A Discourse on Satisfaction

Quorum remiseritis pecata, remittuntur eis, 
& quorum reteneritis, retenta sunt.

Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them: and whose you shall retain, they are retained.


What was the joy of the Patriarch Noah when he saw himself and his family preserved from the universal deluge, by means of this so celebrated ark, only asylum from the most dreadful tokens of the wrath of God? But at the same time, what was the destruction of all the rest of mankind destined to the sad and ineradicable necessity of being buried in the abyss of this vast ocean without any reliever of hope? What will be the consolation of penitent sinners at the last day, when by favor of the mysterious arch of Remorse, they shall have escaped not from a deluge of water but from a deluge of fire and an eternal one? But on the other hand, what will be the despair of the reprobate, who for having neglected or despised so easy a means, or for having wilfully abused it, shall see themselves condemned to the east headlong into hell that frightful abyss of fire without any hope of ever being delivered from the hell.
The arch of Penance like that of Noah is not built in a day; it requires, at least ordinarily, the labor of many years. The plan hath been drawn out to you; you have been shown how to lay the foundation, which is conversion; you have been spoken to on the body of the edifice which is conversion. There is no question at present of telling you how to put the last hand to it by the means of satisfaction. We will see then in the first part of this discourse, the necessity of satisfaction, and in the second we will examine the conditions it ought to have.

Satisfaction may be regarded as an essential or an integral part of the sacrament of Penance. Satisfaction regarded as an essential part of the sacrament of reconciliation is the desire and sincere will of the penitent that the penitent ought to have of satisfying God and his neighbors. And in this sense it is so essential to the sacrament that it is wanting, absolution is absolutely null and factious regarded only as an integral part of the sacrament. Conception, consists in the execution of the desire and resolution of which we have been speaking; and this actual and effective satisfaction obliterates under mortal sin when the matter is considerable.
It is therefore certain in the first place that the desire, will and resolution of submitting our sins and that this desire and will which ought to be true and sincere are an essential part of penance. In such a way, it is not, that if any one of you hath approached the sacred tribunal, without this desire and will, it is beyond all doubt that he hath committed some subileges as he hath received absolutilions with this that disposition. Examine yourselves well hereupon. And do not flatter yourselves. There is not here question only of the resolution of complying with the penance ordered by the Confessor. Penitents, ordinarily have that resolution. I say ordinarily, because there are those who are determined to do no more of what is commanded them than they please and refuse the penances that are proper for them. But there is more unusual question of being firmly resolved to repair as far as they are able the consequences and effects of sin, to render unto God the honour which they robbed him of by their offences, entirely to repair the wrong done to their neighbours, restore him his goods, to repair his reputation, to be reconciled with him, to put a remedy to the bad examples given him.
in a word to put all things in the state they were in before the sin. What subject of fear for us Dr. Gresham! Who can flatter himself with having always been in the disposition of which we are speaking? What ought those to judge of their Confessions, who have always deferred to restore ill-gotten goods; to repair their scandals; to restore their neighbours honour and reputation; to acquit themselves of the parts of amissayers which were ordred them in the sacred tribunal of Benance, who make no scruple in omiting them, either all or in part, who seek not the occasion of being reconciled to their enemies, but who see on the contrary to shew them with all care. Can it be thought that these people had a sincere and deliberate desire in Confessions of satisfying all these duties? They say that they had, and perhaps they think so, but they godsly deceive themselves, and consequently they ought to regard their Confessions as null, and to repair them as soon as possible after having satisfied these duties. For a real confession they ought to repair them at once as possible by a general Confession. At least this is a precaution which all these ought to take, who would put their valuation in that security which they ought prudently to do.

In the second place, it is certain that the execution of the desire, will, and sincere purpose...
of satisfying God and our neighbours, although it be but an integral part of the sacrament, desirous under mortal sin when the matter is considerable. I do not say that when one hath failed to execute what he promised and had the will to do it, in confession for this omission he can and the sins that were pardoned to return. No, Brethren, the gifts of the Lord are without rep as the Apostle teacheth, that is, that sins once pardoned never more appear, they are buried in an eternal oblivion. But I say that he who fails to execute and accomplish what he promised and had a will to do for the satisfaction of his offences, renders himself guilty of a mortal sin, of a crime that contains a most sore ingratitude towards God and of often a crying injustice towards his neighbour. This is not all; the obtrusion of this so essential a duty does not rise up in some manner the course of graces or at least much diminishes it and thereby exposes the sinner to fall into the same sin he had confessed and others still more grievances.