

AN UNDIVIDED

Love

LOVING AND LIVING
FOR CHRIST

ADOLPHE MONOD

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❧ *part one* ❧

COME AND DRINK

(John 6:35)

❧ *part one* ❧

At first, there seemed every hope of finding real satisfaction in life. All the world's promises were out there. "Maintain health, get a good education, embark on a rewarding career, enjoy marriage and family, perhaps take up a hobby, and you will be content." But as one goal after another was attained without bringing the promised fulfillment, a sense of restlessness and frustration began to mount. Some key element of my life was missing, but what was it?

Then on August 11, 1975 I found the answer to my longings—or rather, it found me! I had become willing to consider the possibility that Christianity might have something to offer, and I was reading John's Gospel. As I reached the fourth chapter, I was overwhelmed by a sense of Christ's presence. He knew all about the Samaritan woman's life, and he knew all about mine. Jesus saw it all, knew it all, and—astoundingly—loved me anyhow!

God's loving desire for our hearts, his unique ability to be all that those hearts require, and the amazing sacrifice he was willing to pay to gain them are the subject of the first sermon. "Give Me Your Heart" expresses in flowing, powerful, persuasive language the essence of the gospel in Monod's day and in ours. Though outwardly addressed to those who have not yet yielded their hearts to God, it will rekindle the love of those of us who have been walking many years with our Lord, and it will challenge us to be sure that our hearts are still fully given to him.

Yes, Jesus was the key missing element in my life—I have never doubted that—but giving him my heart did not put an end to all my longings. In fact, the closer we get to God, the closer we want to get. Our hearts thirst for fuller, more

intimate fellowship with him, for more perfect holiness, for relief from suffering. In the second sermon, “Are You Thirsty?” Monod shows us how to put these longings in an eternal perspective and find satisfaction in this life, even as we await full, unhindered, and unbroken communion with God in eternity. Then he challenges us to look beyond ourselves, reaching out to help satisfy the thirst of others by leading them to the Savior.

— E. J. W.



GIVE ME YOUR HEART



(Paris, 1850)

Proverbs 23:26

My son, give me your heart.

A HEART TO GIVE

There has been no shortage of definitions for human nature. There is no philosophy that hasn't attempted its own, but is man any better known? The Bible, the most practical of books and the least systematic, takes the opposite approach. Instead of defining man without revealing him, it reveals him without defining him. Here in my text, he is depicted indirectly and almost by chance through a single trait, but a trait that brings light to the very root of the matter, a trait that you will easily recognize. Man is a creature who has a heart to give

THE NATURE OF MAN'S HEART

The center of man is the moral man, and the center of moral man is his heart. Here, by the heart I do not mean tender affections, still less emotional demonstrations. I take

the word in its more masculine and more serious sense, which includes all types of personalities, all ages, and all degrees of culture. The heart, for me, is the seat of the emotions, conscience, and love—all of which belong to that inner region that is the primitive and substantive soil of human nature.

Intelligence and logic, with their admirable clarity, penetrate less deeply. Indeed, there is less of a man in the intellect that makes profound critiques of a sacred text or a book of canon than there is in the faith of the heart that launches itself out into the midst of the void with only a “word” coming “from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4) as its support. There is less of a man in the logic that discusses the relationship of man to God and of God to man than there is in the repentance of the heart that says to God, “Against you, you only, have I sinned” (Psalm 51:4), or in the needs of the heart that cries out to him, “My soul thirsts for you . . . in a dry and weary land” (Psalm 63:1).

But this heart that is within us and, more than anything else, *is* us is also a heart that aspires to give itself. Beyond that, it finds itself only in giving itself away. To be loved is its joy, but to love is its life. It is in our hearts that the full truth of the Lord’s word, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35), finds its application. Or rather, for the heart, to give is to receive; to give freely is to receive abundantly; and in order to fully possess itself, it must give itself without reservation. Lacking this natural nourishment, our heart folds in on us—or rather against us. Turning to egotism, it gnaws its way through the bosom that contains it without satisfying itself. Given away it would bear us up, but kept it weighs us down. Given away it would cause us to live, but kept it kills us. There is no one who doesn’t seek a place of rest for his heart.

COMPETING CLAIMS FOR OUR HEARTS

God answers the heart engaged in that search with the words of my text, saying, “to me.” This response is even more sensitive and tender in a completely literal translation: “Give, my son, your heart to me.” Alas, that *to me* is neither the only one that the heart has heard, nor the first to which it may have listened.

“To me,” says sin with its covetousness, and many hearts have thrown themselves into that wide open pathway until a belated experience taught them that sin only scratches the heart’s needs in order to irritate them and that the most alluring seduction is followed by the bitterest aftertaste. Isn’t that true?

“To me,” says the world with its pomp and pleasures, and too many other hearts have been captured by that bait until they have recognized that the world, even the innocent world—if it ever was—has nothing to fill the heart’s void except its own void, which adds itself to the other instead of filling it. Isn’t that true?

“To me,” says natural affection in the form of a mother, a spouse, or a child, and how many hearts have given themselves without qualms to an inclination that seemed to have the cry of nature and even the approval of God, until they found that there is no creature in the world who can give rest to another creature? Alas, even if he could give it to him, what kind of rest would that be, reduced to reckon day by day with possible accidents, probable illness, and certain death? Isn’t that true?

Then it is that God comes. Or rather, since he was the first to come but without gaining access, we should say that God mercifully comes back, after all the others. He is content to take that humble place provided that he is welcomed in the end, even as a last resort, and he says to us, “My son, give your heart to me.”

WHO IS THIS GOD?

God, I say, but what God? Strange question, but all too necessary today when this sacred name is turned to such diverse uses—even to such profane uses.

GOD OF THE TRINITY

The God who asks for your heart is the God who reveals himself in Scripture; the God of Jesus Christ; God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Do not treat that doctrine as theological speculation. It is a mystery. More than that, it is “*the* mystery,” but a mystery full “of godliness” (1 Timothy 3:16). There is the Father, who has loved us so much that he would strike his only Son in order to spare us, while hating sin so much that he could not spare us except by striking his only Son. There is the Son, who caused all the fullness of the Deity to dwell in our midst, clothed in a mortal body in which he also bore our sins on the tree. There is the Holy Spirit, who, coming to dwell within us, makes us one with the Son as he is one with the Father (John 17:22), and who makes us participants in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

The fact that it is this very God who speaks to you in my text is made apparent enough simply by the name that he gives you there: my son. That name has its truth only in the mouth of this God who is thrice holy and thrice good. As poor fallen and rebellious creatures, we are sons only because the Father has adopted us in his beloved son (Ephesians 1:5-6). We are sons only because the Son “is not ashamed to call [us] brothers” (Hebrews 2:11). We are sons only because the Holy Spirit has sealed us with the Father’s seal and instructed us to cry out, “Abba! Father!” (Romans 8:15).

There, there is the God, the only God who asks for our heart. He is the personal God. Better yet, we say with Scripture that he is “the living and true God” (1 Thesalonians 1:9), the God who wants to maintain a warm,

personal relationship with us, because he has a heart that responds to ours and that seeks ours (see e.g. Judges 10:16, 1 Samuel 13:14). He is God made man, whom we can love as truly and as naturally as we love a brother or a friend, and yet, through a marvelous union, he is also the spiritual God who enters into an inner communion with us that we cannot know or conceive of with any created being.

THE ONLY GOD WHO CARES

Your heart! What other God is there who cares about it? It is not the God of Pharisaism, who is amply and abundantly satisfied if your body is zealous for his worship. He is happy if your knee is bent down to the ground, if your flesh is emaciated by fasting, if your mouth has pronounced a few rote prayers, or if your hand extends itself in meritorious alms.

It is not the God of Pantheism, who blends in turn with the human spirit or with inanimate nature, and who can have no personal feelings, since he has no self-existence. For him giving and receiving, loving and being loved, creating and being created are all the same. Beyond that, truth and falsehood, good and evil, being or not being are all blurred together; or rather they lose themselves in a universal negation that is adorned with the superb name of absolute unity.

It is not the God of Deism, who gives life without giving himself and who creates in order to unburden himself. This God is distant from his creatures, lost from sight—and from life—and is locked in the frigid ice of a fatherless creation and an uncaring providence. He makes existence an eternal winter and the world an icy tomb of which he himself is only the statue.¹

I have said nothing of the God of Islam, who repays a bloodthirsty and fatalistic devotion with the impure currency of a self-centered and carnal pleasure. Nor have I mentioned

¹ This perhaps refers to the statue of the one buried in the tomb.

the God of Paganism—I should have said its thousand gods—who gives back to man with interest the lessons of impiety and injustice that they receive from him. Nor have I spoken of the many other gods that man has created and created in his own image.

Thus, outside of Jesus Christ (Jesus Christ already come or still awaited, it matters little; the spirit who inspires a Saint Paul is also the one who inspires a Solomon or a David), no religion offers anything that resembles the invitation of my text: “My son, give me your heart.” Give me your observances, says the God of the Pharisees. Give me your personality, says the God of Hegel. Give me your intellect, says the God of Kant. Give me your sword, says the God of Mohammed. Give me your lust, says the God of Homer or Virgil. It remains for the God of Jesus Christ to say, “Give me your heart.”

A HEART RELATIONSHIP

God takes up this contrast with all the others gods² and makes it the essence and the glory of his doctrine. For him, giving one’s heart to God—that “heart” from which “flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23)—is not just an obligation of godliness, it is its very foundation; it is its beginning, its middle, and its end; it is the unmistakable mark of a true conversion. You tell me that a man has believed in the gospel of grace. That’s good, but has he believed with a living faith? You tell me that he has made an irreproachable profession, but is that profession sincere? You tell me that his conduct is always exemplary before his peers, but is that conduct holy before God? You tell me that he is at the forefront of Christian works, but does he bring a Christian spirit to them?

² Literally “this rejection by [or of] all the other gods.” This seems to be a reference to the observation that all the other gods reject our hearts while he alone desires them.

But tell me that he has given his heart to God, and all other questions are superfluous. Faith, works, grace, holiness, a new creation—it is all there.

Very well, you who don't have this totality of the gospel and who sense within you that you lack it (for I want you alone to be the judge of that), it is a matter of knowing today whether you want finally to lay hold of it. You who hear God in my text, place yourself without distraction before the practical question that it raises and tell me whether you want to give your heart to the God of Jesus Christ.

OUR HEART'S RESTING PLACE

“My son, give your heart to me;” to me in whom alone your heart can rest and for whom it yearns without knowing it.

Your heart has been kept from giving itself fully to any created being, because none of them has all that it requires. Yet, your heart will find all it needs in the God of Jesus Christ, and without him those needs will never be met. More than that, without him your heart will never really understand its needs, for this living God both satisfies them and reveals them to us at the same time.

Among all created beings, take the one you know to be most loveable and most loved. Isn't it true that you cannot try to yield yourself to his love without soon finding a barrier that unmercifully stops the impulse of your heart; a barrier that seems to say to you with bitter defiance, “You will come this far and no farther”?

WE NEED THE ETERNAL

Why is that? It is because the creature is mortal. There is not a day when you have no reason to say to yourself in the morning, “He could be taken away from me before evening.”

But suppose you could give your heart to an object from whom nothing in the world could separate you and to whom

you were permitted to yield yourself with the joy of life, the freshness of life, the certainty of life, and the immortal power of life! Very well, this God whom I proclaim to you is what your heart requires. He “is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). Hold fast to him; he will in no wise escape from you. Call to him; he will always answer. Count on him; he will never fail you. And when you yourself “depart and are no more” (see Psalm 39:13), it will be to go elsewhere in order to behold him without a veil and to unite yourself to him without hindrance.

WE NEED THE INFINITE

Why else would you find this barrier to a full giving of your heart to a created being? It is because that creature, even if he were immortal, is finite. How could he respond to the infinite needs of your heart? Enclosed within the narrow confines of the flesh, constrained by his will, limited by his illumination, equally incapable of testifying to all that he feels and of sensing all that your heart expects from his, how could he be enough for you? Perhaps in an impulsive moment, touched by so much devotion, so many attractions, such varied worthy traits, you think that there is nothing more to desire in your happiness except to see it continue. But the very next moment, you return to yourself and step out of your tender illusions. In spite of your best efforts to contain it, this cry escapes from you: “And yet, that really isn’t it. My heart is begging for something else!”

Very well, that something else, that infinite thing that will fill, that will overflow the full capacity of your heart, you will find in the God whom I proclaim to you. You will find it in this God who possesses light and power and truth and life, all without measure. No, he himself *is* all of that, and it is from his bosom that everything on earth that has some share in those sacred names flows forth like an inexhaustible treasure.

Light, power, truth, and life are scattered fragments of “the one who is” (see Exodus 3:14), leading you to God, like so many divergent streams leading to their common source. In attaching yourself to him, you will gather together the infinite variety of all these gifts in an unchangeable unity.

WE NEED THE HOLY

Finally, why do we find this barrier to giving our hearts fully to another creature? It is because that creature is sinful and, if he knows himself at all, reduced to joining you in saying, “I know that nothing good dwells in me” (Romans 7:18). And you could abandon yourself to him without reservation? What! That fallen creature for whom you need to beg for God’s forgiveness as you do for yourself; that creature in whom you find the same battle of the Spirit against the flesh that takes place in you; that creature whose infirmities and weaknesses you must bear with each day, just as he must bear with them in you—is that the one in whom you should seek and in whom you could find what your heart demands? Oh, unworthy thought!

Give fresh air to that unhappy soul who struggles in an atmosphere unable to sustain life. Give daylight to that prisoner who groans in a deep dungeon far from the sweet gleam of the sun. Give bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty—and give to man’s heart, as the object of his supreme attachment, a being who is “holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26). Love for such a being can, at last, be the holiness of our hearts, and serving him the holiness of our lives! Very well, in these traits, how can you fail to recognize the God I proclaim to you?

WE NEED THE GOD OF JESUS CHRIST

Yes, my brother, give, give your heart to the God of Jesus Christ. This eternal God, this infinite God, this holy God is

the only one made for your heart, and your heart is made for him alone.³ He is the one your heart cried out for before knowing him, and how much more will it cry out for him once it has begun to know him? If you have merely glimpsed him, you will henceforth find your rest only in him. The heart of man is made in such a way—thanks be to the one who formed it!—that it cannot leave its attachment anywhere, if it conceives of the possibility of carrying it higher. Though you may well have climbed the ladder of creatures, moving always to those more worthy, something will always urge you to climb higher. As long as there is a God in the universe, nothing less will be able to satisfy your heart. Him or no one! Him or a frightful void and a bitter disgust!

I will go further. Him for the joy of your heart or him for its torment! His love can allow you no rest apart from him. Your drunkenness? He will dissipate it. Your attractions? He will chill them. Your cup of delights? He will poison it. Your idolatrous attachments? He will bring separation, sickness and death against them until the day when, deprived of the creature, you will at last throw yourself onto his fatherly bosom, even if it be through weariness, thirst, and despair. His desire is that you might learn to cry out with the psalmist, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the rock of my heart and my portion forever” (Psalm 73:25-26 marginal reading). He is my portion *because* he is the rock of my heart; a rock on which this heart can lean all of its weight without fear of ever seeing it give way!

³ “There is a void in the heart of man, and God alone can fill it.” (Erskine) [A.M.] [Thomas Erskine was the Scotsman who was God’s agent in causing Monod’s faith to come alive.]

THE GOD WHO LOVES

“My son, give your heart to me;” to me who began by giving you my heart before asking for yours.

A SELFLESS LOVE

Love calls to love, and that is the most irresistible call of all. Someone says to you, “You are required to love that person,” and your heart may not yield itself. It might even experience a temptation to resist, through the secret pleasure it finds in affirming its freedom. Or someone says to you, “That person is worthy of your love,” and while recognizing the right he has over you, your heart may feel restrained, as if in spite of itself, through a lack of natural attraction. But let someone say to you, “That person loves you with the most tender of loves. He has risked his fortune, his health, his life for you, with no thought of personal benefit or even of repayment,” behold, your heart is won over in an instant by the instinctive horror that ingratitude inspires in the human conscience, even an unregenerate one.

This condition of love is never completely fulfilled by the creature, either because he doesn’t find in you any more of what such a great heart requires than you find in him, or because there is in him, as there is in you, a core of coldness and of egoism which mixes self-seeking even in its most abandoned devotions. But God has fulfilled that condition, truly fulfilled it. If you ask what he is, Saint John replies, “God is love” (1 John 4:8,16), and if you ask what he has done, the same Saint John answers in the same place, “He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). That is what breaks the heart once it has believed the gospel, the good news of God’s love through Jesus Christ. The thing that makes Christians like Saint John—if you will allow me this expression—is the ability to say with Saint John, “We have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us” (1 John 4:16).

LOVE ON THE CROSS

You would see that love of God everywhere and always, if only you had eyes to see. You would see God's love giving itself, the first to give itself, giving itself without reserve. But do you want to find it fully proclaimed? Then follow the apostle of love on Golgotha, for it is there in front of the cross that he wrote the words I just read to you.

Someone has said, "In creation God shows us his hand; in redemption he gives us his heart." No doubt this antithesis is somewhat forced, and I would argue on the side of creation. No, God's heart is not absent in nature. It throbs in the stirrings of the human soul, in the beating of a mother's heart, in the precious fruit of a rich soil, in the rain from heaven, in the fruitful seasons, and even in the satisfied hunger of the little birds (see Psalm 145).

But it is quite true that the tokens of love that God gave us in creation pale beside those he has given us in redemption, just as the nighttime stars are extinguished for us in the brightness of the day, without, in reality, giving way to it. In going directly to the cross of Jesus Christ to show you "what kind of love the Father has given to us" (see 1 John 3:1) we will only be imitating Saint John and all the apostles. The verb "to give," a favorite word in the gospel, can be replaced by no other, and if Saint John chose it, it is because he saw more in the love of the cross than a sentiment declaring itself. He saw a heart that was giving itself.

My dear listener, have you ever really placed yourself in front of the cross of Jesus Christ? Have you ever pondered the love that God gave you in that mysterious hour when the cry of sacrificial love, "It is finished!" resounded across vast space and eternal ages? It is said that the pious Moravian reformer dated his consecration to God from the day when, crossing a gallery adorned with pictures, he stopped by chance—"I am speaking in human terms" (Romans 6:19)—

before a painting showing the Lord Jesus dying on the cross. These words were written at the bottom: “See what I have done for you; and you, what have you done for me?” The thought of what God gave us on that cross, contemplated seriously for the first time, won the heart of Zinzendorf that day, and with his heart it won his life.

Oh, if only this discourse could be for you what that painting was for Zinzendorf! And why shouldn’t it be? Why should you and I not count on the truth of the gospel, on the Spirit of God, and on your heart, if you have one? No elaborate verbal painting of the sufferings of your Savior, no emotional appeal to nervous sensibility. Just the fact, the simple fact of redemption speaking to your emotions and your reason about what this God who asks for your heart has already given you. “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

CHRIST DIED FOR US

Christ died for us; I need nothing more.

Christ—that Son of God, his only and beloved son; that other self “with whom he is well pleased” (see Matthew 17:5); that God become man in order to give himself without hindrance to man. Who will tell us his true name? Who will tell us of his divine glory? Who will tell us of his tender relationship with the Father? Who will tell us of these things when even the seraphim cover their faces with their wings in order to hide themselves from the brightness of his majesty (see Isaiah 6:2)? As for us, once we have tried to imagine the most exalted, the most sanctified love of the most loving father for the most loveable son, and to imagine that love silently ascending Mount Moriah,⁴ how can we disguise the

⁴ Mount Moriah is where Abraham went in order to sacrifice Isaac, his only son, his promised son, the son whom he loved (see Genesis 22).

fact that all of that is as much below the mysterious reality as earth is below heaven and man is below God! Oh, inexpressible gift!

Christ *died*—that death, that cruel tearing of the body that scarcely comes to mind next to that bitterness of soul which is a thousand times crueler; that burden of all of the sins of the human race weighing on one single head, the only innocent head; that curse of Sinai⁵ swooping down with all its terrors on “the Lamb of God” and made all the more striking by the victim’s human holiness and by his divine grandeur. What earthly death could approach it? What earthly sympathy could reply to it? What earthly imagination could conceive of it? When you have tried to assemble in your mind all that you have experienced and known and heard and dreamt concerning human suffering, what will become of that drop of water in the abyss of anguish that resounds with that mournful cry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). Oh, inexpressible sacrifice!

Christ died *for us*—for you, for me, for us all. For us who are holy, submissive, and faithful? No, but for us who are sinners, rebels, enemies; for us who only live in order to cause offense and who have, by our crimes, fixed him to that cross where he came to atone for them. For us, at least, who are repentant, believing, praying? No, but for us who are unrepentant, unbelieving, “having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12); for us who have begun to sense our unrighteousness and our peril only upon learning at what price God has redeemed us from the one and withdrawn us from the other. “Is this the manner of man” (2 Samuel 7:19 KJV)? And what are “our ways beside the ways” of that completely free grace, or “our thoughts beside his thoughts” (see Isaiah 55:8). Oh, inexpressible mercy!

⁵ Mount Sinai was where Moses received the law and the 10 commandments, God’s standard for holiness and righteousness that humanity has violated.

THE MARVEL OF AN UNRESPONSIVE HEART

If only I might return with you to the original source of the love that was revealed to the world through the cross. If only I could go right back before the ages and penetrate into those impenetrable sanctuaries where the councils of the mighty God are held (see Psalm 73:17). If only I could cause you to listen to that deliberation of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit where the redemption of fallen man is determined from time eternal and where love's work is divided between the Father who calls us, the Son who redeems us, and the Spirit who sanctifies us! (1 Peter 1:2)

Angels from heaven, you who are present at the church's gatherings (see Ephesians 3:10), speak. Has nothing come to you from this council of love? No word, no thought, no wayward ray of light that could reveal the gift of God to those hearts whom nothing has yet been able to touch? And if the laws that govern our relationship with you while we are still shut up in these mortal bodies do not permit you to bring news of that divine deliberation from heaven to earth, then come, let me give you news about another deliberation to carry from earth to heaven. It is completely human, but at least as amazing!

Go and tell the celestial beings that, in agreement with you, with Scripture, with the truth of God, and with the conscience of man, I am proclaiming here the love of a God who sent his Son into the world. Tell them that while I do so, there is in front of me a lost sinner debating within himself as to whether or not he should give his heart to the God who gave him his Son. Tell them that in order to make up his mind, this sinner is waiting until he can escape from the influence of a message that is too much in control of him or not enough in control of itself. Tell them that he will be able to tell you tomorrow what side he has come down on. Go and tell them, and you, who so often find earth to be incredulous of word coming from heaven, will find for

the first time that heaven is incredulous of word coming from earth!

THE GOD WHO ASKS

“My son, give your heart to me;” to me who asks it of you.

WE LOVE BECAUSE HE IS LOVE

Who asks it of you . . . If my goal were simply to defend God’s rights over the heart he asks for, I would only need to remind you that he is the one who made it and that, in asking for it, he is merely asking for something that came from him in the first place. I was just saying that the God of Jesus Christ began giving us his heart in creation, but he has done more. He has put that heart in each one of us. Love, which is the most beautiful definition of God, is also the most beautiful gift that God has given to man. If the creature is loving, it is because the Creator is love. And who, then, has the first rights over that power to love if it is not the one who placed it in us along with his own image?

What! That eagerness of devotion, that warmth of affection, that need for communion, all those feelings that are at once so intense and so tender, those feelings through which he has not only revealed himself but also depicted himself within us—all that should be for the rest of the world and not for him? Away with that impious wandering and that excess of ingratitude! But the more it is detestable, the less I feel the need to dwell on it. There is a more delicate concern that I want to present to you here, and I want, in concluding, to appeal to that which is most sensitive and intimate in man’s heart.

HIS INFINITE CONDESCENSION

When God appears before you and says to you, “My son, give your heart to me;” when he recognizes in you a heart

to give and invites you—if I may put it that way—to grant him first place, doesn't it seem to you that the roles are reversed through an infinite condescension? Doesn't it seem to you that you are hearing today something like a prayer from God that man can grant; that you are called, for the very first time, to do something for him who has done everything for you?

Far, far be it from us—do I need to say it?—to have any thought that could in the least diminish the infinite grandeur, the unchangeable bliss of the King of kings. He doesn't need man to serve him or the son of man to come to his aid. “Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are in the right, or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless?” (Job 22:3). But God's grandeur is not, after all, an insensitive grandeur, nor is God's bliss a cold and impassive bliss. The God of Jesus Christ is a living God in whom there moves a spirit of love and sympathy. Well, how can we represent that love, that sympathy to ourselves, other than by transferring to God feelings analogous to those in man; transferring them while disengaging them from all that is tainted by sin and by the flesh so as to retain only that which is, in its essence, living and personal?

Nevertheless, in contemplating this marvel of love—a Creator and Savior God who asks for the heart of his sinful and lost creature—let us, like Moses before the burning bush, be fearful of coming too close. Without pretending to raise a presumptuous eye to the divine nature, let us rest our gaze on this God who has made man expressly for the purpose of placing himself at our disposal, and let us contemplate the Father's heart through the human heart of the Son who said to us, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Can you imagine Jesus being unmoved at the sight of a repentant sinner who comes to give him his heart? Unmoved? The one who compares himself to the good shepherd going “after the [sheep] that is lost, until he finds it?”

And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost' " (Luke 15:4-6)! Don't you want to give him that joy?

THE JOY WE CAN GIVE

When Jesus, "wearied . . . from his journey" and sitting beside Jacob's well, says to the Samaritan woman, "Give me a drink" (John 4:6-7), who among you does not envy that woman the privilege of being able to give her Savior a cup of cold water to quench his thirst? But you will have no reason to envy her if, through the gift of your heart, you respond to that deeper, more spiritual "I thirst" (John 19:28) that escapes from him on the cross where he died for you.

When Jesus says to Zacchaeus, "Hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today" (Luke 19:5), who among you does not envy Zacchaeus the privilege of receiving his Savior into his home and lavishing all of his cares on him? But you will have no reason to envy him if you open your heart to this same Savior who says to you today, "I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

When Jesus succumbs beneath the heavy instrument of his punishment, who among you does not envy Simon of Cyrene the privilege of carrying for a few minutes that cross on which his Savior will soon bear our sins in his body (1 Peter 2:24)? But you will have no reason to envy him if you are among those in whom he gathers the fruit of "the anguish of his soul" (Isaiah 53:11) and if your heart is part of the precious "spoil" that is his "portion with . . . the strong, because he poured out his soul to death" (Isaiah 53:12, marginal reading).

And when this same Jesus, already crucified and having just been resurrected from the dead, says to Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” (John 21:17), which of you does not envy the fallen apostle, who has been raised up again, the privilege of pouring the “oil and wine” (Luke 10:34) of his repentance and love into the wounds that he helped inflict in the body and soul of his Savior? But you will have no reason to envy the apostle if, eager to bring a measure of joy to the one for whom you have caused so much pain, your heart flies, like Peter’s, to meet the question posed by his Master and yours, so that you, in turn, say to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you” (John 21:17).

THOSE WHO HESITATE

Is there someone here who feels otherwise about this? Is there someone who, in the Samaritan woman’s place, would have refused the cup of cold water; someone who, in Zacchaeus’ place, would have kept his door closed; someone who, in Simon of Cyrene’s place, would have left the cross on the shoulders that bore it; someone who, in Peter’s place, would have responded, well, differently from Peter? If so, he will only be consistent with himself in resisting the invitation of my text and continuing to deny the God of Jesus Christ the heart for which he is asking.

WHY WOULD YOU REFUSE?

Deny him? And why? When you have denied him the heart for which he is asking, what will you do with it? Speak. Explain yourself. Do you dare to stand up in this congregation and tell us what more worthy object would cause you to rob God of the heart that he requests? “Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate,” declares

the Lord, “for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:12-13). That is precisely your unworthy history! That is the bitter outrage you have committed against the living and true God!

A few days ago a devout missionary told us the touching story of the Bassoutos who were suddenly brought “from darkness to light” (Acts 26:18), “from death to life” (John 5:24), “and from the power of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18). Let one of them lend me his voice. “God told the sun to shine, and it shone; he told the grass to sprout, and it sprouted; he told the rivers to flow and they flowed; he said to man, ‘love me,’ and man refused to obey!”

But what have I been doing for the last hour? I have been gathering the strongest reasons, choosing the most touching expressions, urging, entreating. Who have I been entreating and for what? Has it been for God to pardon sinful man and give him his heart, which is all too justly alienated from us? No, I have been entreating sinful man to give his heart to the God of Jesus Christ; to the God for whom that heart hungers and thirsts; to the God who has fully given us his own heart; to the God who seems to have need of ours in order to complete his bliss of love. What? Isn't that taking unnecessary care?

Alas, let us rather fear that it is taking useless care.

GIVE GOD YOUR HEART

Oh, my brother, my sister, give the world today the only moral spectacle more lovely than that of an angel who has never stopped loving God. Give it the spectacle of a sinner, an enemy who has become a friend. Give it the spectacle of a Saint Peter, just recently apostate, to whom Jesus says, “Do you love me?” and who answers him, “You know that I love

you.” Give it the spectacle of a Mary Magdalene, just recently possessed with seven demons, to whom Jesus says, “Mary,” and who answers him “Rabboni.” Give that spectacle to the world today while waiting to give it to the universe on the day of judgment. Yes, be that Saint Peter, be that Mary. You can, if you want to. Man refuses God’s heart every day, but God has never refused man’s heart. He doesn’t solicit it, awaken it, and touch it in order to refuse it. Only desire, and you will give him your heart. Desire and you have already given it.

As for you, elder brothers who have already returned, go and embrace that prodigal child retracing the path to the father’s home. “Greet [him] with the kiss of love” (1 Peter 5:14). Encourage his still wavering steps. Above all, above all, spare him the scandal of your dead profession and know for certain whether you yourselves have truly given your hearts to God!

And you, eternal Father, who sees him “while he [is] still a long way off” (Luke 15:20), come out to meet him, and while he is pouring out on your bosom his humble confession, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son” (Luke 15:21), may he sense the beat of your father-heart against his son-heart, and may he hear this fatherly cry coming from your mouth, “This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found!” (Luke 15:24). Amen.