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HIGHLIGHTS OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY: DIVINE LOVE, MERCY, JUSTICE

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Many Christians revere the Bible but seldom read it. Too often it seems boring in a fast paced society in which we are constantly bombarded by various forms of frivolous, but entertaining, distraction. To the person who finds a quiet time to read and a great enough will to meditate, however, the Scriptures reveal much that is both worthwhile and exciting. In the pages that follow, Msgr. John E. Steinmueller explores through the sacred writings the love, mercy and justice of God. In a study valuable to all, the author brings understanding in an area where confusion often reigns. And he brings a measure of comfort to those who out of bitterness might blame God for not finding love, mercy and justice anywhere else.



FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, SACRED SCRIPTURE AND SACRED TRADITION ARE THE channels of divine revelation—the revelation from which she draws her sacred faith and doctrines. The Church has always encouraged the proper use of the Bible, and its devotional reading by her faithful members. Today, the Bible is one book among a million others. Many people feel they must read the daily papers for local news or gossip, for financial and business reports, for a knowledge of national and international events. Many people feel they must keep abreast of current literature, and must read the best-sellers. Some of this may be good. But the Church continues to remind us of the timeless value of the Sacred Scriptures, and of the inner peace that is brought to us by devotional reading of the Holy Bible. In this sacred literature Almighty God, through His divinely inspired writers, discloses all-important truths. Some of the lessons that are taught in the Bible will be discussed here—lessons from which God intends us to gain spiritual profit and to store up priceless treasure for our immortal souls, so that at death we may not meet our Maker empty-handed.

In order to gain the intended profit from these lessons, we must know at the outset that the teachings of the Bible are true. Vatican II reaffirms this consistent belief of the Church. The sacred writers, it says, inspired by God, “consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted.” And, “since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation.”¹ The fact that Scripture includes a variety of literary forms—poetry, parables, prophecies, figures of speech—does not affect its inerrancy.

THE BIBLE’S MESSAGE OF LOVE

The greatest and most important lesson for a devout reader of the Bible is that this sacred literature contains the message of love. God loves His creatures; He loves each and every one of us. Consequently, we must love God;

and the first effect of devotional reading of the Bible is an increase in our love for God, and because of it, for His creatures.

The word *love*, in the English language, is a broad and ambiguous term. At times it signifies a pagan, sensual, erotic love like that which appears in ancient Greek and Roman literature and in many of our modern novels, plays and songs. The English word *love* likewise includes the affection existing between relatives and close friends. But in the Holy Bible, this word *love* also means the highest type of affection, a pure, unadulterated, supernatural love which plays a role in the spiritual life of every human being.

From the Holy Bible, we know that God loves Himself. His love is a divine attribute or perfection. St. John the Apostle, in his First Epistle, uses this perfection to sum up the very essence of the Godhead, when he writes: "God is LOVE."² Yes, God is love itself. Just as power, light, and heat radiate from one and the same sun, so too the almighty power of God the Father, the redemptive light of God the Son, and the heat or fire of the Holy Spirit radiate from one source: infinite love. This measureless love or *agape* is the very source and fountain of all we love and of everything we can desire as human beings.

From the Bible, we know that God the Father loved Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. The writers of the synoptic gospels—St. Matthew, St. Mark and St. Luke—recorded the very words of the Heavenly Father: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," which were uttered at the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River and at His Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. It is this loving Father, we are told by St. John the Evangelist,³ who has given all things into the hands of His Son, Jesus Christ, and shows the Son all that He Himself does.

God, the Lord of revelation, loves all His created beings, but in particular, good, virtuous, and faithful souls. The ancient Hebrews fully realized this divine attribute as a source of God's benevolence toward His Chosen People. The mercy of God, His goodness as well as His forbearance or infinite patience—so frequently stressed in the Old Testament, especially by the prophets—are to be regarded as marvelous manifestations of His love, and as criteria regulating the relations among His human creatures. But the stupendous magnitude of God's love for each and every one of us has been revealed with even greater fullness in the books of the New Testament. God's love is *all-embracing*. How simply and forcefully this truth is expressed by Jesus Christ! In one of His parables,

He vividly explains how the bountiful hand of our Father in heaven is extended to all His children:

But if one of you asks his father for a loaf, will he hand him a stone? Or for a fish, will he for a fish hand him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will he hand him a scorpion? Therefore, if you, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Good Spirit to those who ask Him.⁴

God, the Heavenly Father, wishes all men to be saved. He wants them to reach their heavenly goal and to enjoy His presence and company for all eternity. "He so loved the world," says St. John the Evangelist, "that He gave His only-begotten Son, that those who believe in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting."⁵ The Heavenly Father's love is abundantly poured out upon the souls of the faithful through the graces merited by Jesus Christ and through the vivifying influence of the Holy Spirit. Thus the faithful become God's adopted, spiritual children and live in closest union and friendship with Him. God's love and intimate friendship—these are precious spiritual gifts for man to enjoy!

If God, our Heavenly Father, loves us to such an intense degree, then it is every man's first and paramount duty to love God above all things. This means that man must prefer God to all things, and must entrust himself to God in everything he is, does, or has. The saintly Moses realized this truth. Shortly before his death on Mount Nebo, he fervently exhorted his Hebrew co-religionists to whole-hearted love for Almighty God in these words:

Hear, O Israel, THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength. All these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart. And thou shalt tell them to thy children, and thou shalt meditate upon them sitting in thy house, and walking on thy journey, sleeping and rising. And thou shalt bind them as a sign on thy hand, and they shall be and move between thy eyes. And thou shalt write them in the entry, and on the doors of thy house.⁶

In New Testament times, the Jewish people were reminded of these solemn words of Moses through their phylacteries worn at the time of prayer, through a little

capsule, called *Mezuzah*, with several Scriptural texts enclosed and placed over their doors, and through their daily recitation of the prayer which begins with the words: "SHEMA ISRAEL," which means "HEAR, O ISRAEL." At the time of Our Divine Savior, the Jewish people were instructed that their Law consisted of hundreds of positive and negative precepts or commandments. When one of their doctors of the Law approached Jesus and tried to embarrass Him with the question, "Master, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Our Lord's ready response was emphatic: "The first Commandment of all is: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one God; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second is like it: thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is no other commandment greater than these."⁷⁷

But it is not enough for us to say merely, "we love God." Our love for God must always be shown through our faithful observance of His commandments. "If we say," writes St. John the Apostle, "that we have fellowship with God and walk in the darkness [of sin], we lie and are not practising the truth. . . . He who says that he knows him and does not keep his commandments, is a liar."⁷⁸ Our love for God requires us to avoid sin, to live a holy life, to follow the norms of virtuous conduct. It requires us to do these things even if it entails death. The greater our love for God, the greater will be our advance in spiritual life and perfection, and the more brightly our light of truth and good works will be shining before men. The devotional reading of the Bible should then have, as its first effect, an increase in our love for God and for our neighbor.



THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST

Three times a year, the Old Testament tells us, every pious male Israelite was to make a pilgrimage to the Holy City of Jerusalem and appear before the sanctuary of Almighty God in the temple to celebrate and commemorate three important feasts: the Feast of the Passover, the Feast of Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles or Succoth.

The New Testament stresses five principal events in the life of Jesus Christ which have become major feast days in the Christian calendar. These are Christmas, His birthday; Holy Thursday and Good Friday, the days of the institution of the Sacrament of His love and of His meritorious death on the Cross; Easter, the day of His resurrection from the dead; Ascension, the day of His return with His glorified body to heaven; and Pentecost, the day of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and disciples, with our Blessed Mother in their midst. This last event was the birthday of the Church, Christ's spiritual kingdom on earth.

We are all reminded, year after year at Christmas time, of the birth of the world's Savior, Jesus Christ, when all devout and pious Christians solemnly celebrate this joyful event. The historical circumstances of Jesus' birth are described in simple language in the first two chapters of the respective gospels according to St. Matthew and St. Luke. But it is St. Paul who gives the early Christians, in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians (8:9), the authoritative, theological and devotional meaning of this singularly blessed event that took place at Bethlehem. At the Incarnation, says St. Paul, there was revealed the graciousness, the loving-kindness of Our Lord, who Himself being rich (that is, being the God-Man) became poor for our sakes, that by his poverty we might become rich spiritually.

The Four Gospels give us a faithful explanation, an accurate demonstration, and a definite manifestation of this loving-kindness of Jesus for all men. His loving Sacred Heart poured out words of consolation to the poor, sick, and oppressed, and at the same time He gave them renewed energy, vitality, and courage to carry the heavy burden of their daily crosses and cares. In the eight beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, which contains the Magna Carta of the Christian moral code, we have a splendid compendium of the religious perfection and the fundamental law of the Messianic Kingdom. Let us read again these sublime, majestic words of divine wisdom:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are the meek,
for they shall possess the earth.
Blessed are they who mourn,
for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice,
for they shall be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called children of God.
Blessed are they who suffer persecution for jus-
tice' sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.⁹

Christ's loving Sacred Heart readily and promptly responded to the earnest pleas of the sick, the diseased, the diabolically possessed, and of other unfortunate people. To the fervent request of a grieving father: "Sir, come down before my child dies"; to the earnest petition of a leper: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean"; to the plea of the two blind beggars at Jericho: "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David"; or to the entreaty of the ruler of a synagogue: "My daughter has just now died, but come, lay thy hand upon her, and she will return to life"; to all these and to other appeals, the loving heart of Jesus manifested His goodness and kindness to people, especially by healing the sick.

Christ's love for truth and His zeal to enlighten the minds and warm the hearts of His audience are exemplified by His parables, in which He made use of actual or possible events to illustrate some spiritual truth or teaching. The parables in the Four Gospels are immensely rich in thought and practical suggestion; they are embodiments and expressions of the highest spirituality. It was by means of these parables that He conveyed His gospel message of the Kingdom of God, of His spiritual Church on earth.

Christ's gospel message of love and peace, was, according to the parables, like a pearl of great price, a discovered hidden treasure; it was like a heavenly seed sown in the field of this world. The members of His Kingdom are like laborers coming at various hours of the day to work in God's vineyard, who at the end of their day of living would receive their eternal reward. They are like wedding guests at the royal banquet in honor of the king's son. But the members of His Kingdom must produce good fruit in the form of pious deeds. They must not be like the barren fig tree. They must be humble like the publican praying in the temple; charitable like the Good Samaritan; repentant, if necessary, as the Prodigal Son. They are to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, a city set on a hill which cannot be hidden. These members of the Kingdom may expect their full wages and a glorious reward at the consummation of His Kingdom, when He shall come unexpectedly as the thief in the night.

The greatest evidence of Christ's love for mankind, however, was the institution of His Blessed Sacrament at the Last Supper, and His voluntary sacrificial death on the Cross of Calvary, when His Sacred Heart was pierced by a Roman lance. As St. Paul the Apostle tells us, Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as an offering and a sacrifice to the Heavenly Father, to ascend to Him as a sweet perfume; He loved His Church and delivered Himself up for her to sanctify her.¹⁰

The Holy Bible stresses man's strict obligation to love Jesus Christ. St. John the Evangelist tells us that no one can love the Heavenly Father without loving His Son, who was sent by Him.¹¹ He tells us this love must be shown by the observance of the commandments, and that as a result of our love for Christ, we will be loved by the Father, and the Father and the Son will dwell in a special manner in our souls. "He who has my commandments and keeps them," says Jesus, "he it is who loves me. But he who loves me will be loved by my Father. . . . If anyone love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him."¹²

Our love for Christ is also one of the primary aims of the devotional reading of the Holy Bible. The pattern or model according to which man is to be molded, if he wishes to develop the proper love of God and neighbor, is the God-Man, Jesus Christ. Commenting on the words of Jesus, "I am the Way," St. Augustine writes: "Always keep before you Him whom you are to follow (that is, as your spiritual leader). The Lord placed a model on earth, when He left the Gospel for you, in the Gospel He is with you."¹³

The Holy Bible, and in particular the New Testament, is to develop in us a love for Jesus Christ, and a deeper appreciation and a wish to imitate Him. It is to produce in our minds and hearts Christlike traits and qualities; it is to mold the faithful to be other Christs.

We can only love what we know. But our knowledge of Christ must not merely imply information about Him; it must also mean *formation* according to Him. Hence our faith and confidence in Him and our love for Him are not abstract things, but personal. They result in a strong, living faith and an intimate attachment to Him—and in the avoidance of sin for which He died on Calvary.

THE MERCY OF GOD

Many modern writers falsely claim that the ancient Hebrew religion was merely a religion of fear be-

fore the divine majesty. But this is not true. It was also a religion expressing God's merciful love or loving-kindness. Nearly every page of the Old Testament stresses the mercy of God. The richness of this divine mercy is gradually unfolded, until it reaches its climax in the New Testament times. It is true that the Gospels and the Apostolic Epistles do not speak so frequently and so explicitly as the Old Testament does about divine mercy, because they directly treat of the life of Jesus Christ and of His salvific mission in the world, and because man's spiritual and physical miseries have been diminished by Christ's sacrificial death, whereby mankind has been reconciled to God and participates, through the merits of Christ, in the divine nature of God. As we learn from the New Testament, the manifestation of divine mercy reaches its height first in the birth of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, at Bethlehem and in His redemption of mankind through His precious blood shed on the altar of Calvary; secondly, in the call of the Gentiles or pious pagans to the Christian faith; thirdly, in the future conversion of Israel to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah according to the prophecy of St. Paul; and finally in our being destined for eternal blessedness in heaven. Let us explain a few of these things in detail.

In primitive times, there is every evidence in the pages of the Holy Bible for an all-good, merciful, and forgiving God. After the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, whom God placed in the garden of Eden and destined for immortality and eternal happiness, He sought to make them acknowledge their positive disobedience to His commandment, and then promised them a future Redeemer or Savior. Later, it was God who warned the angry Cain, and even after Cain's murder of Abel, his brother, God listened to his lamentation. It was through the penitential preacher, Noe, that God warned the descendants of Cain to refrain from their continual impiety and religious rebellion. After the deluge, Almighty God resolved never again to send another flood of such gigantic proportions as to destroy a great part of the human race, and established, as a sign of His covenant or promise, the beautiful rainbow in the skies. At the time of Abraham, God would have spared the five wicked cities if there had been found only ten righteous men in Sodom.

The devotional reader of the Bible will recall that the entire history of Israel is a continuous chain of divine favors and blessings, and is a positive proof of God's mercy toward His Chosen People of the Old Testament. The Hebrew nation, with whom God entered a personal and special covenant on Mount Sinai, and to whom He

gave His law through Moses, was the particular object of divine mercy because, as the prophet Jeremias tells us, He loved it with an everlasting love.¹⁴ All the warnings of the divinely chosen prophets, as an Isaias or a Jeremias, an Amos or an Osee, all their terrible predictions of the divine impending judgment and punishment of the Hebrew nation were uttered to obtain a genuine and sincere repentance on the part of God's Chosen People, so that He might show His mercy and pardon them. Even at the time of the Babylonian exile, when the majority of the Jewish people were violently taken away from their homeland and were compelled to settle along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., the Hebrews realized that God's mercy would not fail them. During their exile, God continually urged His Chosen People to repent, so that He might shower His mercy upon them and so that His future blessings might become effective. It was only for a moment, says the prophet Isaias, that He forsook them; but with great mercy He would bring them home again to Palestine.¹⁵ Even after the exile, when the people forgot their debt of gratitude to God as their Father and Master, He continued to shower His mercies upon them; so we are told by the prophet Malachias.¹⁶

Everywhere in the Old Testament we see the merciful Heart of God poured out upon individual souls; upon the poor, oppressed and suffering; upon truly repentant sinners who would rend their hearts rather than their garments in contrition, so that they could say with David that it is better to fall into the hands of God, whose mercies are many, than into the hands of men.

When we come to the New Testament, we must observe that one of the most outstanding features in the life of Christ was His mercy and sympathy toward the miserable conditions of men, both physical and spiritual. To the mourning widow of Naim He gave words of comfort: "Do not weep!" and then brought her only child back to life. For the sick and suffering, His Sacred Heart was full of compassion, and He healed many of their ailments. He was full of sympathy for everyone who was in real need and with whom He came in contact. In His parable of the Good Samaritan, He told the simple story of the merciful Samaritan who, although hated by the Jewish people, gave generous and unselfish assistance to a poor Jew, a beaten and wounded victim of a robbery on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, after his own co-religionists, a priest and a Levite, had passed him by. Jesus thereby gave us an important lesson in the practical exercise of charity toward all men, most especially toward those who require our assistance.

As Christ's mission was essentially spiritual, He showed, in particular, His deep sympathy toward repentant sinners. By forgiving their sins, He gave them renewed courage and strength to amend their lives and to make them pleasing to God. In the parable of the Lost Sheep, Jesus pointed out that just as a good shepherd cares for even the least of his flock and makes every effort to save a single lost sheep, so does the merciful Heavenly Father care, above all, for the welfare of even the least of immortal souls. In the parable of the Prodigal Son—the crown and pearl of all the parables of the Bible—we read of a son who turned his back on his own father and house, and yet, when he repented, was welcomed with a greater expression of love and tenderness than if he had never done any wrong or gone away. This parable was intended to show the great truth of the inexhaustible love and mercy of the Heavenly Father for His sinful yet repentant child on earth; to exemplify the love and mercy which the Sacred Heart of Jesus had come to proclaim to mankind by His teachings and even more by His example.

Recognizing the mercy of God and of Jesus Christ in the pages of the Bible, and aware of his frailty and weakness as a son of Adam, the reader of the Bible will receive consolation and encouragement to help him face trials and disappointments. He will find inspiration to live a life of virtuous conduct and resolution to better his spiritual condition. In his constant struggle for spiritual perfection, the devotional reader of the Bible will draw from his reading an inner joy and contentment, an interior peace of soul which surpasses worldly comprehension.

Devotional reading of the Bible will serve as a medicine for the soul by acting as a remedy for evil and sin, by refreshing the weary soul with lofty thoughts and ideals, by comforting it in affliction, by strengthening it for the battle against temptation. It will build the moral courage to carry out the difficult tasks, and will bestow an inner power to prevent discouragement. The interior life of the Bible reader is constantly nourished so that warmth and devotion to God are constantly maintained. His devotional reading feeds his love for the better things in life; it helps him to center his life around Christ and thus to become more Christlike.

THE JUSTICE OF GOD

Human justice is a virtue which disposes us to give every man what belongs to him, what is his due. The general or cardinal virtue of justice includes such other

virtues as piety, reverence, obedience, truthfulness, gratitude and friendship, by which our conduct toward God and toward our neighbor is properly and supernaturally regulated.

When we speak of the justice of Almighty God, however, we speak of a divine perfection whereby He rewards good and punishes evil according to man's merit or demerit.

A purely material historian may view ancient events merely in the secular light of social trends, cultural progress, advance in development or retrogression. But a divinely inspired historian of the Old Testament interpreted many ancient facts as positive indications of God's intervention in matters of personal, social, or spiritual justice. Thus, for example, our first parents, Adam and Eve, were driven from the Garden of Eden because they had been disobedient to God's command. Cain was warned by God, and after murdering his brother Abel had to flee, because the blood of his brother cried to heaven for vengeance. The deluge was sent upon mankind because it had deserted God; only Noe and his family were spared because they were religiously good. The various races assembled at the tower of Babel were scattered because of their defiance of God. At the time of Abraham, because of the immorality and unnatural lusts of their inhabitants, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed and everyone in them perished. Even among the early pagans—the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Egyptians, Canaanites and others—there was universal recognition of the fact that a deity rewards good conduct and punishes wickedness.

The whole history of Israel, in the Holy Bible, is a manifestation of God's justice. By virtue of the covenant relationship established on Mount Sinai between Almighty God and His Chosen People through their mediator, Moses, the Israelites enjoyed the right to His special protection; but they also had the obligation of observing laws that were divinely imposed upon them. In the desert, they bitterly experienced what it meant to oppose God's will. As a punishment for their disobedience, the people had to remain for forty years in the desert before their children could enter the Promised Land.

When at times Israel's faith and confidence grew cold and their observance of the Mosaic Law became lax, it was the men of God, the prophets, who predicted the coming judgment of God upon His people. Precisely because Israel was His Chosen People, God punished them the more severely for their crimes. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians,

Israel repentantly acknowledged that Almighty God was just and that His people had provoked Him to anger.

During the Babylonian exile, the prophet Ezechiel reminded the Jews that Almighty God is not only the Judge who punishes the wicked, but also the Savior who forgives penitent sinners.¹⁷ Foreseeing the conditions that would prevail in the post-exilic period, the prophet Isaias wrote that Israel's sin was forgiven; that its punishment had been sufficient that God, in His justice, would raise up a Cyrus to liberate His people and that in justice He would call His servant, the future Messiah, to redeem both Israel and the Gentiles or pagans.¹⁸ For Israel, its belief in God's justice and His covenant relationship with her was a constant source of strength. Hence, when in misfortune, Israel always returned to Him and did not utterly despair.

Not only the Hebrew nation as a whole, but also the individual Israelite firmly believed and trusted in God's justice. He firmly believed that God would show no partiality based on wealth or on social position, but that He would consider only a man's ethical or spiritual condition, blessing the virtuous man and punishing the wicked. He trusted that God would readily forgive a penitent sinner, and that He would lovingly receive innocent but virtuous sufferers. Mindful of God's promises, pious Psalmists praised His justice.¹⁹

The divinely inspired books of the Old Testament frequently allude to Almighty God as a just judge of the whole earth, a judge who loves righteousness and who will be absolutely impartial in the distribution of punishments and rewards. The action of this divine justice is described as twofold: vengeance and wrath toward the wicked; vindication and deliverance of the just. The spiritual leaders of the people constantly and piously invoked the justice of God, and repentant sinners implored His justice and placed their trust in Him.

In the divinely inspired New Testament books there are frequent references to the seriousness of God's justice. No one has stressed this doctrine more emphatically than did Jesus Christ Himself. In His Sermon on the Mount, He declared that God will justly reward good conduct, even the good that has been done in secret. In His parables, as for example those of the weeds which grow among the good wheat and of the separation of the sheep from the goats, Jesus teaches us that at the time of His Second Coming, there will be a great separation of the good from the wicked.

This great separation, this general sifting of mankind as a whole which will come at the end of the world, however, will be but a final and public ratification

of the sentence pronounced at death on each individual soul. As death finds us, so shall we remain substantially and essentially for all eternity. As in the parable of the royal wedding, where the king immediately spotted the guest who was without a wedding garment, so too the Heavenly Father sees us individually as we really are; and none of us can hope to hide from his all-perceiving eyes, either now or in the judgment to come. Let us not be like the rich fool in the parable, and go before Him with empty hands.²⁰ That man was prudent in taking care of his physical and temporal welfare, but he was a fool in neglecting the care of his soul. He was wise as regards material things, but a fool with regard to the heavenly goods that endure. This is an important lesson from Holy Scripture: that when we make the great leap from time to eternity, we will leave our possessions and plans, and will be ushered into another world where only the spiritual treasures of our souls will have real value. It is Christ Himself who tells us that there is a judgment—that unrepentant sinners will hear the verdict: "Depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels."²¹

The justice of God is one of the themes which runs all through the Bible. "The Lord is just and loves justice," the Psalmist writes. "The upright shall behold His face, now and forever."²² Our souls were created to reach heaven; it is there that we shall begin to live forever free from pain and sorrow, from labor and weariness, from worry and fear—free from all that can cast a shadow on the perfect peace and joy of our life with God and His Saints. Let us live in accordance with God's holy laws, so that when we have come to the end of our earthly pilgrimage, the Eternal King may smilingly greet us with the words: "Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."²³



NOTES

¹*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, Chapter III, no. 11.

²1 John 4:8.

³*cf.* John 1:14-18; 3:35; 5:20.

⁴Matthew 7:9-11.

⁵John 3:16.

⁶Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

⁷Mark 12:29-31.

⁸1 John 1:6; 2:4.

⁹ Matthew 5:1-10.

¹⁰*cf.* Ephesians 5:1f; 2 Corinthians 2:13; also Ephesians 5:23-27.

¹¹*cf.* John 3:16, 35; 5:20; 8:42; 15:23. Also 1 John 2:23-25; 4:8ff. *Cf.* also Steinmueller-Sullivan, *Catholic Biblical Encyclopedia: New Testament* (art. *Trinity, Blessed*) 642-644.

¹²John 14:21, 23.

¹³For a further discussion, see J.J. O'Meara, *The Young Augustine* (N.Y., 1965) and Sr. M.A. McNaMara, O.P., *Friends and Friendship for Saint Augustine* (N.Y., 1958).

¹⁴Jeremias 31:3.

¹⁵Isaias 54:7.

¹⁶Malachias 3:10, 17.

¹⁷*E.g.* Ezekiel 18:21.

¹⁸*Cf.* esp. Isaias, Chapters 42-45.

¹⁹Especially Psalms 34, 75, 92, 97, 98.

²⁰Luke 12:16-21.

²¹Matthew 25:41.

²²Psalms 11:7.

²³Matthew 25:34.