

### FOR WHAT END ARE WE ON THIS EARTH?

As the scholar goes to school in order that he may afterwards attain a certain position in life, so man is placed on this earth in order that he may attain to the lofty end of eternal happiness. As the servant serves his master and so earns his bread, so man has to serve God, and through his service attains happiness to some extent in this life, and in its fulness after death.

**We are upon this earth in order that we may glorify God, and so win for ourselves eternal happiness.**

The glory of God is the end of all creation. All creatures on the earth are created for this end, that they may manifest in themselves the divine perfections and God's dominion over His rational creatures, that is, over angels and men, and that He may be loved and praised by them. Even the material world, and creatures not possessed of reason—animals, trees, plants, stones, metals, etc., all praise God after their own fashion. "The Lord has made all things for Himself" (Prov. xvi. 4). Man is created for this end, that he should proclaim the majesty of God. He must do so whether he wills it or not. The construction of the body of man, the lofty powers of his soul, the rewards of the good, the punishment of the wicked, all proclaim the majesty of God, His omnipotence, wisdom, goodness, justice, etc. Even the reprobate will have to contribute to the glory of God (Prov. xvi. 4). In the end he will show how great is the holiness and justice of God. Man, from being possessed of reason and free will, is through these enabled in an especial way to give glory to God. This he does when he knows, loves, and honors God. Man is created chiefly for the life beyond the grave. In this life he is a stranger, a wanderer, and a pilgrim. "We have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come" (Heb. xiii. 14). Heaven is our true country; here we are in exile.

**Hence we are not upon earth only to collect earthly treasures, to attain earthly honors, to eat and to drink, or to enjoy earthly pleasures.**

He who pursues ends like these behaves as foolishly as a servant who, instead of serving his master, devotes himself to some passing amusement. He stands idle in the market-place, instead of working in his master's vineyard. He is like a traveller who, attracted by the beauty of the scenery, does not pursue his journey, and so allows the night to overtake him. We are not made for earth; we are made to look upward to heaven. The trees, the plants point upward to heaven, as if to remind us that it is our home.

**For this reason Our Lord says: "One thing is necessary" (Luke x. 42), and again "Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all other things shall be added unto you" (Matt. vi. 33).**

Unhappily, too many forget their last end, and fix their hearts on money, influence, honor, etc. They are like the kings of that heathen country who, although they reigned but for a year and after that had to go and live on a barren island, spent all their time in luxury and feasting, and did not lay up any provision for the future on the island whither they were bound. He who does not think on his last end is not a pilgrim, but a tramp, and falls into the hands of the devil as a tramp into the hands of the police. He is like a sailor who knows not whither he is sailing, and so wrecks his ship. Our Lord compares such to the servant who sleeps, instead of watching for his master's coming (Matt. xxiv. 42).

#### HOW ARE WE TO ATTAIN TO ETERNAL HAPPINESS?

Eternal happiness consists in union with God, through the exercise of the intellect contemplating God and the will loving Him. If we wish to attain it, we must begin to draw near to it in this life. We must seek to know and love God. But love of God consists in keeping His commandments (John xiv. 23). From this it follows that: We shall attain to eternal happiness by the following means:

**1. We must strive to know God by means of faith in the truths He has revealed to us.** Our Lord says: "This is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent" (John xvii. 3). That is to say, the knowledge of God brings man to eternal happiness.

**2. We must fulfil the will of God by keeping His commandments.** Our Lord says to the rich young man: “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matt. xix. 17). By means of our own strength we can neither believe nor keep the commandments; for this we need the grace of God. Even Adam and Eve in a state of innocence needed the help of grace. He who travels to a distant country, besides his own exertions needs money for the journey. The farmer cannot cultivate his land without the aid of sunshine and of rain. Man, too, has a special weakness by reason of original sin. This makes grace the more indispensable. The blind man needs a guide, the sick man strengthening food. We are like a man who through weakness has fallen to the ground, and has no power, of himself, to rise. He must look around for one to aid him. So Our Lord tells us: “Without Me you can do nothing” (John xv. 5). As the sun is necessary to the earth, to enlighten and warm it, so is grace necessary to our soul. We obtain the grace of God through the means of grace instituted by Jesus Christ.

**3. We must therefore avail ourselves of the means of grace; of which the chief are holy Mass, the sacraments, and prayer.** The means of grace are a channel through which grace is conveyed to our soul. Faith is the road which leads to heaven, the commandments are like sign-posts by the way, the means of grace the money for the journey. “The way that leads to life is narrow and thorny; the way that leads to destruction is broad, and many are they who go in thereat” (Matt. vii. 13).

It is also true that he who desires happiness must have religion.

Religion consists in a knowledge of God and a life corresponding to the will of God. Religion is not a matter of feeling; it is a matter of the will and of action, and consists in following out the principles that God has laid down. Mere knowledge does not constitute religion, else the devil would have religion; the service of God is necessarily included in it. We do not call a man a baseball player or cricketer because he knows the rules and nature of the game; practice is also required.

It is also true that he who desires to be happy must strive to be like to God.

Man becomes like to God when all his thought and action resemble the divine thought and action. The commandments of God are a mirror, in which we recognize whether our actions are like or unlike those of God.

## CAN WE ATTAIN PERFECT HAPPINESS ON EARTH?

**1. Earthly goods, such as riches, honor, pleasure, cannot by themselves make us happy, for they cannot satisfy our soul; they often only make life bitter, and invariably forsake us in death.**

Earthly goods deceive us; they are like soap-bubbles, which reflect all the colors of the rainbow but are really only drops of water. Earthly joys are like artificial fruit, beautiful to behold, but disappointing to the taste. Earthly pleasures are like drops of water; they do not quench the fire of the passions, but only make it burn more fiercely. Man can no more be happy without God than a fish can live out of the water. Hence St. Augustine says: "Unquiet is the heart of man until it rests in God." No sensible or material goods will nourish or satisfy the soul. Hence Our Lord says to the Samaritan woman: "He who drinks of this water will thirst again." Riches will no more satisfy the soul than salt water will quench thirst. In the days of the early empire of Rome, when riches and sensual pleasures abounded, suicide was most widely prevalent. Earthly possessions are a continual source of anxiety; he who rests in them is tormented by them, like a man who reposes on thorns. As the fresh waters of the rivers are changed into the salt waters of the sea, so all earthly pleasures sooner or later turn to bitterness. Forbidden pleasures soon bring misery after them, like the forbidden fruit. They are like bait that has a hook concealed within it. Earthly goods all forsake us when we die: "We brought nothing into the world, and certainly we cannot carry anything out of it" (1 Tim. vi. 7). When the Pope is crowned, a handful of tow is kindled, and while it blazes up the choir sing: "Thus passes the glory of the world." As the spider spins a web out of its own bowels and in a moment the broom sweeps it all away, so man labors for long years to obtain some honor, or possession, or office. Some obstacle comes in the way, death or sickness visits him, and all the labor is gone for naught. As the glow-worm shines in the night, but in the light of day is but an ugly insect, so the delights of earth are brilliant during

the night of life on earth, but under the light of the Day of Judgment will show themselves vain and worthless.

Earthly goods are given to us only that through them we may attain to eternal happiness.

Every creature on earth is intended as a step to bring us nearer to God. As in the workshop of the painter, brushes, colors, oils, are all destined to serve to the completion of the picture, so all things in the world are intended to contribute to our eternal happiness in heaven. Not to use earthly things for this end is to lose the hope of eternal happiness; but to make them our end and to be dependent on them no less deprives us of the end for which we were created. Earthly goods are like the surgeon's instruments; if they are ill-employed, they kill instead of curing. We must therefore use them only in so far as they help us towards the attainment of our last end. When they hinder us we must cut ourselves free from them. We must not serve them, they must serve us.

**2. Only the Gospel of Christ is capable of giving us a partial happiness on earth, for he who follows the teaching of Christ is certain to have peace in his soul.**

This is why Christ says to the Samaritan woman: "He that shall drink of the water that I shall give him, shall not thirst forever" (John iv. 13). And again: "He that cometh to Me, shall never hunger" (John vi. 35). The teaching of Christ can alone satisfy the heart of man. The reason of this is, that earthly sufferings do not render unhappy the man who follows Christ.

**3. He who follows Christ will have to endure persecution; but these persecutions can do him no harm.**

St. Paul tells us that "All who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. iii. 12). The whole life of the Christian is a carrying of the cross and a suffering of persecution. Christ Himself says: "The servant is not above his master" (Matt. x. 24). That is, the servant of Christ has no claim to a better lot than his Master Christ. We must expect the men of the world (that is, those who seek their happiness in this life) to regard us as erratic people and as fools, to condemn us and to hate us (1 Cor. iv. 3, 10; John xvii. 14; xv. 20). To be loved and praised by the world is to be the

enemy of Christ. The principles of the world are in contradiction with those of Christ, and the world regards as a fool him whom Christ declares blessed (Matt. v. 3, 10).

**Yet Christ tells us: “Every one that heareth My words and doeth them, shall be likened to a wise man, that built his house upon a rock” (Matt. vii. 24).**

He who trusts in God builds on solid ground. The patriarch Joseph derived advantage, not harm, from being persecuted; the pious David was persecuted, first by Saul, and then by his own son Absalom. From his own experience he was able to say: “Many are the afflictions of the just; but out of them all the Lord will deliver them” (Ps. xxxiii. 20). All the saints of Christ have been persecuted, but God has turned to good the evil that their enemies thought to do them. “If God is with us, who can be against us?”

**4. Hence perfect happiness is impossible on earth; for no man can entirely avoid suffering.**

The end of the worldling is misery as we have seen, and the just man is persecuted. No one can escape sickness, suffering, death. The world is a valley of tears; it is a big hospital, containing as many sick men as there are human beings. The world is a place of banishment, where we are far from our true country. In the world good and ill fortune succeed each other like sunshine and storm. Prosperity is the sure forerunner of adversity. In life we are on a sea, now lifted up to heaven, now cast down to hell. Society is always sure to be full of all kinds of miseries, whatever efforts may be made to improve the condition of mankind. Vain indeed are the hopes of the modern school of social democrats who dream of gradually abolishing all evil and misery from the world.