

Alter Christus

*“As an **alter Christus** (another Christ) the priest is in Christ, for Christ and with Christ... Because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people: he is the minister of their salvation” (Pope Benedict XVI)*

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Why So Little Comes of Frequent Confession

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WHY SO LITTLE COMES OF FREQUENT CONFESSION.

We go to confession every week, and we are what we are. If we think soberly of this fact, it is about as great a mystery as any which either nature or grace can show us. Confession is a stupendous work in which God and man combine to do great things. We take pains with our confessions. We use at least ordinary diligence with our examinations of conscience. We pay particular attention to our dispositions. We receive absolution. This happens weekly, and we remain what we are. If anything is worth enquiring into, this is. Instead of going through the mystery, in order to arrive at its explanation, I will give the explanation first, and consider the mystery afterwards. For the explanation is practically of much greater importance to us than the mystery itself. One is a mere fact; the other is a lesson. If we are really in earnest about our souls, there is no lesson we have more need to lay to heart than the one which explains the little fruit which comes of frequent sacraments. The lesson is, that holiness depends less upon what we do, than upon how we do it.

This axiom, then, is to be our text: Holiness depends less upon what we do, than upon how we do it. It sounds commonplace enough; but it has sufficient matter in it for the study of a life, and for the practice of eter-

nity. In spiritual things the goodness of the matter is of more consequence than its novelty. So do not let us scout this trite remark. In devotion it is better to be safe than to be original.

Reading the life of a saint is a very edifying thing. But, when we have read many hundreds of saints' lives, we begin to see a great deal which we never saw before. We learn a wisdom from them, which no single life of a saint can give. The peculiarities of saints drop out of sight. We see them as a whole, as a class, as a species. We perceive what is common to them all, and what is the foundation of sanctity in them all. This is of far more importance to us than their individual examples. It also leads us much deeper. It is getting another sight of God from a fresh point of view. It is a kind of Bible, written historically like the Old Testament. It is a Summa of theology. What I want to do now, is to call attention to one only of the very many spiritual characteristics of the saints, looked at as a body. Of course there are exceptions, exceptions which will rise to everybody's thoughts. But they are really so few, that they barely suffice to prove the rule. The characteristic is, that on the whole the saints did few things. Be sure of the truth of this before you grant it; for you will find that a great many things follow from it. What I assert then is, that the saints, as a class, did few things. Their lives were by no means crammed with works, even with works of mercy. They made a point of keeping considerable reserves of time for themselves, and for the affairs of their own souls. Their activity was far more contemplative, than we in these days are inclined to suspect. They were men who were not over-ridden by publicity. They were men whose devotional practices were few in number, and remarkably

simple in method. On the whole their lives seem very empty of facts, disappointingly empty. I am almost afraid to pass on to anything else, lest you should not have time to master this statement as I should wish. It will take us years to realize the importance of it.

The lives of the saints often innocently deceive us in this respect; especially those lives which are modelled on the Processes of Canonization. A chapter on a saint's heroic charity will perhaps overwhelm us by its crowded facts, multiplied occupations, incessant movement, almost incompatible offices, superhuman activities, and the like. We forget it represents fifty or sixty years, of twelve months each. But if we turn to the chapter on the saint's gift of prayer, we find he spent four, or five hours a day in prayer, or seven as Suarez did, or ten as St. Francis Borgia did. Then we see that, even without giving the saint any time to eat or sleep, his prayer left him no time in the day for as much activity as modern life demands of most of us. Check the chapter on charity by the chapter on prayer, and you will get some notable results about the saints.

But I proceed. Many saints have been made saints by one thing.* The sanctity of many has been consummated in its very beginning. To these, conversion has been the same thing as perseverance. St. Antony of the Desert and St. Francis of Assisi are examples of this class of saints. Hence it was that the great feature of their holiness was its extreme simplicity. St. Francis' manner of prayer by repetitions may be quoted as an instance of this characteristic simplicity. Think, again, of what St. Alphonso and others say of a single

* Bellecio enumerates among these, SS. Martin, John the Calybite, Gualbert, Francis Borgia, and Francis Xavier. *Solide Vertu*, part iii. chap. ii. art. iii. sect. 2.

Communion, that it is enough of itself to make a saint, or what the Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice says of gaining Indulgences, that that one practice is a certain road to sanctity. We are too much given to swallowing our graces without chewing them. We do not extract from them one half the sweetness, one half the nourishment, one half the medicinal virtue, which God has deposited in them. We are too quick with them, too impetuous in the use of them. We do not develope them. I believe the clear knowledge of what grace is, its nature, its habits, and its possibilities, would destroy half the lukewarmness in the world ; for I suspect full half of it comes from impetuosity and precipitation, from human activity, and a want of slowness before God.

The saints, as a body, do few things. Some saints have been made saints by one thing. One Communion is enough to make a saint. These are specimens of the hidden wisdom of the saints. What it comes to is, that the only important thing in good works is the amount of love which we put into them. The soul of an action is its motive. The power of an action is neither in its size nor in its duration, though both these are very considerable matters. But its power is in its intention. An intention is pure in proportion as it is loving. Thus, you see, what we want is not many actions, but a great momentum in a few actions. If we could give an equally great momentum to a great number of actions, so much the better. But the fact is that we cannot. Actions trip each other up when they are crowded. No one has the use of his arms in a crowd, and very little use of his legs. His voice is all that is free, and that is not very audible ; and in heavenly things the voice is a most singularly unhelpful part of

us. Devotions even prey upon each other, eat each other up, and then lie dormant because they are gorged. In good deeds we cannot unite number and momentum. We must choose between the two; and there can be no hesitation in our choice. One stone that we can throw into heaven is worth a thousand that fall short of it, and tumble into homeless space. In truth we have thrown stones enough into space already. It is sad to think of where they may have got to by this time. Oldfashioned people talk in an uncomfortable way of a certain pavement of hell. There is no doubt then that the principle of number must go to the wall. We make our election of momentum. Momentum is purity of intention. Purity of intention is love.

We must not fall into a mistake here. It is true that, as a general rule, great love gives a facility in doing hard things. But I am not speaking of an heroic love. I am speaking of such a love as you and I may soberly persist in exacting from ourselves, considering all the grace we receive. Love, which is sufficient to give momentum enough to an action to carry it to heaven, may not be sufficient to make a hard thing easy to do, neither need it be accompanied by any sensible sweetness. Indeed in most cases it is not. Nay, I will go further. It is not by any means clear that heroic love devours all the repugnances of nature with sufficient rapidity to give even saints an habitual facility of action in hard things, any more than it always makes the flames of the martyrs cool and refreshing, and the teeth of the wild beasts as gentle as embraces, although it has done so to some. But it is perfectly clear that even heroic love is by no means universally accompanied by sensible sweetness in its exercise. It is often very heroic when it is driest, and most heroic when it

is not so much as conscious of its own existence. Hence we must not distrust our actions or devotions, because they have not this sensible sweetness, neither must we make such sweetness the test of our purity of intention. It is no part of real momentum. We must be the more careful to bear this in mind, because, in mere natural activity, facility and sweetness are full half the momentum. If this were to be the case in religion, piety must begin in sentimentality, grow in excitement, and perfect itself in frenzy. There would be no help for it. Christian enthusiasm is a very sober sort of determination. It does not consist in neglecting calculations, but in running immense risks in the face of very disheartening calculations. We agree, then, to throw sweetness overboard, wistfully indeed, but quite understanding what we are about.

Now this doctrine of intention gives a peculiar character to all our actions. We see that their value does not depend upon their size or age, altogether, or even chiefly. They have to do with God, to whom, because He is infinite, nothing is great and nothing small. Greatness and littleness are not His standards. Thus the capabilities of our humblest actions have something in them which approaches the inexhaustible. Or at least they are of such a nature that grace can use them almost inexhaustibly. Who, in the inner space of his own soul, has ever known what an unfolded grace is like? We have given our graces neither time nor room. Their capabilities are immense. This is one of the things which make holiness so difficult. We are always falling so far short of our grace. Take the saying of the Angelus three times a day. What is it but saying a short prayer when a bell rings? Yet years of saying it, with great love, with intense atten-

tion to God, with an interior spirit of jubilant thanksgiving for the Incarnation, would take us half way to heaven. Nay, one such saying of it, if we came to that, could merit heaven. This illustrates the inexhaustibleness of grace. Then is it not true that the saying of the Angelus is really a very considerable difficulty? When the bell startles us, how far we find ourselves to have been from God, by the very fact that we hardly get back to Him before the prayer is over! We are thrown into a bustle. We sometimes hardly know what we are saying. If some one interrupts us by coming into the room, we do not know where we left off. No devotion can be less satisfactory to us. Yet, when it is over, how the study, or the conversation, pieces itself naturally and painlessly on to its antecedents, as if there had been no Angelus, while there was something positively painful in the effort we made to put ourselves together for the act of prayer. Perhaps the Angelus is often rather a fountain of venial sins, or slovenlinesses, than a prolific source of merit, as it ought to be. The good it has done us has often come rather from the external admonition which it is, than from its being an act of interior worship. It seems to me uncommonly difficult to attain to a satisfactory saying of the Angelus. It so soon degenerates into praying against a bell. The difficulty I find in saying the Angelus always shows me more than anything else the immeasurable distance between holy persons and myself. It illustrates to me the way in which a man must possess himself, and be recollected, and always ready to give the due momentum to his actions, and therefore how few they should be, in order that he may have time and room, not so much to do what he has to do, as to do it well.

It is only in exceptional cases that coolness and calmness are compatible with having much to do. Multitude is not simplicity. Things that are done for God should be done very cleanly. They must be shapely, as well as vigorous. What a beautiful thing, doubtless, was the Angelus of St. Francis of Sales! There was more in it than in a week of our devotional failures. When a man has to make a great effort, he must carefully put himself in a position to make it. The saints threw immense effort into their least actions. Immense efforts cannot help being limited in number. Hence the saints were men of few actions and of few devotions. Their power was love; their touchstone pure intention. They concentrated everything upon their intention. They made it do duty for everything else. It was their compendium of holiness. When we, who are not saints, want to be better than we are, we add a new devotion, put on an additional mortification, undertake a fresh work of mercy, or give more liberal alms. All this is most excellent. But, as an animal betrays itself by its instincts, however long it may have been domesticated, so we, who may be always reading the lives of the saints, betray by all this that inadequate view of holiness which belongs to the imperfection of our love. Our first impulsive notion of greater sanctity is some form of addition. The only variety is in the choice of what we shall add. The saints live in a roomy day, a day of few actions; they lessen these few as their fervour increases, perhaps make them still fewer by way of advancing more rapidly, and then throw harder, that is, fling a more nervous, energetic inward life into what they do. This appears to me the whole account of the saints. To begin, therefore, to follow the saints we must repudiate the addition theory.

Now that we have got together this little collection of facts and principles, our next step must be to apply them to the results of frequent confession. They may all be summed up in one sentence, The saints were men, who did less than other people, but who did what they had to do a thousand times better.

What then is confession? It is one of our actions. Or rather it is a mixed act, partly by God and partly by man. It belongs therefore to the supernatural order. It is an action of immense significance, of superhuman power, and it may be of incalculable worth. The very fact of its combining in itself the agencies of the Creator and the creature is enough to show us of what value and consequence it is. If a few common actions done perfectly are enough to make saints of us, what may we not say of a few perfect confessions? Yet we go to confession weekly, and are what we are! Literature is a power on earth, and a power in the natural order, whose importance it is not easy to exaggerate. Different nations have had their literatures. Each nation has had various schools of literature at different times. They have stood to the progress of civilization in the double relation of cause and effect. They have stamped epochs. They have been dominant, or nearly dominant, over the manners and morals of their times. They have therefore indirectly decided the eternal destiny of multitudes of individual souls. Yet no one school of literature, nor all its schools put together, can compete with a single good confession in beauty, or importance. Philosophies have risen and fallen on the earth, and have reigned successively, and have reigned energetically; and each system thought itself the perfection of the world and the solution of the grand difficulty. Yet

the homeliness of one good confession is a better thing than the subtleties of the most profound intellectual system. No revolution, though it may uncrown a king, and emancipate a people, is of so much consequence as a good confession, though alas! it supplies multitudes of souls with superabundant matter for confession. No one must underrate the importance of scientific discoveries. Not only may the wider distribution of comfort and the elevation of the temporal wellbeing of the world depend upon them, but happiness and morals are often implicitly concerned in them. Yet no discovery that was ever made can compete in real intrinsic importance with a good confession. Nevertheless all this is a feeble and inadequate way of attaining a true notion of the grandeur of confession.

Confession is an act of faith on the part of the creature. It is also an act of the most concentrated worship. It is a breaking with the world, and a turning to God. It is a triumph over millions of evil spirits of huge power and, comparatively with us men, of unbounded intellect. It is the beginning of an eternity of ineffable union with God, and confers the right of beholding the Invisible face to face. A man in a state of sin sees in a fellowcreature, as sinful as himself, perhaps even evidently more unworthy, the form and features and real jurisdiction of the Incarnate Son of God. He kneels at his feet as if he were divine. He narrates to him the most secret shames and hidden sins of his soul. He submits to his questioning, as if he were the absolute and ultimate Judge of all the earth. He listens with meekness to his reproof, as if it were God Himself who spoke. He leaves to him the fixing of his punishment. He gives him rights over the

arrangement of much of his external life. He makes this narration of his sins with a profound sorrow, a sorrow which is based on no mere human disgrace, or forfeiture of worldly honour, or ruin of temporal interests. It is not even based only on the fear of divine punishments, without some admixture of divine love. He is sorry with a sorrow, to which neither all the power nor all the wisdom of the world can help him, but which is itself the supernatural gift of God. His sorrow involves a detestation of his past sin, which is another gift of God. It is accompanied also with a firm determination never to offend God again, a determination which chooses between the will of God and the liberty of sin, and elects God's will, whatever cost it may be found to involve. This energetic determination is the thing which he has taken most pains about. Neither has he come to it without study, effort, and diligence. Nevertheless it is God's gift rather than his own attainment. His act thus completed, with much help and interference on the part of God, God Himself begins His exclusive part. One of His creatures, a fallible as well as himself a guilty judge, pronounces some few words, and straightway, though invisibly and spiritually, there falls from the veins of Jesus a shower of the Precious Blood, shed hundreds of years ago and resumed three days after it was shed, and bedews the sinner's soul. All his guilt is done away instantaneously. His state is completely changed. Manifold works are done in his soul, such as the reinfusion of certain supernatural habits, the revival of dead merits, and a communication of the divine nature. His change can only be paralleled with that of a devil into an angel. All heaven is stirred at the event. It is the special subject of the angelic jubilee. No angel or saint could

have done it, or even have applied it as instruments. It is the immediate action of the Creator on the soul of His creature. This is a modest description of a good confession, kept very much within bounds, and which might have been heightened by many other seemingly miraculous phenomena. In its measure and degree, without the reinfusion of habits, and sundry other changes, the same supernatural apparatus attends upon the confession of venial sins. God is not less active, nor grace less mysterious in the act. Yet this is the act, which we with God perform weekly, and are what we are !

Now from such an action as this, what results might we not expect? We can only compare it to baptism or to martyrdom, one of which permanently changes our state and impresses an abiding character upon our souls, and the other admits us to the immediate Vision of God. Indeed there are many analogies between these three actions. But let us moderate our expectations. We should at least expect great things to follow from a valid confession ; we should look for marked changes, and enduring results. In truth such results would seem unavoidable. The action involves so very much on our part, and holds in itself such a vast amount of divine agency, that, if it be valid at all, it must go forth on its way conquering and working miracles. Let us take any saint we please, and consider the build and fashion of his holiness. Let us measure the height of his prayers, the depth of his humility, the breadth of his love, the length of his austerities. Surely less grace than goes to a valid confession might, were it handled judiciously, accomplish as much as this. If a valid confession can send a lifelong sinner and a public criminal from the scaffold to

the bright inner heaven, surely also the making of a saint is within the compass of its capabilities. But now multiply these valid confessions, the valid confessions of us who are aiming at a devout life, and are taking very considerable pains about it. Multiply our years by fifty. Perhaps we have made between one and two thousand valid confessions. For each confession we have reverently prepared; for each we have examined our consciences, and excited our sorrow; for each we have taken peculiar pains and made hearty prayer for our firm purpose of amendment; each has been gloriously crowned by absolution. Now would it not be monstrous to say that these thousand or two thousand grace-miracles had made no visible change in us, had left us substantially what we were before, and had done nothing more than *possibly* prevent us from having become something worse? Would it not shake a man's faith to be told such a thing? If this were true, must not grace be altogether a romance, and the sacraments mere rubrics or postures? Neither can we fall back upon the supposition of the invalidity of all these confessions. For I am speaking only of careful confessions, of the confessions of people who are very much in earnest, who are not taking things easily, who do not indulge in liberties with God, and who are making a great point, and a distinct point, of sorrow for venial sins, while they are also solicitous to a scruple about their purpose of amendment. If such confessions are not valid, then none in the world are.

But let us come down from the heights of our imaginary expectations. What, as a matter of fact, are the actual results of a thousand good confessions? We have a tolerably clear remembrance of what we were twenty years ago. Now as to the general improvement

of our character, what have all these confessions done? Is there much palpable change? Is the change solid? Is its amount at all proportioned to the amount of supernatural agency, to the quantity of the Precious Blood, to the immediate operation of the Eternal Creator upon our souls? Again; what has been the result of all these confessions in the way of power over the venial sins and culpable unworthinesses, which we have been perpetually confessing? Are we more masters of ourselves than we were? Are we much more masters of ourselves? Is our growth in self-mastery at all adequate to the expenditure both of God and ourselves in a thousand confessions? Let us take our tongues. It is plain that a man, who makes his meditation in the morning, and does not govern his tongue during the day, is a religious sham. Surely a man, who confesses week after week to want of government of the tongue, and who governs it not a whit better in the succeeding weeks, ought not by common laws to be far off from being a hypocrite. Yet we should be afraid of laying down any such axiom, lest we should only be sanctioning a law, not merely against ourselves, but by which if men were judged, they might as well cease to hope. For what has our experience been, the experience of a thousand confessions, in this very particular? Again; what have our thousand confessions done for us in the way of increase of fervour? Is the retrospect from this point of view at all more satisfactory? I dare not go on, lest we should lose heart too much. The road to all amendment lies through some disheartenment. But this is so unusually disheartening. Then let us speak gently. The result of our thousand confessions has not been in all respects what we should have expected beforehand. Their influence has been hardly up to the

mark. There has been disappointment in the matter, invariable even if not excessive.

But there is no kindness in landing us in a difficulty, unless we are also shown how to get out of it. What is the cause of the results of frequent confession falling so far below our most reasonable calculations, nay even below our lukewarm expectations? We are sincere. We are diligent. We have faith. We have carried our faith, our diligence, and our sincerity into our confessions. What then is lacking? What is the secret want? Purity of intention. A short answer, yet a very broad one. This is the whole account of the matter, the reading of the riddle, the light in the dark place. We have not looked simply, and only, and always, to God.

We shall prove this to ourselves by examining our own motives. Much practical good will also come of the examination by the way. We do not do justice to our own insincerity. We know we are not simple; but we hardly know how very far we are from simplicity. Let us look then at the different motives which prevail in our minds at different times, when we go to confession; and let us remember that it is not so much with these motives in themselves, but with these motives as dominant, that we are finding fault. Sometimes it is rather low spirits than sin, which send us to confession; and this also with a very considerable admixture of self-love. We want comfort and consolation, because we are downcast; and we know that both those spiritual luxuries are for the most part to be found in confession. We have begun of late to feel a little lonely. God has become a little short of being sufficient. Nobody has praised us for a long while. We want a little quiet spiritual flattery. We believe we can get this from our confessor.

Either he is very kind, and indulgent, and prone to talk long, and given to consolation : or at least we can open our hearts to him in so piteous a way, making our confession a sort of elegy, with a dash of exaggeration, that we are nearly sure, unless he is unusually preoccupied, to elicit from him the honey of which we stand in need. It will disagree with us to a certainty. Experience has taught us that. But it can be set right in another confession, a confession of a different species.

Sometimes we have a general feeling of being all wrong with God. It is not so much from having some definite fault upon our consciences, as from an equable and universal tepidity. It is like the feeling of an invalid before he is washed in the morning. It is a strange and peculiar discomfort. Confession is the bath of the hot dry skin and superficial fidgettiness of the soul. So we go to it to recover the sense of being right with God. We half know, that what is wanted is more prayer, more honesty in mortification, a little more decisive separation from the world, and, above all, an instantaneous putting into execution of good resolutions which have been hanging about us for weeks past only partially resolved. But all this involves a good deal ; and really, we are spiritually so weak just now, that discretion suggests that we should take things easily. Confession at all events will give us for the time, what a little smart severity with ourselves would give us permanently. So we will go to confession first of all, and discuss the question of severity later on.

Some of us think a great deal of our director's judgment of us, and by watching him we manage to get a side-view of it, which is tolerably correct. Now this judgment of us we consider to be not quite the thing. If it does not need reversing, it calls for revision. We,

honest souls! have no self-love in the matter. We do not want him to think better of us than we deserve. Indeed he had better think a little worse of us, because it would be rather sanctifying, and we look forward to being saints some time. But, as he has to direct us, it is really of importance to our best interests that he should at least take an accurate view of us; and somehow if this view of us were a trifle more accurate, it would be considerably more favourable. But what shall we do? We cannot argue the matter with him. He would at once put that down to wounded feeling. He would not give us credit for the dispassionate state of mind in which we really are. We must use God's sacrament as a sort of stratagem. We must shape our confessions so as to insinuate into his mind the view we would have him take. We must adroitly anticipate his objections. We must involve his answer in our question. We must glide in a very general way over what is likely to strengthen his present prejudices. We can even accuse ourselves of something wrong in feelings which he would wish us to have, but which he thinks us without. All this must be done, and may be done, without any positive untruth; and it should be done with all the air of innocence and guilelessness. To be sure, it is sad having to make such a use of a very grave and reverend sacrament. To be diplomatic and contrite, both at once, is a little hard. Still the necessity is so urgent, the end in view so good, that we must tolerate with a graceful patience the discomfort of the means.

It may be that our time has come for going to confession, and therefore that we go, not driven by any interior necessity, by any desire to be more closely united to God, or to be more and more thoroughly

washed from our iniquities. It is the day for confession, and therefore we go. We run a risk now of an invalid confession. However we avoid that, by taking the usual pains with our examination, our sorrow, and our purpose. Still it remains true that we go chiefly because it is our time to go. Let me make an observation here. It is hard to do well the things that we are doing constantly. Certainly. But experience shows us that these things do not tend with equal propension at all times to become mere formalities. Like other temptations, the temptation to be formal has its seasons, its departures and its returns. So there are times, for which we can see no reason, only so it is, when the sacraments incline to become formalities. Now at these seasons we must not be content with our usual pains; we must take unusual pains, because the unusual pains are necessary then to get us up to the common point, to which at ordinary times the usual pains can take us. Thus a meditation of ten minutes before the Blessed Sacrament, on the sanctity of God, or on the necessities of our souls, if added to our usual diligence and preparation, would put the vigour we need into our confession of routine. But enough of this. Confessions of routine want a treatise to themselves.

Some of us get into a way of never looking at confession by itself. To us it is simply part of the preparation for communion. Of course we know that confession is a sacrament by itself; but we do not know it with an energetic practical knowledge. It is to us practically part of another ceremony. Few people do justice to the mischievous tendency of this mistake. It is fertile in evils to the soul. It even goes to the length of blunting our faith at last. It interferes with our perception of the necessity of grace. It diminishes our

motives for loving Jesus, by confusing them. It takes off the edge from our hatred of sin. It operates unfavourably on our humility, by leading us to reflect too much on our privileges and too little on our responsibilities. It even lessens our appreciation of God's goodness, by leading us to dwell on it apart from the sense of our own wretchedness. We must look at confession not as a whole, but as a part. There is a propriety in confession going before communion. But confession is an awful sacrament in itself, with separate proprieties of its own, deeply to be revered, and almost dreaded, because of the tingling realities of its contact with God.

Sometimes, and this is a common fault in converts, people go to confession only for the purpose of direction. They use a great sacrament merely as a handle or occasion for something else, for another purpose, a good purpose indeed, but a very inferior and subordinate one. Thus they put aside all thought of the absolution, or rather it does not come to them to think of it. They have probably not taken so much pains with their examination, their sorrow, and their purpose of amendment, as they should have done. They have not realized God's peculiar presence in the confessional, because they have not come to confession as a sacrament. Hence confession often disappoints them, and they lose their devotion to it as a sacrament. Their irreverence has been unconscious and unintentional; but it has not been the less an irreverence; and they suffer for it in their souls. They have come to talk, or they have come to listen. They have not come to confess. Thus they confess, not invalidly, but unworthily, not discerning the Precious Blood and its special sacramental dispensation there. Experience shows,

that there are few things more difficult to implant in converts than a real faith in confession as a sacrament, and a grave humble advertence to the sacramental character of the action in which they are engaged. We must be at great pains in teaching them this, more especially if they have been in the habit of going to confession while they were outside the church, as it is precisely these persons who take the greatest liberties with the sacrament. This often interferes very seriously with their becoming fervent catholics. Plainly it is the old leaven still at work: self is the centre, and not God. Direction is more attractive to them than confession.

Sometimes we go to confession, because, having sinned, we fear the punishment of our sins. It is a most excellent reason for going to confession; nay, more than excellent, it is imperative. We want to shorten purgatory. We want to be in a condition for gaining plenary indulgences. Two most excellent wants, so excellent that a man has reason to suspect his whole piety to be a delusion, if he has them not. It is very hard also, while under the pressure of a sense of sin, not to let this motive be, not merely present, but dominant. Nevertheless we had better take some little pains to hinder its being so. Without losing hold of that motive, we can push a little deeper by prayer and effort, because prayer and effort will both bring the grace to do so. We can put ourselves in God's presence, and look at His side of the question. We can wish to have our souls cleansed for the sake of God's glory, as well as our own safety. At any rate the avoiding of hell and the shortening of purgatory must not have the action all to themselves. Some room must be left for higher things. There must be some loving

devotion to the sanctity of God, in order to do well what we do validly.

These are specimens of the intentions with which we too often go to confession. Self-love, varying as it does in almost every soul, can vary them indefinitely. Each of us best knows his own dishonesties. The conclusion seems to be, that we do not habitually go to confession, looking simply, and steadfastly, and exclusively, to God. The consequence is, that very little, comparatively speaking, comes of our frequent confession, so little that we can bear its littleness no longer, and are determined there shall be a change. The advice then is, to do fewer things, and do them better, taking more pains with our purity of intention. Do we not often ask ourselves, why so few souls are perfect? Surely the answer is, That they are kept back by many things, but by few things so much as by the too great number of their prayers and spiritual exercises. They do too much to do it well. Their life treads on its own heels all the day long. They are so pressed by all they have taken upon themselves, that they get into a hurry, and so raise a dust as they go, and this dust hinders them from seeing God.