

# FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES.

## CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

### CHAPTER III.

## THE LORD'S PRAYER.

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### IV. - FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES, AS WE FORGIVE THEM WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US.

498. *A Saint Throwing Stones at a Statue.* -

As we are destined to live in society, my friends, it is necessary that we should bear with each other, and forgive mutually the little injuries one may do the other. It is related in the *Lives of the Fathers of the Desert* that seven solitaries of Egypt assembled in one place and resolved to live together. They chose for their dwelling an old pagan temple, ruined and long deserted. But before installing themselves in it, the Abbot Nubus, who was to be as it were the superior of this little community, told the six others that they were to remain a week outside the temple, without saying a single word one to the other. During those eight days, the holy abbot went every morning to throw stones at a pagan idol that was in the temple and, every evening, he said to it: *I was wrong in doing*

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*what I did, forgive me!* At the end of seven days, Abbot Poemen, who was younger than he, said to him:

"Why, father, did you ask pardon of that idol all the week?" The holy old man made answer:

"It was for your sake I acted so. For, pray, tell me, when I threw stones at that idol, did it utter a single word of anger? and when I asked pardon of it, did it feel any vanity from my doing so?"

- "Certainly not," answered Abbot Poemen.

"My brethren," continued Abbot Nubus, "there are seven of us here; after the example of that idol, let none of us be angry when we are reproached, or give way to vanity when our pardon is asked." All promised the holy abbot to observe this rule; and they remained together several years in great joy and with true satisfaction. So true it is, my friends, that if charity reigned in all families, the world would be a foretaste of heaven.

- P. MARIN, *Vies des Peres des Deserts.* (*Lives of the Fathers of the Desert.*)

499. *Forgive us our Trespases, as . . . - -*

Who amongst us, dear children, would dare to say the Lord's Prayer, if he retained either enmity or hatred against anyone? Leontius, Bishop of Cyprus, who lived in the same 6th century as St. John the Almoner, whose life he wrote, relates that that holy patriarch of Alexandria, St John, made use of this excellent means to oblige one of the greatest lords of that city to be reconciled with his enemy. He had exhorted him several times, but all in vain, to make his peace with him. Seeing him still inflexible, he requested him to come and see him, under pretence of some public

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business, and took him to his chapel, where he celebrated the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, letting in only one person to serve. After the consecration, when he had commenced the Lord's Prayer, which they all three recited together, according to the custom of that time, the holy patriarch made a sign to the server to be silent at the words: "Forgive us our trespases, as we forgive them who trespass against us." He was silent himself, so that the nobleman was the only one who repeated the words. Then the Saint, turning towards him, said with much sweetness: "Think, my dear friend, I beg of you, what it is that you have just asked of God, and what you have declared to Him, at this dread celebration of the holy mysteries, when to induce Him to forgive you your trespases, you protest that you have forgiven those who have done you wrong. And yet there is one who has offended you whom you refuse to pardon." These few words sufficed to throw the poor gentleman into salutary confusion. He admired the ingenious charity of the holy patriarch, and immediately after Mass hastened to embrace his enemy, grant him a generous pardon, and pledge to him a Christian friendship.

- LEONTIUS, *Life of St. John the Almoner.*

500. *Mass Interrupted at the "Pater Noster." (the Our Father) -*

Amongst the edifying stories I have read in the life of St. John the Almoner, patriarch of Alexandria, there is one which I never forgot. He was one day celebrating Mass in his chapel. Being come to the moment

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for saying the Lord's Prayer, he suddenly remembered having been told that a certain deacon had conceived a great hatred of him. Immediately making some feasible excuse, he leaves the altar, and goes to the place where he expected to meet this deacon. He finds him there, and although there were several persons near him, the holy Pontiff threw himself at his feet, and besought him in Our Lord's name to forgive him, if he had unwittingly given him any cause of discontent.

The deacon was so confused by the humility and charity of St. John the Almoner, that he knelt beside him, and with tears in his eyes said

"What are you doing? Arise, holy pontiff! it is for me to ask your forgiveness; I have done wrong, I repent of it, I beseech you pardon me!" The Saint rising up, took him by the hand and said: "God will forgive us both, my dear son!" He returned then to the church full of consolation, and once more ascending the altar, he repeated with a sweet confidence and great happiness this petition of the Lord's Prayer. "Forgive us our trespases, as we forgive them who trespass against us." As for the deacon, he was so deeply struck with what the holy patriarch had just done in his regard that he thought of it unceasingly. It was better to him than all the sermons in the world, and from that day he made such progress in piety that, a short time after, he was deemed worthy of being ordained priest.

- LEONTIUS, *Life of St. John the Almoner.*

501. *A Letter Burned by the Clemency of the Emperor Napoleon. -*

It is always fine to forgive, my friends,

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but especially where one has the power in their hand, and would have but to speak a word to crush their enemy. Napoleon signalized his stay at Berlin, capital of Prussia, by an act of clemency which is justly entitled to the admiration of posterity.

After the military occupation of that city by the French, the Prince de Hatsfeld had been retained by the

Emperor in command of Berlin. One day, going out from an audience which he had had of Napoleon, he was arrested. He was to have been brought before a military commission, and would have been inevitably condemned to death. A letter addressed by him to General Hohenlohe, intercepted at the outposts, had shown that, although he pretended to be solely occupied with the civil command of Berlin, he was secretly informing the enemy of the movements of the French.

His wife, who was the daughter of the Minister Schulemburg, came to throw herself at the feet of Napoleon; she thought her father's hatred against France was the sole cause of her husband's arrest. The Emperor soon undeceived her, and gave her to understand that papers had been seized clearly establishing the fact that her husband was playing a double part, and that the laws of war were pitiless for such a crime. The princess attributed this accusation to imposture, calling it a calumny of his enemies. "You know your husband's handwriting," said the Emperor; I make you the judge."

He brought the intercepted letter and gave it to her. The lady, more than eight

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months gone with child, grew fainter and fainter at every word that showed her how far her husband was compromised. Napoleon, touched by her anguish, said to her in a kind tone: "Madam, you hold that letter, throw it in the fire; that document once destroyed, I have no proof whereby to condemn your husband." The princess gratefully obeyed, and her husband was saved.

- FILASSIER, *Dict. d'Educ.*, I., 527.

## **V. - LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL. AMEN.**

502. *Seven Crowns for Seven Temptations.* -

Here is a charming story that will prove to you, dear friends, that temptation is not a sin. An anchorite who dwelt in the Thebaid, in the depth of Egypt, had with him a young disciple whom he had tried very severely.

The holy old man was accustomed to make him an exhortation every evening. after which they made their prayer together, and he sent him to rest. It happened that, one day, some pious persons, drawn by this old man's reputation of sanctity, came to visit him; and remained with him till it was far in the night. After they were gone he began to make his exhortation as usual; but he made it so long that, towards the end, overcome with weariness, he was sleeping himself without perceiving it. His disciple waited, thinking every moment that he would awake so that they might say their

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prayers together and then retire. But, seeing that he did not awake, he became somewhat impatient, and was tempted to go to bed without saying anything. He resisted once, he resisted twice, and, the same thoughts having attacked him as much as seven times, he resisted still with much firmness. At length the holy man awoke when it was well past midnight, and finding him still in the same place, asked him why he had not awoke him. The disciple answered that it was for fear of giving him any trouble. Having then said their matins (their early morning prayers) together, the good old man gave him his blessing and sent him to rest.

Meanwhile this holy old man, returning anew to prayer, was ravished in spirit to a place all radiant with glory where an angel showed him a resplendent throne, whereon were seven bright crowns. The angel told him that this throne was for his disciple, for whom God had had it prepared, because of the sanctity of his life; and that for the seven crowns, he had gained them that very night. As soon as the day was come, the holy old man hastened to question his disciple, and asked him what had happened during the night. The disciple related very simply the movements of impatience he had had; he told him he had been tempted seven times not to wait till he awoke; but that he had always resisted the temptation. Thereby the old man knew that it was by those seven successive victories he had merited the seven crowns of glory.

- RODRIGUEZ, *Christian Perfection*, III., 130.

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503. *The Temptation of a Young Man and an Old Man.* -

There is no harm in being tempted, my friends; but there is in yielding to the temptation, however hard it be.

A young solitary, being tormented by continual temptations against the holy virtue, applied to an old anchorite, and discovered to him the state of his soul, hoping to find consolation and the remedy for his evils in the counsels and good prayers of the old man. But the contrary was the case. This man, who had neither the prudence nor discretion that age usually gives, rebuked him sharply and sent him away with contempt.

Much afflicted by this harshness and the severe reprimand he had received, the poor young man even thought no more of resisting the temptation, and busied himself only with the means of yielding to it.

The Abbot Apollo, one of the holiest and most prudent solitaires that was then in the desert, met him on the way to the city, and judging the interior trouble by the emotion visible without, he asked him with much mildness what was the matter with him, and what was the cause of the sadness and confusion he saw on his face. But he was so deeply buried in his own thoughts that he made him no answer. The holy abbot, knowing still more by the disorder of his soul, insisted more strongly, and pressed him so that, at last, he obliged him to declare the agitation of mind in which he was, as also the injudicious reproaches of the old man. "That has so discouraged me," added he, "that despairing of being able to surmount my temptation, and to live as a true solitary, I have resolved to quit

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the desert, and return to settle in the world." After this painful avowal, St. Apollo began to console and encourage him, saying that he had himself combated every day the same temptations, and that, in order to do so, there was no need in being disheartened nor lose courage; since, to overcome them, it is not on his own strength one should rely, but on the grace and mercy of God. He finally conjured him to put off for one day the carrying out of his resolution, and to return immediately to his cell to implore God's assistance. As the term he asked for was but one day, the young solitary consented. After that the pious abbot journeyed towards the cell of the cross old solitary; as soon as he came near it, he prostrated himself on the ground, and raising his hands to heaven, he addressed to God the following prayer: "Lord, You who know our strength and our weakness, You who are the sovereign physician of souls, grant that the temptation which afflicts this young man may pass into the heart of the old man, so that, at least in his old age, he may learn to have compassion on the weakness and troubles of his brethren!" Scarcely had he finished his prayer, when he saw a fiend, under the form of a hideous little negro, but with horns and tail and a body like a grey dragon, darting a fiery arrow into the old man's cell. The latter had no sooner felt the dart, than behold a tumult arises in his mind which he cannot quell even for a moment. He arises, he goes out, he goes in again, and after some time spent in this way, being no longer able to endure the flame that devoured him, he takes the same resolution

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as the young solitary, leaves his cell, and takes the same way to return to the world. The holy abbot who was observing him, and who knew, by the vision he had, the temptation that tormented him, approached him:

"Whither are you going, father? how is it that, forgetting the gravity of your age and your profession, you are so agitated, and walk so fast?" The old man, who thought himself discovered, and the testimony of whose evil conscience filled him with shame and confusion, made no answer. Then the holy man, availing himself of the trouble in which he saw him, added: "Go back to your cell, my dear brother, and believe that, if the devil has hitherto left you in peace, it is because he knew you not, or made no account of you. And when some young monk comes to confide his troubles to you, receive him with kindness and compassion."

St. Apollo completed this act of charity by praying for him, and his temptation instantly disappeared.

- Pere MARIN, *Vies des Peres des Deserts.*

504. *Alypus at the Circus Games.* -

"He that loves the danger shall perish therein," is said in Scripture.

So, my dear friends, the best means of avoiding sin is to avoid even what might lead to it, such as immoral plays, profane and unwholesome sports, (such as cock-fighting), immodest dancing, bad books, etc. Hear what St. Augustine himself relates of his friend Alypus, a young man of excellent qualities, but who met with a grievous fall. Here is how it happened: Some of his young friends, who were studying law with him, going one day from dinner together, met him on the way

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and undertook to take him with them to the gladiatorial games in the amphitheatre. It was one of those fatal days when the people were delighted by the sight of human blood-shed. As he had an extreme horror of such cruel exhibitions, he at first resisted with all his strength.

But the others, using that sort of violence which is sometimes done amongst friends, drew him away in spite of himself; then he told them: "You may drag my body and place me amongst you in the amphitheatre, but you shall not dispose of my mind or my eyes, which will assuredly take no interest in the play. Thus I shall be there as though I was not there, and so I shall at once place myself above the violence you do me, and the passion that possesses you." But let Alypus say as he would they carried him off. Whilst the whole amphitheatre was in the transport of these barbarous pleasures, Alypus restrained his heart from taking part in them, and kept his eyes closed. Would to God that he had sealed his ears! For, having been struck by a great shout, which something extraordinary had raised, curiosity prevailed, and, intending only to see what it was, he opened his eyes. . . . . It was enough to give his heart a deeper wound than that which one of the combatants had just received. Thereby it was that that heart, in which there was much more presumption than strength, and which was so much the weaker for having counted on itself, instead of expecting nothing but from God, found itself suddenly wounded. Cruelty glided in at the very moment

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when the blood just shed met his eyes, and, very far from turning them away from what was passing, he kept them fastened on it, drinking fury in long draughts without perceiving it, and allowing himself to be intoxicated by that barbarous and criminal pleasure. It was no longer the same man who had been dragged thither by force; it was a man of just the same stamp as all those who made up the crowd in the amphitheatre, and a fitting companion for those who had brought him. Behold him, as fond of these blood-thirsty plays as the others, mingling his cries with theirs, becoming as warm and as much excited as any of them by what was passing. Finally, he left the place with such a passion for shows and games that he thought of nothing else, and not only was he ready to go back again with those who had brought him, but he was more infatuated than any of them, and even induced others to go. Sad proof, dear friends of the truth of the words which I have just quoted for you: *He that loves the danger shall perish therein*. Much later the Good God rescued Alypus and gave him the grace of a profound conversion which enabled Alypus to become one of North Africa's greatest bishops.

- St. AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, Book VI., Chapter 8.

505. *How the Devil is Resisted.* -

You remember that Our Lord would allow Himself to be tempted by the devil in order to teach us how to resist him.

When he had dared to transport Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple, he plainly told Him: *Cast Yourself down!*

"That is precisely," says St. Jerome, "the true language of the devil, because he desires nothing so much as the fall of men. He may well, indeed, persuade them to throw themselves down, but he cannot himself throw

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them down the precipice." The voice of the tempting devil tells us: "Do that and cast yourself into hell!" We ought to answer: "May God rebuke him! Wretch, go yourself, you know the way. For me, I will have nothing to do with it." In fact, he cannot force us to do anything if we have not the will. A man feeling himself continually tormented by the devil, who was urging him to kill himself, revealed to his confessor the trouble

and agitation of his mind. The confessor made him understand that the solicitations of the evil spirit could have no other power over him than that which he himself chose to give him; he added, by way of advice, that as often as he felt himself pressed by this temptation, he would content himself with saying: "Let me alone, I will have nothing to do with it." This man practised faithfully what his confessor had told him, and delivered himself, by that means, of the temptation that tormented him. At the end of eight days it had left him and he went to thank his confessor, with an overflowing heart, for the infallible remedy he had given him.

- RODRIGUEZ, *Christian Perfection*, II., 65.

506. *How the Devil Fears the Lord's Prayer.* -

We gain much more before God, my dear friends, by a single petition of the Lord's Prayer, made from the depth of the heart, than by the repetition of a great number of prayers said hastily, and without any attention.

Take the following fact as a proof: St. Gregory, Bishop of Tours, relates that St. Calufan, a recluse, was long tormented by remorse, so that a gloomy despair, a dark hopeless grief, in a word, every

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trouble of the mind, accompanied him everywhere. The devils, under the form of horrible serpents, sometimes appeared to him in a visible manner, and so came to torment him even in his solitude. He tried every means of getting rid of these tortures and of those malignant spirits, but without being able to succeed.

At length he bethought him of trying the Lord's Prayer. He, accordingly, recited the "Our Father," dwelling long on each petition, and repeating it several times. Well, this means succeeded perfectly, and as often as he pronounced the words "but deliver us from evil," he felt peace springing up in his soul, and the serpents that surrounded him, often twisting themselves around his neck as if to stifle him, went hissing away. Sometimes the devil was heard to let fall this avowal, "Be silent, will you? that prayer is a torment to us!"

- St. GREGORY OF TOURS, *Glory of Confessors*.