

## HOMILY VII

**B**RETHREN: I pray you not to faint at my tribulations for you: which is your glory. For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened by His spirit with might unto the inward man, that Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts: that being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth: To know also the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge, that you may be filled unto all the fulness of God. Now to Him who is able to do all things more abundantly than we desire or understand, according to the power that worketh in us: to Him be glory in the Church, and in Christ Jesus, unto all generations, world without end. Amen.—EPISTLE, *Eph.* iii. 13-21.

**S**T. PAUL lived three years, from 54 to 57, in Ephesus, a well-known city of Asia Minor, and there founded a flourishing Church, later on governed by the apostle St. John. He went from there to Jerusalem, where he was imprisoned by Felix and subsequently by Portius Festus, and having appealed as a Roman citizen to the tribunal of the Emperor Nero, was thence conducted to Rome. Arriving in Rome, as we learn from the



Acts of the Apostles,<sup>1</sup> he remained there two years, exercising his apostolic ministry as best he could among those with whom he came in contact. According to an ancient and venerable tradition, he abode while there in a house on the site of the present church of *Sta. Maria in via Lata*, on what is now the Corso, in the very heart of modern Rome. From that prison, where he was allowed considerable liberty, he wrote several Letters, known as the Letters of *Captivity*, and one of these is the Letter to the Ephesians, from which are taken the verses just read for you. This is one of the most difficult Letters, both because of the depth of the subject-matter, and of the conciseness and ruggedness of the style; the phrases, too, are half Hebraic, and the digressions sudden and bold.<sup>2</sup> This Letter differs from all his others in this, that there is in it no reference to questions concerning Judaism, but instead he warns the Christians of Ephesus against the empty teachings of the philosophers, then widely diffused among them. And now let us turn to our commentary.

St. Paul after telling his neophytes that the calling of the Gentiles was in a special way committed to him, the least of the faithful, and that he had preached the great mystery of Christ, and had boldly proclaimed it even in Rome, adverts to a

<sup>1</sup>Chap. xxvii, toward the end.

<sup>2</sup>See the beautiful volume of Canon L. Arosio entitled, *The Fourteen Letters of St. Paul*. This is certainly in every sense a work of merit, and would of itself prove that there are still those who are devoted to serious Biblical studies. Had this work appeared in England or Germany, or even in France, it would have sufficed to make a splendid reputation for its very diligent author.



difficulty, which might be a scandal to those recently converted Christians; namely, that because of the Gospel he had been exiled, persecuted, and cast into prison. To remove this scandal from those who had but just given up Paganism and embraced Christianity, he says: "*I pray you not to faint at my tribulations for you,*" as if he would say: "You have received from me the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you have welcomed me among you, and you have believed me to be His apostle, and now seeing me made the object of so much hatred and anger, so furiously mistreated in Jerusalem, and detained in prison here as a malefactor, I would not have you lose heart, or be discouraged, or be tempted to give up your faith, because it may seem to you impossible that the omnipotent God should so forsake His apostles and His Church and permit them to be the sport of wicked and implacable enemies. No, be not discouraged because I have been made to suffer these trials for your sakes and for the faith you now profess: *I pray you not to faint at my tribulations for you.* Instead of being cast down, disheartened, and ashamed at seeing me thus ill-treated and defamed, you should rather glory in it and rejoice: *Which is your glory.* Far from feeling yourselves humiliated in seeing me, your teacher and father, thus fiercely harassed and made as it were the very sweepings of the earth, you should lift up your heads and be proud of it." What elevation of thought! What sublimity of language! St. Paul repeats in his own case what his brother apostles did in theirs, who, after being publicly scourged in Jerusalem, went forth rejoicing that



they had been deemed worthy to suffer for Jesus Christ.

I am quite well aware, my friends, that in these days there are those, and among them even good Christians, who appear to think that the Gospel and the spirit of Christianity have undergone a change since the days of the apostles. They would seem practically to take it for granted that, because Christ triumphed over Judaism and Paganism and set up His Kingdom from one end of the world to the other, they, being His followers and His ministers, should receive only honors and homage, rank and wealth and an abundance of the goods of this world, and if they do not, they are surprised, they complain, they are scandalized, they can not be resigned, and they almost suspect that Christ has failed of His promises. Why should this be? Do they forget the example of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross? of the apostles, who suffered all manner of privations and the most atrocious martyrdom? of all the saints, who followed in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and of His apostles? Do they forget the words of Jesus Christ, repeated in a hundred passages of the Gospel: "*If they have persecuted Me, they will persecute you;*" "*If they have called the good man of the house Beelzebub, much more them of His household;*" "*He who will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me*"? Do they forget the terrible words of St. Paul: "*All who will live godly in Jesus Christ shall suffer persecution*"? Do they think that Jesus Christ came into this world that they might live in ease and pleasure, that they might enjoy



the honors and the glory of this world? To say so would be to transform the Gospel into the Mosaic Law, to destroy outright the example and teaching of Jesus Christ, who came to minister and not to be ministered unto, who by choice took for Himself poverty, humiliations, and the death of the cross. Away, then, with those who would pervert the Gospel of Jesus Christ and enjoy here on earth the happiness which the divine Master promised us only in heaven: "*Rejoice and be glad when they revile and persecute you, because your reward is great in heaven.*"

We have wandered from our commentary; let us now return to it, and listen to the words of St. Paul, who assures the Galatians that, "*For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ.*" That is, for your sakes, that you may not be disheartened at seeing my afflictions, but rather that they may be your boast and comfort, I humbly prostrate myself before the infinite majesty of God, the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Why does St. Paul say that he prostrates himself before the Father, the First Person of the Blessed Trinity? Could he not have said that he prostrates himself before the Son or before the Holy Ghost? Certainly he could have said so, the three divine Persons being perfectly equal and inseparable the one from the other, and the honor given to one being given equally to each of the others, because of the identity or oneness of their nature; but the Apostle wished preferably to name the Father, because in the order of origin the Person of the Father is first, and is the root and fountain of the Son, and together with the Son, is the



root and fountain of the Holy Ghost, and hence in naming the Father, he necessarily indicates the Son, and also the Holy Ghost, who proceeds from both. St. Paul in spirit prostrates himself before the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and the very naming of the Father evokes in the fervid mind of the Apostle another and analogous idea, which calls up a host of thoughts to which he can not help referring in passing and which he sets himself briefly to explain. He says, referring to the Father: "*Of whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named.*" What is the meaning of these words? As the Father, through the generation of the Son, is the Principle without a principle of the Son, and with the Son, through spiration and love is the Principle without a principle of the Holy Spirit, so from Him, as from a supreme and eternal exemplar, the principles of all created things are derived. He does not say, notes St. Jerome, that all paternity is born of God the Father, but that it takes the name of Him, or is constituted by Him, both in heaven and on earth.<sup>1</sup> In heaven, outside of God, there are only angels and saints, and there is there no generation properly so called; but the minds of the angels as of the saints have an order of principle as to their thoughts, their knowledge, and their love; in heaven the angels, belonging to the superior orders, are as principles of light and love relatively to those of inferior orders; on earth men, inasmuch as they are fathers and give life to children, reflect the



infinite paternity of God, the Father; and hence, in a most true sense, that infinite and eternal paternity, which is perfected in the heart of the divine Life, is marvelously and luminously reflected in the likeness of all creatures, material and immaterial, in heaven and on earth: "*Of whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named.*"<sup>1</sup> The vastness and sublimity of the conception are worthy the great apostle.

There prostrate before the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the perennial fountain of all paternity in heaven and on earth, what does St. Paul do? Whosoever prostrates himself before God adores and prays, and so, too, does St. Paul; he prays God that, "*according to the riches of His glory,*" that is, by reason of his exuberant and glorious grace, "*they may be strengthened by His Spirit.*" Or in other words St. Paul says to the Galatians: "I am well aware that the knowledge and the sight of my afflictions and humiliations are a most serious trial to you and a source of scandal, and hence have I besought God that in the abundance of His grace He will powerfully strengthen you with His Spirit, so that you may bear up under the trial and come victorious out of it." And this strengthening force has no reference whatever to the material force of body, of arm, or muscle; it refers solely to the force of mind and will; and it is given that they may be

<sup>1</sup>Philologists observe that the word *paternitas* in the Vulgate, in Greek, is *πατρία*, or *fatherland*, and means *family*, and in a wider sense, *race, people, nation*, etc. Here the word *paternity* is used in the sense of *principle*—relatively to that which is referred to it; in this sense one is said to be the father of his country, the father of poetry, of music, etc.



made strong to cling firmly to the truths they have received and to live a life conformable to them. A man may be very strong in strength of body and very weak in strength of soul; and, conversely, he may be very strong in strength of soul and very weak in strength of body. To take an instance, a Sister of Charity, say, leaves her home and friends, she refuses honorable marriage, takes passage, and is borne away into a strange land; she lives for years and years in a climate that is a perpetual menace to health and life, attending the sick or caring for and teaching abandoned orphans, ready and willing to die for the Faith by the sword of the executioner. She is a woman weak indeed in bodily strength, but strong in spirit. Again, here is a man in the flower of his years, full of life and vigor, but he can not resist the seductive charms of some young woman, he forgets or spurns his marriage vows, he squanders an ample fortune, he indulges in every pleasure, he neglects his children, he can not bear to have any one chide or advise him, he gives free reign to his tongue, he denies himself no gratification. Such a man may have great strength of body, but in spirit he is weak and feeble. It is strength of mind that makes men great and virtuous; but of what use is strength of body? One may be as strong as an ox, as agile as a tiger, as big as an elephant, but all this does not add an iota to his dignity as a man.

The Apostle asks God the Father for another favor for his well-beloved Ephesians, namely, that Christ may abide in their hearts by faith: "*That Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts.*" This



expression needs some explanation. Did St. Paul, in praying that Christ might dwell in the hearts of his children by faith, mean that He might abide there as He does when we receive Him in holy communion? By no means; His presence then within us is sacramental and real. What, then, is meant by this abiding of Christ within us by faith? *Faith*, as here used, means the truths of faith, as taught by Jesus Christ. When the truths taught by Jesus Christ take possession of our minds, when we believe them firmly, when we cling to them tenaciously, and make them the rule of our conduct, then through these truths and in them Jesus Christ Himself dwells within us. When the light of the sun falls upon an object and illuminates it, do we not say that the sun is there? When a man professes to be a disciple of any philosopher, no matter of whom, say of St. Thomas, do we not say that that man carries St. Thomas in his head or in his mind? Do we not read of St. Cecilia that she *carried the Gospel in her heart*, that is, that she kept constantly in her heart the teaching of the Gospel? So you see, my friends, how great and exalted is the dignity of a true and loyal Christian; by believing firmly the teaching of Jesus Christ he in a true sense bears Jesus Christ about within him; Jesus Christ illuminates him, is the guide of his life, the inspiration of his thoughts and affections: "*That Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts.*"

Nor does St. Paul stop here; he prays God the Father to strengthen his children of Ephesus; he prays that Jesus Christ may abide in their minds



and hearts by faith, and finally he prays that they may be rooted and founded in charity: "*That being rooted and founded in charity.*" As you know, my friends, we may profess the Faith pure and undefiled, and yet be destitute of charity; we may believe all the Creed teaches, and our works may contradict our belief. How many believe and live not according to their belief; how many have faith and do not the works of faith? What good is faith without works, or without charity, or the love of God, moving men to put their faith into deeds and to make it real and living, "*the faith that works by charity*"? It is absolutely no good, it is their condemnation. And hence does St. Paul pray God that his beloved Ephesians may not only have Christ dwelling in them by faith, but also and pre-eminently by charity; that they may be deeply rooted and well grounded in charity; for only by the charity that inspires and leads on to works, will Christ dwell perfectly in them and make Himself one with them. Strive then, my friends, to make Christ yours, to have Him abide in you, not by faith alone, but also by charity; profess the Creed but observe the Commandments; to faith join good works, and you will be, as St. Paul elsewhere says, not hearers of the word only, but doers also.

By doing this you will gain another, and a considerable advantage, of which St. Paul tells us in these words: "*That you may be able with all the saints to comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth.*"<sup>1</sup> The four dimen-

<sup>1</sup>The words *scire etiam*, to know also, are, I think, but a repetition of the word *comprehendere*, to comprehend, of the preceding verse. Then the sense is clear and natural.



sions of bodies are here used to express all the measureless greatness of charity, and to make the Ephesians know and comprehend it, as it is known and comprehended by the angels and saints in heaven.<sup>1</sup> This charity, says St. Paul, transcends all knowledge, which is equivalent to saying: Who can ever adequately comprehend the charity that led Christ to suffer and to die for us? This charity of Christ is above and beyond all human knowledge and all the knowledge of the angels and saints in heaven. It has no bounds, either of width, because it embraces all men of whatever race, or rank, or condition; or of length, because it includes all time; or of height, because it transcends all perfection; or of depth, because in its ardor it embraces all and loves all, in heaven and on earth, both men and angels.

In the next verse St. Paul concludes the enumeration of the goods which he prays God to grant to his Ephesians, putting them all into a phrase, Hebraic in form and quite usual with him: "*That you may be filled unto all the fulness of God.*" God is the fulness of all good and of all perfection, as faith and reason teach; and whatever we have, or whatever we can possibly have, all comes to us from Him, and we receive all from His fulness, as St. John says: "*Of His fulness we have all received.*"

<sup>1</sup>No one can comprehend the charity of Christ, this being infinite; and hence in this phrase of St. Paul, *to comprehend* should be taken in a wide sense, meaning *to know*, as it is said immediately after, *to know also*. Some, interpreting these four divisions, have given so many and such diverse explanations of them that we must admire their fecundity and possibly also their eccentricities. Suffice it to say that they have even discovered in those four divisions the *four arms* of the cross to which Christ was affixed!



Any one who attentively reads the writings of St. Paul and meditates upon them, will easily perceive in them a peculiarity, not uncommon with him. When in his unpolished, harsh, and almost fierce fashion, he writes down some powerful phrases, some great and fertile idea, he seems to lose sight of the thread of his reasoning, always vigorous and compact, and to be wholly absorbed in this idea, to be carried away with it, to follow it up, to develop it, and to try to make it clear and luminous. It is a style characteristic of men of highly gifted intellects and warm hearts, who, when truth dawns upon them, are in spite of themselves fascinated by it and enamored of it. Something of this sort happened to St. Paul, after he had written the sentence already quoted: *“That you may be filled with all the fulness of God.”*

Kneeling in the presence of God, of the majesty of the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom comes all fatherhood in heaven and on earth, he prays fervently, earnestly to Him to strengthen his children and to reign in their hearts through faith and charity; he prays that they may know the measureless length and breadth, height and depth of this charity of Christ, that surpasses all understanding, and that they may be filled with the fulness of God; and, while praying, the eye of his mind, illuminated from on high, looks away into the ocean of the divine perfection, contemplates that infinite Being, that center and source of all good, that gives out and yet loses nothing, and, as if carried out of himself, in an ecstasy of gratitude, adoration, and love, he cries out: *“To*



*Him, who is able to do all things more abundantly than we desire or understand, to Him be glory."* This sublime hymn, full of true and exalted poetry, is the crown and complement of the good wishes and prayers that he offered up to God for his children, and in the words: "*Who is able to do all things more abundantly than we desire or understand,*" is revealed the intimate knowledge the Apostle had of God and the limitless trust he placed in his power and goodness.

We can give nothing to God because He has all things and we have nothing of our own; nevertheless, endowed as we are with the great gift of liberty, which we can use as we will, we can feel pleasure in the perfections of God, we can be glad that He has them, and we can say to Him that, were it possible, we would wish to increase them; we can say to Him that we wish and desire to exert ourselves to have all the free wills of men render Him the love and homage that are due Him, and which constitute that external glory which is a faint reflection of that which He has in Himself and which no one can either take from Him or diminish; and we can say with St. Paul: "To Thee, O Lord, be glory;" and this is precisely what Jesus Christ in the *Our Father*, that most excellent of all prayers, teaches us to say: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

To the words: "*To Him (God) be glory,*" the Apostle adds these: "*In the Church, and in Christ Jesus, unto all generations, world without end.*" All creatures are like unto mirrors, more or less



bright and clean; mirrors receive the light of the sun, reflect it back, and, as we should say, increase it, and in a sense show forth the glory of the sun; so also are creatures images, mirrors of the divine perfections, each according to its nature, and, without adding to these perfections, they reflect them, and in a way make them known and increase them by augmenting their imitations. They give glory to God, and the greater the excellence and perfection of the being that gives the glory, the greater will the glory itself be. This being granted, my friends, you understand that the Church is the most stupendous creation, the most perfect work, that ever came from the hands of God, and far surpasses the creation of the universe, because the universe is a kingdom of matter, of corporeal things, whereas the Church is a kingdom of spiritual things, of minds, and of intellects, and hence she should show forth the glory of God above all His other works. Above the Church, again, is her head, the Man-God, Jesus Christ, who embodies in Himself all the perfections of heaven and of earth. He is the masterpiece of the Father's omnipotence and wisdom, of His justice and mercy, and in Him He finds the object of His infinite complacency; in Him His external glory touches its supremest height, so that not even He Himself, omnipotent as He is, could conceive or produce a greater work.

Rightly therefore does St. Paul, in language full of truth and poetry, cry out: "*Glory to God . . . in the Church, and in Christ Jesus unto all generations, world without end. Amen.*"