

Notes On Ephesians 1:15-23

4. ST. PAUL GIVES THANKS FOR THE PAST BENEFITS GIVEN TO THE EPHESIANS, AND PRAYS FOR MORE

15, 16. Wherefore I also hearing of your faith that is in the Lord Jesus, and of your love towards all the Saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making commemoration of you in my prayers.

From the fact that St. Paul says he has heard of the faith of those he was addressing, some have doubted whether this letter was written to the Ephesians, who without question were his own con-

Continued next page

verts. But there seems to be nothing solid in the objection; for St. Paul does not say that he has heard of their conversion, but of their faith, which, as he had been absent for a considerable time, can without the least difficulty be understood of perseverance in the faith.

We learn from verse 15 that charity and good works are the signs of the true life of faith, for without them faith is idle, useless, and dead. As we judge of the vitality of the body from the pulse, so can we estimate the life of faith by the amount and energy of charity and good works.

St. Paul also here implies that faith and charity are gifts of God's grace. We thank God for gifts bestowed by His mercy, and we should have no need to thank Him if they were our own by right, or could be acquired by our own efforts. Nor need we pray for them, if without God we could have them. "Prayer," says St. Augustine, "is the most clear witness to grace. What more foolish than to pray that we may be able to do what we can do of ourselves?"

Moreover, St. Paul teaches us that we ought to thank God for the good that others have received from Him, as well as to pray for them, especially in the case of Pastors giving thanks for their flock.

I cease not. "Never was anything equal to the yearnings of the Apostle; never anything like the sympathy and the affectionateness of the blessed Paul, who made his prayer in behalf of whole cities

and peoples, and writes the same to all, I thank my God for you, making mention of you in my prayers. Think how many he had in his mind, whom it were a labour so much as to remember; how many he made mention of in his prayers, giving thanks to God for them all, as though he himself had received the greatest blessing" (St. John Chrys., Hom. iii. in *Eph.*, Oxford Trans. Compare Rom. i. 9; 1 Cor. i. 4; Phil. i. 3, 4, etc.).

17, 18. That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of Wisdom and of revelation, in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your heart enlightened that you may know what the hope is of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the Saints.

The Father of glory means the author of glory, and of our glorious redemption in Christ. In Hebrew the word Father often stands for Author or Producer, *e.g.* Job xxxviii. 28, "Who is the Father of the rain?" that is, the one whose power causes the rain. St. Paul has no name, says St. John Chrysostom, by which he may represent the mysteries and secrets of which we are partakers, so he calls them **glory**, "which is in fact with us the name and appellation of every kind of magnificence."

The Apostle here prays that God would vouchsafe to pour out on the Ephesians two of the gifts of the

Holy Ghost, wisdom and knowledge. God alone can give true wisdom: "Who shall know Thy thought unless Thou give wisdom, and Thy Holy Spirit from above?" (Wisd. ix. 17). He also asks that the gift of knowledge may be bestowed on them, calling it the spirit of revelation, in order that they might have an exalted idea of God's goodness to them. The light necessary to see supernatural truths comes from God, the Father of Light, and therefore we should earnestly pray for it, remembering that the "sensual (or natural) man perceiveth not the things that are of the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. ii. 14).

The eyes of your heart. The heart, both in the Old and New Testament, often means not only the affections, but also the thought or the intellectual powers (Gen. vi. 5; viii. 21; Exod. xxxi. 6; Rom. i. 21, etc.). He prays therefore that their minds may be enlightened by the gifts of wisdom and understanding that they may see the immense dignity to which they are called. By the gift of understanding the Holy Ghost not only enables the soul to realise more clearly to what we are called, but bestows upon us a firm hope of attaining to our supernatural end, and raises us up to aspire to union with God as His adopted children. This hope is the "anchor of the soul, sure and firm" (Heb. vi. 19). The Apostle's desire is that we may know more fully and perfectly how truly wonderful are those blessings we hope for in Christ; how rich, how magnificent is the inherit-

ance of heavenly glory promised by God to the **saints**, that is, to all Christians who live according to the teaching and example of Christ. When the eyes of the heart are thus enlightened, a man will gladly give up all for God.

The exaltation of Christ is the pattern of ours.

19, 21. **And what is the exceeding greatness of His power* towards us, who believe according to the operation of the might of His power, which He hath wrought in Christ, raising Him up from the dead, and setting Him on His right hand in heavenly places, above all principality and power and virtue and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.**

I pray also, says St. Paul, that the Father of Light may enlighten you to understand the supreme excellence of that power by which God, operating according to the might of His power, makes us believe, yet leaves our liberty intact. The wonderful power of God towards us, who believe according to the operation of the might of His power, is also proved

* *Greatness of His power, etc.* St. John Chrysostom, and after him Cornelius à Lapide, places the comma after the word "believe," thus joining it with the preceding words, and explaining it all of the power God displays in calling us to the faith. But, writes Drach, the next verse shows it should be understood of the power exhibited in the Resurrection. This is the reading of St. Thomas, Cajetan, Estius, Bisping, and others.

from the fact that He enables so vast a multitude to believe truths so difficult and so far removed above human reason, and to believe them so firmly that they are willing to sacrifice everything the world can give, yea, life itself, for the truth of God's faith, and in hope of the eternal though invisible Life He has promised.

How exceeding great and worthy of all praise is that power which, without taking away the liberty of the will of man, yet by its mighty operation makes a good will where there was malice, an obedient will where there was stubborn resistance, and loving hearts out of enemies.

In verse 20 the Apostle proceeds to speak of the power displayed by God in the supreme exaltation of Christ as Man; and brings this as a proof of the mighty things which that same power can, and if we are faithful, will do for us, vile and miserable as of ourselves we are. The righteousness of Christ is the model or pattern of ours; and so also His glory and exaltation indicate to us what ours will be. For He is our Head, we His Members. So, says the Apostle, according to the operation of the might of His power which He wrought in Christ, will He also exalt us (cf. Phil. iii. 21). In many other places are we taught that we shall become participators in the glory of Christ. For instance, "If we suffer with Him *it is* that we may be also glorified with Him" (Rom. viii. 17).

Then St. Paul proceeds to describe the exaltation

of Christ as Man, by the might of His Father's power, and mentions three points:—

1. His passage from death to life.
2. His exaltation to the highest glory.
3. The highest degree of power being bestowed upon Him.

1. **Raising Him up from the dead.** Christ, as God, raised Himself from the dead, as He Himself declared, saying, "I lay down My life that I may take it again . . . I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it up again" (John x. 17, 18). But as Man, Christ owed the glory of His Resurrection to the power of His Father. "If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead be with you, He that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead will quicken also your mortal bodies" (Rom. viii. 11).

2. **Setting Him on His right hand.** The glory and exaltation of Christ, as Man, may be considered under three different points of view, mentioned here by the Apostle, namely: (*a*) in relation to God; (*b*) in relation to created things in the material world; (*c*) in relation to spiritual created natures.

(*a*) In relation to God, the glory bestowed upon Christ, as Man, consists in this, that the Father has set Him at His own right hand (compare Col. iii. 1; Heb. x. 12; 1 Peter iii. 22). This expression, familiar to us in the Creeds and *Te Deum*, is of course metaphorical, implying that Christ, in His Human Nature, possesses in heaven the highest

possible participation in the attributes of the Godhead. He promises the same, in a certain measure, to us His members in those magnificent words: "To him that shall overcome, I will give to sit with Me in My throne: as I also have overcome, and have sat down with My Father, in His throne" (Apoc. iii. 21). As God, the glory of Christ is manifestly equal to that of the Father, for they are the same in Nature.

(b) In relation to created things of the material world it is said that our Lord, as Man, is raised into **the heavenly places**. As, says St. Thomas, the heavenly bodies hold the highest place in relation to other bodies, this expression implies that He is exalted above every created material thing (Eph. iv. 10).

(c) In relation to created spiritual natures, St. Paul says, in verse 21, that Christ, as Man, is exalted "above all principality, and power, and virtue, and dominion"; and further, above "every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." He therefore declares that Christ, as Man, is exalted above every other created spiritual nature in general.

Out of the nine choirs of Angels, the Apostle here mentions four by name—the Principalities, Powers, Virtues, and Dominions. Above these are the Cherubim and Seraphim and Thrones; below, the Archangels and Angels.

The reason St. Thomas assigns for the mention of

these four particular choirs* is that their names express the dignity of their offices in the world of creation, and the Apostle desires to show that Christ, as Man, is exalted above the whole of creation, and all those of whatever rank or dignity that rule in creation. Further, the Apostle says in general terms that Christ is exalted above **every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come**, meaning that not only was He, as Man, raised above the particular choirs just specified, but above every other created spiritual nature, whether their names are already known to us here, or will only be revealed to us in the life to come. The Divine Nature is not included in those things that are named either here or hereafter.

Our present knowledge, feeble and limited as it is, enables us to understand many of God's works, to name and classify them; but how immense must be the multitude of things about which we have

* There is a slight variation of order in the names of the nine choirs in the works of Dionysius and St. Gregory. The former, or the author of the works under his name, enumerates them thus:—

First Hierarchy,	(1) Seraphim,	(2) Cherubim,	(3) Thrones.
Second „	(4) Dominations,	(5) Virtues,	(6) Powers.
Third „	(7) Principalities,	(8) Archangels,	(9) Angels.

This order agrees with the text under consideration.

St. Gregory enumerates them thus:—

I.	(1) Seraphim,	(2) Cherubim,	(3) Thrones.
II.	(4) Dominations,	(5) Principalities,	(6) Powers.
III.	(7) Virtues,	(8) Archangels,	(9) Angels.

This order is founded on Colossians i. 16.

no kind of knowledge whatever, and therefore cannot even name. Even if we were able to bring every science to perfection, after the telescope, microscope, and every other instrument of scientific research had revealed all their wonders, we should even then be obliged to say, This is but the beginning of His ways. We see but one ray of His light. For, however far human science may progress, it will always remain true that in this mortal life "we know only in part" (1 Cor. xiii. 12). "For the corruptible body is a load upon the soul . . . and hardly do we guess aright at things that are upon the earth; and with labour do we find out the things that are before us. But the things that are in heaven, who shall search out?" (Wisd. ix. 16). If, then, we are now justly astounded at the marvels that science unfolds, what will be the ecstasy of our minds when "that which is perfect is come"; when we see no longer "through a glass in a dark manner, but face to face" (1 Cor. xiii. 12), in the full light of the Face of God, in that city that needs not the light of the sun, "for the glory of God hath enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof" (Apoc. xxi. 23). Of such wonders did St. Paul speak when he tells us that in heaven he heard "secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter" (2 Cor. xii. 4). In like manner St. Thomas Aquinas towards the end of his life was favoured with a marvellous rapture during Mass, after which he wrote no more. Being asked the reason, he replied, "After what I have seen all

I have written or could write appears to me as nothing."

Above all these secret things, Christ, as Man, has been exalted: "He hath given Him a Name that is above all names" (Phil. ii. 9).

22, 23. **And He hath subjected all things under His feet, and hath made Him head over all His Church, which is His Body, and the fulness of Him Who is filled all in all*** (compare Ps. viii. 8).

Here St. Paul repeats that Christ, in His human nature, has been raised to the highest possible power and dominion, first over all created things in general, and then over the Church in particular.

God the Father hath made all, angels and men, good and bad, animate and inanimate—in fact, every created thing subject to the power, rule, and sway of our Lord, as Man. **He hath put all things under His feet** may be taken simply as a figurative expression of the complete subjection of all things to the authority of Christ, as nothing can be more under our power than what we trample upon with our feet. Of this our Lord spoke when He said, "All power is given to Me in Heaven, and upon earth" (Matt. xxviii. 18; comp. Heb. ii. 8). Or the phrase **under His feet** may be understood metaphori-

* The R.V. has: "And he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

cally to denote that all things are subjected to Christ, not only as God, but also as Man. The feet are the lowest part of the body and the head the highest, and though the divine and human natures in Christ are not like parts of a material body, still, by a metaphor, the divine nature can be called the head—"The head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. xi. 3)—and the human nature can be metaphorically called the feet. Thus understood, the words would mean that God the Father has subjected all things to Christ as Man.

All things indeed, but in different ways; some willingly, others unwillingly. Origen argued from this passage against eternal punishment: he contended that those that are subject to Christ are saved; and the Apostle declares that all things will be subject to Christ, therefore all will be saved. The answer to this sophism is that salvation depends on the way in which we are subject to Christ. If willingly, by love, He is our salvation; if unwillingly, to the glory of His justice, we shall be lost. The righteous who in this life subject themselves to Christ and do His Will, in the next life will be subject to Him that He may in all things fulfil their will and desire, as the Holy Ghost says, "To the just their desire shall be given" (Prov. x. 24.) But others will be subjected under His feet, as criminals before their judge, that God's just will may be done in them (comp. Luke xix. 27).

He hath made Him Head over all His Church.

Here St. Paul proceeds to describe the peculiar subjection of the Church to Christ, as the body to the head. He is Head of all the Church, both militant and triumphant. He is Head of the angels as well as of men in the sense of being pre-eminently exalted, in His human nature, above them all, and as being the source of grace communicated to them; but as far as the title "Head" implies conformity of nature, Christ is not Head of the angels but only of men, for He assumed not the angelic but human nature. "To which of the angels has He said at any time, Thou art my Son?" (Heb. i. 5; Ps. ii. 7).

The Church is the Body of Christ, because it is subject to Him as the body is to the head; because it receives divine influence from Him, as the bodily members receive vital movement from the brain, and die instantly if separated from the head; because in nature it is conformed to Christ, as Man, as the head is the same nature as the body (Rom. xii. 4, 5; 1 Cor. xii. 12).

How can the Church be called **the fulness of Christ**? Is not Christ, it may be objected, full of all perfection without the Church; is it not He Who imparts to the Church all her perfection? To answer this difficulty we must consider the relation of a body to its head. Certainly the body without the head cannot live, but the head is not complete without the body. As the different members, eye, hand, foot, are necessary to complete the body, they are necessary for the head that its office may be perfectly

exercised. If we change the metaphor slightly and consider the soul as head, or moving principle of the bodily members, then, as the body is made for the soul, it may be said to complete the soul, which would not be Man without it.

In like manner with Christ and the Church. As the Church is made for Christ, and instituted on account of Christ, we may rightly say that the Church is the fulness or completion of Christ. In a sense, all those things that are in Christ may be said to find their completion in the members of His body, the Church; for all gifts and graces, whatever, in one word, can be in the Church, are all derived from Christ and find their completion in His members. Our Lord Jesus Christ, as day by day His members increase in number and graces, may be said to be filled up or completed.

“Note here,” writes Cornelius à Lapede, “the union of love between Christ and the Church. For Christ, though in Himself full of every perfection, still considers Himself as if maimed, and like a head deprived of its members, unless He has the Church united to Him as a body with its head. So also Christ is sometimes called the whole Church; for instance, in 1 Corinthians xii. 12. Likewise it is said that we live, grow, act, and suffer in Christ. In the same manner also does the Apostle say that Christ liveth in Him and He in Christ. This explains that saying of Christ, ‘Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?’ From this is all our hope and comfort.”

Who is filled all in all. The meaning is that while He maketh those who are members of the Church wise, holy, etc., according to the perfect wisdom, holiness, etc., which are found in Him, Christ finds His completion under every respect in the members of His Church.