

CHAPTER XVIII

Confess Your Sins At Least Once Every Year

Translated From The French By MRS. J. Sadlier.
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401. There is no Time now for Confession. - Oh! My dear children, what a good thing it is that the Church obliges us to confess our sins at least once a year! However necessary; however indispensable this salutary remedy may be for us, experience proves that, if we were not obliged by a formal precept to do it, we would unhappily often forget it. The Venerable Bede relates, in his Saxon Chronicles, that King Conrad, a very pious prince, had at his court a nobleman to whom he was much attached, on account of the great services he had received from him. Yet, notwithstanding the repeated entreaties of the prince, this poor gentleman remained several years, now under one pretence, now under another, without approaching the tribunal of penance. At last, he was attacked by a dangerous malady, and the king went to visit him; he returned again to the charge and urged him strongly to have a confessor, but he could do nothing with him. He went again some days after, and, finding him at the last extremity, besought him again, in the most pressing terms, not to die in that sad state. But the unhappy man, after remaining some moments without replying, threw a wild look on the king, and exclaimed: "Prince, there is no time now for confession; I am lost; hell is my portion!" - "God is merciful! Never despair! Call on Him for forgiveness!" - "No! I am lost. Hell is my portion!" Saying these words, he expired in impenitence and despair; all who witnessed this scene felt the blood frozen in their veins, such an impression did this fearful death make upon them. - NOEL, Cat. de Rodez, VI., p. 62.

402. The Establishment of the Annual Confession. - For ages, Christians had no need of being obliged, by an express commandment, to confess their sins. And, my friends, are sick people ever seen waiting till they are commanded to send for a doctor? Do they not eagerly ask for one as soon as they feel themselves ill? It was only in 1216 that the Church, anxious to remedy the laxity that had been manifested by some Christians, made it a precept for every one to confess, at least once a year, all their mortal sins with the necessary dispositions. It was the fourth General Council held in the Church of St. John of Lateran, in Rome, that made this law. It was conceived in these terms: "Let each of the faithful who has attained the age of discretion, confess secretly all their sins to their own pastor, at least once a year, and let them take care to perform, to the best of their ability, the penance that shall be imposed upon them. Let them also receive, at least at the festival of Easter, the Sacrament of the Eucharist, unless that, by the advice of their confessor, and for some just and reasonable cause, they may deem it right to abstain for some time from Communion. Failing in this, let them be denied entrance into the church during life, and Christian burial at their death." Eight years before this law was made, that is to say in 1208, it was decreed by a Council held in Paris that persons who had not been to Holy Communion, at least once, before Palm Sunday, could not receive it within the next fifteen days, and would consequently be obliged to wait till the Octave-day of Easter. And, in order to stimulate them a little in the accomplishment of this sacred duty, this

Paris Council obliged them to continue the fast of Lent till that day. - SCHMID et BELET, Cat. Hist., II., 588.

403. A Doctor at Easter! - I have somewhere read, dear friends, the ingenious comparison employed by a holy priest to show how absurd it is to wait for Easter to go to confession, when one is guilty of any serious sin. He ascends the pulpit, makes the sign of the cross, and thus commences his sermon: "On my way hither, brethren, to exercise my ministry, I chanced to see a heart-rending sight. A young man was driving his carriage very fast across the square; suddenly the horse takes fright, runs away, and breaks the carriage to pieces; the unhappy man escapes death, but he is bruised and mangled in every part of his body. People gather round him, they express their compassion, are much interested in his fate, and speak of going with all haste to fetch a doctor. 'A doctor!' he exclaims, in surprise; 'I will not have a doctor till Easter!' You may judge how amazed the spectators were, they all thought that the poor young man was crazed by his fall. This story affects you, brethren! - Well! that unhappy man, that madman, is you, yourselves. Running rapidly in the career of vice, you have had a fatal fall; the noblest part of you, your soul, is more than wounded; it is dead. You are spoken to of a physician who is all-powerful, not of himself, but by the mission he has received from God, and who can restore you to life, and you say: 'At Easter, at Easter I will apply to this great doctor!' Well!" This ingenious comparison made a lively impression on the minds of the hearers, most of whom hastened to have recourse immediately to that great physician, and were healed. - GUILLOIS, *Nouv. Explic. du Cat.*, 288.

404. I Take Medicine Once a Year. - Although the Church does not oblige us to confess more than once a year, it is certain that she would be happy to see us profit oftener by these two great graces; she earnestly exhorts us thereto, and our own wants require it. What a blessing it is to have access to the graces of Confession and Holy Communion. A man being on a journey once, passed through a town where lived an old friend of his. He went to see him, flattering himself that he would spend the rest of the day pleasantly with him; alas! he found him in a sad state. This unhappy man was not to say old; but, undermined by habitual sufferings, he had grown very old within a few years, so that his friend could scarcely recognize him. "I did not expect to see you in such a condition," said he. "I am grieved to see that your health is very bad. However, you must not despair of being cured. If the doctors here are not as skilful as you could wish, you must consult others. What regimen have you observed since your health began to fail?"

"None." "How! none; have you tried no remedies, then?" "Why, yes; every year I take a dose of medicine." "And is that all?" "Of course it is, and I think it a great deal; I had no small trouble to decide on doing it." "I am not surprised, then, to see you reduced to such a state of pain and debility. How do you think that purgatives, used but once a year, could effect your cure! You required, from the very beginning of your illness, a course of remedies, with one, as it were, supporting the other, and attacking together the root of the evil, might have destroyed it and restored you to health. Then you should, afterwards, to prevent relapses, make it a rule to take some purgatives now and then, during the year, and subject yourself to a certain regimen. For want of these wise precautions, the disease has made continual progress; it is, so to say, rooted in your system and your state is becoming every day more dangerous. There may still be time to have recourse to remedies, but there is not a moment to lose, so, you must this very day call in the best physician that is to be had here and place yourself in his hands." "I feel that you are right, my friend, nevertheless I will not follow your advice. I will, as usual take a dose of medicine once a year as long as I live, and nothing more. That is my custom, and I will not change it."

What do you think of this man? Do you think his conduct very sensible? You will doubtless answer, children, that it appears to you, on the contrary, very unreasonable, and you are right. Try, then, never to merit the same reproach. - NOEL, Cat de Rodez, VI., 61.
