

Pray if you wish to be saved

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JMJ

U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love You, save souls

O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

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THE CHRISTIAN'S LAST END = Volume 5

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

The Conviction of the Criminal in the Judgment

“I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world.”— St. Matthew 13: 35.

There is nothing so hidden in the hearts and consciences of men from the beginning of the world that our Lord shall not bring to light and speak out openly on that day when he shall come to judge the living and the dead. And not only shall the Judge do that; there shall also be many accusers to demand justice on the sinner. What will you do then, oh, sinner? Will you be able to deny your wickedness, or to excuse it against so many witnesses? Will you, perhaps, appeal to others? But where the accusers are so numerous no appeal can help. But do you still wish for other witnesses? Then, if so, you will find enough of them to convict you as clearly as the noonday sun of the crimes you shall be charged with; as I now intend to show.

I. The criminal will be convicted of having led a bad life, and therefore no denial will help him.

II. He will be convicted of having been able to lead a better life, and therefore no excuse will help him.

I. I cannot represent to myself better the sinner convicted of having led a vicious and criminal life than by considering the case of St. Peter in the court of the high-priest, warming himself with the servants at the fire. How he must have been embarrassed! A servant-maid who attended the door was the first to attack him: “Thou also wast with Jesus the Galilean. But he denied them all, saying: I know not what thou sayest” (St. Matthew 26 : 69, 70). A little later the servants came to him and said: “Art not thou also one of his disciples?” But Peter kept fast to his denial: “He denied it and said: I am not:” I know not the man, nor what you are speaking of. At last one came to him, saying: “Did not I see thee in the garden with him?” (St. John 18: 25, 26.) There Peter was caught, and as it so happened the cock crew and he escaped.

Sinner! there you have a picture of what shall one day happen to you; but with this difference, that you will not, like Peter, be able to seek safety in flight. You will then be publicly accused of all your crimes, not merely before a few servants, but in the presence of all in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and your accusers shall surround you in countless numbers. Are you not the man, they will say, the wretch who did, said, or thought this or that contrary to the law of the great God? Try now, if you can, to deny the charge; say: I am not; I know not what you are speaking of; I am innocent; and see if your efforts at deceit will be as successful then as they oftentimes are now when you hide your wickedness from the knowledge of men.

Those countless witnesses will cry out against you: "Did I not see thee?" Was I not present while you were actually committing the sin? Such shall be the evidence of all your companions and co-operators in sin, and they shall testify to the crimes you committed with others. Did I not see you? Were we not together in that house, that room, that garden, that deserted street, that hidden corner, on that day, that night when we did that wicked act together? The lifeless creatures that the sinner abused to offend God shall testify against him; they will accuse him of those sins that he committed in solitude by outward action. On that day the heavens and the earth, the sun and the moon, the day and the night, and the whole world shall stand against us to convict us of our sins.

There is not the least need of witnesses, oh, sinner; your case is lost already without them if you leave this world in the state of mortal sin. You yourself shall be your own accuser; you shall convict yourself of your sins and vices, not only of those that you have committed with others, not only of those that you have committed in act and secretly, but also of those that no man, no creature whatever, could possibly know anything of except yourself, namely, of the inward sinful thoughts of your heart. Your own conscience shall be a witness against you:

"Their conscience bearing witness to them," says St. Paul, "and their thoughts between themselves accusing, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men" (Rom. 2 : 15, 16). The book shall be produced in which all is written from which the world shall be judged. "The book spoken of," says St. Augustine, "is a certain divine force and intelligence which shall cause every one to recall to mind and to remember with a wonderful quickness all his works, whether they are good or evil." This is that truthful and infallible book that shall be opened before the eyes of all men, and cry out in a loud voice: "Did not I see you?" Did I not behold everything you have thought, said, or done, and see when, how, and where you did it? Have I not always experienced a pang of anguish whenever you acted contrary to the will of God and his commandments? From this conscience, says St. Bernard, all your sins shall spring forward like dogs let loose from the leash, and they shall seize you by the throat and cry out upon you as their author. Terrible it is to read what the Sacred Scriptures say of Sennacherib: after his whole army had been destroyed by the angel, he returned in shame and confusion, "and his sons that came out of his bowels slew him with the sword" (2 Paral. 32: 21). Wicked Christian! what sort of children have you brought into the world during your life? Do you not know them? Come without having first done penance into the valley of Josaphat, when the angel's trumpet

shall call you thither, and then you shall see how they will rage and storm against you. The children of your head, your proud thoughts, in which you extolled yourself and lowered others; the children of your heart, those wicked thoughts and unlawful desires, that hatred and vindictiveness; the children of your eyes, those unchaste looks; the children of your tongue, that hateful, abominable conversation; the children of your hands, those acts of injustice, those impure touches—these shall all cry out against you: you have committed us! we are your works! Unhappy sinner! what excuse shall you make? Wherever you turn you are betrayed by other men, by all creatures, by yourself. There is no use in denial; you are fully convicted of having led a godless life. Nor is there any chance of making an available excuse, for it shall also be clearly proved that you might have lived much better and holier.

II. In nothing is our understanding quicker and more apt than in palliating and excusing our own faults and sins; it is most easy for us to find some way of either lessening or cloaking our own wickedness. Sometimes we put the blame on the Almighty, saying that it is he who gave us such strong inclinations for evil; sometimes we accuse our own weakness and frailty; sometimes others with whom we have to deal in the duties of our state, and in whose company we find daily occasions of sin; sometimes we blame our own ignorance or want of deliberation, and say: I knew no better; I did not think this or that was forbidden under pain of mortal sin. With these and similar excuses we try to persuade ourselves while here on earth that our sins are not so very grievous, and that God does not look on them as very wicked.

But bring those lame excuses with you on the judgment-day and see how they will serve to defend and protect you. Say to God; Oh, Lord, I am the work of thy hands; as thou hast made me, so I am; the violent inclination and proclivity to anger that I experience every day; the impatience, avarice, impurity, and sensuality that I am subject to; the aversion I have to the cross, and to everything that is hard and bitter; the law of sin that always fights in my members against thy holy law—these things I have not given myself; I have received them from nature. What else, then, couldst thou have expected from a poor, weak mortal, such as thou has created me, but faults and sins? What! *will* you make the Almighty the author and cause of your wickedness? Bring witnesses here! Your own conscience will convict you of a lie. It is true that you came forth from the hands of your Creator with those violent passions? Were you always so wicked and inclined to evil, even before good fortune or the esteem of men turned your head? even before that senseless love hardened your heart? even before you learned to know the world properly? Were you like that forty, thirty, twenty years ago, and even in your first youth, in your early innocence? Can you not remember that you were then more inclined for devotion and the fear of the Lord, and that you were afraid of the very name of mortal sin? Why have you not been able to continue in those good dispositions, and to restrain and mortify, while still weak and almost dormant, the evil inclinations that afterwards showed themselves?

Let each one look into his own conscience, for it will be a book full of matter on the last day. There is hardly one of us who cannot remember having served God for some time or other during his life; no one who has not had some experience of the sweet repose of a

good conscience; no one who has not tasted the consolation and joy of being free from all guilt and loving God above all things. Perhaps many a one when comparing his present with his past life will be compelled to sigh forth with shame: ah, beautiful life! where art thou? How modest and retiring I was then; how vain and haughty I am now! How pious and devout I was then; how tepid and slothful in the divine service now! How chaste and pure then; how dissolute and unclean now! What shall I say when my conscience gives testimony of me before the tribunal of God? Shall I allege in excuse that my evil inclinations and corrupt nature did not allow me to live in better fashion? Ah, the innocence of my early years shall convict me of a lie, and prove beyond doubt that I might have lived better if I had only chosen to do so.

Can I appeal to the weakness and frailty that in the midst of so many dangers and opportunities of evil did not suffer me to offer resistance to temptation? Oh, a countless multitude of witnesses shall be there to put me and all sinners to shame in that case! It seems to me that I hear all the chosen saints of God crying out with one voice in the words of the prophet Job:

“My strength is not the strength of stones, nor is my flesh of brass.” What! Do you think we are made of granite, or of brass, or iron, like the statues you see of us? Our bones and relics that you honor on the altars show clearly enough that we were not Angels, but men, weak and frail like you, who had flesh and bodies like you. Look at the countless multitudes of every age and sex; the young boys, tender virgins, weak widows, who, in spite of the severest temptations and of many crosses and trials, remained chaste, patient, resigned to the divine will, and lived in a pious and holy manner. Could you not have done the same? If you know your own weakness and frailty, why did you rush so wantonly into the dangerous occasions of sin? Why did you not guard your senses more care-fully? Why did you not humbly beg of God to protect you, as we did? No; away with your lame excuses! You could and should have led a better life!

And what answer shall I then make? Shall I throw the blame of my sins on my state of life, on my daily occupations, as most worldly people do? To excuse their sins and slothful lives some appeal to an unhappy marriage, others to the number of children and household cares they have to attend to, others to the labor they have to undergo, to their riches, to their *poverty*. Is it then true that you have not been able to lead good lives nor to work out your salvation? But listen again to the countless multitude of witnesses who cry out against you from amongst the number of those who are on the right hand of the Judge—married and single, superiors and inferiors, courtiers, warriors, rich, poor, people of every condition and sex and station in life. All these will say to you: We have lived under the same conditions, in the same domestic circumstances, in the same office and employment, amidst the same worldly fashions and customs, yet we became holy, and are now eternally happy. Could not you have done as we did? We have lived in the world, in daily intercourse with worldly people, but we shunned the vain customs and laws of the world; why have you always adored them and taken them as the guide of your actions, although the Christian law was placed before your eyes as well as before ours, and the warning of the Apostle was for your good as well as ours: “Be not conformed to this world”?

Ah, what is to be done then? Shall I say: I knew no better at the time; I did not reflect on what I was doing? But that might avail a heathen, a Turk, a Jew, a wild barbarian brought up in savagery, who never heard a word of the Christian Gospel, of the commandments of God, of the holy Sacraments. But you and I, oh, Catholic Christian, who are born and bred in the full light and with every opportunity of doing good, how could we put forward such an excuse? But what am I saying? Even many heathens, who followed the mere light of reason and lived better than many a Christian, shall testify against us.

You will say, perhaps, that the subject of our past meditations was chosen only with a view to frighten and terrify you. And you are perfectly right. Would to God that all who need to be frightened were filled with terror by it! I should congratulate myself and thank God from my heart, but in the way which St. Paul speaks of: "I am glad: not because you were made sorrowful, but because you were made sorrowful unto penance" (2 Cor. 7: 9). Even so should I rejoice if some of you were terrified and dismayed by the meditation on the last judgment; not by a mere passing fear, but by a fear unto penance; a fear that would make you regret your past sins and never again offend God. We shall all appear before the tribunal of God, there to give an account of our stewardship; what will it help us to thrust that truth out of our minds? Shall we have less reason to fear or to expect judgment? Not without cause does the Holy Ghost warn us: "Remember thy last end," oh, man! and think of it often, "and thou shalt never sin." Let each one recall this to mind when he feels an inclination to sin; let him say to himself: would I do this if I heard the last trumpet calling out: arise, ye dead, and come to judgment? Should I wish to have this revealed to heaven and earth? Let each one think: the life I now lead and the manner of it is in accordance with my Christian profession, and with the sworn promise I made to God in Baptism to renounce the vain world and its idle, silly customs, the flesh and its lusts, the devil and all his works? that there may be no one to accuse him at the last day. Otherwise, if your answer to this question is not favorable, then abandon the life you are leading and embrace another. Say to yourself: on this life, and I know not how long it will last, depends my future judgment, the position I shall hold in it, whether I shall be on the right side with the Angels, or on the left with the devils; therefore I will spend this short, uncertain time in the service of my God alone, so that the meditation of the last judgment, instead of terrifying me, shall inspire me with a consoling hope, and when the great day comes I may enter with the sheep of Christ into eternal joys! Amen.

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