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JMJ
U.I.O.G.D.
Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love Thee, save souls
O God, come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

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VOL. III - THE GOOD CHRISTIAN
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

The Peace of Heart that Comes From a Good Conscience

“Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.” Luke 2: 48

Mary and Joseph, whose souls were enlightened and united to the will of God, were they oppressed with sadness and anguish of mind? Yes, they were; and they had good reason for it; they had lost Jesus, the divine Child; and this loss was the only thing on earth that could disturb the peace of their hearts. We are daily disturbed and uneasy at heart. Why? Is it because we have lost Jesus? Ah, if that were the reason of the sighs and tears of sinners, they would soon find peace again! But that is not generally the cause of our trouble. What is it, then? We have now so many trials and calamities to contend with; sickness threatens our health and life; manifold troubles make life bitter to us. If I could now say to you with truth: be comforted! Rejoice! You have nothing to fear; would that not be good news for you? Well, I am not wanting in good wishes in your regard; and if you do your part, you will attain peace of heart that comes from a good conscience.

- I. *A constant peace of heart is a beautiful and consoling good;*
- II. *How we must seek this peace to remain with us in all circumstances*

In what does peace of heart consist? It consists in this: that no matter what troubles, crosses, or trials come to us from exterior sources, we still keep the heart quiet and tranquil. This is what the Angels announced at the birth of our Lord: “And on earth peace to men of good will” (Luke 2: 14). This is the peace that Christ left to his disciples when

he sent them forth as lambs in the midst of ravening wolves: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you” (John 14: 27). It is the peace that St. Paul wishes the Philippians: “And the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keeping your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4: 7).

Oh! What a beautiful good, to have peace with one’s self, to be always and unchangeably contented and satisfied at heart! This is the best, nay, the only true good that man can enjoy on this earth. “There is no pleasure above the joy of the heart” (Ecclus. 30: 16). And in truth, how would it help me to happiness to have all the goods of the world, if I were discontented at heart? And how could it make me unhappy to be the poorest of men, if I am peaceful and contented at heart? Therefore whenever the Holy Scriptures speak of peace, they always assign the heart as its true dwelling-place. Thus Anna in her Cantic says: “My heart hath rejoiced” (I. Kings 2: 2). And Ecclesiasticus: “My heart delighted” (Ecclus. 41: 20). And David: “Thou hast given gladness in my heart” (Ps. 4: 7). The joy itself of the elect consists in inward joy and peace of heart. All men seek and desire this peace as there is no one who does not wish to rejoice so there is no one who does not wish to have peace. That is, there is no one who does not wish to be contented, pleased, and satisfied at heart. Ask the farmer in the field, the tradesman in his workshop, the merchant in his journeys by sea and land, what they seek by their labor; and they will all answer contentment and peace of heart—that is the object of all their thoughts, desires, and cares. If I were not so poor say some, if I were as rich as those others, I should be contented. If I were in as high a position think others, as such-and-such a one, I should be contented. If there were nothing to prevent me from enjoying the love of that creature I should be contented. Ah, you are wrong from the very start! “O ye sons of men,” I may well exclaim with David, “how long will you be dull of heart? Why do you love vanity and seek after lying?” (Ps. 4: 3.) Peace is not to be found where you are looking for it. The goods that you seek are external to yourselves they cannot touch the heart or satisfy it interiorly. Get possession of all the riches and honors and pleasures of earth; what good will they do you, if you have to lie sick in bed? Will they give you peace? No. And why not? Because health, which is an interior good, is wanting to you; without it all outward things cannot bring you contentment. “When you say,” writes St. Augustine, “I wish to live happily, you desire a good thing, but you cannot have it here.” So it is; to no purpose do you seek in the world what you cannot find in it, nor expect from it.

There never was since the beginning of the world and there never will be till the end of it any one who found perfect satisfaction and contentment in honors, riches or pleasures. No matter how abundantly one may be provided with them, there still remains a want, which disturbs the peace of the heart. Achab was a great king in Israel; was he contented in the midst of his riches and treasures? Hear what the Scripture says of him: “Angry and fretting...and casting himself upon his bed, he turned away his face to the wall and would eat no bread” (3 Kings 31: 4). What was the matter with him? What distressed him to such an extent? Naboth had a vineyard near the palace, and Achab wished to get possession of it in order to increase his gardens, but failed to do so. That was the sole cause of his discontent. And was it worth while to trouble himself so much about it? Was a piece of

ground that he wanted able to disturb his heart and cause him such worry that he was inconsolable? Peace and quiet of heart do not consist in having an abundance of worldly goods and riches, but in being content even with a little. Aman, the favorite of king Assuerus, came home to his wife and dilated on the extent of his glory and honor: Was he happy with all his honors? Not by any means! "And whereas I have all these things," he said with bitterness of heart, "I think I have nothing" (Esther 5: 53). What was wanting to him? Mardochai alone refused to honor him, and that caused him so much pain that all his riches could give him no pleasure.

Ptolemy, king of Egypt, was once walking on the bank of the Nile, when he saw some laborers, who after having eaten their poor meal, which consisted of bread and water, began to laugh and joke with each other. The king could not restrain his sighs and tears at seeing how happy those poor and lowly people were. "Ah unhappy me!" he exclaimed, "that I cannot be one of them." Charles V, that great Roman emperor, makes the same confession with regard to himself. After having heroically despised the world so far as to abdicate his crown and retire into solitude, he acknowledged that the whole time while he was king and emperor he never enjoyed a single quarter of an hour of true peace and contentment of heart, such as he did enjoy after having left the world. To put the matter briefly; was there ever a man in the world who had more of its riches, honors, and pleasures than Solomon? Gold and silver were to him like the stones on the street. On account of his wonderful wisdom, kings and queens of other countries looked on him almost as a god. He himself describes the pleasures he enjoyed: "Whatsoever my eyes desired, I refused them not: and I withheld not my heart from enjoying every pleasure, and delighting itself in the things which I had prepared." But was he contented and happy with it all? Hear what he says of it: "I saw in all things vanity and vexation of mind" (Ecclus. 2: 10).

II. All the exterior goods of the world, its honors, riches, and joys are not capable of contenting or filling the human heart. It is useless, then, to seek for peace of heart in such things. Therefore you must seek it in something better than all that the world can give or take away; in something better than yourself. And what can that be unless God? There is only one Good, and that is an infinite one which can satisfy your heart. So great is the dignity of the human heart, that no good except the Supreme Good can satisfy it. This Good we can all possess, if we wish, by keeping our consciences in the state of grace and free from sin. If I have a good conscience, then God is mine, and with him I have all that I can wish or desire. And God is so permanently and constantly mine that no angel in heaven, no devil in hell, no man on earth, no joy or sorrow, can deprive me of him, unless with my own consent; and he is mine with the assurance that, if I only keep my conscience pure, I shall possess him for all eternity.

This joy of heart, this peace of a good conscience is what I wish you, not only for this year, but for all the years of your lives.

Peace be with you, married people! The most necessary thing in your state is peace and harmony with each other. If that is wanting, oh, then your state is a bitter one, a hell as bad as it can be made on this earth! Ah, perhaps some are now thinking, that is what we have

to complain of! That drunken, passionate husband has not a kind word or look for me; he can only curse and abuse. That vain, idle wife uses her time paying useless visits, and allows the house to take care of itself; she spends more in dress than I can make in a year; the children are obstinate and disobedient; how can we have peace and contentment under such circumstances? But where do all these disorders come from? You are not at peace with God in your hearts you have not a good conscience which is in all things conformable to the will of God. If you only endeavor to keep in the friendship of God, the evils you complain of will soon be remedied; the husband will love his wife, the wife will obey her husband; parents will bring up their children carefully for heaven; children will love their parents, and show them due honor; and therefore all will enjoy peace and contentment, on which so much depends.

Peace be with you, unmarried people! Many of you, who are still in the bloom of youth, seek peace, pleasure, and happiness in living according to the world, in dressing and adorning yourselves to please the eyes of others, in talking, amusing yourselves, going on parties of pleasure, dancing, and such things. But what a great mistake you are making! "Seek what you are seeking," says St. Augustine, "but there is no peace where you are looking for it." True peace of heart is to be found nowhere but in a pure conscience united with God; in the follies you seek the conscience is often wounded. Your hearts are created for far better things! It is God, and God alone whom you should love, him should you possess by sanctifying grace, and in him should you rejoice. Only try to please him; clear out your hearts for him, and avoid with the utmost care all that could offend him; then you will be able to rejoice even in solitude, and to say with truth: "I found him whom my soul loveth" (Cant. 3: 4). I possess God, and with him true peace and joy of heart.

Peace be with you, sinners! For you this wish is most necessary, because, as you are in the state of sin, you have lost peace altogether. No doubt, unless you are hardened in wickedness, you will acknowledge that "it is an evil and a bitter thing for you to have left the Lord your God" (Jer. 2: 19). "For who hath resisted him, and hath had peace?" (Job 9: 4.) "There is no peace for the wicked." Who could be contented and happy, knowing that God, who is present everywhere, is his enemy? No one. Come, then; delay no longer; return by true penance and enjoy that peace which the merciful, though angry God offers you every moment; then you will see and experience that there is a great difference between being a servant of God and a slave of the devil, and how sweet it is to enjoy peace of mind in a good conscience. Again do I wish you all, "the peace of God which surpasseth all understanding." May it "keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4: 7). May it remain with you all the years of your lives, until you enjoy it with the elect of God in the kingdom of heaven for all eternity. Amen.

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