

"LONELINESS?"

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ONE of the most painful things in life is loneliness. To struggle along the pathways of life without company, without friend or associate is to taste bitterness. Every heart knows the desire for companionship, for someone who will be interested, for someone who will help. This is a fundamental shade in the texture of human character. Other troubles can be borne somehow. To be cut off from all one's fellows, to be forced into the necessity of walking alone—no amount of other joys can dull such a pain. From the seed of this need for companionship has sprung human society in all its various forms. Friendship, fellowship, citizenship are rooted in the desire which human nature always feels for support, for aid. We have pride in our family, our state, our nation, not because they are the best necessarily, but because through them our own lives have flowered. Through them we have received help in forming our lives.

Still, these man-made groups which some bond, affectionate or economic, keeps together, do not, and indeed can not, answer the whole need of souls who realize their supernatural destiny. Men, whose eyes look to the eternal hills, seek a higher company, a stronger bond, than family or club or country. Here we are, spirits in a habitation of clay. Insufficiency, inabilities, frailties cling to us on every side. Within ourselves we find weakness where we need strength, vice where we need virtue, sin where we need grace. In spiritual things, more than in all the other departments of life, we find the need for association. What if our body feel the flow of noble blood? What if the city which gave us birth be the home of the world's masters? What if the state to which we give allegiance be the mightiest under the sun? All these are quite insufficient associations for the task which matters most. They will give us place on earth. What will give us place in heaven? An artist can find a club, membership in which will aid his art. A writer, too, meets the group which helps him. Even the bricklayer, the carpenter, the plumber, has his club, his union. What of the Christian who is to raise and furnish and decorate a house not built with hands? Where is he to look for

the company most interested in his business? If it be said that his soul is dead who can own no native land, human tongue could not describe us if there were no association to aid us in attaining our destiny.

Loneliness? There can be no loneliness for the Christian, no solitude, no lack of association. The aristocrat boasts of his blood, the citizen of his country; but there is no genealogy can compare with the pedigree of Christ's followers. There is no nation can claim a leader and a spirit equal to those which a Christian owns. We are "fellow citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God."¹ We are the members of Christ; we are a "chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people."² As Tertullian so concisely says, "our citizenship, our magistracy is the Church of Christ. We are aliens in this world and citizens of the Jerusalem that is above."³ Whether bond or free, "we are all baptized into one body, we are the body of Christ, and members of member."⁴ The Celt can look with pride, if mixed with pain, to the glory of a day that is dead. The Gaul can dwell with complacency on the one time power and majesty of his native land. The American can thrill to the names of the fathers of his country. But, those who are of the City of God can look today and tomorrow, even as they did yesterday and a thousand yesterdays before, to a glorious kingship which ever abides. He who belongs to Christ can associate himself with an unnumbered multitude of sages and princes and poets and scholars, whose arms are joined with his under the banner of their mutual head, Jesus Christ.

This doctrine of the headship of Christ is not a fiction. It is no mere pious fancy, spun from the effusions of imaginative writers. That Christ is the real head of mankind is the teaching of the Church, finding its source in the words of the Master Himself. It stands out in the history of the Church as a touchstone of Christian belief, which for ages has united princes and paupers, doctors and dunces, masses and masters, sinners and saints, in oneness of hope and aim. Christ is the head, for in Him originates the flow of vitalizing faith and grace. As in the head of the human body is the brain, whence flow the movements of the frame, so in Christ is the grace which can move the members of the Church to supernatural acts.⁵ "Before the foundation of the world, God chose us *in Christ* that we should be holy

¹ *Ephes.*, ii, 19.

² *I Peter*, ii, 9.

³ *De Corona*, xiii.

⁴ *I Cor.*, xii, 13, 27.

⁵ cf. *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 8, a. 1.

and unspotted in His sight in Charity."⁶ In the Son of God was every plenitude of the divinity. Through his taking of human flesh, all men received of that plenitude.⁷ In the beautiful words of St. Peter, God became man that we might be partakers of the Divine Nature. We may be poor. We may be despised. The wealth and the power of this world may be totally lacking to us. It does not matter; Christ is our head, we are His members. If we have sinned, still we are not cast off.⁸ His life and grace can make us live again. Up from the dunghill we are raised by the grace of Jesus Christ, to sit among the princes and saints.

Often it is thought that only our souls are concerned in this vast citizenry which embraces all peoples of all time. But these bodies of ours, they too participate in this allegiance to Christ.⁹ Through Him is that one day, made new and whole again, the body shall rise to taste and feel the delights of God's vision. True, the soul is the first object of Christ's coming, for it is nearer to the image of God. Yet, when the world and its beauty have melted into nothingness, the body which bore us along this way shall share the reward of the soul.

So it is that our all is Christ's. Nothing we do, nothing we are or have, is quite removed from the influence of His grace. In the kingdoms of this world, the ruler, the head, can affect but a small portion of the lives he governs. In the kingdom of Christ, the ruler, the head, always and ever is influencing His members. Not an occasional visit, not a periodic gift, but a continued presence and an unabated giving are the characteristics of Christ's rule. In soul and in mind, in body, and in all life, our head gives His graces and favors.¹⁰

This tremendous truth of our membership in the kingdom of Christ ought to influence our lives. Set over against this kingdom and this Head, is another kingdom with another head. The power of this kingdom is temptation, the bond which unites the citizens of this state is sin. Satan is a head, his subjects are sinners.¹¹ To this kingdom we would not belong. Its rewards are pain, its gifts suffering. Yet, to one or the other of these states we will belong. One head or other will claim us. Christ will not force us; Satan will cajole us. We are free.

All men find themselves faced, at some time or other, with lone-

⁶ *Ephes.*, i, 4.

⁷ cf. *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 19, a. 4; q. 22, a. 1.

⁸ cf. *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 8, a. 3, ad 2.

⁹ cf. *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 8, a. 2.

¹⁰ cf. *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 8, a. 6.

¹¹ cf. *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 8, a. 6.

liness. No matter what our connections—our friends, our clubs, our state—there are elements of life which we can not share with others. There are regions of a man's soul which he needs to open but can not. In the midst of crowds, a man can be alone. Yet, those who know Christ need never be alone. There is nothing which can not be known to Him. There is no circumstance of life wherein we cannot have His counsel and that of His many friends. Only a very thin veil separates us from the real world of Christ and His saints. Nothing can keep us from consciously living in this world, except our own wills. Those favored ones who part this thin veil live in a world which knows no pain, no loneliness, no frustration. Troubles there may be, but these can never be very serious—they live in the City of God. The world goes on its way. Poverty, sickness, contempt may be their lot here, yet they have riches, health, and companionship which the world knows not. They are dead to this world, for their life is hid with Christ.