

THE LAPSED

BY

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Quasi holocausta accepit eos.

CROSS the fair landscape of the Church's life, and dimming the sunlight of her holiness, and casting a shadow over her beauty, is that heavy cloud, which surely grows no less in these days of unpeacefulness, that cloud of lapsed Catholics. This blot is ever present with us, marring the joy and triumph of the Church's life, staining the robe of her perfection. The faithful are always there, the sweet odour of their prayers and good works rising like clouds of incense, ceaselessly up to God. New converts are received; but still that ugly cloud remains to darken our sun, and wound anew the broken Heart of God. There are the ever moving, tragic figures of the once-faithful turning away, repudiating the Light, casting aside the outstretched wounded hand they once held, turning their backs upon the love of God. Tragic indeed for their own sakes; for what can be worse than for a soul to have seen the Light, and deliberately to turn from it? To have known the Truth, and to repudiate it? To have experienced the Love, and to have none of it?

But more tragic, more disastrous than all this on the individual soul, is the immeasurable evil that is wrought to the Church, to the faith, to the world, by the fact of the lapse of one of these souls. Nowhere has the devil more power, nowhere has he got so facile and deadly a weapon, than the soul of the lapsed Catholic. He uses these souls, not only for their own downfall, but for the corruption and weakening of many another soul too. The lapsed Catholic, however lacking in active animosity he may be to the Church he once adhered to, is in truth by his very lapse the deadliest and most dangerous enemy of that Church. I venture to say that more harm has been done to the Church by one lapsed soul, however seemingly passive, than by hundreds of active enemies outside. I would not presume to affirm what is usually the cause of the lapse of the great majority of those who go. The priest in his study and experience of the human soul knows best what this cause may be. But the cure for this ill may well be, humanly speaking, in the hands of the laity themselves. Not that many of us are called to use argument or even persuasion in the matter. In any case, that is usually of little avail. But to some there does come the call, the vocation, to offer themselves up as holocausts, as victims of the divine love, for lapsed Catholics. This is a distinct vocation; it is not for all, not even for the majority. To understand

the purport of such a vocation, we must try to see the object from God's point of view. Think for a moment of any lapsed Catholic you know, man or woman, boy or girl—let us call him John. Then consider: 'God so loved the world that he gave . . .' Yes; he so loved the world, and the world is a collection of individuals, and for each one God has loved, and given. He loved, and still loves, this lapsed Catholic. All his love, his power, his pain, has been poured out for this one soul, John. Bethlehem was for John—Calvary was for John—the Resurrection was for John—the Ascension, and Heaven itself, for John. And God himself—all love, all beauty, all power, has given himself to John in the white Host, the 'Flake of Christ', again and again and again.

And what has happened? John has thrust all love, all beauty, all power, away from him. He has repudiated the outstretched wounded hand, cast aside the love of the Sacred Heart, decided to 'walk no more with him'. 'My son—my daughter—will you also go away?' We too must hear that cry of love and anguish before we can understand what this vocation for the lapsed is going to demand. 'Will ye also go away?', and one by one they turn and go, these sons and daughters of his divine love, his divine pity. And it may be our vocation to offer ourselves up as holocausts to turn one, or even more, of these poor blinded ones back to the Sacred Heart. If it is, then our feet are set on a road of loneliness, pain and exhaustion, a veritable 'Way of the Cross'.

Loneliness, because even our nearest and dearest will in all probability misunderstand us, and anyway can never approach the inner darkness we must know and follow in our Calvary.

Pain—for not only must it contain a sharing in the grief of the Sacred Heart for souls who have turned from him, but also it will in all probability entail physical suffering to a certain degree.

Exhaustion—yes, of mind and body, as the offering is accepted and the life-energy drawn out, and united with the sufferings of the Cross.

But it is a vocation, and like all vocations it can be refused. There is no habit, no uniform, no badge, no organisation, connected with this vocation. Hidden away, secret, unrecognised, and unrecognisable. Living in the world, but not of the world; the world crucified to us and we to the world. Here it is that we may be accused of eccentricity, or even unsociability, because it will become increasingly difficult to live the ordinary life of the world of pleasure and social activity, when body, mind and spirit, are a victim of his love. The world, as a whole, is friendly to, even admiring of good works, even if performed by religious. It can never understand or appreciate the inner life of prayer and offering which is the life of the holocaust. But he who cries,

'Will ye also go away?' to those who turn from him may ask of some of the faithful, 'Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?' Dare we accept it? Can we refuse it? To be asked to surrender ourselves utterly—nail ourselves as willing victims to his Cross for the souls he loved and lived and died for, is not that a task we must undertake with all that is in us should he ask for it? Can we refuse the plea of so great a Lover?

Loneliness, pain, and exhaustion, that is the price, the price to pay that anyway one lapsed soul may be brought back, to solace the wounds of his most Sacred Heart. The cloud hangs heavy and dark over the life of the Church; the stain is a blemish on her beauty. Argument, endless talk, will not lift it, will not cleanse it. There is only one way—sacrifice—the offering up of holocausts, of the victims of the divine love, united to his divine sacrifice on Calvary. The lives of offering and prayer, hidden away in loneliness, in pain, often in exhaustion, known only to him.

'Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?' Tremblingly some will answer, and in deepest humility, 'We can, we will'. God grant that many may be found to face this great aloneness, and may offer up their lives as holocausts and victims, to stem the tide of lapsing Catholics, and bring them back once more to the love of the Sacred Heart.

AN ACT OF REPARATION FOR LAPSED CATHOLICS

'Lord, I am thine only, thine utterly.

I offer thee my body, mind and spirit.

I am the victim of thy love,

A holocaust, offered up on behalf of the souls of lapsed Catholics.

Unite this sacrifice, poor and wretched though it is

With thy most perfect Sacrifice on Calvary,

That at least one lapsed soul may be turned back to thee this day,

And so may solace the wounds of thy most Sacred Heart.

Lord, I am thine only, thine utterly,

Thine, in perpetual Reparation. Amen.'