

Sermon 31, 17-21 (First Sunday in Lent II): The Practice of Love

by Bl. Isaac of Stella

So you see, my dearest brothers, the value of the work of being sober and vigilant against our adversary the devil, as the prince of the Apostles advises the blessed, since the devil wanders around with such diligence, and with such vigilance observes our whole behavior, our way of life, our needs, the weaknesses of body and habit, the sudden and varied coincidences, and the very constitution of our nature, to see if he can find some approach to us somewhere and the material and opportunity for tempting us.

Why are we so little concerned, my brothers, to find opportunities for salvation in each other, such that, where we see a greater need we might in turn offer greater help and bear our brother's burdens for each other? For advising just this, the blessed Apostle says: "Bear each other's burdens, and thus will you fulfill the law of Christ"; and elsewhere: "Bearing each other up in love". This undoubtedly is the law of Christ. Whatever I discern to be incorrigible in my brother, either from his need or from the weakness of his body or habits—why do I not lift it up patiently, why not console him cheerfully, as it is written: "Their children shall be borne on their shoulders and consoled on their knees"? Is it because I lack that which bears all things, which is patient enough to carry, kind enough to love?

This surely is the law of Christ, who truly bore our ills by his Passion and carried our sufferings by his compassion, loving what he bore and bearing what he loved. But he who attacks his brother in need, who lies in wait for his weakness of whatever kind, undoubtedly submits himself to the devil's law and fulfills it.

Videte ergo, dilectissimi, quam sobrios operae pretium habemus esse et vigiles, sicut beatos admonet apostolorum princeps, contra adversarium nostrum diabolum, qui tanta diligentia circuit, tanta vigilantia scrutatur omnem conversationem nostram, vitae modum, necessitates, infirmitates corporum et morum, subitos ac varios eventuum casus ipsasque naturae nostrae complexiones, sicubi de nobis in nos aditum invenire poterit et materiam occasionemque tentandi.

Quare minus solliciti sumus, fratres, occasiones salutis quaerere in alterutrum, ut ubi magis necessarium viderimus, magis invicem subveniamus et alterutrum onera fraterna portemus? Hoc enim admonens, beatus apostolus ait: *Alter alterius onera portate, et sic adimplebitis legem Christi* (Gal 6,2); et alibi: *Supportantes, inquit, invicem in caritate* (Eph 4,2). Ipsa nimirum lex Christi est. Quod in fratre meo aut ex necessitate aut ex infirmitate corporis sive morum incorrigibile cerno, quare non porto patienter, consolor libenter, sicut scriptum est: *Pueri eorum in humeris portabuntur et super genua consolabuntur* (cf. Is 49,22; 66,12)? An quia illa mihi deest quae *omnia suffert*, quae *patiens* est ut portet, *benigna* ut amet (cf. I Cor 13,4-7)?

Haec utique lex Christi est qui vere languores nostros tulit passione et dolores portavit compassione, amans quos portavit, portans quos amavit. Qui autem fratrem in necessitate aggreditur, qui infirmitati eius cuiuscumque generis insidiatur, legi diaboli se procul dubio subdit, et eam implet.

Therefore let us be compassionate with one another, let us be lovers of brotherhood, bearers of infirmities, censurers of vices, especially we few who for the sake of the discipline of our more arduous purpose have come out from the ordinary world into this hidden solitude and distant island. For every practice that quite sincerely seeks the love of God and for His sake the love of neighbor—with whatever observances or custom one lives it—will be more accepted by God. For that practice is love, for the sake of which all things should be either done or not, changed or not. For love indeed is the principle by which and the end to which all things must be directed. For nothing is done culpably which is honestly done for the sake of love and according to love. And the one who has deigned to grant us this is he himself to whom we cannot be pleasing without it, and without whom we can do nothing at all, he who lives and reigns, God for undying ages. Amen.

Compatientes itaque invicem simus et fraternitatis amatores, infirmitatum portatores, vitiorum insectatores, maxime qui pauci propter arduioris propositi disciplinam in hanc abditam solitudinem et semotam ab orbe communi insulam evasimus. Omnis enim disciplina quae caritatem Dei et ob ipsum proximi caritatem sectatur sincerius, quibuscumque observantiis vel habitu vivat, a Deo plus acceptatur. Ipsa enim est caritas propter quam fieri vel non fieri, mutari vel non mutari omnia debent. Ipsa enim et principium quare et finis ad quem dirigi omnia decet. Nihil enim fit culpabiliter quod pro ea et secundum eam fit veraciter. Quod nobis ipse praestare dignetur cui sine hac placere non possumus, et sine quo omnino nihil possumus, qui vivit et regnat Deus per immortalia saecula. Amen.