

V3_2nd_after_Easter= We Must Avoid Venial Sin, Because It Is Small
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Jesus died
for us

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JMJ

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 + + +

VOL. III - THE GOOD CHRISTIAN

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Good Shepherd Sunday

We Must Avoid Venial Sin, Because It Is Small

“That we, being dead to sins, should live to justice.” 1st Epistle St. Peter 2: 24.

The Son of God became man and died on the cross not merely to free us from the eternal death to which we were doomed by original sin, but also, that we might die to sin and live to justice. Is it not strange that a man can still offend his God, when he remembers that the same God had to die on the cross to atone for sin? Yet how often is not that God who was crucified for us offended by most men in the most grievous manner, and thus nailed again to the cross? But I have nothing to say to such men now. I will confine myself to just Christians, who have the name of being pious and of wishing to serve God faithfully. How many even of these act against the will of God, not indeed by indulging in mortal sin, but by committing willful venial sins, because they are small in themselves. Now, I acknowledge that venial sin is a small thing in itself, and that, too, in a twofold sense:

1. *Because it is committed in a trifling matter of little importance and for a trifling reason, which is not of much account.*
2. *Because it can easily be blotted out and is easily forgiven by God. But from those very reasons I shall now prove that he who commits a venial sin with full knowledge and consent is all the less to be excused and offers a greater insult to God.*

I. Venial sin is and remains a small sin, which is committed in a trifling matter from a trifling cause; this we know very well, and so we make no account of it. Again venial sin is small, and is committed for some trifling reason; but, mark well, it is precisely on that account that we are less to be excused, and that the Lord God has more cause to complain of us when we commit that sin wantonly and willfully. If something great were to be gained or avoided by venial sin, still it should not be committed. And what excuse shall I bring forward for your conduct and mine in so easily and wantonly committing certain venial sins? A distracted thought in prayer that we notice and do not put away, so that we choose the sin and thereby offend God. A useless word that we do not wish to keep to ourselves, so that we trouble our good Saviour by sinning against charity. A curious look that we do not wish to refrain from, so that we do not hesitate to offend the all-seeing God who is looking at us. A slight sloth in the divine service that we do not wish to amend; human respect, or vain honor, for which the honor and glory of God must suffer; an annoyance that we do not wish to bear with patience, a word that displeases us, and which we willfully resent. For trifles of that kind, and a thousand others that are still more insignificant, we do not fear to go against the will of God daily and hourly. Is that not what the Lord complains of by the prophet Ezechiel: “And they violated me among my people for a handful of barley, and a piece of bread” (Ezech 13: 19); for a trifling, a wretched thing they have insulted and disobeyed.

Since it is such a small thing, since, as we maintain, so little depends on it, why do we refuse such trifles to a God who is worthy of all honor and love? Why do we not give these small things to the God who for our sake assumed human nature and offered Himself as a victim for our salvation on the cross? Truly, we deserve the reproach that the servants of Naaman addressed to him when he complained of being ordered by the prophet Eliseus to wash seven times in the Jordan in order to be cured of his leprosy. “If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, surely thou shouldest have done it;” if he had told you to undertake something difficult in order to be healed, —for instance, to give away half your property, to set out on a long and dangerous journey, to take bitter medicines, —surely you would have obeyed him, to get rid of your loathsome disease and to be restored to your former good health. “How much rather what he now hath said to thee: Wash and thou shalt be clean”? (4 Kings 5: 13)

We deserve the same reproach, my dear brethren. Great as God is, He now and then requires something very small from us; for instance, He wishes us to restrain our loquacious tongues, with which we often criticize and find fault with others, and speak of them behind their backs. He wishes us to abstain from jocose lies, which certainly do not profit us anything; to mortify our curious eyes and keep them from beholding dangerous objects; to moderate our anger and displeasure when anything is done to annoy us to keep from talking and looking about in church. Now, if we do not obey Him in these things, if we refuse Him the trifles He asks for, then we are all the more inexcusable, more despicable in ourselves, more unjust and ungrateful to God, our best friend, from whom we have received everything that we have and are. Can He not complain of us in the words in which the Church complains in His name of the ingratitude of His people: My people, my Christian people, what have I done to you, that you should so contemptuously refuse Me that small service? I have brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the blind heathenism in which so many thousands have been left, into the true light of the Catholic Church; I have fed you with bread from heaven, with My own Flesh and Blood, and I have strengthened you with My sacraments; I have planted you as a chosen vineyard, and have expected to gather good and agreeable fruits from you. But now you are become too bitter to Me. You must know that those small sins that you so carelessly commit daily and hourly are more bitter to Me than the gall and vinegar that the Jews gave Me to drink. I shower down benefits on

you constantly, but I cannot induce you to grant Me a trifling favor, to give up for Me a small thing that is of no use to you. I do everything for the welfare of your soul; but you do not hesitate to displease Me daily by your misconduct. It is only a small offence against God, you think; therefore it does not much matter. Is that the way in which you treat Me as a friend?

Because venial sins are small, we commit them over and over again; we commit them through habit, and bring them again and again to confession, but never truly amend them or lessen their number. We commit them without fear or anxiety; we make a boast of not being scrupulous like others. Nay, we commit them and meanwhile contemn the mercy and goodness of God; for we make little account of them because they do not entail eternal punishment, and are easily pardoned. See, there you have another degree of malice in the wanton commission of venial sin, so that we have no great punishment to fear.

2. God has before now severely punished venial sin. Have you forgotten what happened to Moses for having doubted whether the water would come out of the rock on his striking it with his rod, as God had commanded him? Was he not on that account excluded from the Promised Land? Have you forgotten what happened to Nadab and Abiu, when they put strange fire in their censers? Were they not consumed by fire on the spot, in punishment of that act of thoughtlessness? Have you forgotten the severe chastisement inflicted on David, for a single sin of vanity he was guilty of in numbering his people? Did not that act of his cost seventy thousand of his subjects their lives? Have you forgotten what happened to Oza, when he put forth his hand to support the ark, lest it should fall? Was he not punished by being struck dead on the spot? All these faults were small and venial, and they were committed only once and for the first time. What sort of a punishment have we not to dread, then, for sins that we willfully commit every day and make no account of, for sins that we make a habit of and multiply until they are beyond counting, that we never really repent of and amend, although we often go to confession and holy Communion?

Descend in thought into purgatory, and see the immense number of souls there; some of them have been confined there for five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years, and who are those souls? They are all friends of God, and kings, heirs of heaven, who have a right to the vision and possessions of the highest Good. What keeps those souls so long in that prison? What fearful crime have they committed against God? A venial sin, and if we could interrogate those souls, they would answer us to that effect. One would say: a small lie that did no one any harm, and that I did not do penance for during my life, is the cause of my being here; another would attribute his punishment to his culpable carelessness and willful distractions in prayer; another to vanity in dress and trying to attract attention, although that vanity was not the cause of scandal; another to the habit of suspecting and finding fault with his neighbor, giving way to impatience in daily crosses, committing small sins against Christian charity, and this class of sins is what most of them would confess to. This, they would say, is what keeps us here; this is the bolt that shuts against us the heaven that belongs to us; this the sole reason why we must burn so long in this fire.

I know, my dear brethren, that this thought makes but little impression on our minds; as a general rule purgatory does not frighten us much, and therefore we often hear people say, and indeed it is the sentiment of the greater number, what matter if we have to go to purgatory? We shall not stop there long, and we shall be sure in any case of going to heaven I wish I was only sure of going there, even if I were to be put next to hell itself; I am not afraid of purgatory, but they may think and say what they like; all sensible men ought to be frightened when they consider that one venial sin is enough to keep even the holiest soul from the enjoyment of happiness,

so that, if such a sin could remain forever on the soul, and there was no atonement offered for it that soul should be forever deprived of the beatific vision. This alone should convince us that the punishment inflicted by God on venial sin is not a small but a very terrible one.

But I will say nothing today of the just punishment of venial, sins; but will admit that, since it does not last forever, it seems tolerable enough to us. I grant moreover that they are easily remitted in this life, but for that very reason the injury and offence offered to God is all the greater when we commit such sins deliberately. For, how comes it that we make such a difference between mortal and venial sin? We avoid the former with all our strength if we have any conscience left, and we so wantonly commit the latter daily and hourly. What is the reason of that? Is it not because on the one side God is infinitely just and pursues mortal sin with an infinite hatred, casting us off on account of it and condemning us to the eternal pains of hell, and we are in dread of this justice; while on the other side God is infinitely good and merciful, is not so severe against venial sin, and we deliberately commit that sin on account of His goodness and mercy, as if we said to His very face: O just God, I know that thou wilt give me over to the demons, and send me to hell on account of this grievous injustice, this impure act, this intemperance and deliberate drunkenness, this revenge and injury inflicted on my neighbor, this calumny and detraction, this cursing and swearing which really comes from the heart, this scandal and leading the souls of others astray; therefore I will be careful not to commit such sins. But in other matters I need not be so careful; this or that is but a venial sin; I know Thou art a good Lord, and wilt not be hard on me for it; it will not cause me to lose Thy grace and friendship altogether; the punishment I have to expect for it is small and will not last long, while Thou hast given me a thousand means of getting rid of it at any moment. Venial sins, then, make no great matter; I will commit them as they come, without scruple, although I know well that they offend Thee. Ah, how just that is! "Is thy eye evil, because I am good?" Is the answer that our Lord gives us.

But what a shame that is! Away with those dishonorable, boorish, mean-spirited souls, who always think and say, when there is question of doing something that their consciences are not quite easy about, is this or that a mortal sin? While they do not trouble themselves in the least as to whether it is a venial sin or not! Away with you! I say. You do not deserve the name of loving children and true friends of God; you are rather slaves and bondsmen; for you do not wish to serve God unless He comes with the rod or the sword in His hand and threatens to force you to obey Him. You respect, reverence, and fear nothing in Him but the fact of His being able to hurl you into the terrible fire of hell, which He will undoubtedly do, unless you repent and amend your life. Amen.



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