

DAY 2.

Of the washing of the disciples' feet.

WHEN the time of grace and mercy was at hand, in which He had decreed from everlasting to accomplish our salvation, and to redeem us, not with corruptible gold and silver, but with His own precious Blood, out of true love, Christ Jesus, as a most bountiful Master of the household, desired to eat supper with His disciples before He departed from them by a cruel death, and as a sign of the mighty love with which He loved them. And in this supper it was His will to establish His testament, declaring openly, that even to the end He had loved them as His true children, and had pressed them to His fatherly heart from everlasting. For, when the supper was over, and He had pointed out to His disciples that His death and Passion was very near at hand, and had contemplated how grievously they were afflicted at the thought, namely, that they were to be torn to pieces from so faithful a Father and loving a Teacher—out of His exceeding great compassion He gently comforted them, and said: “My little children, do not be sad, nor let your heart be troubled, I will not leave you orphans. It is to your advantage that I go away. I shall go away, but I will come again to you.” But when He saw that they had lost all heart, and were sorely stricken, some of them, indeed, with tears running down their cheeks, and others heaving deep sighs from their inmost heart, and others, again, showing by their pale and changing countenances the anguish of their spirit, all the bowels of His compassion were moved, for He is full of mercy, and, at the same time, He spoke to them words of comfort, and said: “My little children, fear not, nor be troubled. For I am with you, even unto the end of the world.” See, with what burning love He embraced them. Again, when the Paschal Lamb was made ready in the place where He had eaten, He entered the upper-chamber, and His disciples followed Him.

Come, then, and let us also follow Him, for our tender-hearted Lord will not allow anyone to go out of that chamber hungering. When, therefore, the Paschal Lamb had been eaten, according to the rites

and law of the Jews, He summed up, as it were, in one, but, at the same time, a twofold virtue, all the virtues which He had practiced His whole life long in various and marvelous ways, that they who cannot follow the works and virtues of Christ, may, with all earnestness, endeavor to acquire, at least, these two, which He taught us so carefully at the end of His life. For, indeed, without these virtues no man can obtain salvation, or the bliss of heaven. He rose, therefore, from the table, and, girt about with a linen cloth, began very diligently to wash His disciples' feet. Now, the reason why He performed this grand work of striking humility at the end of His life was this:—namely, that He might deeply impress upon His dear disciples, and upon all of us, the virtue of profound humility. For, without this, we cannot persevere in the other virtues, nor make progress, nor please God, nor obtain His grace, since, according to the Scripture, God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble. And as pride is the beginning and source of all evil, so humility is the groundwork of all virtues. This blessed virtue unites us with God: and by humility we, as it were, force God to sink down into our souls. For no man can use force over the exceeding mighty power of God, save by deep self-contempt, and utter self-deprivation. And as water always seeks the lower places, so does God, by His grace, flow down with greater readiness into a lowly heart. By humility the Blessed Virgin, our Lady, overcame Him Who is unconquerable, reconciled Him Who had been offended, gave pleasure to the King most High, and drew Him down to rest in her pure body, as she herself confessed: “For He has looked with favor the lowliness of His hand-maiden.” By pride we have been cast out of Paradise, by humility we are raised again to glory. But if pride was so damnable in the angels, that justice required that they should be driven out of the everlasting heaven, although, by reason of their great glory and brightness, they had many more reasons for exalting themselves than man; how does the latter dare to lift himself up, as if he himself were somewhat, when, of a truth, both his substance, and state, and nature, and dwelling-place, and all belonging to him, drag him down, and render him vile? For, if he will only observe what he had been, what he is, what he undergoes, where he dwell, and what he will be, he surely will perceive how his one condition lowers

and humbles him, and casts reproach upon the depth of his lowness in these words: “Why are you proud, O dust and ashes?”

But, although our Lord Jesus taught us this virtue His whole life long, both by word and deed, yet, when He was now near unto death, He desired more deeply to impress it both upon His disciples and all of us, and more expressly to teach us by His own lowly actions, so that it might never be blotted out of our hearts. And, in truth, could our sweet Lord have shown us deeper humility than by washing His own creatures’ feet? He bowed Himself down to the earth, and was made the servant of all His disciples. Who, I ask, without compunction and devotion, can behold the King of glory, at Whose marvelous power the angelic spirits are lost in wonder and trembling adoration,—girt round the loins with a linen cloth, and washing so carefully the dust-covered feet of His own servants? His disciples sat, and He, the Power of God Almighty, threw Himself down upon the ground. He, the Lord of lords, knelt down at the feet of His own disciples, although at His Name every knee is bent. Oh! how humbly, how devoutly, how lovingly He passed from one to the other, and, placing His sacred knees upon the ground, touched the dirt of their feet with those fair, clean hands of His,—not only this but, so carefully washed them, and dried them, and kissed them. Nor was it only the feet of His friends, but even of him who betrayed Him, that He desired to wash and kiss, since He knew that he had been sold by him for thirty pieces of silver; yet, not with less kindness He showed him than to the others, this truly tender-hearted Jesus. Now this great work of humility He did for our instruction. Hear Him speaking Himself to His disciples: “Know what I have done to you. If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, so you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For, see that, I have given you an example, that as I have done, so you should do also, that you, in like manner, may perform one to the other the works of mutual love, and mutually help one another, and this, too, not only to your friends, but to your enemies.” So, whoever refused to follow the profound humility of the Son of God on earth, will never be exalted with Him at the right hand of His Father in heaven. For, there is nothing God loves so much as a pure, and lowly, and peaceful heart, as He said Himself:

“On whom shall My Spirit rest, unless on him who is of a lowly and peaceful heart, and who trembles at My words?”

