

V1_19th_after_Pentecost= The Malice of Irreverence in Church

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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!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

VOL. I = THE BAD CHRISTIAN

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Malice of Irreverence in Church, and the Punishment It Deserves

“How camest thou in hither?”—Matt. 22: 12.

What a severe Judge! What a terrible punishment to inflict on the poor man! What had he done? He had come to the marriage-feast, without having on a wedding garment. That was his whole crime. If that is the case, how will it then be with those who appear, I will not say without decent clothes, but with a disrespectful demeanor, in the house of the great King of heaven, to which the faithful come, either to receive Holy Communion or to hear Mass or the Word of God in sermons? Christ Jesus, who is bodily present in our churches, and who sees not only the outward behavior, but the most secret thoughts of men, how many there are who enter his house and who remain in it to whom he could say, with just resentment: “How camest thou in hither,” dressed as frivolously as if going to a dancing-house? How camest thou in hither, without bending the knee and showing me proper honor? How camest thou in hither, to talk and chat, as if you were on the market-place? How camest thou in hither, to allow your eyes to indulge in impure glances? How camest thou in hither, to approach my table with a conscience stained with mortal sin? Quick, ye Angels! Bind the hands and feet of this impious man who dishonors my house, and “cast him into the exterior darkness.” Yes, so it will be one day with all who in any way are irreverent in the church of God. A sin that we generally think little of, although by it the Almighty is treated with the greatest contempt, so that he punishes it with the greatest severity, as I shall now show.

Irreverence in the church of God is an act of the greatest contempt toward God, which he, in his anger, punishes most severely.

Every sin implies a dishonor and a contempt of God, since a miserable mortal dares to rebel against his Almighty Lord and God, and to trample his law under foot. Therefore every sin merits the just anger and vengeance of God to such a degree that, if it is a mortal sin, and is not repented of, it deserves no less a punishment than eternal fires amongst the demons in hell.

I. The whole world belongs to God, and he has given it to men, to do with it what they please. They can build houses to live in, courts of justice to settle their disputes, markets and shops to buy and sell, streets to walk on, while they can use the mighty ocean to transport their merchandise from one place to another, and they have besides fields and forests, mountains and valleys, gardens and meadows for their support, business and amusement. The churches alone God has reserved for himself, to receive therein due homage and adoration from men. Although the whole world belongs to God, he is satisfied with the

church alone as his dwelling-place, as he said to Solomon:

“I have chosen, and have sanctified this place, that my name may be there forever, and my eyes and my heart may remain there perpetually” (2 Par. 7: 16). I do not allow any one to use this place for any other purpose, except to do homage to me.

2. It is true that the great King of heaven is present in all places, and that honor and reverence are everywhere due to him; but he dwells in the church as in his palace, where he is seated on his throne, that he may be seen and adored by all. When I am in the church I am in a holy place, where the same God who gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai still declares his law to the people; in a place where I can adore the same Lord and Saviour who was adored in the stable at Bethlehem; in a place where sins are forgiven by the same merciful Lord who went about formerly in search of sinners; in a place where that loving Lord gives as our food and drink the same Flesh and Blood which he gave to his Apostles at the Last Supper in Jerusalem; in a place where the holy sacrifice of Calvary, in which the Son of God was offered on the Cross as a Victim to his heavenly Father, is renewed daily, in which the same Precious Blood still flows for us that was shed on the Cross. Ah, when we think of this, should we not cry out, like the patriarch Jacob, when he saw the ladder on which the Angels were ascending and descending: “How terrible is this place! This is no other but the house of God, and the gate of heaven. Indeed the Lord is in this place” (Gen. 28: 17, 18).

Now, to be disrespectful to God, to be in any way wanting in reverence to him in such a holy place is not that to insult and offend the Majesty of God, which deserves infinite honor and love, on his very throne, in his own palace? Therefore, is it not to offer God the greatest possible insult? And can a Catholic dare to do this? Or if any one is so foolhardy, can the all-seeing God allow such conduct to remain unpunished? A Catholic, I say; for I dare not even accuse heathens and idolaters of such a crime toward their false gods of wood and stone. I feel ashamed when I read what Seneca says of the humility, modesty and reverence which the Romans observed in former days in the temples of their gods.

A Turk was once urged by a zealous missionary to embrace Christianity. No, said he, defiantly (and his answer may well put some of us to shame), I will never embrace your religion; I cannot, and must not do so. And why not? Because you Catholics either believe what you all profess, that God is really present in your churches, or else you do not. If you do not believe it, your religion is a mere hypocrisy; if you do believe that you adore the true God, to whom the highest reverence is due, and yet with such disrespect behave so badly in his presence, as I myself have seen in your churches, where people appeared dressed in a frivolous style, talking, laughing, staring about them, hardly bending a knee, or stretching out a hand to God, even while their lips were moving in prayer—if, I say, you behave like that, even while the sacrifice you call so holy is being offered, and while your God is elevated to be adored, then, if you still believe in God, you must be the most wicked people on earth. Therefore I will never belong to a religion in which God is so shamefully treated in his own house.

Now, what have you to say to this? Can you deny his accusation and the conclusion he lawfully derives from it? Do not people behave as badly as that, nay, even worse, in many of our churches? If the Turk had been able to see all the sin that is committed in our churches in thought and desire, nay, sometimes even by the outward senses, how would he not have been scandalized? Sins without number are committed in private houses, in dancing houses, in the public promenades, in public houses, in places of resort for young people of both sexes, in hidden corners, by day and by night. Not even the church, the holy house which God has reserved for himself, that he may receive due honor therein, is free from sin. Certainly those sins are concealed from the eyes of the pious, who keeping themselves recollected as they ought, in the presence of God, are attending to their prayers and suspect no evil of others; but can they be hidden from the all-seeing eye of the God who is present? If Turks, heathens, or heretics were guilty of such wickedness, it might be tolerated to a certain extent; for they could excuse themselves, as people sometimes do, when they have not shown due respect to another. Oh, they say, I beg your pardon; I did not recognize you. Catholic people, who knew that he, the true God, was present amongst them, they are

the guilty ones, and in his own house, too! Have they not room enough to commit sin elsewhere, that they must make choice of his house as a place in which to offend him?

3. A sin of that kind must be punished, even before the day of general punishment arrives. God has already announced his determination by St. Paul: "If any man violates the Temple of God, him shall God destroy" (1 Cor. 3: 17). Did not the city of Jerusalem feel that punishment often enough? Jerusalem was the favored and chosen city of God, the holy city; nevertheless, how often has not that city been destroyed and laid waste. It was taken and plundered by Sesac, the king of Egypt; it was plundered by Joas, king of Israel; Nabuchodonosor attacked and took it twice; it was taken by Antiochus, the Illustrious, and afterwards by Jason; it was captured and sacked by another Antiochus, until at last it was completely destroyed by the Romans. And why was that? If God loved that city, why did he deliver it so often into the hands of its enemies? Did not its magnificent Temple, consecrated to God, help to save it from destruction? Nor its altar, nor its tabernacle, nor the Holy of holies, nor the many sacrifices that were offered in it? No; the Temple itself was plundered, burnt and destroyed along with the city; the altar and tabernacle were carried off, and all sacrifice ceased. And why was that? The three Hebrew youths walked about unhurt in the midst of the flames of the furnace in Babylon, because the Almighty, in order to preserve their lives, changed the heat of the fire into a gentle breeze. Could not the same God prevent his Temple from being burnt? Certainly he could have done so, but God wished to teach the world that he has no pleasure in the beautiful stones and gilded walls of a temple made by hands: but in faith, and charity, and purity of heart. The three youths were full of piety and the fear of the Lord, therefore God dwelt in them, and protected his dwelling from the flames; but in the Temple at Jerusalem he saw all kinds of sin and abomination, with which the Jews dishonored it, and, as a punishment of their crime, he allowed it to be destroyed, although it had been consecrated to him.

4. Now, if God acts with such rigor toward his own churches because they are profaned by men, what refuge can they hope to find in the church, or rather what a terrible chastisement will they not have to expect who profane the church by their irreverence and by many sins? The church will help them as little as the tabernacle helped Core and his companions, whom the earth swallowed up before the very tabernacles; as little as the Temple sheltered Joab, who was slain as he was embracing the altar with both arms; as little as the ark protected the Israelites, when thirty thousand of them were slain around it. For such contempt of God cannot but draw down severe punishment. If we knew the judgments of God, could we be surprised that God so often visits us with private and public calamities? If no other sin was committed, the profanations and sins that are committed in the churches by word and thought, I will not say by act, would be enough to draw down the anger of God.

Is it to be wondered at that the prayers we offer up in our necessities before the altar of Jesus Christ are so seldom heard? For we insult God by profaning the place in which he would otherwise hear our prayers, according to his promise. No; he is carrying out the threat he uttered long ago: "And when they shall cry to my ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them." When they are under the pressure of difficulty and in danger of losing a great part of their property, when a decision is about to be given against them to their great detriment, when husband, or wife, or only child, whose help they are in need of, grows dangerously sick even to death, they will run to the church and cry out for mercy with a loud voice, with outstretched hands, on bended knees, and prostrate on the ground; but he will not hear them; he is determined to close his ears to all their prayers and supplications! They will redouble their prayers, promise amendment, go on pilgrimages, make vows, burn candles, have Masses said, and get prayers said in convents; but he will not hear them; he will not pay the least attention to them; the misfortune that threatens them will surely happen; they will lose their case, the husband, or wife, or child, will die. But, oh, Lord, after so many prayers, sacrifices, and promises? Yes, no matter what they do, God says, I will not hear them. I will despise all their prayers and cries, and that because they have so often despised me in the same churches!

I trust that this threat will not be carried into effect against any of you who are here present, and that my whole sermon may be necessary simply as a salutary warning never to forget the reverence you owe to the

house of God. In future, when you are going to church, think on the way of the great God whom you are going to adore; and while in the church, keep up a lively recollection of the great Monarch of heaven, and imagine that you are quite alone with him, so that the thoughts of others may not distract you. If any one attempts to disturb you by the ordinary greetings or salutations, or by talking, give them, more by silence and modest demeanor than by words, the same answer that Ferdinand II., Archduke of Austria, whispered into the ear of a certain prince, who spoke to him in church: "Let us pray, that we may not give scandal to the devout people;" lest they should think we did not know what reverence is due to God, who is here present. In a word, always appear in church with such inward and outward humility, and so watch over your eyes and hands, over the postures of your bodies and the thoughts of your hearts, that you may not make the house of God a house of destruction for yourselves, but that you may one day acknowledge with joy and gladness, that you have found in that house the eternal salvation of your souls. Amen.

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