

V1_6th_after_Epiphany= Sloth in the Service of God

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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 + + +

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SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Sloth in the Service of God

“The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which is the least indeed of all seeds, but when it is grown up, it is greater than all herbs, and becometh a tree.” St Matthew 13: 31, 32.

How can the kingdom of heaven be like to a grain of mustard seed? How can that immense and boundless kingdom be compared to a small seed? By the mustard-seed we may understand Christ himself, or the Catholic Church, or the Gospel of Christ and its propagation throughout the world. But we can also understand the mustard-seed to mean every good work of the just man; for as the mustard-seed is very small in itself, but has such strength that it grows to be a lofty tree, so also the good works that we perform in the state of grace, considered in themselves, are small indeed, but nevertheless they are powerful enough to gain heaven and God himself as the reward. But I must complain bitterly of the folly and madness of most people, who lose and neglect an eternity of happiness, either by continuing in the state of sin, or by their sloth and tepidity in good works. How little is thought of that? Small and trifling things as we imagine them to be, by which we could frequently please God and gain heaven. Small and trifling things, in which we often offend God and lose an eternal reward; these things are generally looked upon as of no account, and against this sloth and tepidity in the service of God I mean to speak to-day and say: He who neglects small things in the service of God is in a dangerous state,

- I. Because God can have no pleasure in him;*
- II. Because he can have no pleasure in God.*

I. Suppose you have servants in the house to wait on you. They do what you tell them, but they do not do all; they are faithful in many things, but now and then they take sides with your neighbor, who is an enemy of yours. They look after your comfort and welfare, but now and then they take little things out of the house without your consent. They do their work, but in some instances according to their own ideas, how and when they wish, and not how and when they are told to do it. Now I ask you, are you satisfied with such servants? Are they just what you want? No, you say; I do not want such people in my house at all. But why not? It is only in little things that they act against your will; it is only in certain things that they refuse obedience. No matter, you say; I do not want them; if I hire a servant, I expect him to do what I tell him, exactly as I tell him; and he must be as faithful to me in one thing as in another. And you are quite right, too!

But tell me now is God, perhaps, less a master than you? Has he less right to command us mortals than you have to command your servants? Has he less right to our service and obedience than you have to theirs? Perhaps he does not care much if we now and then go over to his adversary, or serve him, according to our own inclinations. The first commandment teaches us quite the contrary: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind" (Luke 11: 27). Not half-heartedly, not partially, not incompletely; but with thy whole heart, above all things, in all things, nothing excepted, in the least things as well as the greatest.

Now, it is evident enough that he does not serve God in this way who disregards small things, as he imagines them to be, now and then, in the divine service, although they may in reality be small things; for he does not accomplish the will of God in all things, but reserves some things for himself, since he does not do them when and how God wishes them to be done. They make nothing of small things, or what they imagine to be small things, although they are frequently and in reality of great importance. They do not seek God with all their hearts; they do something for the soul, but they also allow the flesh a good deal of satisfaction; they strive to practice virtue to a certain extent, but at the same time they indulge in vice. They observe the law of God, and also fulfill the law of the vain world; they try to please God, and at the same time to refuse nothing to their sensuality; in one timing they serve God, in another the devil. What they want is some way to heaven that is not marked down in the Gospel of Christ; a way that is neither too broad or too narrow; they try to build a city midway between Jerusalem and Babylon, in which the love of God and the love of self may be on an equal footing. Can God be pleased with such servants? No, he cannot. "No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will sustain the one and despise the other" (St. Matthew 6: 24). "He that is not with me, is against me" (St. Matthew 12: 30).

We hope to possess the great God for all eternity in the kingdom of heaven, and yet we refuse to give ourselves completely to him for a few short years on earth! Do we not, then,

deserve to have no part in him either on earth or in heaven? Alas! yes, says St. Augustine, that must be the end of it, according to the threat pronounced by our Lord himself: "I know thy works; that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot; but because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth" (Apoc. 3: 15, 16). Hear this, tepid Christians, who neglect small things in the service of God, who divide your hearts, and keep one part for God, and the other for the devil, the world and your own sensuality, so that you offer to God only half service: because you are neither hot nor cold, but tepid. Can the great God be satisfied with such a half-hearted service? No, you do not and cannot please him. His desire is that his holy will be done in all things without exception, with the greatest exactness. I have found a man according to my own heart, says he, speaking of his servant David, because "he shall do all my wills" (Acts 13: 22), in small things as well as in great. "he that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater" (St. Luke 16: 10). So that God has no pleasure in him who disregards small things in his service, and who, even in one or two timings only, does not try to do his will with all diligence.

II. A man of that kind, no matter how pious and devout he may be otherwise, can have no pleasure in God, for God cannot please him who does not please God. If I see a servant who is continually unfaithful to his master, even in small things, who is always disobedient and obstinate in certain matters, and who refuses to do as he is told, whenever he is inclined to differ with his master, although he sees that the latter is displeased with him on that account, I must necessarily conclude that such a servant has little love and respect for his master, and cares little about his favor amid good opinion. Certainly, if I have a genuine love for a person, I would be afraid to do thee least thing to displease him, and I would do all in my power to give him pleasure; if he only gives thee slightest sign that he wishes me to do something for him, I am quite delighted to it, no matter what trouble it may cost me.

How do we know that a man is avaricious and fond of money? For instance, a man has a bag full of gold; he is very careful of it and keeps it under lock and key, so that it may not be stolen; what do you think of him? Is he avaricious? Another man has inherited thirty thousand dollars; he runs to and fro, and gives himself no end of trouble to secure the possession of this legacy; would you look on that man as avaricious, and say, oh, what a miser he is? No, you would do the very same yourself, for you would think that such a large sum of money is well worth the trouble; and even the most prodigal of men would be unwilling to lose it. But if you see that same man is just as greedy of a small amount as he is of a large sum, that he disputes about a penny, that he is willing to get out of bed at night and to open the door for the sake of a few pence, and that he looks at every penny twice before he spends it, oh, you would say, that man is a regular miser: there is no doubt that he is fond of money. If, on the other hand, he neglects small things in his business, so that he will hardly rise from his chair to make a few pence, and does not care if he loses a dollar now and then, oh, you think, he does not care much for money; nor is he a provident man, for he is too ready in spending what he has.

The same is to be said of a Christian with regard to the love and service of God. There is many a one who is neither a murderer, nor an adulterer, nor a blasphemer, nor given to cursing, nor does he cheat or rob others—in a word, he does nothing and will do nothing that he knows to be a mortal sin; but is he earnest and zealous in the divine service? Has he a real, sincere love for God? I am not yet certain of that by any means; for the sins he avoids are grievous mortal sins, and must be avoided by every one who wishes to save his soul and go to heaven. But if I find that he is just as careful in avoiding venial sin, that he is equally diligent in performing the least of his obligations to God, and that he does at once what he knows to be pleasing to God, then I must acknowledge that he really loves God with his whole heart, and that he is determined to go to heaven. But, on the other hand, does he commit venial sin without fear or shame, does he adhere to certain practices or customs of the world which he knows to be contrary to the divine will? If so he may go to confession and Communion, he may hear Masses and sermons, he may attend public devotions; he may give alms and pray as much and as often as he likes, but he will never persuade me that he has a sincere pleasure in God, or that he loves God with his whole heart.

And what sort of a love can such people have when they say, not, indeed, in words, but by their acts, no matter how long they spend reading their prayer-books, or how high an opinion they have of their own piety, when they say: My God, I love thee above all things, but (and this is a thought that must often occur to them) not above this or that thing, which I do not wish to give up? Lord, may thy holy will be done, but not in this matter. Oh, my God, I am ready to do all that thou wishest, except that one thing; in that I have to conform to the custom of the world, and to prefer it to thee. I am willing to sacrifice everything—my life, my property, my blood, if thy holy faith or thy honor and glory should require it, but thou must not ask me to overcome myself in this or that matter. Is that the way to love God with the whole heart and above all things? You may say to me a hundred times, and a thousand times, that it is; but I will not believe you, and I maintain that all your piety is mere nonsense; God does not please you; you do not love him at all, not to speak of loving him with your whole heart. For “he that feareth God, neglecteth nothing” (Eccles. 7: 19), be it great or small.

Consider the example of the Saints; you may learn from it what it is to love God with one’s whole heart. Ask St. Bernard, and he will tell you that “a soul that loves God looks upon it as more fearful and terrible than hell itself to offend him in the least thing.” He does not speak of offending God in great, but in small things. Nor does he say that a soul that loves God would find such offences terrible, but more terrible than hell. Consider patriarch Abraham; he was so ready to obey the least sign of God’s will that he actually drew his sword to sacrifice to God his only son Isaac, whom he loved most tenderly. And we, Christians, who say so often in our prayers that we love God with all our hearts, we refuse to sacrifice to him not our only child, but some miserable thing that he asks of us! Is it not evident that we do not really love our God, and therefore that he does not really love us from his heart?

But, alas! What an effect on the soul and mind of a Christian who wishes to save his soul and to go to heaven must this thought have: I have no true pleasure in God, and he has no true pleasure in me! On the contrary, the thought, I now give to my God all that I have, and my God has a true pleasure and joy in me, is the thought that takes all the bitterness and pain out of the torments of the martyrs, out of the labors and afflictions of apostolic men, and fills their hearts with the sweetest heavenly consolation.

But for you, tepid and slothful Christians, who refuse to give to God all that he asks of you, what a painful and troublesome thing it is for you to have to think, in the midst of your business, your household cares, and your sensual enjoyments, nay, even in the midst of those apparent good works of yours, that you do not do all that God wishes, that God is not satisfied with you, that he has no pleasure in you! In that state you go to the church to pray; but the worm is gnawing secretly at your conscience: God is not pleased with me. You confess your sins, but your conscience cries out: God is not pleased with me, because I do not amend all that I should amend. You go to the table of the Lord to receive the Flesh and Blood of your Saviour; but your conscience cries out: God is not pleased with me, there is still something in my actions or in my dress, as I approach the communion-rail, which is displeasing to God because it gives the others an occasion of offending him by looks or desires. After Communion you repeat the usual prayers to the God whom you have within you; I love thee with my whole heart; I am sorry for ever having offended thee by the least sin; I would rather die than displease thee in the least; I offer myself, body and soul, to thy service; do with me, oh, God, whatever thou wilt! What fine words these are, which are found in every prayer-book; but they are accompanied by the gnawing worm: I know that what I say is not true; I do not love God with my whole heart; there is still a sin, an imperfection that I am not sorry for, a scandalous custom that I do not wish to give up; I will not give everything to God; in this or that thing I will not do what is pleasing to God. Therefore you have great reason to fear that God, to whom you are unwilling to give yourself and all that you have completely, may also, when temptation assails you, deny you those special helps of his grace, which he is bound to give to no one, and in your last moments he may deny you the grace of final perseverance, which he is equally at liberty to give or to refuse. Can any Christian who wishes to go to heaven be at ease with such a thought as that in his mind?

Ah, Christians, let us act honestly with the God of infinite goodness; let us serve him with all possible zeal, and fulfill his will as far as we know how; let us be true to him in small things as well as in great; let us not give even the smallest portion of our hearts to the devil, the world, or the flesh, but keep them altogether for him to whom alone they belong of right, and who wishes that we should offer them completely to himself! If we do so, he will address us at the hour of death in these joyful words: “Well done, good, and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (St. Matthew 25: 23). Amen.

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