



Amantissima Voluntatis

To The English People

Apostolic Letter

April 27, 1895

Some time since, in an apostolic letter to princes and peoples, We addressed the English in common with other nations, but We have greatly desired to do this by a special letter, and thus give to the illustrious English race a token of Our sincere affection. This wish has been kept alive by the hearty good-will We have always felt towards your people, whose great deeds in olden times the history of the Church declares. We were yet more moved by not infrequent conversations with your countrymen, who testified to the kindly feeling of the English towards Us personally, and above all to their anxiety for peace and eternal salvation through unity of faith. God is Our witness how keen is Our wish that some effort of Ours might tend to assist and further the great work of obtaining the reunion of Christendom; and We render thanks to God, who has so far prolonged Our life, that We may make an endeavor in this direction. But since, as is but right. We place Our confidence of a happy issue principally and above all in the wonderful power of God's grace. We have with full consideration determined to invite all Englishmen who glory in the Christian name to this same work, and We exhort them to lift up their hearts to God with Us, to fix their trust in Him, and to seek from Him the help necessary in such a matter by assiduous diligence in holy prayer. The love and care of the Roman Pontiffs for England has been traditional from the days of Our holy predecessor.

Gregory the Great. Religion and humanity generally, and especially the English nation, owe him a deep debt of gratitude. Although prevented, by the divine call to yet higher duty, from himself undertaking the apostolic labor "of converting the Anglo-Saxons, as he had proposed to do whilst still a monk, his mind remained intent upon this great and salutary design,"^ nor did he rest until it was accomplished. For from that monastic family which he had formed in learning and

holiness of life in his own house he sent a chosen band under the leadership of Augustine to be the messengers of grace, wisdom and civilization to those who were still buried in paganism. And relying as he did on divine help his hope grew stronger under difficulty, until at length he saw his work crowned with success. He himself writes of this in tones of triumphant joy in reply to St. Augustine, who had sent him the news of the happy result: "Glory be to God on high and on earth peace to men of good will. To Christ be the glory in whose death we live; by whose weakness we are strong, in the love of whom We seek in Britain those brethren whom We knew not; by whose mercy We have found those whom knowing not We sought. Who can tell what gladness filled the hearts of all here to know that the English race, by the workings of the grace of God Almighty, and by your labors, my brother, has been illuminated by the light of our holy faith, which expels the darkness of error, and has with free mind trodden under foot those idols to which aforetime they were subject in foolish fear." And congratulating Ethelbert, King of Kent, and Bertha his Queen, in a letter full of affection, in that they imitated "Helen, of illustrious memory, and Constantine, the devout Emperor,"* he strengthens them and their people with salutary admonitions. Nor did he cease for the rest of his life to foster and develop their faith in instructions dictated by holy prudence. Thus Christianity, which the Church had conveyed to Britain, and spread and defended there against rising heresy,* after having been blotted out by the invasion of heathen races, was now by the care of Gregory happily restored.

Having resolved to address this letter to the English people, We recall at once these great and glorious events in the annals of the Church, which must surely be remembered by them in gratitude. Moreover, it is noteworthy that this love and solitude of Gregory was inherited by the Pontiffs who succeeded him. This is shown by their constant interposition in providing worthy pastors and capable teachers in learning, both human and divine, by their helpful counsels, and b)^ their affording in abundant measure whatever was necessary for establishing and developing that rising Church. And very soon was such care rewarded, for in no other case perhaps did the faith take root so quickly nor was so keen and intense a love manifested towards the See of Peter. That the English race was in those days devoted to this centre of Christian unity divinely constituted in the Roman Bishops, and that in the course of ages men of all ranks were bound to them by ties of loyalty, are facts too abundantly and plainly testified by the pages of history to admit of doubt or question. But, in the storms which devastated Catholicity throughout Europe in the sixteenth century, England, too, received a grievous wound; for it was first unhappily

The action of St. Celestine I. was most efficacious against the Pelagian heresy which had infected Britain, as St. Prosper of Aquitaine, a writer of that time, and afterwards secretary to St. Leo the Great, records in his chronicle: "Agricola the Pelagian, son of the Pelagian Bishop Severianus, tainted the Churches of Britain with the insinuations of his teaching. But at the instance of the deacon, Palladius, Pope Celestine sent Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre, as his vicar (vice sua), and led back the British people to the Catholic faith, having driven out the heretics."

(Migne, Bibl. P. P. S. Prosp. Aquit. opp. vol. un: p. 594) wrenched from communication with the Apostolic See, and then was bereft of that holy faith in which for long centuries it had rejoiced and found liberty. It was a sad defection; and Our predecessors, while lamenting it in their earnest love, made every prudent effort to put an end to it, and to mitigate the many evils consequent upon it. It would take long, and it is not necessary, to detail the sedulous and increasing care taken by Our predecessors in those circumstances. But by far the most valuable and effective assistance they afforded lies in their having so repeatedly urged on the faithful the practice of special prayer to God that He would look with compassion on England. In the number of those who devoted themselves to this special work of charity there were some venerable and saintly men, especially St. Charles Borromeo and St. Philip Neri, and, in the last century, Paul, the founder of the Society of the Passion of Christ, who, not without a certain divine impulse, it is said, was instant in supplication "at the throne of divine grace" ; and this all the more earnestly that the times seemed less favorable to the realization of his hopes. We, indeed, long before being raised to the Supreme Pontificate, were deeply sensible also of the importance of holy prayer offered for this cause, and heartily approved of it. For, as We gladly recall, at the time when We were Nuncio in Belgium, becoming acquainted with an English- man, Ignatius Spencer, himself a devout son of the same St. Paul of the Cross, he laid before Us the project he had already initiated for extending a society of pious people, to pray for the return of the English nation to the Church.

'For this purpose he specially recommended the "Hail Mary," and obtained from the General Chapter of his Order, held in Rome in 1857, a special injunction upon its members.

We can hardly say how cordially We entered into this design, wholly inspired by faith and charity, and how We helped forward this cause, anticipating that the English Church would obtain abundant assistance there- by. Although the fruits of divine grace obtained by- prayer had previously manifested themselves, yet as that holy league spread they became notorious. Very many were led to follow the divine call, and among them not a few men of distinguished eminence, and many, too, who in doing so had to make personal and heroic sacrifices. Moreover, there was a wonderful drawing of hearts and minds towards Catholic faith and practice, which rose in public respect and esteem, and many a long- cherished prejudice yielded to the force of truth.

Looking at all this. We do not doubt that the united and humble supplications of so many to God are hastening the time of further manifestations of His merciful designs towards the English people when the Word of the Lord may run and be glorified} Our confidence is strengthened by observing the legislative and other measures which, if they do not perhaps directly, still do indirectly help forward the end We have in view by ameliorating the condition of the people at large, and by giving effect to the laws of justice and charity.

We have heard with singular joy of the great attention which is being given in England to the solution of the social question, of which We have treated with much care in Our encyclicals, and of the establishment of benefit and similar societies, whereby on a legal basis the condition of the working classes is improved. And We have heard of the vigorous and persevering efforts made to preserve for the people at large an education based on religious teaching, than which there is no firmer foundation for the instruction of youth and the maintenance of domestic life and civil polity ; of the zeal and energy with which so many engage in forwarding opportune measures for the repression of the degrading vice of intemperance; of societies formed among the young men of the upper classes for the promotion of purity of morals and for sustaining the honor due to womanhood. For, alas, in regard to the Christian virtue of continence pernicious views are subtly creeping in, as though it were believed that a man was not so strictly bound by the precept as a woman. Moreover, reflecting men are deeply concerned at the spread of rationalism and materialism, and We Ourselves have often lifted up Our voice to denounce these evils, which weaken and paralyze not religion only, but the very springs of thought and action. The highest credit is due to those who fearlessly and unceasingly proclaim the rights of God and of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and the laws and teachings given by Him for the establishment of the divine kingdom here upon earth; in the which teachings alone strength, wisdom and safety are to be found. The various and abundant manifestations of care for the aged, for orphans, for incurables, for the destitute, the refuges, reformatories, and other forms of charity, all which the Church as a tender mother inaugurated and from the earliest times has ever inculcated as a special duty, are evidences of the spirit which animates you. Nor can We omit to mention specially the strict public observance of Sunday and the general spirit of respect for the Holy Scriptures. Every one knows the power and resources of the British nation and the civilizing influence which, with the spread of liberty, accompanies its commercial prosperity even to the most remote regions. But, worthy and noble in themselves as are all these varied manifestations of activity, Our soul is raised to the origin of all power and the perennial source of all good things, to God our Heavenly Father, most beneficent. For the labors of man, whether public or private, will not attain to their full efficacy without appeal to God in prayer and without the divine blessing. For happy is that people whose God is the Lord} For the mind of the Christian should be so turned and fixed that he places and rests the chief hope of his undertakings in the divine help obtained by prayer, whereby human effort is super- naturalized and the desire of doing good, as though quickened by a heavenly fire, manifests itself in vigorous and serviceable actions. In this power of prayer God has not merely dignified man, but with infinite mercy has given him a protector and help in the time of need, ready at hand to all, easy and void of effect to no one who has resolute recourse to it. "Prayer is our powerful weapon, our great protection, our storehouse, our port of refuge, our place of safety."

But if the prayer of the righteous man rightly avail so much with God even in earthly concerns, how much more will it not avail one who is destined to an eternal existence for obtaining those spiritual blessings which Christ has procured for

mankind by "the sacrament of His mercy." For He who of God is made unto us wisdom and justice and sanctification and redemption,"^ in addition to what He taught, instituted and effected, gave also for this purpose the salutary precept of prayer and in His great goodness confirmed it by His example.

These simple truths are indeed known to every Christian, but still by many they are neither remembered nor valued as they should be. It is for this reason that We insist the more strenuously on the confidence which should be placed in prayer, and recall the words and example of the Fatherly love of the same Christ our Lord; words of deepest import and highest encouragement; words also which show forth how in the counsels of God prayer is at the same time the expression of our helplessness and the sure hope of obtaining the strength we need. And I say to you, Ask and it shall be given you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you; for every one that asketh, receiveth, and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. And the Son of God Himself shows us that if our prayers are to be acceptable to the divine Majesty they must be united with His name and merits. Amen, amen, I say to you if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you. Hitherto you have not asked anything in My name. Ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full.^ And He enforces this by reference to the tender love of parents for their own children. // you, then, being evil, He says, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask Him.

And how abundant are not the choice gifts contained in that good Spirit. The greatest of them all is that hidden power of which Christ spoke when He said: No man can come to Me except the Father, who hath sent Me, draw him.^

It is impossible that men grounded in this teaching should not feel drawn and even impelled to the habit of faithful prayer. With what steady perseverance will they not practice it; with what fervor pursue it, having before them the very example of Christ Himself, who, having nothing to fear for Himself and needing nothing, for He was God, yet passed the whole night in prayer,* and with a strong cry and tears offered up prayers and supplications,^ and doing this "He wished to stand pleading before His Father as if remembering at that time that He was our teacher,"^ as Venerable Bede, that ornament of your nation, wisely considers. But nothing proves so clearly and forcibly both the precept and the example of our divine Lord in regard to prayer as His last discourse to the apostles during those sad moments that preceded His passion, when, raising His eyes to heaven. He again and again entreated His Holy Father, praying and beseeching Him for the most intimate union of His disciples and followers in the truth, as the most convincing evidence to the world of the divine mission on which He was about to send them.

And here no thought is more welcome to Our soul than that happy unity of faith and wills for which our Redeemer and divine Master prayed in that earnest supplication for a unity which, if useful at all times even for temporal interests, both at home and abroad, is shown by the very divisions and confusions of these

days to be more than ever needful. We on Our part, watching the signs of the times, exhorting and taking thought for the future, urged thereto by the example of Christ and the duty of Our apostolic office, have not ceased to pray, and still humbly pray, for the return of Christian nations now divided from Us to the unity of former days. We have more than once of late years given expression to this object of Our desires, and have devoted sedulous care to its realization. The time cannot be far distant when We must appear to render an account of Our stewardship to the Prince of pastors, and how happy, how blessed should We be if We could bring to Him some fruit “some realization of these Our wishes which He has inspired and sustained. In these days Our thoughts turn with love and hope to the English people, observing as We do the frequent and manifest works of divine grace in their midst; how, to some, it is plain, the confusion of religious dissensions which divide them is a cause of deep concern; how others see clearly the need of some sure defense against the inroad of modern errors which only too readily humor the washes of fallen nature and depraved reason; how the number of those religious and discreet men, who sincerely labor much for reunion with the Catholic Church, is increasing. We can hardly say how strongly these and other signs quicken the charity of Christ in Us, and redoubling Our prayers from Our inmost soul We call down a fuller measure of divine grace, which, poured out on minds so well disposed, may issue in the ardently desired fruit, the fruit, namely, that We may all meet into the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God ^ careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, one body and one Spirit; as you are called in one hope of your calling the one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

With loving heart, then, We turn to you all in England, to whatever community or institution you may belong, desiring to recall you to this holy unity. We beseech you, as you value your eternal salvation, to offer up humble and continuous prayer to God, our Heavenly Father, the giver of all light, who v/ith gentle power impels us to the good and the right; and without ceasing to implore light to know the truth in all its fullness, and to embrace the designs of His mercy with single and entire faithfulness, calling upon the glorious name and merits of Jesus Christ, who is the author and finisher of our faith ^ who loved the Church and delivered Himself for it, that He might sanctify it and might present it to Himself a glorious Church.* Difficulties there may be for us to face, but they are not of a nature which should delay Our apostolic zeal or stay your energy. Ah, no doubt the many changes that have come about, and time itself, have caused the existing divisions to take deeper root. But is that a reason to give up all hope of remedy, reconciliation and peace? By no means if God is with us. For we must not judge of such great issues from a human standpoint only, but rather must we look to the power and mercy of God. In great and arduous enterprises, provided they are undertaken with an earnest and right intent, God stands by man's side, and it is precisely in these difficulties that the action of His providence shines forth with greatest splendor. The time is not far distant when thirteen centuries will have been completed since the English race welcomed those apostolic men sent, as We have said, from this very city of Rome, and, casting aside the pagan deities, dedicated the first fruits of its faith to Christ our Lord and God. This encourages Our hope. It is, indeed, an

event worthy to be remembered with public thanksgiving; would that this occasion might bring to all reflecting minds the memory of the faith then preached to your ancestors, the same which is now preached â€” Jesus Christ yesterday, to-day, and the same forever. ^ as the apostle says, who also most opportunely exhorts you, as He does all, to remember those first preachers who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.

In such a cause We, first of all, call to Our assistance as Our allies the Catholics of England, whose faith and piety We know by experience. There can be no doubt that, weighing earnestly the value and effects of holy prayer, the virtue of which We have truly declared, they will strive by every means to succor their fellow-country- men and brethren by invoking in their behalf the divine clemency. To pray for oneself is a need, to pray for others is a counsel of brotherly love; and it is plain that it is not prayer dictated by necessity so much as that inspired by fraternal charity which will find most favor in the sight of God. The first Christians undoubtedly adopted this practice. Especially in all that pertains to the gift of faith the early ages set us a striking example. Thus it was the custom to pray to God with ardor that relations, friends, rulers, and fellow-citizens might be blessed by a mind obedient to the Christian faith. ^

And in regard to this there is another matter which gives Us anxiety. We have heard that in England there are some who, being Catholics in name, do not show themselves so in practice; and that in your great towns there are vast number of people who know not the elements of the Christian faith, who never pray to God, and live in ignorance of His justice and of His mercy. We must pray to God, and pray yet more earnestly in this sad condition of things, since He alone can effect a remedy. May He show the measures proper to be taken; may He sustain the courage and strength of those who labor at this arduous task; may He deign to send laborers into His harvest.

Whilst We so earnestly press upon Our children the duty of prayer, We desire at the same time to warn them that they should not suffer themselves to be wanting in anything that pertains to the grace and the fruit of prayer, and that they should have ever before their minds the precept of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians: Be with- out offence to the Jews and to the Gentiles, and to the Church of God} For besides those interior dispositions of soul necessary' for rightly offering prayer to God, it is also needful that they should be accompanied by actions and by words befitting the Christian profession â€” first of all, and chiefly, the exemplary observance of uprightness and justice, of pitifulness for the poor, of penance, of peace and concord in your own houses, of respect for the law â€” these are what will give force and efficacy to your prayers. Mercy favors the petition of those who in all justice study and carry out the precepts of Christ, according to His promise: // you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you. ^ And therefore do We exhort you that, uniting your prayer with Ours, your great desire may now be that God will grant you to welcome your fellow-citizens and brethren in the bond of perfect charity. Moreover, it is profitable

to implore the help of the saints of God, the efficacy of whose prayers, specially in such a cause as this, is shown in that pregnant remark of St. Augustine as to St. Stephen: " If holy Stephen had not prayed, the Church to-day would have had no Paul."

We therefore humbly call on St. Gregory, whom the English have ever rejoiced to greet as the apostle of their race, on Augustine his disciple and his messenger, and on those other saints of God, through whose wonderful virtues and no less wonderful deeds England has merited the title of " Island of the Saints " ; on St. Peter and St. George, those special patrons, and above all on Mary, the Holy Mother of God, whom Christ Himself from the Cross left to be the mother of mankind, to whom your kingdom was dedicated by your forefathers under that glorious title "The Dowry of Mary." All these with full confidence We call upon to be Our pleaders before the throne of God that, renewing the glory of ancient days, He may fill you with all joy and peace in believing: that you may abound in hope and in the power of the Holy Ghost} Care should be taken that the prayers for unity already established amongst you Catholics on certain fixed days should be made more popular and recited with greater devotion. Especially that the pious practice of the Holy Rosary, which We Ourselves have so strongly recommended, should flourish, for it contains as it were a summary of the Gospel teaching, and has always been a most salutary institution for the people at large. Moreover, We are pleased of Our own will and authority to add still another to the sacred Indulgences which have been granted from time to time by Our predecessors. We grant, that is, to all those who piously recite the prayer appended to this letter, to whatever nation they may belong, an indulgence of three hundred days; moreover, a plenary indulgence once a month on the observance of the usual conditions to those who have recited it daily. Finally, may the divine prayer of Christ Himself for unity fill up the full measure of Our desires, a prayer which on this day, through the mystery of His most holy resurrection, We repeat with the utmost confidence: Holy Father, keep them in Thy name whom Thou hast given Me: that they may be one as We also are one. . . . Sanctify them in truth. Thy word is truth. . . . And not for them only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in Me: that all tmay be one, as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us. . . . I in them and Thou in Me: that they may be made perfect in one: and the world may know that Thou hast sent Me and hast loved th m, as Thou hast also loved Me."-

Finally, We desire all manner of blessings from God for the whole of the British people, and with all Our heart We pray that those who seek the kingdom of Christ and salvation in the unity of faith may enter on the full realization of their desires.

To THE Blessed Virgin. Prayer for England.

O Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our most gentle Queen and Mother, look down in mercy upon England thy "Dowry" and upon us all who greatly hope and trust in thee. By thee it was that Jesus our Saviour and our hope was given unto

the world ; and He has given thee to us that we might hope still more. Plead for us thy children, whom thou didst receive and accept at the foot of the cross. O sorrowful Mother! intercede for our separated brethren, that with us in the one true fold they may be united to the supreme Shepherd, the Vicar of thy Son. Pray for us all, dear Mother, that by faith fruitful in good works we may all deserve to see and praise God, together with thee, in our heavenly home. Amen.

1. Joann. Diac. in vita ejus, c. ii. 33. 2 Epist. c. xi. 28, et c. ix. 58. ' lb. c. xi. 66, al c. ix. 60, c. xi. 29, et c. ix. 59.
2. 2 Thes. uL 1.
3. Ps. cxliii. 15.
4. Chrys. Horn. 30 in Gen. ^ 1 Cor. i. 30. ^ Luke xi. 9, 10.
5. John xvi. 23, 24. ^ John vi. 44. * Heb. v. 7. 2 Luke XL 13. * Luke vi. 12. ' Li ev. S. Joann. xvii.
6. Â» Eph. iv. 13. 2 lb 3-5. ^ Heb. xii. 2. ' Eph. v. 25-27.
7. Heb. xiii. 8. ^ lb. 7. " S. Aug. de dono persev. xxiii. 63-
8. 1 1 Cbr. X. 32. ' John xv. 7.
9. Rom. XV. 13.
10. John xvii. 11, 17, 20, 21, 23.