

V2_2nd_after_Easter= The Advantages of Perseverance

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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 + + +

Volume two = The Penitent Christian

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

The Advantages of Perseverance

“He seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and flieth.” John 10: 12.

It is cowardice for a shepherd to run away at the moment when his presence is most required for the safety of his flock; and it is wrong for a sheep to leave the flock at the approach of the wolf, and to run into the jaws of the ravening wolf. Foolish and stray sheep of this kind are those penitents who, after having laid aside the burden of their sins in the Sacrament of Penance, run away from God again, and at the first temptation, go back to their sins. To relapse quickly, and through habit into one's former sins is generally a sign that one did not really rise with Christ from the death of sin to the life of grace, and did not do true penance. To encourage penitents still further in their good resolutions, I now say:

I. That perseverance in good, after penance, is the surest sign and means of rising with Christ to eternal glory; and hence

II. He who earnestly desires to go to heaven, must never return to his former sins.

I. That which causes the greatest trouble and anguish to souls really desirous of salvation is the inscrutable secret of eternal predestination to glory, and the constant uncertainty as to whether they are worthy of God's love or hatred. Such souls will say to you: I firmly believe that on the great day of the general judgment we shall all rise again from the dead; but shall I then stand on the right hand of the Judge, with the sheep of Christ or on the left amongst the accursed goats of the devil? Shall I rise with the former to eternal glory or with the later to eternal damnation? Completely hidden from us all during this life, as is this decree of God, this it is that often forces people to sigh: Ah! If I only knew what will become of me during eternity! If I were only certain of being amongst the elect! How utterly wretched they would be, if they knew beforehand that

they would be lost forever! How wisely and advantageously he acts in keeping from the just and pious the certainty of their salvation! Otherwise, where would be their Christian humility, child-like fear, watchfulness and modesty, and horror of sin? No this knowledge of the surety of eternity would not be good for any one. “Wherefore, brethren,” says St. Peter, “labor the more, that by good works you may make sure your vocation and election” (2 Pet. 1: 10). Still, there are different signs from which we may reasonably conclude, nay, from which we may derive a human certainty and assurance that we shall rise to eternal glory. But all those signs of predestination, whatever their name may be, are so called, because they help man in a special manner to persevere in good and to be constant and zealous in the divine service. From this, I conclude that perseverance and constancy in good is, of itself, the surest sign of a future resurrection to everlasting glory.

1. Perseverance places a man, even during this life, in almost the same state as that in which the glorified bodies of the blessed will be in heaven. For, in what does the exceeding great happiness of the latter consist? Mainly, that they are immortal, incapable of suffering or corruption, and not subject to any change. The life, glory, and happiness of the Saints will last as long as God is God. As they are today, so they will be for all eternity, as St. Paul writes of the glorious body of Jesus Christ after the resurrection, which the bodies of the just and elect will resemble on the last day. There you have a true picture of not only a just man who never offended God by a mortal sin, but also of a converted sinner, who, after having done penance, remains constant in his good resolutions, and has still the same earnest will to observe eternal fidelity to his God. Human respect, vain customs and deceitful maxims of the world, points of honor, wealth, station, and carnal pleasures, you are the lords and masters of the children of men, who, according to your good will and pleasure, waver a thousand times a day, like a fragile reed, blown hither and thither by the wind. You can move your subjects by turns to anger or joy—love or hatred. Today, you fill them with exultation, tomorrow with despair; and you continually drive them on to all sorts of vice. But with the servant of God you can do nothing! Once, for all, firmly resolved, at all cost, to keep the faith he has pledged to his beloved God and Master, he never departs from him by a deliberate sin. This is his firm determination; and what he is today, in that respect, he was yesterday, and will be tomorrow. “Who, then, shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom. 8: 35), he can say with St. Paul; neither joy nor sorrow, riches or poverty, honor or disgrace, life or death! No earthly creature shall induce me to do anything against God or his holy commandments. Let the most horrible and formidable temptations come upon me. They will never find the least place in my heart! My chief refuge and help against their attacks will be that almighty God who is everywhere present, and whom I am resolved to serve till the end of my life. I am ready to die a thousand times, rather than consent to a single mortal sin; and I am assured that my God will not forsake me, provided I only remain faithful to him and his service, as I am now determined to do. Oh, truly happy state which, here on earth, so closely resembles the immutable state of the glorified bodies of the blessed!

But you, changeable Christians, you who, like the moon, are ever changing, ever moving round in the same circle, by constantly alternating between confession and sin, what have you to expect? I will tell you honestly, though I pity and compassionate your poor souls. You have reason to fear, nay, it is probable, that you are not amongst the number of those who, on the last day, will rise with Christ to glory; and, therefore, that you will have no share in his kingdom. Not I, but St. Jude, thus assigns to you your place in eternity in these words: “Wandering stars, to whom the storm of darkness is reserved forever” (St. Jude 13). “No man putting his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9: 62).

2. How can an inconstant, dissolute, unfaithful man be fit for the kingdom of God, since he is of no value even for this world? No private individual will keep a servant in his house, unless he can rely on his fidelity. Would you entrust with important business, a man of an inconstant disposition, who is one way today, and another tomorrow, so that you can never be sure of him? No, a man of that kind is looked on as a good-for-nothing even by the world. How, then, could the God of infinite majesty tolerate in his kingdom a wavering, unreliable servant who is full of promises that he never fulfils; who serves God today, and the devil tomorrow? No one looking back, or returning to his old ways, is fit for the heavenly kingdom. Remember lot's wife. The angel who rescued her and her family from the consuming fires of Sodom, forbade them to look back on the doomed city; but the woman's curiosity was excited by the noise of the busy rain and the cries of the perishing people. She turned round only for a moment; but in that moment, she was punished by almighty God by being turned into a pillar of salt. A monument to all time, to warn men not to look back. That, once saved from the Sodom of sin by the angel of penance, they must never more even willfully desire the occasion of their former sins. In short, that perseverance in good is the surest means of rising gloriously and gaining eternal life.

Not he who begins well, nor he who continues well, but he who ends well, will be crowned. Therefore, we cannot promise heaven with certainty to any one no matter how holy he is, as long as he is on this earth. Why did God, in the beginning of creation, praise all he had made, and call it good, man alone excepted? Having created the light: "And God saw the light, that it was good" (Gen. 1: 4). Having created the firmament, and divided the waters: "And God saw that it was good," and so on after the creation of the dry land and the animals, "God saw that it was good." Finally the Blessed Trinity, holding as it were, a council, resolved to create man: "Let us make man to our own image and likeness; and God created man to his own image" (ibid. 26, 27). Now, having said of all the creatures that they were good,—did God praise man as the best of them? No: he says not a word, not a syllable of approbation. Why so? His praise is not to be given beforehand, but afterwards. It belongs not to the beginning, but to the end. Adam was created holy, and a child of God. By sanctifying grace, he had a right to Paradise, and was worthy of the favor of God. But it was not yet time to call him good. In fact, in a very short time, he became a very wicked sinner. Yet he was not immediately condemned to hell for his sin. He did penance, persevered in the state of grace till death, and is now reigning in the glory of heaven with God. His praise does not belong to the beginning, but to the end. Sinner, no matter how wicked you have been hitherto, do not despair of salvation. Only do real penance; amend your sinful life, and your praise will be at the end. Just, innocent, and now beloved children of God! Be not elated because of your piety and virtues! Keep yourselves continually in humility and child-like fear of God; for even you, as long as you are in, this valley of tears, this dangerous exile, may fall and come to an unhappy end. Your praise and salvation do not belong to the beginning, but to the end. Paul made a bad beginning, but a good end; Judas began well, but ended badly; therefore Judas was condemned to hell, while Paul was elected to eternal glory. Man's resurrection to eternal life depends on the grace of final perseverance.

But, then you exclaim! Even if I continue faithful in the service of God, I cannot be sure of the grace of perseverance, on which my salvation depends? That is quite true. A Roman lady once went to St. Gregory, in a great state of anxiety, and said: "Holy Father, help me in my trouble! How will I fare at the end?" "Ah," answered Gregory, "you ask a difficult and a useless question. Difficult, because I know as little about it as you do; useless, because such knowledge as you demand would do neither you nor me any good. Still, if you wish me to tell you with certainty what fate is in store for me and you, know that, if we both remain constant in good till the end,

we shall surely receive the grace of final perseverance, and die happily.” The same answer I make to your objection, Christian souls. My salvation and yours depends on the last grace of final perseverance; there is no doubt about that. But whether we shall receive that grace or not, depends on ourselves principally,—namely, on how we spend the time of our lives. Therefore we should endeavor with all diligence to continue in the right path, and not relapse into sin; for this constancy is the true and most certain means of obtaining from God the last grace of final perseverance. “He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved” (Matt. 10: 22). These words are not to be understood of the grace of final perseverance; otherwise, their meaning would simply be: He to whom I shall give that final grace shall be saved. No, our Lord’s object was to exhort us all to labor for our salvation, and therefore, he urges us to do a thing that is fully in our power if we wish to do it. Hence, to him who diligently avoids evil and perseveres constantly in good until death, to him, says our Lord, I will give the grace of eternal salvation.

But (you urge again), since no one can merit this grace, even by any amount of previous constancy in good works, the uncertainty of salvation is just as great for the good as for the bad. True again. We can, however, merit this grace by a merit founded on the generosity and mercy of God. God never allows himself to be outdone by his creatures in generosity. When he sees a man of good will striving to keep his law, to overcome and mortify his own evil inclinations, to avoid as far as possible all sin and all occasions and dangers of sin, even although he, now and then, commits a fault through frailty and weakness, almighty God is, as it were, forced by his infinite goodness and mercy to give to such a man the grace of final perseverance; and it hardly ever happens that such a man dies an unhappy death.

Such was the assured hope of the elder Tobias, when, filled with consolation, he said to his friends: “We look for that life which God will give to them that never change their faith from him” (Tob. 2: 8). And the same assurance was a source of joy to St. Paul, when he said, “There is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just judge, will render to me in that day” (2 Tim. 4: 8). On what was his assurance grounded? “I am certain of it,” he answers, “because I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4: 7). I persevered after my conversion, and therefore it now remains for me to receive the crown of justice, which the just God will give me.

We, too, as experience teaches, give evidence of a similar assurance in our judgments. If we see or hear of a man dying a particularly peaceful, holy, and pious death, our thoughts revert at once to the life he led. Finding that he lived as a good, pious, and zealous Christian, and was steadfast in keeping the commandments for many years, oh then, we exclaim without the least hesitation: “What wonder is it, that he should die such a happy death! As a man lives, so will he die. As life is, so will death be!” And, hence, if we hear of one who led a good, holy, and even miraculous life, but became perverted at the end, and, dying an unhappy death, was lost forever, we cannot but conclude that there must have been some secret cause to justify the judgments of God. We well know, that there is sometimes an apparent sanctity, a holiness only in outward appearance. There oftentimes exists a secret pride in great corporal austerities, and (as in the case of the Pharisees), monstrous sins hidden under a cloak of seeming virtue on account of which God deprives the secret sinner of the grace of final perseverance.

I conclude with the beautiful exhortation of St. Jerome to a certain layman, who having renounced the vanities of the world, had gone to live a solitary life at Bethlehem, devoting his whole time to the service of God and the salvation of his soul: “I beseech thee, brother, and advise thee with a father’s affection, not to turn back to look at the Sodom you have abandoned.” My Christian brother! You, who now have left the city of sin by a good Easter Confession, and

have been re-admitted among the number of the children of God, I beg and implore of you, by the love you owe yourself and your immortal soul, ah! Do not look back again. You have laid aside the garment of sin; do not put it on again. You are now in a good state, and if you wish to be assured of salvation, keep on the narrow way that leads to heaven, and return no more to the broad road that conducts to hell.

Nor must you allow yourself to be disheartened by imaginary difficulties. The very obstacles we meet with in the divine service should incite us to all the greater fervor in our determination to persevere in it. Have you ever remarked how a boatman acts on the river, when rowing against the current? If he comes to a place where the eddy of the water and the force of the tide, hinder the boat in her progress, he puts forth all the more strength, he works all the harder with the oars, in order to overcome the resistance of the water; nor does he cease his efforts until he is past that perilous point. So must we act in the spiritual life. When difficulties and dangers are the greatest, then must we be more diligent and earnest, trusting in the help of God to come through successfully; and if we fall, now and then through weakness or frailty, we must not lose heart, nor cease from persevering. The boatman is sometimes, in spite of his efforts, driven back by the opposing current; still, he does not lose courage, but labors all the more diligently, until he has made up for lost time. If a merchant were to give up business when he experiences a slight loss, he would never be a rich man. If a peasant ceased tilling his land when an unfruitful season renders his labor vain, where would his harvests be? Now, if these people do not allow slight difficulties to deter them from their usual labor and toil, how much less should the servant of God be rebuffed by difficulties, since he has an infinitely greater gain and reward to hope for, if he labors assiduously!

Daily renew your purpose of observing the law of God, not lessening your courage by a continual contemplation of the difficulties and chances of the future, but fixing your eyes simply on the present time. Regard each day as the last of your life (and as a matter of fact, this very hour might be the last for any one of us), and say to yourself: "Can I not keep the good resolutions I made in confession for this one day, at all events? Who knows whether the Lord will not knock at my door this evening, and call me into eternity? What would it avail me in that case to have often overcome myself, and resisted my evil inclinations, if at the last moment, I cease persevering and consent to a mortal sin?" Oh, no! My brethren, act like the patient Job, in joy and sorrow, in prosperity and adversity, in consolation and temptation: "My justification, which I have begun to hold, I will not forsake" (Job 27: 6). The fidelity I have once sworn to God, when he bestowed on me the great grace of forgiveness of my sins, I will observe inviolably, The document I now hold in my hand, and can, if I will, continue to hold, I will never throw away by falling into sin. "He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved." I wish to be saved, therefore, God helping me, I will persevere to the end in the love and friendship of God. Amen.



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