

V1_1st_after_Epiphany= The Dangerous State of Those Who Seldom Hear the Word of God
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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!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

VOL. I = THE BAD CHRISTIAN

Feast of the Holy Family and the first Sunday after Epiphany

The Dangerous State of Those Who Seldom Hear the Word of God

“After three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions.” St. Luke 2: 46.

What a beautiful lesson does not our Lord give to us all. Do you imitate His example? Do you hear and obey those who are placed over and who have one day to give an account of you? Do you keep the laws of Mother Church? What of hearing Mass on Sundays and holydays? Do you hear the Word of God in sermons? What wonderful power the Word of God has over the human heart! How much good would it not produce among you if you were all eager and ready to listen to it! You have plenty of opportunities of doing so every Sunday and holyday, but, alas! for the deplorable carelessness of so many Christians, who seldom or never make use of those opportunities. What shall I think or say of them? The least I can say is this: To hear the Word of God in sermons but rarely is a very bad and dangerous sign for a Christian. It is a bad sign for a Christian, especially for one who has all sorts of worldly business and anxieties to distract him, and who neither reads nor hears anything of spiritual things during the week, to neglect, as a general rule, the frequent Opportunities he has of hearing the Word of God in sermons on Sundays and holydays; I look upon it as a bad sign, on account of what Jesus Christ has said: “Every one that doth evil hateth the light” (St. John 3: 20); and I maintain that they whose souls are in a bad or dangerous state have no love for the Word of God; and there are four classes of Christians who, as a general rule, neglect to hear the Word of God in sermons, and they are:

- I. Those who will not give up the habit of sin;*
- II. Those who lead an idle, worldly life;*
- III. Those who are in ignorance through mistaken piety; and*
- IV. Those who are too busy with temporal affairs.*

I. Those who will not give up the habit of sin hear the Word of God but seldom, because, having been accustomed to indulge in certain vices for a long time past, they do not yet think of being converted and of amending their lives. Such are, for instance, those who knowingly possess ill-gotten goods, which they do not intend to restore to the lawful owner; those who, being enmeshed in the toils of an unchaste passion, do not give up nor avoid the proximate occasion of sin, or who allow a secret mortal sin to remain on their consciences for many years, because they are ashamed to declare it candidly in confession. All these people will not go to sermons, or, at all events, they will not be eager to hear them, but will do all they can to avoid them, because they cannot bear the bitter reproaches of their own consciences, which are touched and disquieted by the explanation of the Gospel truths, and because they fear losing the false peace they have hitherto enjoyed in the midst of their sins.

A monkey cannot bear a looking-glass, nor a camel clear water, because they see their ugly figures reflected therein; therefore, the one will break the looking-glass or throw it away in anger, and the other will trample about in the water until it becomes muddy and is no longer transparent. The Word of God is a looking-glass which places clearly before the eyes of sinners the fearful state of their consciences, the filth and deformity of their sins and vices; they hate this looking-glass, because they cannot look at their own vileness without shame and fear. “The light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light” (St. John 3: 19). And He gives the reason of that: “For their works were evil: For every one that doth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, that his works may not be reprov’d” (St. John 3: 19, 20). You cannot cause greater annoyance to a man who is lying in a deep sleep and wants to rest than to shake and pull him about, and hold a lighted candle before his eyes. Oh, he will cry out, turning away his face; go away with that light, and let me alone! It would not be half so bad if you were merely to talk, laugh, or make a noise in the room in which he is sleeping. Why so? Because the light shining in the eyes is the surest to interrupt the sleep that he is so anxious to continue. That is the reason why the habitual sinner has such a hatred of sermons; he is buried in the deep sleep of his sins; he finds a false peace and pleasure in sensuality; he does not wish to be disturbed or awakened; the light of truth, the Word of God in sermons, is likely to disturb this sleep most effectually; it shines in his eyes; it cries out: “Rise, thou that sleepest;” and therefore he cannot bear it; away, he says in thought, away with the light—away with sermons! I will have nothing to do with them.

But that is the very reason why you should be all the more diligent in coming to sermons, and all the more eager and attentive to hear them; that the light may arouse you out of the sleep of sin, which otherwise will certainly be followed by the sleep of eternal death.

Come, he says, listen to me! I will make you uneasy, but with an uneasiness that will gain eternal repose for you. But most people do not want to be converted from their evil ways; the unjust wolf, greedy of gold, wishes to remain a wolf; the unchaste swine wishes still to wallow in the filth of his passions; the raven, blackened by sin, wishes still to remain a raven, and to put off repentance to some future time; and therefore they will have nothing to do with sermons or the Word of God. But woe to those who, through fear of being changed and converted, fly the light of truth! God has already pronounced sentence on them in these words: "And this is the judgment; because the light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light" (St. John 3: 19). That is, since they avoid the light of truth, they need not be judged any further; for they are already judged, and the sentence of eternal damnation is pronounced against them.

II. The second class of men who seldom hear the Word of God are those who lead lives that are apparently not very bad or vicious, but neither are they good or pious. They are neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm and tepid; they are quite satisfied if they do nothing that is in their opinion evidently a grievous sin against the commandments of God and of the Church. Otherwise they hardly trouble themselves as to how they fulfill many obligations of their state that bind under pain of sin. They would be very glad to go to heaven, but at the same time their hearts cling to earth and earthly things; they remain away from sermons, either through fear of becoming scrupulous and anxious, and thus being induced to change their mode of life; or else through carelessness or negligence, inasmuch as the thought of going to hear a sermon never occurs to them, and they imagine that they are not in want of the Word of God, and are under no obligation to hear it; or else they are so sensual and unmortified that they will not put themselves to the slight trouble that is necessary to hear the Word of God. In the winter they cannot bear the cold and the harsh wind; in summer the heat oppresses them, or they are afraid of draughts, or of rain.

What a lamentable mistake! They live in great uncertainty and carelessness of their eternal salvation, and yet they imagine they are on the straight road to heaven. If these men and such as these are not in a bad state, there is no doubt that they are in a very dangerous state, and, I might add, in a more dangerous state than those who are openly addicted to gross vices, but who know the unhappy condition in which they are, and may yet be touched by divine grace and repent sincerely and amend their lives. But since they neglect to hear the Word of God they continue in what they imagine to be light, but which is in reality darkness: "they walk in darkness as if it were in light." What a light and knowledge will break upon them, but too late, when the eyes of the body shall be closed in death, and the eyes of the soul shall be opened in the house of their eternity! "Therefore," they will say with the fools in the Book of Wisdom, "we have erred from the way of truth, and the light of justice hath not shined unto us, and the sun of understanding hath not risen upon us" (Wisd. 5: 6). Because through laziness and sloth we refused to see, and to receive that light, that shining sun, "We have walked through hard ways, but the ways of the Lord we

have not known” (Wisd. 5: 7). Now we acknowledge that we have missed the right road to heaven. What fools that we have been! What an irreparable mistake we have made!

III. The third class consists of those who flatter themselves, and persuade others, too, as far as their outward actions are concerned, that they are devout and pious, while in reality they are in utter ignorance of many things that are useful and necessary to their eternal salvation, and they are addicted to many serious faults and imperfections. These people seldom hear the Word of God, or, at least, they do not hear it regularly; not because they hate and avoid it, but because they have not taste or desire for it. They think they can employ their time better in some other way for the glory of God and the salvation of their souls. The whole substance of their piety consists in certain special devotions to churches, meditations, vocal prayers, hearing several Masses one after another, making their usual confessions and Communions; the whole day is occupied with these and similar devotions, and each devotion has its own particular hour fixed for it; there must be no interruption, change, shortening, and, least of all, omission in the list of devotions; if anything occurs to be done during the day, no matter what it is, it is put aside if it interferes with them.

Such people are pious only in appearance and in their own imagination, for if we consider their conduct while they are in church at their devotions, and compare it with the way in which they behave at home, or during the performance of the duties of their state, which the law of God obliges them to fulfil under pain of sin, what a striking contrast we should find! During their prayers and meditations they are like Angels in modesty and humility; they shed tears of sweet consolation when they read in their prayer-books about the love of God; a thousand times they offer to God, with their lips, their bodies and souls, and all they have, and they profess to belong entirely to God and to be ready to accept from Him crosses and trials, sickness or health, life or death. That is the kind of piety that suits their taste; that is what makes them look on themselves as really devout; and it is a piety and devotion that they have no chance of finding by hearing sermons. But how do they act sometimes, when they have finished their devotions and get to the end of their pious affections, and go home to do the will of God, not by empty words and with the lips only, but in deed and work?

Oh, that is quite a different matter! It does not belong to their usual devotions, and so, if they are commanded to do anything that does not exactly chime in with their own ideas, they are full of murmurs, complaints, and opposition; they do only what pleases themselves, and what best suits their own convenience. If a person whom they dislike ventures to say a word to displease them, they show just as much proficiency in abusing and reviling that person as they did when in church repeating their prayers. If some trifling thing annoys them—if, so to speak, a cross of straw is laid on their shoulders—there is no more talk of offering themselves altogether to God, to be disposed of according to his will. In a word, all their piety and devotion is on their lips, and in their outward demeanor. And yet they are so obstinate, or, to speak more truly, so infatuated and superstitious in observing the devotional practices they have prescribed for themselves, that they would

look on any one who tries to detach them from those devotions as an enemy of God's honor, and their salvation; while if they are obliged to interrupt their usual practices on account of some unforeseen occurrence, they are full of scruples and uneasiness during the whole day, as if they were guilty of some grievous sin; although they make light of neglecting the duties of their state.

IV. The fourth and last class consists of those who are overwhelmed with worldly cares and business, so that they have no time or leisure to hear the Word of God in sermons. For these I have very few words, or, rather, nothing but a sigh of profound pity. Pitiably indeed is your state, oh, unfortunate people! You bury yourselves, of your own accord, so deeply in temporal things that you have no time to devote to the consideration of eternity! You undertake so many different kinds of business, that you must neglect the all-important business of your souls! Tell me, why are you on this earth? To know God, to love Him, to keep His commandments, to do His holy will in all things, and to save your immortal souls; this is the one necessary business, to which all other things must be directed. You send your children twice a day to school to learn to read and write, and fence and dance, and sew and spin; but you are so involved in worldly cares, and so careless and negligent about your precious souls, that you cannot spare half an hour in the week to acquire the knowledge necessary for your eternal salvation. What shall I say of those who hardly once in a month—nay, hardly once or twice in a whole year—hear a sermon? I must say, in the words of our Lord, what does it profit a man to gain by his energy and industry the whole world and all its riches and treasures, if his soul suffer loss thereby? (St. Matthew 16: 26.)

Christians, think of this, and let those of you who seldom come to sermons see for yourselves whether you have not grave reason to fear that you may belong to one of those four classes of people whose souls are in a bad state, or, at all events, in a very dangerous state. No matter who you are, it still remains true that to go to sermons rarely, when one has an opportunity of going frequently, is a very bad sign for a Christian. "He that is of God, heareth the words of God," says Christ; "therefore you hear them not, because you are not of God" (St. John 8: 47). What a terrible conclusion that is to draw! Yet it must be true, for Christ Himself says it.

But what is the use of speaking to those who are absent, and who therefore cannot hear what I say? The whole fruit of this sermon is for you who form my regular audience. Continue to refresh your souls and encourage yourselves in the divine service by constantly hearing the Word of God. Constantly, I say, for to come once to a sermon and stop away two or three times after that is not the sign of a man who is really anxious to save his soul, and who hungers for its spiritual food. The loss of one sermon may entail an eternal loss, for an opportunity of doing good once lost never comes back again, even if the same sermon were repeated. Still it is not certain that God, who, by His grace, is the Author of all the good that is done by sermons, and who gives to each individual the special grace He has prepared for him, it is not certain that God will offer that grace again. "The Spirit breatheth where He will" (St. John 3: 8). Cardinal Newman, being asked the

question whether, if he had stayed in the Anglican church till now (July 3, 1871), he should have joined the Catholic Church at all, at any time now or hereafter, said: “I think that most probably I should not; but, observe, for this reason—because God gives grace, and if it is not accepted He withdraws His grace; and, since from His mercy and from no merits of mine, he then offered me the grace of conversion, if I had not acted upon it, it was to be expected that I should be left a worthless stump, to cumber the ground, and to remain where I was till I died” (Letter of Card. Newman, July 3, 1871). Therefore, you must take the light whenever you can. “He that is of God, heareth the Word of God let that be verified in us all; we are of God, and therefore we have derived fruit enough for to-day, and we can rejoice and say: “This day is salvation come to this house” - that is, to our souls. Amen.

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