John 20:23

A Discourse on Satisfaction

Quorum remiseritis peccata, remittuntur eis; & quorum retinueritis, retenta sunt.

Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them: and whose you shall retain they are retained. Words taken out of 20th Chap. of St. John & 23rd Verse.

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 arch [ark], only asylum from the most dreadful tokens of the wrath of God? But at the same time, what was the desolation of all the rest of mankind destined to the sad, but inevitable necessity of being buried in the abyss of this vast ocean without any relief or hope? What will be the consolation of penitent sinners, at the last day, when by favor of the mysterious arch [ark] of Penance, 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 willfully abused it, shall see themselves condemned to be cast headlong into Hell, that frightful abyss of fire without any hope of ever being delivered from thence?

[1 Archer has used the ampersand, the Latin symbol for “et,” translated as “and.”]

The arch of Penance like that of Noah is not built in a day; it requires, at least ordinarily the work [labour] of many years. The plan hath been drawn out to you: you have been shewn how to lay the foundation, which is contrition, you have been spoken to on the body of the edifice which is confession[.] There is 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 as 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 neighbour. And in this sence it is so essential to the Sacrament, that if it be wanting, absolution is absolutely null. Satisfaction regarded only as an integral part of the Sacrament Confession, consists in the execution of the desire, will and resolution, of which we have been speaking; and this actual and effective Satisfaction obliges under mortal sin, when the matter is considerable.

[2]

It is therefore certain, in the first place, that the desire, will and resolution of satisfying God and your neighbour, when we go to confession, are absolutely necessary to obtain pardon of
our sins and that this desire and will which ought to be true and sincere, are an essential part of penance. In such sort, Dear Breth. 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 as many sacrileges as he hath received absolutions with this bad disposition. Examine yourselves well hereupon, D’ Aud. [Dear Auditors] & Do not flatter your selves. There is not here question only of 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 moreover, 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 rob[b]ed him of by their offenc[es], entirely to repair the wrong done to their neighbour, to 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 sute[2] they were in before the sin. What subject of fear for us D’ Breth:! Who can flatter himself with having always been in the dispositions 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 neighbors honour and reputation; to acquit themselves of the fasts, alms, & prayers, which were order’d them in the sacred tribunal of Penance, who make no scruple in admitting them, either all [the whole] or in part; who seek not the occasion of being reconciled to their enemies, but who seem on the contrary to shun them with all care. Can it be thought that these people had a sincere and deliberate desire in Confession of satisfying all these duties? they say that they had, and perhaps they think so; but they grossly deceive themselves, and consequently they ought to regard their Confessions as null, and to repair them as soon as possible, after and having satisfied these duties, by a general confession they ought to repair them as soon as possible by a general Confession. At least this is a precaution, which all those ought to take who would put their salvation in that security which they ought prudently to do.

In the secon[d] place, it is certain that the execution of the desire, will, and sincere purpose

[² “sute” – (obs.; Mid. Eng.) Variant of “suit”: to arrange in a set, series, or order.]

of satisfying God and our neighbour, altho it be but an integral part of the Sacrament, obliges 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 causes
the sins that were pardoned to return. No D' Breth: the gifts of the Lord are without repentance as the Apostle teaches;[3] 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 monstrous ingratitude toward God and often a crying injustice towards his neighbour. This is not all; the omission of this so essential a duty dries up in some manner the source of grace or at least much diminishes it, and thereby exposes the sinner to fall into the same sins he had confessed and others still more grievous.

[End of sermon.]

[3 See Romans 11:29; “For the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance.” (DRB)]