

Label Your Luggage

By Robert Nash S.J.
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I

It is very important to have it labelled - at all times indeed, but particularly at present. If you entertain any doubts about this, may I ask you to read the screaming notice in the window of the bus office? If even still you cherish any lingering delusions concerning the need of a label, just try what will happen if you attempt to leave your luggage in the cloak-room without one. The attendant will rap out at you: "This bag is not labelled. Labels can be bought at the counter, and write distinctly, *please*." And having unburthened himself, in stentorian tones, of these illuminating statements he pushes your bag back towards you again and proceeds to look after the needs of the next person in the queue.

At the Bus Office

Well, it's fair enough. How can you expect the much-tired man to pick out yours later on if it is not labelled? One bus or train has now to do duty for the the six or seven of pre-war days, and one result of this drastic curtailment is a big increase in the amount of luggage to be handled, consequent on the increase in the proportionate number of persons travelling. When, a few hours later, you return to the office, to claim your bag your friend the porter withdraws into the background to a place littered with what seems to be half the city's luggage. Green bags and brown bags and black bags, bags large and bags small, tennis rackets, bicycles, paper parcels, bundles of news papers, luckless sickly chickens tied together in pairs, workingmen's tools, boxes marked "with care" or "fragile," cases with the warning "this side up" or "perishable" - this is the conglomeration in the midst of which he picks his steps, your friend the porter, keeping his eye open all the time for the particular piece of property which belongs to *you*.

It's labelled. Yours would be, of course. So he glances from the docket in his hand to the dockets dangling from the various trunks and other oddments on every side. Yours has a distinguishing mark, a seal by which he is enabled to recognize it, and presently his quest is rewarded. You watch him make a jerk forward and pounce upon an object, and sure enough when he drags it forth from its hiding place into the light of day it proves to be your suitcase, and he dumps it down on the counter before you. But it is not in the interests of the Company only that you should label your luggage. If at the end of your journey, in the joy and excitement of meeting your friends on the platform, you have the misfortune to mislay or forget that suitcase, what is going to happen to it now? On remembering, your first thought will be: "And it wasn't even labelled!" And with that thought there settles down upon you a sinking feeling, for you know that a lost bag or bicycle without a label stands a very poor chance of finding its way home.

Belonging to Him

We may very well look upon our own selves as so many pieces of property which are belonging to Jesus Christ. No need, I take it, to stress the truth that we are not mere chattels, for by sanctifying grace we have been actually raised to a state in which we share in the very life of God Himself. God owns us, by every kind of right and title, for God created us, God redeemed us, and God it is Who sustains us in existence from one second to the next. Did He cease to think about us and thus uphold us, we must at that instant lapse into the nothingness from which He drew us forth. And is there any label to be affixed which will at once show this ownership? Is there any seal to be stamped upon us which will prove that we belong to Him? Our Lord compares Himself to a shepherd and us to His sheep, and He adds: "I know Mine, and Mine know Me." But *how* does He know them? What is the sign and the seal? Has He too a label for His property?

Yes He has, and He tells us very definitely what it is. I see Him seated at the Supper Table. He is speaking to the group about Him and I catch His words quite plainly: "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, *that you have Love, one for another*." So there it is, the mark which characterizes property belonging to Him. A true Christian can be picked out by his practical charity, by the love he shows towards his fellow man because that fellow man takes the place of Jesus Christ.

Love Letters

On that same night there leaned against the breast of Our Lord, John the disciple whom Jesus loved. Years later he was to write three wonderful letters, the theme of which would be, in the main, the need of this strong mutual love one for

another. "My dearest," he would say, "if God hath so loved us, we ought also to love one another." A conclusion which at first sight seems a little strange. Wouldn't you have expected rather: "My dearest, if God hath so loved us, we ought also to love God"? But no. With the memory of the Master's parting discourse vividly in his mind John put the conclusion in his own way and knew it was logical.

And when his life was drawing to a close he never tired of repeating to those who came to talk with him: "My little children, love one another." "And why do you always tell us the very same thing?" they asked, a little weary perhaps from the monotony of the refrain. "Because," he told them, "it was the Master's own special commandment. If it alone be perfectly observed all else will be right." Those were the days when even the pagans were able to read the label. "See," they would exclaim, "See how these Christians love one another!"

Look to the motive

"Love" is one of the most sadly abused words in the English language. One of the abuses from which it suffers is to confuse it with a mere philanthropy, a mere kindness and readiness to relieve pain, but whether that pain be found in a man or in a cat or a horse, does not seem to matter so very much. Natural goodwill of this sort is right enough in its way but it is by no means the test of discipleship with Christ. The man who has grasped the import of the great commandment recognises that every human being upon whom his eyes rest takes the place of Jesus Christ, and he loves him and is kind to him *for that reason*.

It is therefore no real Christian charity to alleviate pain or scatter largesse merely because I have a horror of seeing suffering in man or beast, or merely because I am in the humour to be generous with my money. Such a natural motive is not necessarily excluded but the one Our Lord demands goes much deeper. What is it?

The answer becomes very evident when you recall that the second reason for labelling your luggage is to guard against loss of your property. Turn now for a moment to the seventh chapter of St. Matthew and you come upon a reference to works which, though good in themselves, were discovered to be devoid of all merit when those who did them arrived at the final stage of their journey. "Many will say to Me in that day," says Our Lord, "'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name and cast out devils in Thy name and done many miracles in Thy name?' And then I will profess unto them: 'I never knew you. Depart from Me, you that work iniquity'."

Before you close your bible please go on a few pages more and this time open St. Luke at his eighteenth chapter. Here is the account before you of the prayer of the pharisee and the publican. The pharisee proclaimed that he fasted twice in the week and gave tithes of all he possessed. The publican struck his breast and begged for mercy, and he went down to his house justified rather than the other.

Lost Luggage

Now it was probably quite true that that pharisee did those righteous deeds, and that those condemned in the judgment did cast out devils and work miracles and prophecy. Why then are they rejected? For no one will deny that it is an excellent thing to fast and to give alms, nor will anyone call in question the value of miracles and the blessings that accrue from them. Yet all these things, good in themselves, have gone astray. They are lost luggage, and lost beyond recovering as far as eternal life is concerned. Why? Because they did not bear the stamp upon them. The motive was all wrong. They had no label to prove that they were done for love of Jesus Christ and for the neighbour as taking His place.

Those alms were given merely for show. Those fasts by which the body was starved were made to pander to the appetite of an overbearing and insatiable pride. The miracles were Satan's counterfeit, Beelzebub feigning to cast out Beelzebub but in reality only tightening his grip on the foolish agent whom he had duped. The long prayers rose up from a hypocritical heart. A truly terrifying confirmation this is of St. Paul's teaching: "If I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor and if I should deliver my body to be burned, *and not have charity*, it profiteth me nothing." It is all lost at the end of the journey.

One With Christ

So kind deeds are not enough, nor are penances enough, nor even miracles. If the label is going to convey all these safely to eternal life they must be done from the right motive. "Let all your things be done in charity." Love is the fulfilling of the law; the twofold love of God and of the neighbour for His sake contains all the law and the prophets. Love for another, therefore, to be genuine, must be the overflow of my love for God. By grace we are all united to Christ and to

each other, so as to form together one great organism, the mystical body of Christ. That is why the heart of the true Christian goes out in a sincere love towards everybody, the tinker and tailor and candlestick maker, because (and this is the all important point), every single individual who crosses his path takes the place of Jesus Christ. He is part of the mystical body and *therefore* to be loved.

"By *this* shall all men know that you are My disciples." A cup of cold water given from this motive merits a reward surpassing great in eternity. A tiny farthing dropped from this motive as temple tribute by a poor widow is beyond reckoning more pleasing in God's sight than the lavish alms handed out by the pharisees "that they might be seen by men."

You will find still further confirmation of this in Our Lord's account of the last judgment. To the just He will turn and say: "I was hungry and you gave *Me* to eat, thirsty and you gave *Me* to drink, a stranger and you took *Me* in, naked and you covered *Me*..." And they shall ask in astonishment: "When, Lord?" And He shall answer: "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these, My least brethren, you did it to *Me*." And these shall go into everlasting life. They have reached the journey's end laden with good works. Their luggage bore the right label and it has all arrived safely.

What They Forgot

Just because that same label is missing those on His left hand are condemned. "As long as you did it not to one of these My least brethren, neither did you do it unto *Me*." For this alone they are excluded from the kingdom. "And these shall go into everlasting punishment." Many of them probably did kind deeds. Many of them submitted to the conventions of good society and were considered models of refinement and tact. But once again all was vitiated by the motive. Underneath there lurked the galling insincerity of a heart enslaved by worldliness. There was no real love, only make-believe. There was no seeing Christ in others and loving them for that reason. If they did kindly deeds, or repressed signs of annoyance, or spoke pleasingly, it was all done from selfish motives - to win applause, to secure worldly advancement, to curry favour with those who wielded worldly power. The motive underlying all their external show was self in one form or another, and in that selfishness they are now confirmed. Their goods were not labelled, and so Our Lord, because He is just, must tell them at the end: "I never knew you."

One more scene to illustrate the closeness of the union which binds Christ to the member of His mystical body. Saul of Tarsus is kneeling on the dusty road outside the city of Damascus. He is a bigot and a persecutor of the Christians, and today Our Lord shows Himself to him and asks him: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *Me*?... I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest." Now you will observe that at this time Our Lord had already ascended into heaven. How then could He complain that the wrath of Saul was directed against Him? How, except by identifying Himself with His disciples? Injure the hand or the eye in the human body and you injure the whole person. Injure a member of the mystical body and Jesus complains: "You are doing that to *Me*."

Summing Up

All that has been said thus far is put forward by way of explaining the teaching of Our Lord about love of the neighbour. Before we pass on to the second part of our paper it may be worth while gathering up the points He stresses under a few heads. You tie on a label for two reasons - to distinguish the property which belongs to you from everyone else's, and to prevent your things from going astray. Practical charity is the "label" distinguishing the true Christian. Without this label the luggage will certainly go astray at the end of life's journey. This charity must be built upon a supernatural motive - the kind deeds done because you recognise that your neighbour takes Christ's place, is part of His mystical body. So intent is Christ on making you understand the importance of all this that He calls charity His own special commandment. "This is *My* commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

II

So much, then, for the theory. We now come to the practical working out of this teaching of Christ in our own daily lives. You would be inclined to say at the outset that it is impossible to overstate the far-reaching effects of this principle. One is almost bewildered by the multitude of implications of the great commandment which at this point begin to range themselves before the mind's eye.

You are reading these lines, let me suppose, on a Sunday afternoon. Whoever you are and wherever you live you will not go through the week ahead of you without running into innumerable opportunities of treating others as you would treat Christ.

Next Week

You are a teacher and on each of the next six days you are going to stand several hours before your class. Those young people are eaten up, you tell me with love of the world, and you almost despair of making any impression on them and awakening in them a true religious sense. They come to you with minds dissipated by the reading of sentimental novels, with their impressions of the meaning and sacredness of human existence warped by film stars, with no thought in their minds except amusement and a good time. Christ is very effectively disguised here, isn't He? It is at times like this that your spirit of faith is tested. If they were easy to manage, solidly pious, responsive to your efforts, you would have a powerful stimulus to your zeal. But after all nearly anybody would delight in leading a class of that sort. It is when you have to penetrate the disguise and discover Christ beneath that you show most convincingly that your zeal is of sterling quality. "You did it to Me" - every effort on behalf of your unruly brood is marked by Him, and, for your consolation, is bound to produce its effects, if not here, certainly elsewhere, perhaps at the antipodes. Nothing done from the motive of charity is lost, despite appearances. The label will make it secure at the end. *Bon courage* then.

Authority from God

You are an employer in shop or factory. Does it ever remotely occur to you to apply the practice of the great commandment in your dealings with those men under you? Or do you regard them as "hands" merely, as cogs to be used for the efficient running of your machine? Isn't it astounding when you sit back and think of it, that He assures you solemnly that what you do to them is done to Him? And if the employee came to look upon his employer as holding his authority from God, and if he did his day's work in a spirit of loyalty and obedience not to a mere man but to God's vicegerent, with what conscientiousness he would labour and what treasures he would daily accumulate in heaven! If all this seems fantastic the sorrowful admission has to be made by way of explanation that even we Catholic employers and Catholic employees have got far away from Christ's standards. We are forgetting the label.

Here is a nurse or doctor in the hospital ward. Those patients are entrusted to you, not only that you may tend to the needs of the poor body, which, despite all medical skill, must die soon in any case. But the eye of faith recognises Christ behind that cancer or lupus or diphtheria or fractured limb. As you fasten that bandage, or mix that medicine, or apply that poultice, you may hear the very voice of Christ speaking to you through your patient's lips and telling you: "You are doing this to Me!" You are touching Him in a member of His mystical body. Souls, not mere bodies, are all around you; how much apostolic spirit is in you?

Supernaturalized Trifles

The great principle can find its way, and should, even into trifles. You give up your place in a bus or tram - you have done that to Christ. You refuse to elbow your way in the queue and another secures the last place which should have been yours - suppress your anger and your deed is regarded by Christ as done to Him. You share your umbrella with this poor half-drenched old woman - you are giving shelter to Christ. You carry the parcel for that messenger boy or those letters for the postman up that avenue where you were going in any case, and so you save him a walk of ten minutes; you are gracious and considerate towards those who cannot retaliate, the waiter or the charwoman or the street singer; you close the window with a good grace when you very much want to leave it open, to satisfy the whim of somebody who is hipped about draughts you make place for another, and willingly, in your bench in Church; you refrain from looking back with an expression of annoyance at the man who exasperates you by "whispering" his prayers aloud; you check a mannerism because you have discovered, perhaps by accident, that it gets on someone's nerves; you put aside your pipe or cigarette smilingly, in the railway carriage, just because the dear old lady sniffs ominously and pointedly asks her companion if this is not a non-smoking compartment; you laugh good-humouredly when inwardly you are seething with annoyance, and nobody suspects what it costs you - the thousand and one little acts that can be seized upon and sanctified if we realize that all this is done to Christ in one of the members of His mystical body.

The great commandment gives us the clue too, to much that is otherwise unintelligible in the saints' lives. You see they are overwhelmed with gratitude to Our Lord for the graces with which He has inundated their souls. They understand much more profoundly than we do the astonishing truth that His Heart is on fire with love for them. And they experience an ache, an immense longing, to prove to Him the sincerity of their love for Him. Then they ponder on the great commandment and it begins to send its rays, like a great arc-light, into every nook and corner of their daily lives. Here is the way, par excellence, of repaying love for love. "You did it to Me!" Such a joyful discovery is this, Jesus living in His members!

A Few Examples

That is why Francis Xavier tore his heart out of his much-loved Spain and separated himself from friends and relatives, to slave for souls in India and Japan. That is why St. Catherine of Siena watched by the bedside and waited lovingly on an old witch whom nobody else would go near. And the ungrateful creature repaid the saint by spreading shameful calumnies about her, and Catherine retaliated by redoubling her attentions! That is why the Jesuit martyr, St. Noel Chabanel, after trying for years without success, to master the language of the North American Indians, bound himself by vow to remain in the midst of them till his death! The charity of the saints is indeed all-embracing, but if they have a predilection, it would seem to be for those who are ungrateful and inappreciative. For if you show love to such, you have a surer guarantee that you are actuated by the motive of pure love of Christ. "If you love them that love you," says Our Lord, "what thanks are due to you? Do not also the heathens this?"

It may be worth while illustrating further how the practice of the great commandment meets you at every turn. Here comes into your office the bore and when you are very busy too! You foresee that this interview is going to consume at least twenty minutes of your precious time. And of course he will tell you, in his leisurely way, his funny story, which you have already endured ten times, on a rough calculation. Instinctively you prepare yourself to cut him short and show him the door. Instead, you suppress all sign of irritation. Instead, you listen with apparent interest for the eleventh time, to his tale, and at the end you pat him on the shoulder, shake hands and send him off with a cheery smile. Now why didn't you bustle him out? Because you saw Christ in him, and a grateful Christ looks out at you through the man's eyes and assures you: "You have done that to Me."

(In parenthesis let me forestall a possible objection. Of course if you can escape the bore and husband your valuable time, without hurting him, by all means do so. This can be done by jokingly bowing him out, or better still by managing to see him first!)

You step out of your office at lunch hour and a poor man stops you to ask for an alms. All right, snap at him if you will. Tell him what you think of frauds like him. But before you begin your tirade may I tip you on the arm and remind you that what you are going to say is said to one who takes Christ's place? Yes even if the man in sober truth is a swindle. "You did it to Me."

Sinners Too

Or you have to deal with a sinner, a man or woman whose evil life is the talk of the town. You are going to upbraid him, are you? To denounce him in harsh cutting tones? But after all the man has sinned, not against you but against God and God is all eagerness to forgive him. What right have you, then, to hurl invectives at his head? You have often prayed, haven't you, to have your trespasses forgiven in the same measure as you forgive others? Suppose Our Lord had taken you at your word? Suppose He had treated you after your sin, as you are on the point of treating the man standing here? And anyhow, what is going to be the result of your harshness? Is it going to make your sinner a genuine convert? I doubt it. Much more likely is it that it will harden him in his sin. "You will catch more flies with a spoon of honey than with a hundred barrels of vinegar." At any rate, be chary of how you speak, for you are addressing Christ in one of His members.

You have always been on friendly terms with Mrs So-and-So, but the other day she snubbed you, just because she happened to be walking with Lady Purcoat from Aristocratic Square! The idea! You are fuming with indignation. So she considers her salute a compliment, does she? Very well. Just wait till you meet her again and you will teach her?

Snubbed

Next day you see her approaching and this time you observe with delight that she is alone. Here now is your chance and you almost lick your lips in pleasant anticipation. This is where you get your own back, stare her full in the face (so as to make quite sure she knows you have seen her), and then very deliberately look the other way. Yes, it is very human, I suppose. But let me ask you: Suppose Jesus Christ was walking up this street towards you, would you, a Catholic, dream of acting towards Him with this studied rudeness? Why, of course not. Well, open wide your eye of faith for He assures you that He is, in very truth, hidden there in that vain silly woman approaching you.

But Our Lord would never have snubbed me as she did. Granted. We are not defending her either. She too must learn that He regards her foolish pride as shown towards Him. But though she is wrong, He is going to take your return as done to Him. Where am I to find words to express the merit you will gain and the proof of love you will give Him if you smother your indignation? So please dispel that frown, and at once, for she is quite near by now. Come along and give

her your most friendly smile. Can you hear the echo in your heart: "You have done that to Me"?

That wealthy old aunt of yours had left you a nice substantial little sum in her will. But busybody came to hear of it and whispered lies about you which the dear soul believed. Forthwith you find yourself cut off from your share. Of course you are in a fever of anger. Now listen. Would you like to do something heroic, for the sake of Him Who died for you, for your aunt, and even for busybody? Would you welcome an opportunity of giving Christ a really magnificent proof of your love? All right. Seal your lips. Let not a word of complaint against the manifest injustice escape you, and begin tomorrow a novena of the most fervent Holy Communions you ever made, and offer it-for busybody!

Over the Teacups

You dearly love to discuss a spicy piece of scandal over the teacups. Up comes the name of the absent one, and at once you are all alert. Yes, push your cup to the right and your plate to the left. With your dainty fingers lay hold of that absent person's character. Settle back now in your chair, tighten your grip on the poor reputation and prepare to tear it to shreds, section by section, limb by limb, atom by atom. But before you begin let me ask you to pause for just one moment and look in my direction. Down there in the secret places of your heart please say three times: "I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest." That is all I want. Now turn your head again in the direction of your table companion and proceed - if you dare!

You are assistant in that shop and standing behind the counter. Just look at who is coming in. Oh, one glance is all you need for you know her well - that impossible nuisance who pulls the whole place down about your ears and then calmly marches off without buying anything. Fortunate, isn't it, that you saw her in time? This is where you fade out behind the curtain and allow the other unsuspecting assistant to walk into the lion's - or should we say into the lioness's - mouth? What a laugh you will have at her afterwards! How clever you think yourself to wriggle so opportunely out of this unpleasant corner! Listen again. *Refuse to wriggle out.* Take on the old lady, wait on her pleasantly, smile and chat with her as if she was the one person in the whole world with whom you wanted to spend the remainder of the afternoon! Forestall the other girl. Restrain your desire to appear the smart one. But why on earth should I? Because down in the depths of your soul you catch the tiny whisper of Jesus: "As long as you did it to one of these you did it to Me." And if the other girl doesn't see why you did it, don't you tell her. And if the laugh appears to be on her side, join in it!

Charity Begins at Home

You must let me remind you too, that charity begins at home. If there is one place more than another where you should try to live up to this high ideal it is in your relations with the other members of your family. There are some who keep all their smiles for outsiders and are nearly impossible to live with at home. Outbursts of bad temper constant quarrelling and bickering, bad example to children, back answering from children to parents - where would there be room for all that if each member of the household had come to recognize Christ in father and mother and brother and sister?

I suppose that in even the best families there will be an occasional misunderstanding. Or some weakness will betray itself in husband or wife. It is no small part of charity towards the home to guard carefully those "family secrets." To be constantly telling the world about your bad-tempered husband or nagging wife, to rail bitterly against the exaction of father or mother - no, let us keep our family business sense enough to understand that there are little matters of great which should not be spoken of outside.

The Neighbours

And what about the neighbouring families? From my heart I hope you are not the type of Catholic who keeps up long-standing differences with those around you. Such conduct is nothing short of highly scandalous. You pass that man or woman and refuse to bid them the time of the day. You drive to Mass on Sunday but you wouldn't dream of offering him or her a lift as they trudge along. The tradition grows up with your children and from their earliest years they are taught to ignore those people who live, perhaps, within a stone's throw of the home. And why? All because of some miserable misunderstanding or petty quarrel. Because in the heat of the moment, you and he exchanged a few angry words. And for all these years you harden your heart and harbour this feeling of resentment and refuse to forgive and forget? Yet, disgraceful is the word, and don't forget the label. This too you are doing to Christ. Now before you read any further turn down the page and make up your mind that this very day you are going to end this wretched business.

Do you recall what Our Lord has to say about this sort of thing? "If you offer your gift at the altar and there you remember that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift at the altar and go off and be reconciled to your

brother, and then come and offer your gift." It is a good rule to be the first to apologise, even if the other is in fault. You never will have to endure the smallest fraction of the injustice of Calvary, and Jesus retaliated by praying for His persecutors.

Even Once

So you are not surprised that we prefaced this portion of our booklet with the remark that the practical applications are nearly infinite, of the principle under consideration. That is something to be intensely grateful for, for it means that at every turn you find abundant opportunities of exercising your love for Christ. And do not take alarm and say that the great commandment is too difficult to fulfil. Of course you will fail sometimes. Of course you will let occasions slip. But keep trying. Even one such victory over self like those shown above is a source of immense gain to your soul, and, as we saw, it is the proof He values most of all of the love you profess for Him. So once more - keep your eye on the label.

Saint Therese

Yes, you find opportunities everywhere if you watch for them. Do you remember the Little Flower kneeling that evening in her convent chapel? All day she had been looking forward to this quiet hour of prayer, and now it has come at last and she settles down to it. All goes splendidly for a few minutes till presently a fidgety sister enters the chapel and proceeds to park herself right behind the saint. Throughout the entire hour she kept rattling her rosary and shifting about, and the young nun in front felt, I fancy, beads of perspiration breaking out on her forehead. Why? Because all this is upsetting her prayer, and fifty times in the course of the hour she wanted to turn around and say: "For goodness' sake will you keep still and leave your beads alone?" And fifty times she forced herself to put on the brake. "You did it to Me" - the same motive all the time.

And you can recall the day when she was down in the laundry bent over her tub of clothes. Opposite St. Therese, over her own tub, was another sister, a large, good-natured soul. In her thoughtless way she sent the suds every now and then flying across and they came full in the saint's face. Many times again was she on the point of taking out her handkerchief and wiping them away and thus showing the good lady what inconvenience she was causing. But that tiny warning voice within told her that here was a chance of proving her love, and, *after a struggle*, she was able to pretend not even to notice. After a while, she tells us, she actually began to enjoy the performance!

Gems of great holiness lie strewn across our path every other day. Those who are keen stoop to pick them up. "To those who love God all things work together unto good."

These practical applications are given more or less haphazard. It is time now we were a little more methodical, so let us see how Our Lord's great commandment works out under three different heads - charity in the matter of *thought*, of *word*, and of *act*.

Charity Thinketh no Evil

Thoughts. - A father or mother, told about the disgrace of their child, hopes against hope that the report is false or at least exaggerated - because they love. A person is very reluctant to believe that his friend has proved himself a traitor - because he sets a high value on that friendship, because he has trusted the man or woman and shared with them the innermost secrets of his soul. A son or daughter living in Australia learns that a lady bearing the same name as mother dropped dead in a Dublin street today. They do not *want* to think that it is she. They will cable at once to find out, and while waiting for the reply they are full of anxiety and try by every means to persuade themselves that the alarm has no foundation. In the case of all three, parent or child or friend, there is a marked unwillingness, a repugnance even, to giving credence to the tale, because the person concerned is someone who is loved.

That is exactly the reaction towards another's fault which you will find in the man or woman who understands the great commandment. So far from investigating into the truth of the rumour with a sort of excited hope that it may be so, so far from gloating over it and retailing it with a sense of satisfaction if it be discovered to be indeed a fact, you will find on the contrary that he hopes in his heart that what has been said is untrue or exaggerated. He does not *want* it to be so. His tendency is to close his eyes to the shortcoming, however obvious, and his ears to the evil report however loudly it be proclaimed from the housetops. The reason is always the same. In his neighbour he sees Christ and he is saddened by any shadow which would dim the beauty of the vision.

Trial by Jury

Moreover, everyone knows from experience how very easily reports become distorted in the telling, and as a result how black the evidence may look against an accused until it is thoroughly sifted by a competent judge. I open the day's paper and I read that a man has been arrested on suspicion of having committed murder. In due course the trial begins and part of the evidence comes to light. It looks very bad for the arrested man, and you are inclined to think that he is guilty and doomed to be hanged. As one session follows another you are confirmed in your first impression. You talk about the man to your friends - the barber who cuts your hair tells you it is clear that he is guilty, the chance companion with whom you get into conversation in the bus asks if he is yet sentenced, taking it for granted that the pronouncing of the sentence is only a matter of time.

And lo, at the end of several weeks and after much lengthy discussion and bringing forward of all that accumulation of evidence, the jury surprises everyone by returning a verdict of "not guilty." It is true that there may have been much against the man, but on the main charge he is acquitted. It takes an expert to weigh up the merits of the case. You can recall that this sort of thing does happen, and the moral is: Even from motives of natural prudence, apart altogether from the high supernatural motive, be slow to believe evil of another. You never can tell. You are not an expert.

Even if You are Right

But suppose the evil has *certainly* been done? Suppose the evidence is such as to compel me to give an unfavourable verdict? It cannot help knowing that my neighbour has said bitter and untrue things about me, for with my own ears I have overheard him. I cannot but believe that so-and-so is dishonest, for I have caught him red-handed three times in the same week. I cannot do otherwise than see through the sham and hypocrisy of a so-called friend, and I know the underhand methods by which he succeeds in carrying off a situation.

What becomes of the great commandment in cases like these? Well, once again you will be slow to allow your mind to *dwell* on these thoughts. If you are impelled to think of your neighbour's faults, you will react by trying to remember that he is possessed too in all probability of many qualities that are excellent. But tell me, did you yourself ever do evil to another? Were you ever dishonest or dishonourable or uncharitable or false to your friends? Were you ever guilty of vices which St. Paul affirms should not so much as be mentioned amongst Christians? And now you are the one to sit and criticise another! Why, the plain fact of the matter is that you have probably done much worse yourself than your neighbour. And if you haven't you owe your escape, not to anything of innate goodness in yourself but only to the sustaining grace of an omnipotent God allying Himself with your weakness. "What hast thou that thou hast not received, and if thou hast received, why dost thou glory as if thou hast not received?" If you must sit in judgment, it is sane to begin by placing yourself in the dock. And if others get on your nerves, remember it is not unlikely that you get on their nerves. A most fantastic suggestion, no doubt, but still one worth setting down in this place!

"Imaginitis"

I wonder if you want me to talk about the man or woman who thinks that everyone is "down" on them. You know the type of person I have in mind; they are suffering, in many cases, from a disease which we conveniently call "imaginitis." You see two people in close conversation and they lower their voices as you draw near - at once you come to the conclusion that they are discussing you. The lady next door quite innocently drops a chance remark - you begin to explore for the *arriere pensee* and you keep ferretting into your mind to try to discover what is her insinuation. An acquaintance of yours smiles at you in the street and you wonder what he is sneering at. You receive a letter and between the lines you read a jibe or an insult at your expense. You ask a question and the straightforward answer arouses your suspicions. You are asked a simple question and you determine to hedge lest you give yourself away. Your employer changes your hours or your place on the staff and you proceed to hunt for a scheme to undo you, to injure your reputation, to pay you off - goodness knows for what!

One might extend the list almost endlessly. There is no knowing where a man or woman will stop if once they allow the imagination to run away with them in this fashion. For it is the imagination. Once again the common sense of the matter is that ordinarily you won't find folk who take the bother to give you a fraction of the thought that you are attributing to them. In point of fact they usually find something more interesting to do or to think about. For proof of this consult your own experience. Take yourself to task and find out how much or how little you yourself think about others - what they do or why they do it. The ordinary man or woman is not given to prying constantly into other people's affairs, and it is foolish in many cases, and opposed to the great commandment, to keep imagining that they do so in yours.

A Film of My Life

But once again suppose you happen to be right. Suppose your neighbours are actually watching your actions narrowly, discussing them in detail, and attributing to you motives of which you never even thought. If you are quite sincere won't you have to admit to yourself that all they say is negligible in comparison with what they could say if they knew you as Our Lord knows you? Suppose a film of your life was shown in a public cinema - all your secret thoughts and words and acts exhibited on the silver screen for a crowded house to witness. You would feel somewhat embarrassed, wouldn't you, to say the least? Having seen that film what can they say *now* and what can they think? Isn't the reality much more humiliating than that slight, real or imaginary about which you were fuming?

There is another point to be made before we end this section of our booklet. Here is a man or woman who has been uniformly kind to you, who has many many times given of his best, always considerate, always approachable, always ready with the wisdom of experience to help you. You ask for an interview and, though you do not know it, at a most inconvenient moment, and you are given it, and for as long as you wish. You write, and the prompt reply soothes your worry. Financial difficulties come, and this friend steps forward, puts his hand in his pocket and solves your problems for you.

One Slip

This has been his habitual attitude for years, a true friend indeed and his adoption tried. But after all those innumerable proofs of his friendship he makes one small slip. He fails to write as promptly as usual, or his letter contains a phrase that displeases you. Or he tells you that times are bad and he cannot send you that sum you asked. Or, sorely harassed as he may be, perhaps his temper snaps, just this once, and he does actually say an impatient word. Now there is a type of person who, after this first slip, will immediately forget. all the kindness, all the instances of patience and regard - all these are swallowed up in a blackout and the full blaze of light is focussed on this momentary failure. Yes it is most unfair, but it happens.

"Charity thinketh no evil," The only form of pity to be excluded from your life is pity for *self*. Even if your suspicions are well founded and even verified, stifle the harsh thought. Remember you have to love Our Lord with your *whole* mind. Now you are not loving Him with as much of your mind as you allow to be filled up with those unkind thoughts. To refuse entrance to such thoughts, to forbid resolutely to oneself the satisfaction of complaining even in the most secret places of one's own heart, to repel every inclination to do so with the same promptitude with which one rejects an impure suggestion - quite often this will be a love for Christ little short of heroic.

And why am I to try to do it? Because the person who has offended you, perhaps with studied deliberation, even such a one takes Christ's place. To refuse to retaliate by even dwelling in thought on the injury and nursing the sore - this too is done to Him. "You did it to Me."

Hard is it? Yes, very hard, heroic indeed, as we have just said. But it was very hard for Christ to go to Calvary. It was very hard for Mary to stand under the cross and watch Him die. Very hard, yes, but well for you and me that they did not say it was too hard. It is hard to repress the harsh thought when you are in fault. It is harder still when you are innocent. But if it is meritorious to do so when you are guilty it is heroic when you know in your own heart that the charge is false. That is why Our Lord and Our Lady stir the depths of our soul's by the dauntless courage they show. That is why only heroes can fathom the lessons of Calvary.

You talk about going to Lough Derg or Croagh Patrick to do penance - excellent things of course. But beware of looking for the extraordinary and missing the opportunity an immense one, that is lying at your elbow.

Words. - Let me begin this paragraph with a quotation from Canon Sheehan's book *Luke Delmege*. Father Luke notes in his diary: "The canon... actually for the first time, said a kind word about my sermon... Why are the old so economical about kind words to the young? They are cheap, and God only knows what a splendid tonic is a kind word."

It would seem that there are three reasons for withholding a word of encouragement, and of these the first is jealousy. Mrs Next-Door's daughter's engagement is announced to the young man whom you considered a Mr Very Eligible for your little girl. You are soured and green with envy and you cannot refrain from showing it. In an extreme case you might even go to the lengths of defaming the young man. Everyone sees why.

Are You jealous?

Your boy does not shine as brilliantly as you expected in his final exam at the University. His results make a sorry comparison with those of Jim or Jack, your neighbour's son, and a full year and a half younger than your Tom. You meet Jim's delighted father or rapturous mother, but you can scarcely bring yourself to mention the magnificent achievement of their boy, due, as you know very well in your heart, to his power of hard study. No, but what trouble you go to, to explain that *of course* your Tom could easily have headed the list, but then all he aimed at was just to "get through," or he was in bad health all that last term, or he had a splitting headache on the morning of the exam! What is the motive underlying all this, I wonder? Be honest. Is it that detestable vice? Jealous, are you?

In the College debate, or the School play or the Cup Final, the cheers that acclaim the favourite's success are gall and wormwood to your heart. Why? Is it because your boy or girl is hardly noticed? And do you ever pause to think that that small-mindedness is shown to Christ? "You did it to Me."

There is a second reason for neglecting to say the word of encouragement. Often this neglect is due simply to thoughtlessness, a reason which, though it lacks the venom of jealousy, is reprehensible all the same.

Or thoughtless?

Here is a zealous Sodalist or ardent Legionary of Mary, who gives up three or four nights in the week to spend them looking after "down and outs" at a hostel, who tramps around the city slums on a Sunday morning visiting lodging houses and trying to get the men out to Mass. Do you ever say a word of approval or encouragement? Oh, they like poking into that sort of thing. Some people are made that way. Perhaps. But then, don't you be too sure. If you have ever tried your hand yourself at any kind of apostolic work you will have experienced at times a sense of nausea and an almost irresistible inclination to pitch it aside. Specious arguments will force themselves upon you - why should you be slaving like this when you could be having a good time at the pictures or at a dance; why should you bother, when nobody else seems to care? It may be desperately hard to keep going, but the right word spoken by the right person in face of just such a temptation to discouragement makes all the difference and you embark once more with renewed zest on God's fine work. "Only God knows what a splendid tonic is a kind word."

Is Tea Ready?

Your little girl aged six brings home her exercise and waits eagerly till you return after your day's work. She has secured full marks - a large ten out of ten, written across the page in characters unmistakable, and by the principal teacher's own hand, too. The child runs delightedly to show it to you the moment she hears your latchkey click in the hall door. In itself it is of small importance but it assumes huge dimensions in the child's little world. And you, the father, how do you regard it? Oh, you are tired, or preoccupied, or worried about that deal. You scarcely look at the open page, hand it back to the child, tell her to run off and play, and call to your wife to ask if tea is ready! And away goes the little girl - on the verge of tears, I'm afraid. You forgot the tiny word of appreciation and encouragement which would have made all the difference.

And yes, your excellent wife has the tea ready, and has secured by fair means or foul a very limited supply of real white flour. Here is a sight in these days, this beautiful white loaf waiting to be eaten. But you make no comment on it. You do not seem to notice, or if you do, perhaps it is only to say that it tastes insipid, and that you prefer the brown! She may make no reply, but I'm thinking there is a soreness felt somewhere all the same. And, woman of the house, for goodness sake do not choose this moment to broadcast your woes. If the maid has given notice, this is not the time to tell him; if you have felt the day long and lonely and had been looking forward to a happy gathering in the evening which now is clearly "off," wait till another time to say so; and let me implore you not to nag - at any time at all - but especially this evening. If nagging is objectionable in ordinary circumstances, it would be nothing short of calamitous tonight. Some wives are utterly tactless and for them this little word of warning is spoken. Of course you never nag, so you don't need it!

You missed the last tram the other night and you had to walk home. You are annoyed about it too, for the night was bitterly cold and the rain heavy.

The Last Tram

As you pick your way in high dudgeon through the muddy streets you come upon this little wooden hut, and inside a poor man smoking his pipe. He is going to sit here all night in the cold taking charge of this engine drawn up on the side of the street. Hundreds pass him up and down, stare curiously for a moment and walk on. Suppose you stopped and said a

kindly word? But why, and when I'm in so bad a mood and in a hurry? "You did it to Me."

The inclination is strong to go on illustrating ways and means of putting in a word of encouragement. But what about shortage of paper, and there is still much to try to fit into our booklet? What has been said will be suggestive we hope, and above all never lose sight of the motive. Keep your eye on the label.

So let me round off this section by adding: Your husband has taken the pledge and kept it for three months. Now Christmas is drawing perilously near, so say your word of praise and encouragement. He has taken to going to daily Mass and Holy Communion and has joined the Sodality: tell him of the joy you feel. Your wife is wearing a new pullover, knitted by herself, or she has put up new curtains, or black-leaded the range, or painted the windows - oh, notice it and tell her so. Say she is a marvel to have been able to secure the paint at such a small cost, or the thread when you were assured it was impossible to buy, or that those lovely curtains give such a cheery aspect to the room. In a word, be on the lookout for your opportunities and you will find them crowding into your day. Do not omit the word of encouragement through thoughtlessness.

There is yet a third reason why it is left unsaid. You tell me you do not want to give so-and-so a "swelled head"; you want to "take him down a peg"; he needs it badly; everyone knows he is a bit of a bounder. Well, do they know, I wonder? Once again recall what we have just been saying about the struggles people have to keep going, the strong tendency to lose heart and consider that effort is useless. Often the "bounder" attitude may be only a smoke screen to conceal all this.

Look Both Ways

Remember too that if there is a danger of puffing up one person with pride there is another even more fatal in its consequences. That is, that enormous good work may never be touched simply because those eager and willing to do it are not encouraged. There is a real danger that zeal will cool down in this frigid atmosphere. People who once were on fire degenerate into cynics, Idealism wilts. Potential giants shrink into pigmies, like Alice in Wonderland. Atrophy and indifference and callousness, worldliness even - all these are the sad effects often resulting from want of encouragement. We are not saying that such a reaction is justifiable, but it is very intelligible. We do not want to maintain that zeal for souls should be dependent on the poor small word of encouragement you or I can give. Perhaps it shouldn't be, but in actual practice aren't there many excellent works never undertaken, thwarted, abandoned, simply because those willing and capable received no encouragement or inspiration?

We have thus touched upon three reasons why the word of encouragement is left unsaid - jealousy, thoughtlessness, and fear of puffing up with pride. There does not seem to be much to say in favour of any of the three, and I can think of no others. If you can, please send them along and we shall have much pleasure in bombarding them together.

Cardinal Wiseman

On the other hand, look at what a word of encouragement can do. I have just been reading Mr. Denis Gwynn's new book *The Second Spring*. In the first chapter he gives an account of the entry into the English College in Rome of a quiet unassuming student. The young man was devoted to his work and he settled down with earnestness to prepare himself for the priesthood. Fortunately he met with encouragement. Mgr. Mai, Prefect of the Vatican Library, took the young man up. At twenty-three he was appointed Professor of Oriental languages, and at twenty five he was Rector of the College! Later he became Cardinal Wiseman, the leader of the Hierarchy on its restoration in England. His colossal work for religion must be read elsewhere. For the moment the question that concerns us is: Suppose he had *not* been encouraged, would the Church ever have been adorned with his virtues and learning, and would he ever have been God's instrument for the salvation and sanctification of so many souls? Other examples spring readily to the mind. Ignatius encouraged Xavier and he became a giant amongst missionaries. Claver, encouraged by Rodriguez, became the apostle of the negroes. It is surely a mighty stimulus to realize the power we can wield by saying a kindly word. And to realize thus is also a warning, for who can estimate the good that may be left undone through the lack of it? "Kind words... they are cheap, and God only knows what a splendid tonic is a kind word."

In this, as in much else, we might well take a page from the enemy's volume. Have you ever noticed how Christ's foes support each other? An absurd theory is advanced - it is written up and applauded on all sides. An attack on religion is launched - they haven't any decent argument to put forward and they know it. But just the same they are four square and dare anyone to oppose them! And here are we Catholics, with all the magnificent heritage of our catholic Faith, with our feet planted firmly on the solid rock of truth - why on earth cannot we too stand shoulder to shoulder and support each other? "A brother that is helped by a brother is like a strong city."

It is bad enough to refuse to say the generous word but we have still to notice the positive ways by which the tongue can be used to offend against the great commandment.

I Told You So

The type of man who studiously avoids saying the word of encouragement is often the very one who waxes most eloquent if you happen to fail. For many years you have been working away in your St. Vincent de Paul Society, or in your Legion Praesidium, or in your Sodality of Our Lady. But, God help you, you are, it may be, growing weary in your well-doing and you begin to show signs of taking things easy. At once this type becomes surprisingly wide-awake. Having sat back placidly himself all the time he now bestirs himself to take the floor and proceeds to explain that he saw you would not last. You were aiming at too much, weren't you? He knew all along and often told you so. Why *must* people talk in this strain? Blind they seemed to be and dumb as long as everything was going well with you. Did anyone mention your good work they would smile knowingly as though to impress you with their own prudence and superior knowledge. And now make the smallest slip, or fail to rise to your best, and what an awakening from slumber and what a chorus of comment!

What are we to say about gossiping? So much there is to say that the subject would require a booklet of its own. Have you ever had an experience like this: A new employer is going to take over, or a new neighbour is moving into your district, or a new priest is coming to the parish. Before ever you meet the newcomer you are prejudiced against him. Why? Because of the gossip's tongue. Newcomer starts life with a big handicap, and it is only by degrees, when you have made personal contact, that you begin to discover that the tale spread about him was twisted out of all recognition. Lucky if even after a time you do come to see, for often the gossip has done irreparable harm. And that is done to Christ. "As long as you did it to one of these... you did it to Me."

Gossip's Tongue

Or you have a lifelong friend, or even it may be a devoted wife or husband, and once again the gossip's tongue begins to wag. You are indignant that any aspersion should be cast upon your friend and you are perfectly furious at the suggestion that the wife or husband you love is not everything you believe them to be. You repudiate the idea at once, but for all that, damage has been done, and with an insidiousness that might almost be called diabolical. For, in spite of yourself, you may find yourself dwelling in thought on the accusation and half wondering to yourself if, after all, there could be any truth in it. Once more let gossip come forward and listen to Our Lord charging him or her with doing this evil to Him. "I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest." Let gossip walk around the stations of the cross and watch those executioners scourging Christ, nailing Christ, jeering at Him in His agony. And let them listen to the words on those dying lips, as, with eyes fixed upon them He complains: "*You are doing this to Me.*"

Are you a good mimic? You possess a dangerous gift and beware how you use it. "But 'tis only a bit of fun." Certainly I'm quite prepared to believe it, and we all need the lighter side of life. But your little bit of fun ceases to be funny if it begins to give pain. And even though the others laugh at the time, in their hearts they do not like you any better for what they recognize as not being quite fair. Moreover they have a lurking suspicion in their hearts that when they are absent your gift may be used against themselves, and the suspicion is not going to do you any good.

Beware of Sarcasm

Can you say sarcastic things? And sarcastic things that are really clever? Do not try to persuade me that he or she needs it badly, that it will do them good that it is high time they were put in their place. I'm exceedingly doubtful if sarcasm ever does anyone any good - either you who indulge in it, or he or she who is the victim of it. On the other hand I do know very well that it has crushed and nearly broken entirely the spirit of the one towards whom it was directed. It stings, and often with a poisonous fang. Did you ever receive a letter which caused you great annoyance? You asked for a favour and you have been refused, and curtly. You sent a query and the answer tells you, in so many words, to mind your own business. You have done a piece of work, of whatsoever nature, upon which your heart was set, and this letter turns it into ridicule. What is nature's reaction? To seize your pen and write back a "snorter"? If you do, you will probably live to regret it. Instead, wait a while. Put the offending document into your desk until tomorrow, and do not think too much about it meantime. You will be surprised how the hard expressions it contains will seem to mellow overnight. Or, if you must write on the spur of the moment, all right, do so. But do not, on any account, post your letter for twenty-four hours. By that time you will probably consign it to the wastepaper basket. And, even at the risk of wearing you with my reiterations, keep your eye on the label. Remember *why*.

Keep Trying

In general, let adverse comment pass you by. If you write a reply unaffected kindness the recipient will probably think you a nincompoop and imagine you did not see through his irony. What about that? Let all such things be. They are not worth a fraction of the time and the energy you will expend in trying to explain them. If you can train yourself to leave them alone you may safely promise yourself immense peace of soul. You expect encouragement and you find apathy. You look for sympathy and you meet with cynicism or open hostility. You crave for a word of understanding when you are weary, or lonely, or timid, or a failure, and instead you receive blame or a sneer. Never mind, The only form of pity to exclude from your life is self-pity. Keep going. Keep trying. Let me implore you not to give up your efforts merely because they are not appreciated. Once again the label will tell you why.

Speaking of Yourself

It is sound advice to warn you to be chary, very chary of speaking about yourself. You know the type whose only subject of conversation seems to be that difficult person in the home, and who treats you on every possible occasion to lengthy documented accounts of the little squabbles and misunderstandings. To talk like that is not charity - it is not fair to the person you speak to nor to the one you speak about. You know the man, and you have probably learned to dread his appearance, who at the slightest provocation buttonholes you and tells you all about his pains and aches, whose only way of being happy seems to consist in a determination to be miserable! He tells you today that the weather is killingly oppressive and next month, from the depths of his overcoat, he groans about the blasts of the east wind. Last week he gave you a dismal record of his sleepless nights and today he assures you that the war bread is driving him, surely, if slowly, to a premature grave. And, the Lord forgive you, perhaps you are tempted to pray that it may be not too slowly!

If you are wise to say little about your ills, you will be wiser still to say nothing at all about your successes. St. Francis de Sales has a forcible passage warning you how easy it is to develop pride if you speak much about the good you do, under whatsoever pretext. And in any case the rest of us, who are perhaps just muddling through, may be discouraged or may even have difficulty in controlling our jealousy.

A Strong Motive

It is a useful exercise to try, occasionally, to write a letter without employing the personal pronoun. A most powerful motive for charity in word in all these ways is reparation for the sins committed - by the tongue, especially today. Think of all the hatred expressed and stirred up by those vitriolic speeches you hear on your radio; think of all the blasphemies uttered against God and the divinity of Our Lord, think of the grossly immoral stories, the lies, the misuse of the Sacred Name so constantly current - for all this your care to fulfil the great commandment, especially in your use of words, is going to make some reparation. Once again you see that there are diamonds for your eternal crown strewn across your path. Do not miss them.

Acts. - There are a few hard or unpleasant things to be set forth about "works of charity" so let us get them said at once and finish with them. We saw that it is bad enough to speak disparagingly about works of zeal or to ignore another's efforts in a stony silence. But what is to be said of those who positively and effectively oppose the doing of good? It would be impossible to imagine this opposition on the part of excellent people, especially in its extreme forms, were there not indisputable facts to prove it. You see that something needs to be done and you are more than willing to undertake it. But your hands are tied. There is a stumbling block right across your path. You are definitely told that the scheme is to be dropped, or that the room is not to be rented for that purpose, or that the man necessary for the success of your venture is not to be approached.

And why? Let us try to be very fair and readily admit that often there may be reasons which you do not see and which cannot be explained to you. Your scheme would, perhaps, be in the way of another one which will give more glory to God. Or if that room was lent to you there would immediately be impossible complications which you do not foresee. Or if that man was permitted to help you there would be not end of trouble with his employer or his family or too severe a drain on his purse.

But...

Are there not cases where that explanation could be given instead of a monosyllabic refusal? And if you were allowed to see the difficulty, might not there be some chance of removing it? And even if there were no such chance would you not be encouraged to keep up your efforts for souls when you see that the refusal this time is inevitable and made with a good grace?

The Curt Refusal

Again. Are there not cases where the flat refusal is given for no reason at all? "It's not to be done and no more about it!" I admit that I have been told this sort of thing by zealous Catholic Actionists and with deep regret I saw the strong inclination to cease trying. No, that is not right. They should not cease trying, but if they do you find it hard to blame them. And would you or I like to be the one who would face the Almighty and explain to Him as explain we must, *why* we had hindered His good work from flourishing? "You did it to Me." Did we think remotely of His glory and the salvation of souls when we gave our peremptory refusal? Once again was our motive pride or jealousy? Was the other person's zeal a censure on our own apathy? Now is the time to put ourselves these questions and face up to the answers, for we have only one life and we shall not be passing this way again.

Our Lord has a frightening sentence which is worthwhile pondering in this connection: "Woe to you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you yourselves do not enter in, and those who are going in, you suffer not to enter." It is bad enough to be indifferent yourself to His interests, but it is little short of criminal to oppose effectively, without sound reasons, those who are eager to throw themselves into the Cause. And it is a fact that this is done, and done with calamitous and irreparable loss to souls.

Rolling Away the Stone

"Who will roll us back the stone?" How are you going to overcome unreasonable opposition in cases where its removal is imperative if good work is to go ahead? Well, I have known apostolic men and women to allow the impression that they wanted to do the direct opposite of what they really desired in their hearts. Why? Because, as surely as they took up one side, the opposing stone would roll to the other! I have met zealous folk who permitted it to be believed that the magnificent scheme they had thought out was all the work of another. Why? Because that was the only way of inducing the other to give a sanction that was indispensable! I can recall a friend of mine once telling me, long ago, that he allowed himself to be beaten at a game of billiards in order to win the favour of a man whose co-operation was necessary for good work. And the ruse worked perfectly! A sprinkling of the wisdom of the serpent makes excellent seasoning for the simplicity of the dove.

But with all your wisdom and tact, there will be times, I'm afraid, when the stone is impossible to move. It is not right, though, to acquiesce in this state of things at once. God's work thrives on opposition, and nobody ever did anything worthwhile for souls by running away from difficulties. Obstacles exist, not to be meekly tolerated but to be dynamited, once you are sure that they are unreasonable. Obstacles exist, for we are short-sighted creatures, even the best of us, and the enemy is everlastingly on the prowl. Obstacles exist, but don't you be the one to raise them or to multiply them. Obstacles exist, but often the best course is not to charge at them, but to employ a little tact which has proved effective in the case of others and may prove so in yours also. I fervently hope it may. "O God," runs the fine prayer, "save me from the calm of the desert and the peace of cowards."

The Gloss on the Apple

It is well to guard against hindering, not only the starting of good works but their perfection too. Anything done in fulfilling the great commandment should be made to yield the maximum of glory to God. You are a member of a sewing guild because you want to help the poor. Excellent, but do not vitiate your fine work by talking uncharitably while you ply the needle. You are gifted with a glorious voice and you take part in your parish choir. Why? To sing God's praises, presumably, to lift up your soul to Him by a prayerful and reverent rendering of the sublime hymns and canticles of Holy Church. Once more congratulations, but do not spoil your undertaking by chatter and gossip, even during the Holy Sacrifice, and by your silly sniggering in the Presence. You wash up dishes after the free breakfasts or penny dinners, you make beds at the hostel - well done, but let me remind you that there are some who must be selfish even in their good works. *They* must be in the limelight. *They* must have *their* way. *They* will work with this person but refuse to work with this other. And dare anyone make a suggestion to them! What a pity to take the gloss off the apple!

You are running a bazaar or a fete, or a sale of work. Why? Oh, for God's glory, of course. You are helping to build a Church or collecting funds for the foreign missions. Splendid, but beware lest you be inordinately anxious that you should head the list, that your stall should outshine all the others, or your entry win first prize. Healthy competition is all right, of course, and lends spice to your work, but easily enough it could degenerate into a petty jealousy or pride which would rob you of much merit..

Do not scowl if your wife asks you to post her letter and to wait ten minutes till she finishes it. You may as well do the thing graciously. If you give your friend a present of a pair of gloves, do not say, every time you meet him, in the

presence of others: "So this is the little Christmas box sent you! " You know perfectly well how annoying it is if you ask: "Is this what you bought with the pound I lent you last week?" And do not tell me: "Yes, Mr. So-and-So certainly is very generous in giving to charities, but then I may say between ourselves that it mightn't do to enquire too closely into how he made his money." Or, "Mrs. Up-the-Street seems a very religious woman; at Holy Communion every morning; but did you never hear that she leads her unfortunate husband a dog's life?" Be chary of the "buts" in contexts like these. These are other ways of taking the gloss off the apple.

Your Failures

It is hard to accept the failure of good work. You are all keyed up about zeal in your classroom, and a bolt from the blue sends you into other spheres, far removed from the scene of your fruitful labours. You had so much trouble in acquiring those premises for your club and furnishing them, but now, thank God, all is doing well. And the next night a fire breaks out or a bomb drops and in half an hour your grand work is a heap of ashes. A girl you had rescued had apparently made a break with her sinful past and you rejoice to know how well she is doing. And today's post brings you a letter to say that she has gone back again into her old haunts!

That is the sort of thing that often happens in apostolic work. You bestir yourself and try to get going, and you end, it seem, nowhere. What's the use? Listen. No work can possibly fail if it be undertaken sincerely for God's glory and the good of souls. Tell me, was there much visible result to show from the life of Mary of Nazareth, or for that matter from the life of Our Lord Himself? Mary lived in hiddenness, and Jesus her Son died a disgrace and a "failure" on Calvary. And often He would seem to allow excellent work to fall through to make you and me understand that it is not so much *what* we do He regards, as *why* we do it.

So remember if you cannot do anything spectacular that your ordinary humdrum day is teeming with little opportunities. To open a door for another, to place the chair for father or mother, to pass the salt, to lend your penknife or fountain pen, to raise your hat - trifles if you like, but who can gainsay their immense value if they are super-naturalized? "You have done it to Me."

Good Manners

This is the place to fit in a word about good manners. Here is a line from a letter lying before me: "I'm taking the liberty of asking your advice on... the appalling lack of good manners in general, and of table manners in particular." Does this "appalling lack" exist? Let us begin with ourselves. How often do we use the word "please" and "thanks"? And teach them to the children? It seems to me that there is no more effective remedy for bad manners than a deepening of our understanding of the motive that has been stressed throughout these pages. "As I long as you did it to one of these... you did it to Me."

For an inspiring account of works of zeal carried on right in our midst, I refer you to the article by Fr. Burke-Savage, S.J., in the *Irish Jesuit Directory* for 1941. In this "Sodality Odyssey" the author takes you for a trip, first round the Dublin Sodalities, and thence up and down the country, and gives you a glimpse of what the Sodality is doing in the field of Catholic Action in Ireland. We say "a glimpse" because we remember that there are 800 Sodalities with 50,000 members.

Or some day you may be privileged to look into the records of a St. Vincent de Paul Conference and to see what is being done, in practical ways, by that fine body, to help the poor who take the place of Christ.

Or you may dip into any issue of *Maria Legionis*, the organ of the Legion of Mary, and if you do, you are going to be heartened by accounts of splendid achievements in fulfilment of the great commandment.

"Who is My Neighbour"

Most important of all it is, however, that you should yourself be practical and see if you cannot find good work waiting for you to do in one or other of these associations. They clamour for volunteers and they assure you there is work for all. "Who is my neighbour?" Our Lord was asked, and He told the story of the Good Samaritan, and put His own question: "Who was neighbour to him who fell among the robbers"? The answer was obvious: "The neighbour was not the priest or the levite who passed the wounded man by. The neighbour was the Samaritan who proved his charity by his deeds."

What a world it would be if men took the great commandment seriously! I need not point out that it is just because it is ignored that we have chaos on every side. The restoration of the world must begin by each individual Catholic living a

genuinely Catholic life, and this implies, as is abundantly clear from all we have been saying, that we labour to reduce to practice, in great things and in small things, the lofty principle which lies at the basis of the structure. "You did it to Me." If He says that to you and me at the end we can look Him in the face full of confidence, for the words are a guarantee and a promise that our luggage has arrived safely, conveyed thither by the label which marked it all along the way as belonging to Him.