

CHAPTER II

On Faith

Translated From The French By MRS. J. Sadlier.
Anecdotes Pamphlet No.ca023

FIRST COMMANDMENT OF GOD.

I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me.

I. - ON FAITH.

199. The Officers of Constantius Chloris. - It is so beautiful, so glorious, so worthy of a generous heart to remain true to its faith, that the pagans themselves could not help admiring courageous Christians, and despising the apostates who abandoned their religion for the sake of gain.

Constantius Chloris, a Roman emperor who resided in the lands of the Gauls, esteemed and protected Christianity, although he was himself an idolater. Nevertheless, he sometimes made use of dissimulation; he even declared publicly, on a certain day, that all the Christians of his palace should have to offer sacrifice to Jupiter and the other divinities of the Roman people, if they wished to retain their offices and keep in his favour. There were, unhappily, some who, preferring their temporal fortune to their eternal interests, hastened to obey this order, which had been given only to try them. But, in return for their impious obedience, they obtained only the emperor's contempt; disgusted by their baseness, he discarded them forever from his household. One of his confidants having asked him the reason of this conduct, at which he was surprised, Constantius made him this wise answer: "Men who sacrifice their religion to their interests, are likely to fail in all their other duties; I could not hope that they would be more faithful to their prince than they had been to their God." Not satisfied with having thus humbled and punished the apostates, Constantius thought himself bound to reward publicly those Christians who, raising themselves above temporal views, had persevered in the open profession of their holy religion. Wherefore, in order to convince his courtiers that he reckoned only on the fidelity of those who remained faithful to their God, he confided to those generous and incorruptible Christians the care of his person and his States. -
ABBE REYRE, Anecdotes Chretiennes.

200. Misplaced Jests of St. Augustine. - Let us beware of ever jesting on the sacred truths which religion teaches us. St. Augustine, my young friends, deploras the misfortune he had had himself in not being sufficiently careful in this respect, at the time of his first wanderings in error. He relates that he had known, at Tagastum, as it is called in Latin, his native city, a young man of his own age, with whom he contracted a close friendship. But, instead of being advantageous to them, this friendship had unhappily turned to their ruin, especially as regarded the other young man, who was, at bottom, less depraved than Augustine. It had scarcely continued a year when he fell ill. St Augustine spent several days at his bedside and witnessed the progress of his malady. The fever was consuming him slowly, when he was taken with a cold sweat which was thought to be the forerunner of death They availed themselves of it to give him baptism, for which he had been some

time preparing. God permitted that he recovered his health. Augustine, full of joy for his recovery, must needs begin to rally him and jest with him in mockery on the baptism he had received during his illness. "I hope," said he, "that it will not make any change in our former way of living." - "What say you?" cried the young man eagerly; "you horrify me, dear Augustine! What! is it you that speak to me in such terms? If you would still continue my friend, I beg that you will never again allow yourself to utter even the slightest jest on the sacred mysteries of religion." This useful lesson was not lost on St. Augustine, who made many serious reflections on the subject; but his reflections were more serious still, when he learned some days after that his friend had had a relapse and was dead. This event was one of those which prepared the way for his final conversion. - ST. AUGUSTINE, Confessions, Book IV., Chapter 4.

201. A Woman Cured by Faith. - Our Lord tells us that if we had faith only the size of a grain of mustard seed, we should do incredible wonders. Theodoret, the famous Bishop of Cyr, in Syria, in the fifth century, relates, on this subject, that he had known a man, named Peter who wrought marvels of this kind. A poor woman afflicted with sore eyes, came one day to this worthy man, so pious and so God-fearing, and besought him to cure her. "Cure you!" said he, "why, I am only a poor sinner, and a man like me has not faith enough to work miracles." - "I beseech you, Peter, if you will, you can cure me." - "You are wrong, my good woman; it is of God you must ask that favour; He always hears the prayers of those who address themselves to Him in faith and trust." The poor woman persisted still the more, because it seemed to her, what was really the case, that the more Peter excused himself from praying for her, the more he proved that he was a saint and a man of faith. Overcome at length by the poor woman's entreaties, he said to her: "If your faith be sincere, if you have no doubt in your mind, receive this cure, which comes from God." And so saying, he laid his hand on her eyes, said a short prayer within himself, and made the sign of the cross over the patient. At the same moment her malady disappeared. There is faith, my dear friends, and there are the works it can operate when it is strong and sincere. - SCHMID et BELET. Catechisme Historique, I., 160.

202. Are the Commandments Impracticable? - It is no uncommon thing to find people who are fond of dogmatizing on religion; and what errors and absurdities they advance on that subject! Nothing is easier at times than to refute them by their own words. A young man was present one evening in a numerous company, where they were exclaiming against the miracles, mysteries, and other truths of religion. He took upon him to reply: he quoted to these sceptics the testimonies and admissions of the very enemies of Catholicity. He particularly mentioned Celsus, Porphyry, and the famous Julian the Apostate, who all admit the truth of the miracles of Jesus Christ and His Apostles. Neither did he forget Voltaire, Jean Jacques, Rousseau, Diderot and the philosophers of the 18th century, who have rendered at times such splendid testimony to our holy religion. Strange to say, all his learning was thrown away; the gentlemen believed in nothing. He then employed a singular means of forcing them to render homage to the truth in spite of themselves. "I see well, gentlemen," said he, "that you do not give in even to the authority and example of your masters; you will, at least, grant me one thing: is it not true that our dogmas are hard to believe, our commandments hard to practise?" - "Difficult!" they all cried at once, "say rather they are impossible." - "But if they are impossible, gentlemen, how comes it that they have been believed, and practised throughout the earth? How is it that the Gospel has counted disciples in all conditions, in the palaces of kings, in the academies of the learned, in the midst of the most civilized cities, and that even when all who were known to be Christians were sacrificed without pity?" To this reasoning, so simple and so true,

our rationalists had not a word to answer, and the courageous champion of the faith and of religion remained sole master of the field. - GUILLOIS, Nouvelle Explic. du Cat., 32.

203. The Confession of Two Unbelieving Deputies. - People sometimes imagine that it is very easy to believe nothing, and to get rid, as they say, of the beliefs and the prejudices of their youth. Alas! those who have tried to do so have confessed many sad things in that regard. In 1829, two of the most celebrated men of France, both members of the Chamber of Deputies, and, I believe, members also of the French Academy, furnish a proof of this. M. Viennet said one day to Benjamin Constant: "I am very unhappy in believing nothing; oh! if I had children, I would preserve them from that misfortune, by having them brought up Christians; I would put them in a Jesuit College." - "Well!" replied Benjamin Constant, "I am just like you; I no longer believe anything, and that fatigues me; I would rather believe in something, but I believe in nothing, and it is truly a torment to me." Is it not true, my young friends, that these confessions are very valuable, especially when they come from men so exalted in public opinion, the one as an academician, the other as an eminent writer? It recalls to our minds the words of Montesquieu, who had likewise the misfortune of being an unbeliever. "It is a marvellous thing," said he, "that the Christian religion, which seems to have for its sole object our felicity in the other life, makes also our happiness in this." - GUILLOIS, Explic. du Cat., 114.

204. A Church Built by a Norman Soldier and Conscript. - When one has faith, my young friends, they prove it by their works, and especially by their zeal for all that belongs to religion. A dozen years since the Revolution of 1848, a poor conscript left Lower Normandy. He was very sad: fate had dealt hardly with him, he had no means to obtain a substitute, and he left his aged parents in want and misery. When his term of service expired he hastened to revisit his native place. But a great change had taken place in his old home: his father and mother were no more; death had been there... His first thought was to pray at their grave. Alas! what does he behold in the cemetery? A church in ruins, tottering walls, and a crazy roof through which the rain penetrates; it was in such a state that the bishop had been forced to remove the pastor of the village. At this sight, the worthy man's sorrow was doubly renewed; he falls on his knees beside the grave of his parents, he prays, he weeps, he begs of God the means of repairing this sad desolation. Next day he arms himself with great courage, and goes from door to door to ask alms for the church; but the country is poor, and his collection did not amount to much. Then he takes a heroic resolution; he says to himself: "I will go and sell myself for our church; all the money I receive shall be for it." And he did sell himself, that is to say, he re-enlisted in the army. But what was the result? Why, that the church was repaired, and the pastor returned to the village. The soldier's good conduct obtained for him a mission of trust to which some emoluments were attached. As soon as he had saved a small sum, he bought linen, ornaments, flowers, candlesticks, and was happy in sending from time to time some new things to his dear little church. Thus it happened that a poor Norman conscript, without money, without resources, but with great faith and sincere piety, had the church repaired, the pastor brought back, and religion made to flourish again in his native village. - ABBE MULLOIS, Mois de Marie de tout le monde, 47.

II. - ON HOPE.

205. The Despair of Judas. - Let us have committed what sins we may, dear friends, we ought never to despair. Despair is more injurious to the goodness of God than are the most atrocious crimes to His justice, because God wills not the death of the sinner; He wills, on the contrary, that he may be converted and live. Of that I find a proof in the history of Judas. He was, as you know, one of the

twelve Apostles. He had the misfortune to let himself be seduced by the bait of money, and he went so far as to sell Jesus Christ, his good Master, for the paltry sum of thirty pieces of silver. But his greatest crime was despair. Our Lord did all He could to bring him back to better sentiments: He embraced him tenderly. He gave him the sweet name of friend. He made him understand that his guilty project was known to him. He even distributed to him, like the other Apostles, his adorable body and blood in the Last Supper. Blinded by his passion, Judas resisted these marks of kindness, and became more and more hardened. Nevertheless, when he saw that the leaders of the Jews did not content themselves with arresting Jesus in the Garden of Olives, but abused and outraged Him in every way, and were preparing to put Him to death, then, says the Gospel, he repented. He even brought back the money which he had received, and gave it to the chief priests and the ancients or elders, saying: "I have sinned, in betraying innocent blood." But they answered: "What is that to us? Look you to it." Judas, seeing himself despised even by those who had encouraged him to commit the crime, threw the thirty pieces on the floor of the temple of Jerusalem, and went away. It was then that he should have run to the place where his Divine Master was, to express his contrition, and ask forgiveness - instead of that, believing that he could never obtain pardon for his crime, he went to a retired place and hung himself from a tree. His body burst open, so that his bowels were scattered on the ground, and he expired miserably; sad consequence of his despair. - St. Matthew, 27:3-10; Acts of the Apostles, 1:16-19.

206. The Mother of St. Symphorian. - One of the finest examples of Christian hope, and the strength which it gives in sufferings, is that of St. Symphorian, a noble and learned young man, martyred at Autun about the year 179 A.D. One day a procession was held in that city in honour of Cybele, a goddess much revered by the pagans. Symphorian happened to be in a place by which the procession was to pass, but, instead of adoring the statue, which was borne in triumph on a car, he testified all the contempt he felt for that impious and sacrilegious worship. He was arrested and dragged before Heraclius, governor of the city, who asked him who he was, and urged him to change his opinion. "I am a Christian," energetically answered the young man, "and I adore no idols." After a long interrogation, in which he manifested his faith and his trust in God, he was condemned to be beheaded, in his quality of Roman citizen. Whilst they were conducting him to the place of execution, his pious mother ran to meet him, and the better to make herself heard by him mounted the ramparts of the city, in the neighbourhood of the gate, then called the Langres, and now the St. Andrew's Gate. Thence she exhorted him to persevere in his glorious martyrdom. "My son, Symphorian, my son, do not lose sight of the God for whom you are going to die; let Him be always in your thoughts. Courage, my son! death is not to be feared, when it must open to us the gates of life. To-day they do not take away your life, but change it to another infinitely better..." These last words have been deemed so fine, that the church has inserted them in the Preface of the Mass for the Dead: "Vita mutatur, non tollitur; life is not taken away but changed. (Life is changed, not ended.)" When the young Christian hero had arrived outside the walls of Autun, he courageously consummated his martyrdom: the executioner cut off his head. - D. RUINART, *Veritable Actes des Martyrs*, I.,135.

207. The Three Words of a Presumptuous Sinner. - We must, undoubtedly, trust in God, my young friends, but we must not presume on His goodness. How many persons who imagined that they should have the time and the means of being converted, have been the sad victims of their rash presumption! Of this number was a gentleman of London, who lived in the reign of Henry VIII. The famous Chancellor of England, Sir Thomas More (now enrolled among the saints), who was as good a Christian as he was a distinguished magistrate, was exhorting this gentleman to leave off his

evil ways and do penance. "Oh I pray, do not trouble yourself on my account," answered the fool; "you see, I have three words that will suffice to obtain my pardon at the hour of death, and in the moment of danger." - "And what are those three so powerful words?" - "Those three words are: 'Lord, forgive me!' " It was no use trying to convince him that he did wrong in trusting to so small a thing, and that God only forgives those who are sincere and have done all the penance they could; he continued his evil courses and his foolish scoffing. One day when he was out riding, he had to cross a bridge; his horse taking fright jumps over the parapet and casts himself into the waves with the unfortunate rider. That was the moment for pronouncing his three words; alas! he had only time to say three others very different; he cried "May the Devil..." and disappeared beneath the waters, leaving all who had known him terrified for his fate in eternity. - SCHMID et BELET, Cat. Hist.

208. A Lady Lost by Her Scruples. - It is not always great crimes that may urge us to despair; simple scruples, my young friends, may sometimes produce that deplorable result, when we do not leave ourselves to the entire guidance of our spiritual director. A missionary of Savoy, the Abbe Favre, relates an instance of the kind of which he had himself been the witness. A very pious young lady was much tormented by horrible temptations and by bad thoughts. Very far from consenting to them she did all she could to reject and resist them; nevertheless, the devil put it in her head that she had consented to them, and succeeded in making her believe it. She imagined, that she fell every day into great sins, and that she committed a sacrilege every time she approached the Holy Table. This state tormented her so much the more that she was sincerely virtuous, and had really a horror of sin. She confessed at least weekly, and never failed to speak of her troubles to her confessor. The latter, who was a very enlightened man, tried to make her understand that it was an artifice of the devil, who was seeking to destroy her by that means. He exhorted her to omit none of her practices of piety, and especially to continue her usual communions. "But, father, it seems to me that I commit a horrible sacrilege every time." - "No, my daughter, that is not possible; since you have a horror of sin and of sacrilege, it is a proof that you commit none." All he could say was useless, she would have her own way. What followed? She fell ill; the devil, who had succeeded in deceiving her so long, continued to delude her; he made her believe more than ever that she had almost always lived in mortal sin, and that she could not fail to be damned. In this fatal notion the unhappy girl refused the last sacraments, would not confess, repulsed even her pastor, and died in frightful despair. How much more serene would her death have been if she had maintained the virtue of hope, and so in tranquility she could have received her loving Eucharistic Lord. Instead she died terror stricken, and failed to avail herself of all the aids which a loving Providence had supplied for her through the ministry of the Church. This poor girl died without mortal sin, falsely imagining that she was damned. May her soul, and the souls of all those who die in such terror, be the recipients of the mercy of God, and rest in peace. Amen. There, my poor children, is what it is to lose confidence in God, and not to listen to those who are charged with our guidance. - ABBE FAVRE, *le Ciel ouvert*, (Heaven is Open) 49.

209. A Vessel Saved by a Child of Seven Years. - There happened some years ago, my young friends, a fine instance of trust in Providence; it is the story of a child of seven years old who saved a vessel from shipwreck. This vessel was sailing on the Baltic Sea. A frightful tempest had beaten it to and fro till the mast was broken and the sails tattered. Every one was in a state of consternation. The Captain himself cried out in a despairing tone: "It is all over! we are lost! the good God seems to be dead!" - "No, Captain," exclaimed the little Adolphus, "He is not dead, He is asleep, and he will wake up when it is time." Scarcely had he said these words when a gust of wind more violent than any that had preceded it, covered the vessel with yet other fragments and a deluge of water. "

We are lost," again cried out the Captain; "prepare all for death; we are going to be buried in the waves." - "You are mistaken," said once more the sweet voice of the child, "we are not going to perish: Jesus is still with us in the vessel." At that moment, the ship was again lifted up by the wave, and seemed on the point of being engulfed forever in the depths of the sea. But Jesus was there; and the faith of a child sufficed to save the life of all on board. In fact, the storm soon abated, and the vessel arrived in safety in the harbour of Toenningen. Let us never give way to despair, my dear children, let us say with Job: Lord, even when You did crush me, I hoped in You still. - SCHMID et BELET, Cat. Hist., I., 130.

210. What Human Glory is. - The Abbe Mullois, almoner to the Emperor Napoleon, relates the following fact, which is well adapted to make us reflect. 'A young man of an obscure family had been destined from early childhood for a military life. One day, in the midst of a murderous engagement, I found him lying exhausted on the ground. I knelt beside him: "You suffer much," said I to him. "Ah! reverend father," said he with a bitter smile, "this is what is called human glory! Seek human glory, and behold where it ends! I know it now by sad experience!" - "But all is not lost, Captain," I replied; "you shall be cured, and then a decoration and a superior grade shall reward your services." The young officer only answered by making a sign for me to raise the rough covering which had been thrown over him. A splinter from a shell had torn his side, and I saw his intestines protruding from the wound. "It is true," I exclaimed, "that human glory is all over for you, but there is another awaiting the brave soldier who has done his duty. In the other life..." - "Father, do not speak to me of that. I will not hear of it." - "But, Captain..." - "I tell you, do not mention it. I have worked for glory, it has fled me, I shall die in despair." I endeavoured, but in vain, to bring the poor young man to more consoling sentiments. His look was frightful, his lips contracted into the form of a smile, a hideous mixture of fury and despair. Soon after he asked me for a soothing potion to enable him to die without too much suffering. With the Major's permission I went to seek it. When I returned to him, he was dead! This unhappy soldier refused the consolations of religion because he had not had the happiness of being brought up Christianly.' Bless God, my dear children, who has given you that precious favour. - ABBE MULLOIS, Mois de Marie de tout de Monde, 83.
