gladdens the spirit, not darkens the understanding; through which sensuality is killed, and our own will brought down to nothing, that God's Will may have place, and God's Spirit may have rule, and God's working may have no hindrance! Such truth was needed by man, who had swallowed the serpent's poisonous morsel, to drink the heavenly drink of Christ's precious Blood, in order to recover the salvation he had lost. Clearly it was fitting that he who had fallen through food that brought him death should be raised up again by the Bread of life; that he who had died through the fruit of the tree, should come to life again in like manner, by the fruit of the Tree, and that he who, through the tree of disobedience, had been sentenced to everlasting death, should, by the Tree of obedience, be restored to everlasting glory. On that former tree hung the food of death, on the latter the medicine of life. In that ran the sap of concupiscence, on this hung the grape-clusters of salvation, which, pressed out in the vine-press of Christ's Passion, gave us that new wine, which delighted the heart of man. Clearly, this is that chosen grape-cluster, sweet to the taste, which they who were said to spy out the earth, that is, the holy apostles, carried on a staff, as they explored with interior eyes the kingdom of heaven; as, for example, St. John, who saw in the book of the Revelation the Lamb, as it were slain, and St. Paul, who himself also went forth to look at the Land of Promise, when he

was raptured into the third heaven, and who, when he had returned to himself, confessed that he knew no other sign, but the grape upon the vine, that is, Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. This is that true grape-cluster which has no sourness mingled with it; this is that sweet-tasting Bread, or heavenly manna, full of spiritual delights, where there is nothing rough or coarse, for it is not made of the grain of the Old Testament, administered by Moses, but it is the flour of wheat, that is, of the grace shown through Christ Jesus; no mere figure, but the truth.

Therefore, let no man forget to eat this Bread, lest his heart should wither. For as we fell into ruin through food, so by food we must be enlivened again to life. Of that former food it was said: “On that day that you eat, You shall surely die.” But of this it is said: “If any man shall eat of this Bread, he shall live forever.” As often, therefore, as, through the deception of Satan, that wicked serpent, we have fallen into sins, and have drunk the cup of death when held out to us by the enemy’s temptation, we ought to often make ourselves ready to partake of this heavenly medicine, with sorrow, and penance, and devotion, and burning longing. Never let us cease at all to minister to our sick and suffering souls, since to no man our tender-hearted Lord refuses His grace, nor is there anything He is more ready to give than Himself. And, in certainty, whatever favors, whatever grace our Lord Jesus brought into this world, and gave to man when He took his nature, all this He brings with Him, and bestowed upon every man who worthily partakes of this worshipful Sacrament. Moreover, whatever virtues Christ performed during His Life,—all the fruit of His Death, Resurrection and Ascension, the blessedness of His gracious Body, the virtue of His precious Blood, and lastly, the merits of His most noble Soul,—all this He brings with Him into the soul that worthily receives Him. What more do You desire? In this most august Sacrament, whatever can be thought of, or desired, is received. For in this, the true Son of God, Jesus Christ, very God and very Man, always one God with the Father and the Holy Ghost, is received. Truly, then, it was right to say, that whatever virtues or merit Christ performed, and obtained in His Life and Passion, all this is received in this Sacrament by the soul that is worthily prepared. Our sweet Jesus is ready to give us all these virtues through His tender

and bountiful goodness, just as if we had performed them ourselves. Let us quickly, therefore, zealously cleanse our hearts from every stain of sin, and to adorn them with virtues and good works, that we may be always fit and worthy to receive this saving food, to the everlasting glory of our most gracious Maker. AMEN.