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YOU naturally expect that the address from the chair, on the occasion of your Annual Meeting, will have to do with that which lies at the very soul and centre of your life as a league, viz:—prayer. Prayer is an all-embracing subject. It may be thought of, or treated, from many points of view. We might think of petitionary or intercessory prayer, for instance, as the soul's assertion of the supremacy and sovereignty of spiritual things; or we might think of that form of prayer in which vocal utterance has little place—mental prayer; a kind of prayer in which out of the silence, wherein spiritual forces work, deep answers deep and the soul learns that there are deeps greater than those of human sinfulness and limitation—even the great deeps of the love and resource-

fulness of Almighty God.

But it is not to one or other of these aspects of prayer that I would direct your thoughts in particular to-day. Rather I would have you think of prayer as a chief means of helping us to make the thought of God and His holiness the central and dominating thought of our lives. I have seen it stated that prayer is a sort of double contact or action, that is to say that in prayer the soul expresses itself to God, and is also impressed by God. I believe that that is a great fact. We cannot doubt that the soul that takes pains to pray, that puts vigour into its prayers, that foregoes many pursuits and interests in order that it may excel in this, the greatest of all the arts of the Christian life, is impressed by God as it prays. Moses and Isaiah, St. Paul and St. John knew what is was to receive the divine impression in prayer. It was that divine impression, the deep and abiding sense of God, that made their lives great and fruitful. Let us try, then, first of all to think a little in detail of what we mean by the Holiness of God.

The holiness of God, what words can express it? Theological writers in their efforts to express clear thoughts about it, have found it convenient to write of holiness as an attribute of God; and, for purposes of thought and expression, to consider it apart from His nature. But it is a distinction permissible for purposes of thought and expression only. And it is very necessary to guard against any thought of the holiness of God as some excellence added to His Nature. For the holiness of of God is not so much an excellence of His Divine Being as the expression of the sum total of all excellencies eternally energising in Him. The divine holiness is then, the necessary outward expression of all that God is in Himself. God is the eternally perfectly good one, in Whome more excellence dwells in its completeness and perfection. So if the sum total of every excellence that makes for goodness, is

most permanent aspect of the divine Being; it is that which most closely approximates to what God is in Himself. As beauty of soul or body is the expression of this or that measure of spiritual or bodily perfection, so the holiness of God is the most complete expression of His own unutterable and eternal goodness: that goodness must not be thought of as a quiescent condition; it is the scene and centre of eternal activity. God is, then—if in all reverence the thought may be so expressed—on fire with love for all that is morally excellent, noble, and beautiful, and also, what necessarily follows from this thought, full of intensest wrath towards all that is opposed to the upward progress of mankind in holiness, which the Incarnation is His method of effecting. At the Incarnation God, the all-holy, was moving, in the impulse of perfect love, manwards; revealing to man in man's own nature that which sin had hidden with a dark veil, the true greatness and glory of his, man's, being—the greatness of interior goodness, and the glory of outward holiness. People are at times startled by the sinister presence, not in themselves only, but even in those whom they rightly think of as possessing far loftier spiritual attoinments, of unworthy motives and selfish aims; and at such times they are tempted to great depression of soul, if not to treachery to their Christian ideals. Most have to experience this very persistent temptation in one or other of its varied forms; none altogether escape it; many, alas! how many, fall under it and never rise again! But the truth of the Incarnation rightly apprehended spells deliverance from such tempta-tions. For the unveiling of God in human nature at the Incarnation teaches men that they must not look at themselves, or at others, so much in the light of what they now are in their present condition of conflict and imperfection, as in the light of what they are becoming through union with the life of Incarnate Holiness.

This truth is a great stimulus to perseverance in prayer. From time to time, as we prepare to engage in intercession, we are depressed by the thought of our great unworthiness as intercessors. Who are we, so feeble, so weak, so worldly, so blemished that we should have a share in this work of intercession which brings us into present personal association with Our exalted Lord? Then there follows the further sad reflection that our prayers seem to effect little observable change in those for whom we pray. Depression and lowering of effort easily force an entry into the souls through such considerations as these. But the truth of the Incarnation, rightly apprehended, spells deliverance from these dangers. For the unveiling of God in human nature at the Incarnation teaches men that they must not look at themselves as they pray, or at those for whom they pray, so much in the light of what they now are in their present condition of conflict and imperfection, as in the light of what they are becoming, or are capable of becoming, through union with the Life of Incarnate Holiness. At the Incarnation—as Bishop Westcott says in one of his books—great spiritual forces began to work in the world, and they have not exceed to expect. and they have not ceased to operate. Prayer is all-important because it opens channels for the extension of the sphere in which those forces operate. It is those forces, at work in the world, which help men to realize the true standard, the true objective of all human life. For, when God took humanity to Himself at the Incarnation, He revealed the truth that His own character of holiness is the standard by which He must judge the world. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews had well grasped this fact when he wrote the words "without holiness no man can see the Lord." One cause of the impotence of the Church in our land is this, that as a whole we have but a faint and inadequate con-

ception of the holiness of God. Everything that helps to impress this on mind and heart and life should be welcomed and prized. But, it rayer that does this emphatically, if it be true that the praying soul

only expresses itself to God, but is impressed by God.

et us now pass on to ask what is the meaning of the character of this holiness which man must acquire if he is to see the Lord. It is an enquiry of the first importance and inexpressibly solemn because the reality of that character of holiness in man will be tested by the searchlight of the eternal throne at the great assize of Jesus Christ. The very imperfect effort has been made to consider what holiness means in God; but that consideration leads on to this further one, namely, how can human beings encompassed by all kinds of spiritual weaknesses respond to the divine requirement? That is the difficulty. How can it be solved? Only in one way—repentance. For the Christian life is not only entered by the gate of repentance but is characterised by repentance through its whole extent. The readiness, the will to make repentance a life-long reality is the surest sign, the most certain guarantee, that men and women are in the way of holiness. It is the penitent soul which makes the speediest fights in prayer. Repentance means essentially a changed mind about sin, not merely sin which has taken definite shape in action, but sin which, though never embodied in action, has been welcomed and permitted in idea and intention. It is a changed mind about sin, not a mere change of thought, not a mere change of opinion, but a change of the mind itself. Repentance represents that condition of after wisdom whereby man realizes that sin is that which has pervented the true meaning of his life and prevented that reproduction of verted the true meaning of his life, and prevented that reproduction of the Christ life which it is the purpose of prayer and sacramental grace to effect. But what brings about this change of mind in regard to sin? It is the realization of that wonderful impulse of holiness in love towards men in the incarnate life. That realization may come home to us in many different ways; probably no two human beings ever awake to it in quite the same way. But when once it has found a dwelling in the soul, it creates a sorrow—an ennobling life-giving sorrow—for all past unfaithfulness to God, and lack of response to His laws of holiness. is the sorrow which has formed the groundwork and beginning of all the known and unknown heroism of the saints of God and His kingdom of holiness the Church. For just as sin fixes a great gulf between the soul and God, so contrition separates the soul from the seductions of its assailant and conducts it into union with the life of incarnate holiness. As Father Maturin used to say "there is no strong virtue, no gentle grace of holiness to which contrition cannot introduce the soul and bring it into fruitful friendship when once it has drawn aside the separating veil of Contrition moreover acts as a God-given protection to the soul in that the soul in which it has been allowed to make its home becomes so beautifully sensitive to the divine impulses that it instantly repels any suggestion that would hinder its growth in holiness. And further the most glorious work of contrition is that it aids man to draw all the strong forces of his soul to one end: there is no longer dissipation of soul energy; but all the essential faculties of man's life are directed day by day Godwards.

Now it is our vocation, if I may include myself among the members of this League, to be banded together for prayer. In prayer we find contact with God. In prayer we give to God His opportunity of finding contact

with us, and also of finding contact through us with others.

Surely our frequent approaches to the Throne of Grace in prayer, should create within us an ever deepening sense of the Holiness of God. That deepening sense of the holiness of God is the making of the penitent, and the basis of sanctity. Those who pray much, those whose ambition it is to pray well, and let everything else fall into the second place in order that they may excel in this, the science of the saints, should be those who because of their frequent approach to God, because of their upward look, sregular, so constant in prayer, should have an ever deepening pain whis full of joy, the pain of penitence, because as they come into to

with the All-Holy the All-Perfect God they realise increasingly their own imperfection. The point is this, that if we would pray well we must be progressive in penitence. Penitence is the most liberating force in all the world. It is the work of the Holy Spirit releasing for prayer wonderful faculties of the soul which sin had atrophied or crippled. Let the thought of the holiness of God, then, occupy the first place in all our

efforts to pray.

Let us believe that we receive the divine impression, when we pray and that quite apart from feelings. Let our faith be of the sort that believes not only what it does not see, but also what it does not feel. Let it be the "I believe" of our life of prayer that in prayer the soul, divinely impressed, is slowly yet surely trained in the capacity to see God, and to see God is to catch also the vision of that great kingdom which at the Incarnation He set up in the world. It is the vision of the Kingdom of God which the lovers of Jesus Christ need to possess to-day: that vision comes sooner later to the soul that perseveres in prayer. Everyone who has tried to pray knows in his or her experience the truth of what St. Teresa says:—"The soul that perseveres in prayer is lost to the devil." And as this vision of God comes to the praying soul, that soul sees all those for whom it intercedes, not those only who are within its home circle of friends and acquaintances, but the unnumbered and unknown friends for whom it prays abroad—it sees them all rising up to take their place as knights of the divine holiness.

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