

V1_13th_after_Pentecost= The Necessity of Restoring Ill-Gotten Goods

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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!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

VOL. I = THE BAD CHRISTIAN

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Necessity of Restoring Ill-Gotten Goods

“There is no one found to return and give glory to God.” — St. Luke 17:18.

To return and give thanks for having been restored to health is certainly an obligation which the law of gratitude imposes on all men; but amongst ten there was found only one who fulfilled this law, as our Lord complains in to-day’s Gospel: “Were not ten made clean? And where are the nine?” Without further delay I will speak of the law of justice. On last Sunday I explained that many men practice different kinds of injustice, and what I fear is that out of every ten who do so hardly one is to be found to come back and make restitution for what he has taken, kept, or injured of the property of others; and yet

I. The restitution of ill-gotten goods is necessary.

II. It is absolutely necessary, and nothing can excuse one from making it.

I must restore what I have unjustly taken, what I unjustly possess, or what I have injured of the property belonging to others. All laws, human, natural, and divine, say: “Pay what thou owest.” This law is written in the hearts of men; no one can doubt of this obligation; and it is a duty founded on the first principles of nature and human intercourse: “Do not to another what you do not wish to be done to yourself.”

What fearful disorders would arise if one were allowed to retain what he acquires dishonestly. Stealing, usury, oppression, how common they are even now, when people know that they are bound to give back the stolen property! How would it be if there was no such obligation—if, after repenting of one’s sin, there was no further atonement required, so that the thief might consider himself the lawful owner of what he has stolen?

There is no sin so great that the Catholic Church has not power to forgive, provided the sinner is truly sorry and firmly purposes amendment. You may have committed all kinds of impurity, you may have cursed your neighbor, you may have beaten your father and mother, blasphemed God; yet, fearful as those sins are, if you are sincerely sorry for them and confess them, with a sincere purpose of amendment, you have done all that is required on your part to be freed from those terrible sins, and to become again a child of God. But if you have stolen a single dollar, and are in a position to restore it, but fail to do so, even if you were to weep tears of blood for your sin and most solemnly promise never to do the like again, and

confess the theft a hundred times, it is all of no use. If you do not make restitution when you can, not all the power on earth and in heaven, neither priest nor bishop, can absolve you, and if you receive absolution a hundred times it will do you no good; the sentence of absolution cannot be ratified even by God; the owner of the stolen property is the only one who, if he wishes, can free you from the obligation of restitution. That man comes to hear Christ speaking to him in sermons on Sundays and holydays, that he may learn how to do good; a pious man he must be, from all appearances; but has he restored the unjust gain he made in his business by cheating and trickery of all kinds? If he has not, I am afraid that, although he has admitted the Saviour into his heart, salvation is not come to him. That man lives in a pious and Christian manner outwardly; that woman is looked upon as a saint; she goes two or three times a week to confession and Holy Communion; very good signs, indeed. But, I ask, do these people pay their debts? Do they restore what they possess unjustly? No matter how often they receive their Saviour in the Holy Communion, if they refuse to do that there is no salvation for them. Sincere sorrow, confession and a firm purpose of amendment, although they are sufficient for the remission of any other kind of sin, are not of the least use in a case of injustice, without the firm purpose of making restitution, when it is possible. "Such a sorrow is a delusion; the sin will not be forgiven until restitution is made." And nothing can excuse from this but inability alone; that is to say, if you have not the means of making restitution; but even in that case, you must still have the sincere wish and intention of making restitution as soon as ever you can.

It is a remarkable thing that in this matter God is more careful, so to speak, of the rights and the property of men than he is of his own rights. He has appointed his priests as judges, with full power to forgive all sins that are committed against his honor alone; but he gives them no power to free any one from the obligation of restoring the ill-gotten property. So strictly has God commanded restitution to be made. To give back what of right belongs to another is necessary, absolutely and indispensably, and nothing can excuse from it.

Were you to ask every one here, all would say at once that of course restitution is necessary; no one ever doubted that. But if you were to ask one who possesses dishonestly something of value and were to say to him: Come, now, give back what you know does not belong to you, I am afraid there would be a good deal of hesitation, and all sorts of excuses would be brought forward to show that either the obligation does not exist in this particular case, or that it is not urgent. Let us examine the principal excuses that are given.

I myself am very often cheated and robbed; many things are stolen from me; people do not pay me what they owe me; I have never known any one to make restitution to me, although I have often missed articles of value; when restitution is made to me, I will make it to others. Such is the first excuse, but, in my opinion, it is the most flimsy of all; it might hold good with a fool, but not with a sensible man. Because you have been wronged, you are allowed to wrong others; because you have been robbed, you are allowed to steal from your neighbor; no one pays you what is due you, therefore you need not give back what you have belonging to others, nor pay what you owe them. Tell me, did they who robbed you act rightly? No, you will say; they were thieves and rogues. Nor are you yourself a bit better, for you have stolen from others. They who do not restore what they have unjustly taken from you, are they in the right? No; they will go to hell with their ill-gotten gains. And if so, how can you think that you, with your ill-gotten gains, can go to heaven unless you make restitution? Your excuse is worthless; pay what you owe, give back what you possess wrongfully.

A second says: I acknowledge that I must make restitution, but I cannot. And what prevents you? My honor and good name are worth more than gold to me. If I made restitution I should lose them, and should be looked upon as a thief. That is indeed a plausible excuse; your good name! Which do you think the more valuable—your honor in time, or the salvation of your soul in eternity? Keep your honor by all means, but do not lose your soul for its sake. Why have you acted in such a way as to risk being looked upon as a thief if it becomes known? Who forced you to be dishonest? Must the innocent suffer on that account, and lose their right to what belongs to them? Besides, in what does a good name consist? In be-

ing guilty of theft and injustice, or in fulfilling the law of justice? To give back what one possesses unjustly is a good, praiseworthy and necessary act of justice, which will not make you a thief or a rogue; but to keep what you have stolen is the very thing that will make every honest man look upon you as a thief. Still, as you are so anxious about your good name, ask an experienced and prudent confessor to help you; tell him clearly what, how much, and in what way you have taken unjustly; he will be able to tell you how to make restitution and at the same time to preserve your honor intact, so that not a soul will know anything of it to your discredit, not even the person whom you have wronged. Therefore, pay what you owe.

But, a third will say, what is to become of my children, if I must make full restitution? How can I ruin them? How can I see them not so well clad as formerly, and having less to eat? It would be like tearing my heart out. You are completely mistaken; if you refuse to make restitution, you will then ruin your children in reality, for you will place them in the unhappy state of sin. When you are in hell, your children will either make restitution, or they will not. If they fulfill their duty, what richer are they for what you have left them? None at all, but they have all the trouble that you should have taken in restoring your ill-gotten gains to their lawful owner. If they do not fulfill their duty, although they know, or have a reasonable suspicion, that what they possess has been unjustly acquired, then you drag them, and perhaps their children's children, down to hell also; because no prescription, not even of a hundred thousand years, can justify any one in keeping property which is known to be the result of dishonesty; the obligation of restitution still remains.

We read in the Book of Job: "The riches which he hath swallowed, he shall vomit up" (Job 20:15). If a man eats too greedily food which the stomach cannot digest, he is compelled to reject it again, and with it, the other food which would otherwise have been easily digested. Ill-gotten goods are an indigestible morsel; not only are they hurtful in themselves, but also they generally bring about the loss of what has been honestly acquired. "The riches which he hath swallowed, he shall vomit up, and God shall draw them out of his belly." Experience teaches us that there are many families, the members of which toil and worry day after day, but cannot get things to prosper with them; they are always in difficulties and cannot find the reason of it. Ah, if their dead ancestors could come up out of their graves they could show their descendants the cause of their poverty; show them that money and property which they gained by usury, bribery, injustice, and left to them. That is the hidden worm that is gnawing away their property, that is the indigestible morsel that compels them to part with the fruits of their honest labor. What will become of my children? Give back what you have no right to, and you will merit for your children a blessing from that God who gave back to his servant Job sevenfold all that he had lost. Pay what you owe.

From all this you can see how foolish and senseless it is to desire and seek for unlawful gain; for I ask you again: Do you intend to make restitution or not? If you do intend it, why do you take what you must give back, greatly against your will? Why should you, then, burden your conscience and offend God by such a foolish and unprofitable sin? Do you intend to keep what you have got dishonestly? Oh, then I pity your poor soul, for you are doing a still more foolish thing. Do you wish to be lost forever? "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?" (St. Matthew 16: 26.) If one of you were condemned to the gallows and the chance of saving his life and reputation were offered him on condition of his paying two or three thousand dollars, would he not willingly part with that sum, if he had it, to save himself from a shameful death? If there is any one here, as I hope there is not, who possesses anything unjustly, I tell you in the name of God that you are sentenced to eternal death, that you will burn in hell forever, if you keep what is not yours. The only means of avoiding this shameful death is restitution, and will you hesitate to make it? In order to preserve your temporal life, that will last, maybe, only a few days, you are ready to give away all you have; but to preserve your eternal life and to save yourself from hell, you hesitate about parting with a little money that does not belong to you; money that death will soon take from you violently, hurling your soul down amongst the devils in hell.

For the sake of your salvation, pay what you owe. Give back to that storekeeper what you cheated him of; make restitution to those customers with whom you have dealt dishonestly; if you do not do it now,

death will come and will cry out to you in a terrible voice: leave the money that you made unjustly, the property that you never had a right to; give back the blood of the poor that you have gorged yourself with; away, accursed one! Out of the house of which you were never a rightful owner; away with you to that hell which you yourself have chosen for the sake of your unjust gains! Amen.

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