

V2_Sexagesima= The Merits to Be Gained in an Unavoidable Association with Sinners
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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

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY

The Merits to Be Gained in an Unavoidable Association with Sinners

“They believe for a while and in the time of temptation they fall away.” Luke 8: 13.

The seed of the word of God falls on some hearts as on a hard rock, where it can neither take root, nor bear fruit! Such people go to sermons, listen with pleasure and satisfaction, and make the best resolutions: “Now, I will begin to give up this bad habit!” “Henceforth, I will never offend God deliberately!” and so on. And those resolutions are confirmed by confession and Communion. That is all very good. If the speakers acted up to their resolutions, they would be sure of heaven. But, “they believe” as the Gospel says, only “for a while;” their goodness is of short duration. In the smallest occasion of sin, “in the time of temptation they fall away;” they relapse into their former sins. Now, all this need not be. If you only do what you can in such dangerous company and occasions, as it is impossible to avoid, the help of God’s special grace will not be wanting to keep you from failing. For, be it known to you, dear Christians:

I. That God makes use of intercourse with sinners to His honor and glory; and hence:

II. That we, too, must embrace as an occasion of merit our unavoidable intercourse with the wicked.

I. So great and bitter is God’s hatred of sin and of the sinner that, according to the teaching of theologians, if it were possible for him to withdraw his omnipresence from any of his creatures he would withdraw it from sinners. Hence St. John Chrysostom remarks that while omnipresence is, indeed, one of the chief attributes and perfections of God, it is also that attribute which, humanly speaking causes him most trouble and annoyance; for it

compels him to remain with sinners and to have intercourse with them, although they are objects of his special hatred, aversion, and execration. “To God, the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike” (Wisdom 14: 9). But, you may ask, since such is the case, and since God is omnipotent, why does he not at once destroy the sinner? Ah! No (blessed be the divine mercy!), God preserves the sinner; he has patience with him for years and years. He feeds and looks after him with as much care as he bestows on his beloved children. Why does he act thus?

St. Paul says that God has ordained every created thing for his own honor and glory:— “Who worketh all things according to the counsel of his will; that we may be unto the praise of his glory” (Ephes. 1: 11, 12). But what glory can God receive from sinners, who dishonor him, despise his law, and defy him to his face; who blaspheme his holy name, and by their bad example and scandals lead others into sin? Though God receives no honor from sinners, he makes use of the very contempt with which they treat him as means to promote his glory. St. Augustine says on this point: “There is no doubt that God makes a good use of the sinner; for he would not even allow him to exist, if he could not use him for some good purpose.” Do you wish to know in what way even the most wicked, scandalous, and obdurate sinners in the world can contribute so wonderfully, even against their will, to the honor and glory of God? Then, consider the number of men in the world who are shut out from the light of the true faith; look at the idolatrous heathens, the superstitious Turks, the hardened Jews, the rebellious heretics and schismatics; does not the God of infinite wisdom use all such persons to further his most important undertakings?

“Does he not make use of the gentiles to carry out his designs?” Does he not make the gentiles serve to manifest the wonders of his grace? A heathen world converted and changed by twelve poor fishermen, as we see it today; what greater proof could there be of the divine power and Providence? What greater confirmation of the evident truth of our holy religion? Does he not make use of heretics for the explanation and spread of his doctrine, and to strengthen believers in the one, true Catholic faith, wherein alone salvation can be found? Never is the truth of that faith better investigated, or more clearly proved and brought to the light of day, than when it is attacked and opposed by different errors and heresies; and generally speaking, never do Catholics show more zeal in defending their religion, than when they have to live in the midst of heretics. Does he not make use of schisms and disunion as means and instruments to make evident the indestructible solidity of his Church, foretold by Jesus Christ, so that the gates of hell shall never prevail against her? In spite of many schisms, the body of the Church still remains in its substantial unity under the one head on earth, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, while we know from experience that sects and heresies constantly change and decay. The Jews, that unhappy remnant of the once chosen people of God, scattered as they are through the world, without king, priest, temple, or head, are they not, even against their will, living proofs that Jesus Christ is the true Messiah and Saviour of the world, and that his prophecies with regard to their dispersion have been fulfilled up to the present day? What have the tyrants and

persecutors of the Christian name effected? The very means they made use of to destroy the Christians have only added to their number, given martyrs to Christ, filled his Church with Saints, and heaven with the elect. And all other sinners in the world, no matter how numerous they are, serve to make known to men the perfections of the Lord God. Therefore it is true that God makes use of sinners and their wickedness to further his honor and glory.

Here, my dear Christians, you have an example of how to act when thrown involuntarily with wicked and dangerous companions. We must indeed fly and avoid all such as well as we can; but if our state of life and our duty compel us to have intercourse with them, we must use them in the same way as God does, for the profit and advantage of our souls. We have abundant opportunities of doing this every day, although we may not seek them; for, as St. Ambrose says, as his toleration of sinners serves the Lord God to make known his perfections, so our unavoidable intercourse with the wicked must serve us in the practice of the chief virtues. If for instance, I have to live with people whose conduct occasions me much annoyance, either because I have a natural dislike for them, or because they maliciously persecute and trouble me, what a splendid opportunity I have here for the practice of Christian patience and mortification! If I have to live with obstinate, passionate, and hot-tempered people, what a grand opportunity I have for practicing Christian meekness! If they contradict me, or vent their ill-humor on me, can I not give them an example of Christian charity by returning good for evil? If they are proud and puffed-up, and conform more to worldly vanities than I do, I can teach them daily lessons of Christian humility and modesty, according to the example of our Lord, who was as the least of men on earth. If they are given to gluttony and drunkenness, I can learn from their excesses how odious those vices are, and how necessary it is to practice Christian sobriety and temperance. If I hear them cursing, swearing, blaspheming, detracting from their neighbor's good fame, that hellish language should teach me to restrain my tongue, and be more fervent in blessing the holy name of God. If they are addicted to many vices that I can neither prevent nor induce them to forsake, they compel me to acknowledge with gratitude the special graces and benefits that God has conferred on me, since he has preserved me, in preference to so many others, from those sins; for, according to the testimony of St. Augustine, without those graces, I should be just as bad as they are. They force me to know myself, and humbly to confess my own weakness, obliging me to walk more circumspectly, lest I should fall into like vices. St. Paul says: "He that thinketh himself to stand let him take heed lest he fall" (Cor. 10:12)

Nay, the holy Pope St. Gregory, ventures to say that, in the ordinary course of things, no one can practice true virtue, or, at all events, practice it perfectly, unless he is, now and then, by divine decree forced to live amongst the wicked. How, in fact, can a man know whether he possesses a certain virtue or not, if nothing occurs to prove or try him in it? No great art is required to be patient amongst the patient, or to be meek amongst the meek; to be charitable amongst the charitable, temperate amongst the temperate, humble amongst the humble, or chaste amongst the chaste? Verily, in that case, virtue, having no combat to

sustain, would not deserve to be called heroic, would not be meritorious, or gain its exceeding great reward.

On the other hand, whosoever lives and deals with sinners, remaining in the midst of them (God helping), constant and steadfast, having no part in their wickedness, allowing neither promises nor threats, flatteries nor caresses, ridicule nor annoyances to get the better of one's good resolutions; firmly setting aside all human respect, utterly disregarding what others do or say, and not to depart a hair's breadth from the principles of Jesus Christ and of his Gospel; it is in this, that real, heroic, and praiseworthy virtue consists. This it is which proves that we love God above all things. If the climax of wickedness in the sinner is, according to the testimony of the prophet Isaias, to be wicked amongst the good and pious: "In the land of the saints he hath done wicked things, and he shall not see the glory of the Lord" (Isai. 26: 10), it may reasonably be inferred that the perfection of justice and holiness consists in being and remaining pious amongst the wicked.

II. But, alas! What happens most frequently? Generally speaking, we become perverted with the wicked, instead of making a good use of them. We quarrel with the quarrelsome, curse with the profane, indulge in invective with the contumelious, drink to excess with drunkards, gamble with gamesters, dance with dancers we do without hesitation what we see others doing; we speak as they speak; nay, mere fashion and custom has in our eyes the power of making everything lawful. Thus, while God furthers his honor and glory by bearing with sinners, we seek in our intercourse with them a cause of our ruin and eternal damnation.

It makes me sick to hear a man allege his state of life or employment, as an excuse for his faults and sins, saying that one cannot be other than bad when one has to live with wicked people. Nor does it cause me less pain to hear a woman lamenting her sad condition, and pretending that the greater number of her sins is to be attributed to her drunken, ill-tempered, dissolute husband. What can we say to such people? They are to be pitied, indeed, not on account of the unhappy state of which they complain, for it is that in which they are placed by divine Providence, but on account of the bad use they make of it, contrary to God's will and intention. The very means that should serve to increase their merits and further their salvation, they pervert into an instrument of their own ruin. I pity the woman, not because she has so much trouble and misery to suffer, but because she either does not know, or does not consider, that her ill-conditioned husband is a cross imposed on her by the inscrutable decrees of God, to serve as a ladder whereby she may ascend to eternal joys.

Still more do I grieve, nor can I always restrain my displeasure, when I hear some, on being exhorted to give up this or that sinful custom, say, in the words of the prophet Isaias: "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people that hath unclean lips" (Is. 6: 5). That is, they appeal at once to the example of others, and to the evil customs of the world. I speak and act in this or that way, they say, but I cannot do otherwise, for I am living amongst people who speak and act in that way. What others of my condition do, I must do also. If they amend, then I will follow their example. What answer can I make to

such people? I might say to them, in the words of St. Peter: “Having your conversation good among the gentiles,” amongst those of your own condition; “for so is the will of God, that by doing well you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (1 Pet. 2: 12,15). But my words would have little effect on them, so that there is nothing left for me but to bewail their folly and blindness, in misusing a grand opportunity of showing their fidelity and love to God, and in turning it into an occasion of dishonoring him all the more, of despising his holy law, and of helping to make vice more common and shameless by imitating the bad example of others. Instead of following with the small number of the elect the narrow path traced by Christ, that leads to heaven, they prefer to go with the majority on the broad road that leads to everlasting ruin.

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