

The Christian, to live Christianly, must (i) believe the holy religion of Jesus Christ; (2) know it; and (3) practise it. The Christian religion, which we may also call Christian doctrine, is the aggregate of the dogmatic and moral truths which Jesus Christ made known to His apostles, which the Apostles preached, and which the Catholic Church continues to preach to the world.

Now this doctrine we must first believe; that is to say, accept as the infallible, immutable truth, since it is the word of God Himself. This faith is the basis of a Christian life, the foundation and root of all justification.

The faith of which we speak is not that credence which we give to the word of a fallible man, which is not more than a human and changeable opinion, but it is that Christian faith which, based on the infallible word of God, enkindles in the soul a perfect certitude. It is an infused virtue which God communicates to the soul in Baptism, and which we may call a supernatural light, added to the natural light of reason. We say, added to reason, because that, far from being annihilated by faith, is only thus enabled the better to understand why we believe; in other words, the motives of credibility.

What are these? They are those external, visible facts which demonstrate that God has spoken to us and revealed to us the Christian religion, as the Catholic Church holds and professes it; namely, (i) the miracles and prophecies which we know of from history; (2) the miraculous and prophetic existence of the Church, of which we ourselves are witnesses. All these facts, which evidently bear the seal of God's approval, demonstrate that the Catholic Christian religion, to which they bear witness, must come from God. Indeed, these miracles for example, the resurrection of Lazarus or that of Jesus Christ are as inseparably united to the Christian religion as is the royal seal attached to the authentic letters which emanate from a king.

Let us thank God, my brethren, for having given us with faith the evidence of these facts on which it rests; and let us ask Him to aid us in always preserving our faith pure and alive, since it is the foundation of a Christian life.

- I. The first duty of a Christian is to firmly believe the doctrine of Jesus Christ. We must believe the entire Christian doctrine; that is to say, all that the Catholic Church believes and teaches. It is not, then, true (i) that it is sufficient to believe what one pleases of Catholic teachings; or (2) that there is more than one true faith; and (3) that each one can be saved in his belief and sect.

For there is but one God, but one Jesus Christ, who preached but one Gospel, and established but one Church. There shall be, says He, one fold and one shepherd; and again: And if he will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and the publican. Therefore is it that we have this maxim: Out of the Church, no salvation; that is to say, no one can be saved who, knowing the Church, refuses to obey her.

II. The second duty of a Christian is to know his religion, the Christian doctrine. In reference to this knowledge the Christian doctrine is divisible into two parts: the first is of necessity, the second of utility; for though we must believe the entire doctrine, we are not held to know in particular all its dogmas.

1. The part which is of necessity embraces all those truths which the faithful are obliged to know, and of which some are of necessity as means, others of necessity by precept.

2. The part which is of utility embraces all that the Church teaches us excepting what is absolutely necessary. They are useful to the soul, as riches and abundance are useful to the body; they enlighten the understanding, they console and fortify the heart, they powerfully assist us to persevere, without stumbling, in the way of a Christian life.

It may also be said, in general, the more one knows of his religion the more he loves it and the better he practises it. Ignorance is the source of all vices, and especially of irreligion. The impious blasphemes that of which he is ignorant, and the present impiety has not a more powerful support nor a more potent auxiliary than the absence of religious knowledge. This also proves that those who are indifferently instructed in their religion are exposed to the greatest of all evils, the loss of faith.

Do we not see it? Alas! but too many examples. Let us therefore, my brethren, be earnest in our own religious instruction, and be careful to procure the same for those for whom we are responsible. The ordinary means to accomplish this are: assisting at the sermons and instructions given by our Pastors, the reading of good books, prayer, and meditation; and for children, the Catechism and Christian schools.