

V1_3rd_of_Lent= The Unaccountable Folly of those Who Injure their Health by Excessive Drinking

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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

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

The Unaccountable Folly of those Who Injure their Health by Excessive Drinking

When a strong man armed keepeth his court, those things are in peace which he possesseth. Luke 11: 21.

As fasting is useful, nay, even necessary, to all, in order to restrain gluttony in eating, so temperance in drink is even more necessary to most people, in order to avoid excess in that respect; because excess in drink is more fruitful of evil than excess in eating. There is no use in asking you to abstain from drink; I will not do so; but one thing I will ask, and you will not, I hope, refuse me, and that is, that none of you will drink more than he is able. But what a strange thing to say, you will think. Whoever drank more than he was able to drink? From an act we may well conclude its possibility. You drink, therefore you can drink.

Would to God that the conclusion was always true in the right sense! How many of those who are addicted to excessive drinking, nay, almost all of them without exception, drink more than they can—that is, more than their health can bear, more than their income can bear, more than their honor and good name can bear, more than their souls' salvation and the divine law can bear? Whatever way we look at it, we must acknowledge that they are guilty of great folly and wickedness.

What an unaccountable folly it is to drink more than one's health can bear, as most people do.

Of all the natural gifts that a man can possess on earth there is none so precious, so useful, and agreeable as health and strength, and there is none God has so strictly commanded man to be careful of.

I. There is nothing more useful, because, what better am I for being rich and owning all the treasures of earth, if I have lost my health and must lie ill in bed, and so cannot enjoy my riches? What would it avail me to be a great lord or king, and to rule over many lands, if I am weak and sickly, and have to suffer pain day and night? What pleasure can I have in agreeable company, in exquisite food, in the delights of friendship, or in the beauty of creatures, if my health is gone, and illness turns everything to bitterness for me? No, a piece of dry bread gives more pleasure and satisfaction to a poor man who is in good health, than the daintiest food to a rich man who is ill and suffering.

2. Nothing is more desirable in this mortal life than health, as is evident from the great care we take of it. How cautious we are about going into a house in which there is a person sick of a contagious disease! If it is not absolutely necessary to go there, we prefer to remain away, so great is our dread of breathing an infected atmosphere and carrying the germs of disease away with us. How we dread exposing ourselves to the cold, damp air! That fear is sometimes so great that we dread going to church to hear a Mass or a sermon, lest we should catch cold and be laid up. There is nothing more precious in the natural order than health, as we see at once when we begin to lose it. Money, silver, gold, and anything that can be called wealth is so dear to the man of the world that no journey is too long for him, no mountain too high, and no sea too dangerous for him to cross in search of it. No watchings and labors are counted difficult, as long as he can add to his treasures by means of them. Lawsuits and contentions, hatred and enmity arise amongst near relations solely on account of the difference between mine and thine. But when there is question of regaining health, although there may be only the faintest spark of hope, all these things are sacrificed without hesitation; if it takes thousands of dollars to buy the necessary medicines, they are sent to the drug store at once; no matter how bitter the medicine is, the patient readily overcomes his dislike and swallows it. Blood-letting, thirst, burning, cutting, all are endured without a murmur, despite the pain they cause; and even he who inflicts those torments is paid for doing so, and thanked into the bargain. And why? Solely for the sake of regaining health. So much do men value the blessing of health.

3. Besides, there is nothing which God has commanded us to look after more carefully than our health and strength. He has even renounced the right he has to our service, when we cannot serve him without injuring our health. All the laws of his Church are suspended when one cannot observe them either on account of actual illness, or through a reasonable fear of it. All Christians are bound under pain of sin to hear Mass on Sundays and holydays; but if you are sick, although you might manage to get as far as the church, or if you are recovering from illness, but still so weak that the cold air might bring on a relapse, then you may remain at home; the law does not bind you; nay, you would even displease God and do wrong by going to Mass under the circumstances. On certain days all Christians are bound under pain of grievous sin to abstain from flesh meat, and they who have attained the required age are obliged, moreover, to eat only one full meal in the day; but if you are sick, and your health really requires it, you may eat whatever and as often as you please; you are not obliged to fast; the law does not bind you under those circumstances. I and all priests are obliged under pain of mortal sin to say the Divine Office every day. But if I am ill, if my health is likely to suffer, if I would get a violent headache by reciting the office, I am not bound to do so; I may put my breviary away; God does not wish me to say it; my health has to be considered before his service.

And yet this precious health, so useful to man, so important in the sight of God, how many there are who recklessly ruin and destroy thee! By what? By frequent and excessive drinking. The life that is so precious, and that would not otherwise be readily exposed to danger by any one, is deliberately and willfully shortened and brought to a premature end by drunkenness. I do not imagine that it will require much to prove that excessive drinking ruins the health, and thereby shortens life. How can it be possible for one who is addicted to drinking too much to remain healthy for a long time? How can a body be healthy, when it is filled with too much drink? Drunkenness is most injurious to the bodily health; drunkenness is a premature old age and a sudden death. "It goeth in pleasantly but in the end it will bite like a snake, and will spread abroad poison like a basilisk" (Prov. 23: 31, 32). "By surfeiting many have perished, but he that is temperate shall prolong life" (Ecclus. 37: 34).

4. I appeal to reason itself and daily experience. Most, nay, nearly all diseases come from ill-digested humors in the stomach; these humors must necessarily arise frequently in a stomach that is constantly surcharged with wine and other strong drinks, which are of their nature apt to heat the blood, and to render the work of digestion very difficult and tedious. Hence the dumb beast that will not drink unless it is thirsty, and poor people, who are not accustomed to exceed in this particular, are not subject to near so many diseases as those who are wont to gratify their sensuality on every occasion. How must it then be with those who drink to excess, and even intoxicate themselves every day? All sorts of fevers, diseases of

the chest and lungs, dropsy, consumption, palsy, apoplexy, gout, trembling of the limbs and impurity of the blood, although they may in some cases have a different origin, are mostly the effects of excessive drinking.

God has wisely ordained that excessive drinking should be its own punishment, and should cause all those evils to those who are addicted to it, in order that, if they are still capable of using their reason and following its dictates, they may be deterred from indulging in that evil habit. Yet how many there are who are utterly uninfluenced by this consideration! If we drink too much, they say, what else can we expect but to suffer for it? And so they go on drinking down disease after disease, if not at once, at least little by little. Drunkenness is a sign of a strong constitution, which never rests till it is broken down, and a sign of a short memory, which forgets the trouble of getting sober. What unaccountable folly that is—nay, how wicked it is! Food and drink are given to us by our bountiful Creator for the sole purpose of preserving our health and strength, and they are abused through intemperance, and made the means of destroying health and shortening life. How will they who thus become their own murderers answer to God for what they have done? What is the difference between killing a man with one thrust of a dagger, and taking his life by slow poison, when death is sure to follow in either case? Is it a lesser crime to drink one's self to death than to commit suicide by drowning?

5. What blindness it is to drink more than one's health can bear! Tell me, why do you drink so much? Is it not to satisfy the sense of taste? But do you not see that by your excesses you are lessening the pleasure that this sense is capable of feeling, that you are ruining your head and stomach, and that you will have little pleasure left when your health is gone? What greater folly can there be?

A man invites a number of friends to a feast, and compels them to drink more than they are able to bear; all must drink till they can drink no more. Why do you invite your friends? Is it not to give them pleasure and to show your esteem for them? But how can it please them to be compelled to drink against their will, and to fill themselves up with liquor until they become sick? What sort of friendship is that which shows itself by forcing a man to get drunk and taking from him the most precious natural good he has—namely, his health? You invite your friend, and then make him take away his life. You ask him to sit at your table, and then force him to drink, as if your greatest wish were to see him carried off to his grave! You call him your dearest friend, and wish him many happy years as you drink his health, and at the same time you sow in him the seeds of a premature death! This is called drinking his health! He who compels another to drink more than is good for him does him more harm than if he were to wound him with a sword; for he thus compels him to lose the health of body and soul. What thanks do you expect from your friend next morning, when he awakens with a splitting headache, for which he knows you are to blame. How can you expect him to be grateful to you, when you have made him sick by dint of drinking his health?

6. Finally, how great the folly of those who allow themselves to be persuaded into drinking more than they can bear, to their own great discomfort, and to the detriment of the health that is so precious to themselves and to their families! Oh, they say, I must do as others do; I do not wish to be the first to interfere with an established custom; I would be ashamed to acknowledge that I could not drink any more, and if I did so I should be laughed at. But what a senseless excuse that is! Let fools laugh, if they will; you have no reason to be ashamed of acting wisely. Why, then, should you be ashamed if you are unable or unwilling to drink as much as others? Is it an honor to be able to drink more than others? If so, it is an honor which belongs also to a large whiskey cask, which holds more than a smaller one. If it were not so large, it would have nothing to boast about more than the smaller one. It is an honor that a sponge might claim, because it can absorb a great deal of water.

If ever an attempt is made to compel you to drink, think and say: I will not drink more than is good for me; my health and strength are too precious and useful to be thrown away in that unchristian fashion, and against my will, too. You often allege your health as an excuse when the law of the Church obliges you to fast, when the bell rings for Mass on a cold winter's morning, or that you fear to injure your health by going. Why, then, should not the same excuse hold good when there is question, not of devotion, or of the divine service, but of being compelled to indulge in drunkenness and intemperance, contrary to the law of

God? Therefore, in the future act on that, and no sensible man can think the worse of you for so doing. Rather be a martyr of temperance, although you thus incur the ridicule of foolish men, than ruin your health and become a torment to yourself through a foolish desire of excelling others in drunken excess. Thus you shall preserve not only the health of your body, but also that of your immortal soul. Amen.



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