No. 70.

Religious retirement.

July 30, 1820 + 13
Matt. XIV. 23. "And when he had sent the multitude away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray." 

This is one of those expressive actions of our Lord's life, by which the Evangelists, with their usual simplicity & brevity, open to our view at once a trait in the character of their Master. It is remarkable that they never describe or set forth his dispositions & feelings; they merely state what he did & leave his conduct to speak for itself. On no occasion do they appear anxious to exert an influence on the understanding of the reader by exaggerating the virtues of the Saviour.
Gave. They give a plain & unvarnished account of his actions, without any comment of their own; of these alone we are to infer what was his character. Of this we have a remarkable instance in the text. The evangelist informs us that Jesus had been spending the day as was usual with him, in miracles of mercy & goodness. These supernatural powers, oh! the joy received from that day, the source of all power, had employed in giving health to the sick, comfort to the distressed, strength to the weak, & hope to the despairing. When evening had come, his disciples, from motives of caution & tenderness, advised him to send the multitude away, that they might prepare food, as the place where they were assembled, was too remote & desert to supply them. It was on this occasion that our Saviour performed the miracle of multiplying the small stock of food they had, till it was sufficient for the whole multitude. With the five loaves & the two fishes, he fed the five thousand who had come around him to receive his instructions; if he were filled by his power? And after he had thus fed them, he led them off the day with doing good, how did he conclude it? In a manner worthy of him, only the first lessons of whose religion was supreme reverence for God. And when he had sent the multitude away, says the historian, he went up into a mountain apart to pray. Such, indeed, is the example of our Lord. After he had laboured through the day to enlighten, to save, & bless those around him, he retire in secrecy & silence to communing with himself, & to pour out his heart to God, his Father. And from the manner in which this prayer exercise is mentioned by the sacred writers, both here & in other places, it is evident, that it was not merely an accidental or occasional thing, but that it was the habit of his life, that it
was the custom of every day, & that it flowed uly without interruption from a deep internal principle of piety. The outline & field of instruction does the devotion of Jesus, who beheld in the feelings of every one should be that of love, uly of desire, though it may be, where his Saviour breathed forth this soul to his God & our God. We can almost imagine, that one bear from him the voice of prayer, breathing the deep silence of the wilderness, & wafting to the throne of heaven the gratitude & the petitions of his heart.

I have selected this particular part of our lesson, for example, my dear, that I might explain & remind you the duty of religious retirement, meditation & prayer. Perhaps there is no duty more liable to be often omitted, & in time to be most neglected than this; for, from its very nature, its claims, though not less strong, are less offensive than those of the duties of the social relations, & in regard to the institution of religion, whether he ever withdraws from the world to meditate in secret on serious things, or not, it is a matter entirely between him & his own heart. Such being the secret nature of this duty, is such the want of an...
immediate, pressing excitement to it, from outward circumstances. It would not perhaps, unless that it is so much neglected. But if this neglect be not a subject of wonder, it certainly does of deep regret. There is no practice, no exercise more than others are needed to strengthen the good impressions, and to communicate spirit for the active and faithful discharge of duty, than that of withdrawing sometimes from the world, and holding communion with ourselves and our God. Surely we need something of this kind to save us from that insatiable consuming love of the world, and devotion to its pursuits, which is so apt to take from us the sense of our accountability to an endless existence, when the short tenure we have of life shall have been run. The most exciting current of the world's affairs is constantly wakening over his minds, and we do not occasionally step aside, and let the current go by, or trace our souls by secret communions with God. before we again plunge into it; there is not reason to fear, that it will succeed every thing like purity, purity, and devotion, and leave us only the most mercenary, cold, worldly motives to the heart, that never returns to contribution. The heart, that never returns to contrition. This heart, that never returns to contrition.
necessary to be governed by it, when they went to the intercourse of the world. But this is a most preeminent blessing of things, it ought to be united. Truth, says one who has been called the first of religion:

"Truth is not local. God alike pervades the earth and fills the world of traffic and the shade. He might be feared amidst the bustle seen, or absent where business never intervenes." But still, though we would not maintain that religion consists in retirement & meditation, yet we must plead that retirement & meditation are essentially helpful to religion. After the best we can say of all helps to religion, we are not so mean as to think of ourselves as allowed. We are that; but I am not so mean as to think of ourselves as allowed. We are that; but I am not so mean as to think of ourselves as allowed.

If we would have the flame of virtue within burn brightly, we must constantly cherish & feed it. Our Saviour did not think it unnecessary to retire from the scene of active action to raise this soul. He said, "Shall we sleep and watch until morning?" Did he,
of our transgressions, & strive to imitate the spirit of contrition & penitence, to cherish the desire of the resolution of amendment. It is in the hour of retirement that we may find our sins before us, more than in their time. For his character Nothing else has a more powerful tendency to strengthen that self deception to which we are so easily prone, & to free us from the knowledge of ourselves, than the bustle & turmoil of the world. We are born along by such a pressure of successive events, that we scarcely stop to reflect for a moment to examine our hearts. The hurry & agitation of the various scenes, in which we are engaged, are extremely unfavorable to the task of self inspection. While we are thinking of nothing but our pleasures or our gains, how we may acquire certain objects or accomplish certain ends, we are little disposed to reflect on the course of our thoughts & turn them for a while on ourselves. & hence it is, that we think so little of our sins, while our minds are occupied by the cares & business of the world. You might as well expect to see plants & flowers shooting up & flourishing on a path daily trod by the feet of successive passers by, as the emotions of deep & sincere penitence for our sins rising up in a soul that is occupied by ten fold of excitement. If we may now, by an incessant train of absorbing cares, & if we are at truth do not refuse to ourselves, we must again seek for the rest, & still reflect on what we have done & what we have omitted to do. In the calm & tranquillity of solitude, that the reflection & contrition will be most distinct & lively. Then our imagination cannot so easily paint our future colours & the objects before us. & so shall the fear of what the desire of applause will die away; & then the overbearing current of hurried thoughts & agitated feelings cease to flow. We shall learn to see that we are sinners before God, that we have offended in our duty, & against the purity of his laws, & that not a day has pass away, without having to bear a sad memorial of our sins & follies. It is in the bos
are constantly supported. There is a tendency in the constant pressure of cares & labours, to remove the Deity from our thoughts. While we are surrounded by the various objects which engage our present, we are hardly conscious of accomplishing favorite purposes, or of returning all our blessings & enjoyments to the hand of God. Thinking, as we do, that by the laws of God's moral government, very much of our success or failure in life is the result of our own efforts, or our own misconduct, we are apt to become independent of self-dependent, & regard ourselves as the authors of our own happiness or unhappiness. Thus it happens that while we are hurrying on by the excitement of active occupations, we shut out the thoughts of God from our hearts, or at least, think of Him but of indifference. Nor to counteract this tendency, the habit of occasional retirement & meditation is absolutely necessary. When we withdraw from the world to commune with our own hearts, we are taught to reflect with proper feelings, on
goodness and mercy of God. We can call to mind the
ten thousand instances in which we have experienced his care
and kindness. His providence has been
to us, as it was to the Israelites of old. a derisory
day a pillar of fire by night. By the invisible
means of his providence, he has preserved us, and
we cannot but see how highly the blessing of
his matchless grace. All that has been, and all
that has passed, will come up in remembrance of us that
we will proceed from the same fountain head.
We
reflect too on the best gifts of God to man. the
gift of his Son, of that religion and virtue which conduce
to holiness and conduct us to the mansions of heaven.
While the mind is deeply engaged with such thoughts
shall not the heart be tranquilly satisfied
of solitude, rise in gratitude to heaven? you will
not the soul pour itself out in the voice of thanksgiving and
prayer to him from whom descends every
perfect gift? en
5. When we are about to indulge in religious reflec-
tions, we should reflect on the goodness and mercy
of life, in the duties with more particularly
belonging. To our station in the abilities and opportunities
we have thus far obtained our heart and understanding,
yielding the will of him, who hath been sent into
the world. It is one of the best uses of religious
retirement to meditate on what we are, and to what
we are destined, to think seriously on the relation
in which we stand to God the relation in which
to each other. It is by such reflections, that the
may be best removed from that mercenary and selfish
spirit, which does not too often give an opportunity
being constantly immersed in the business of the
world. In the solitude of retirement, we can all
be to mind of the many instances of our friends and com-
panions, who have gone down to the grave by an unexpec-
ted and a slow descent, and may bring home to our minds the
remonstrances of our own remembrances are fitted
to teach. In the sacred hour of self-communification, the
individual may ask himself, what have I done
or what have I done? To determine what are now the ob-
jects to which my affections cling most closely, and
the enjoyment & pursuit of which I find most delightful. God has given me many blessings in society, yet shall that station suit me? Doth time press heavily on my hands, or do I feel it with some spiritual interests? Have I yielded to the allurements of that station, y or seek it with passivity, or seek it with alacrity? Have I yielded to the allurements of contemplation, y or seek it with alacrity, or seek it with reluctance? God has opened various means of moral & religious improvement to me, let my conscience and reason have I used those means? These are some questions that each one of us may make the hour of religious meditation an hour of profitable reflection, to the meditation, we should not shun it, let the hour be spent in prayer, in the prayer of all sorts, to make us more diligent, zealous, & faithful, to give us strength for our duty, to enable us to be active in the charge, and to prepare us for the charge of life, as the vast. But, that this may bear its fruits, the joyful welcome "well done" at the bar of heaven.

Such, in brief, are some of the objects, which should occupy the hour of religious meditation. In this setting before you, the advantages & duty of religious exercise, I would not be understood to assert the contemplative virtues above the active & social virtues. The example of our Saviour should forbid us to do this. We find, he did not leave the people till evening came upon him; but at the close of a day spent in the most solemn scene of duty & benevolence, he went to a part of a mountain to pray. Those hours of prayer were passed in meditation, many of them, and in the discharge of his mission, thus he has taught us that the active & social duties are more important than those of a private & ordinary nature. When they come in concert, doubtless the latter should yield to the former. There was a time, when a considerable portion of the world, fearing its temptations, flew from its persecutors, shut themselves up in solitude, & made their religion to consist in silence & meditation, in excluding from their hearts all connexion with mankind. This double life was
a great & gross abuse; it was converting the means
into the end, it was deceiving the shadow instead of
the substance. Such is all the religious retreat,
to whom I would invite you. You are not called
to charm & white his austerity. You are required, like
your Saviour, after you have done hours of exertion in
active duty, to rest from that you may raise your
soul to God, that you may think of your sins &
your duties, of his goodness, of prayer for his assis-
tance & guidance. This is the retreatment, which will
give you strength & clarity for your duty in this
world. You have an acceptable God & your soul
in the world to come. It will not convert you into
solitary, monkish idlers, but it will make you better
members of society & better things. Religious retreat
makes you to no prison house: it does not lead
you occasionally to a calm retreat, where the soul
may shake off many of the gross incumbrances on
its way; but it makes our weary wings feel the heav-
ened flight & more ease.

July, 1820.
Our Saviour in His mercy we thank Thee for all our moral and religious privileges, for the opportunities we enjoy of improving in purity and virtue. We bless Thee for all that we learn from the examples of the wise and good, especially from the example of Our Lord. We pray that we may study to imitate His character; may we transcribe into our own lives His graces. May we receive our Saviour as our appointed and eternal guide to eternal felicity. We thank Thee, O Lord.
God of holiness, thy Source of all good, will it please thee to regard us with thy favor, and enable us in all things to walk in a manner well pleasing in thy sight. Assist us, we beseech thee, to raise our thoughts to thee, our God; to withdraw at times from the pursuits and labors of the world, that we may meditate on the things which belong to our everlasting peace— that we may call the mind on our sins, on the spirit of repentance and contrition, that we may think of all thy mercies to us, and strive to feel the gratitude and we ought;— that we may reflect on the frailty of our lives, on our duties, our destinies, our immortal hopes, and pray for thy grace and assistance. In the hour of religious retirement, may we seek to strengthen our minds with principles of good resolutions, our love to thee, and our converse with thee. By meditation and prayer, may we be raised heavenward; and thus, while on earth may we...