

V3_4th_after_Easter= Fidelity to God in Joy and in Sorrow

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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

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Fidelity to God in Joy and in Sorrow

“Because I have spoken these things to you, sorrow hath filled your heart.” John 16: 6.

There is a constant alternation of sweetness and bitterness, prosperity and adversity. In the morning one is good humored and cheerful, in the evening he is sad and melancholy; today he enjoys the society of a good friend, tomorrow he has to contend with a bitter enemy; this week he has the greatest happiness in his family, the next, one of his loved ones is taken away by death.

This year, he says in cheerful tones, I have made a good deal of profit; the next year he sighs: what fearful losses I have had! Now his cry is: God be praised! I am well and in good health; soon after you may hear him lamenting, and complaining of the pain he has to suffer. Thus divine Providence plays with us mortals, and mingles sour with sweet, prosperity with adversity. But what is the object of that change and alternation? It is to try us, and see whether we have a well founded virtue, and whether we really love our God with our whole heart. This is a consolation for pious servants of God, who lead holy lives, and yet have many trials and crosses to bear. God sends them to try, and to increase their virtue.

To remain steadfast in virtue and in the love of God in sorrow as well as in joy, in adversity as well as in prosperity, constitutes the true virtue and piety of a Christian.

When a man is always prosperous, and serves God faithfully, we might easily look on his virtue as somewhat suspicious, and say of him what Satan said of Job to the Lord: Thou art proud of thy servant; but without reason! Thou hast surrounded him with blessing; why, then, should he not praise and bless thee? But his praise is not sincere; it is only lip-service. On the other hand if a man has constantly to contend with suffering and adversity, and still remains devout and pious, even then we might have reason to suspect him, and to say: his devotion does not come from the heart; it is only forced; he prays to be freed from his miseries, or else since he can find no consolation on earth, he is compelled to seek it from God. Therefore to leave no room for doubt, God generally mingles sorrow with joy, prosperity with adversity, so as to see what a man's virtue really is.

It is a proof of great virtue to love God and remain true to him in the midst of crosses and trials. Therefore in many places in the Holy Scriptures love is compared with gold, and adversity with fire. Thus Job says of himself: "He hath tried me as gold that passeth through the fire" (Job 23: 10). "Gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation," to see whether their piety is sincere or not (Ecclus. 2: 5).

Men are sometimes scandalized at this in their own minds. They are surprised to see a pious servant of God bending under the weight of many severe trials and miseries; as if they thought that God should not thus torture a soul that loves him, or else that the soul itself was not acting wisely in remaining true to him, and praising and blessing him in spite of the torments he inflicts on it. When Job was reduced to the direst poverty and had to sit on the dung-hill covered with sores, his only word was, "blessed be the name of the Lord" but his wife mocked him: "Dost thou still continue in thy simplicity" she said: "bless God and die" (Job 2: 9). When the old Tobias was unfortunate, his wife too showed just as little sympathy for him: "It is evident," said she, "thy hope is come to nothing, and thy alms now appear" (Job 2: 22) thy blindness should teach thee how vain is thy reliance on God, and thou shouldest now acknowledge that the alms have been of little good to thee. But such people do not understand the benefits of adversity; and this very circumstance brings into still clearer light the great virtue of those who remain steadfast in the service of God in the time of trial; for being more enlightened they see that the sufferings that God sends them are nothing but proofs of his love, and real benefits, for which they therefore thank him, and love him all the more.

But it is a far more difficult and rare thing to love God sincerely in the time of prosperity, when all our wishes are fulfilled, than when we have to suffer. How so? Although prosperity should impel a generous mind to sentiments of gratitude, although temporal goods, such as health, riches, honors, the esteem of men, and lawful pleasures are not evil in themselves, but rather opportunities given us to promote the glory of God, and to help others; yet on account of the corruption of our nature, they expose our virtue to far greater dangers than trials and crosses do. Adversity takes away from man many occasions of sin; but prosperity brings with it all that inflames our bad desires and leads us into sin. It is, then, a great and difficult virtue to be prosperous, and yet not to allow our prosperity to get the upper hand. It is extremely difficult to be in an honorable position, and yet to be outwardly and inwardly humble; to be rich, and yet to be poor in spirit; to have abundance

of everything, and yet not to transgress the bound of moderation; to be in the midst of pleasures, and yet to keep one's senses in check by mortification. It is a great virtue indeed to be pious in prosperity! In fact, it seems much easier to bear adversity patiently than to avoid losing one's soul in prosperity.

Since men are wont to do wrong in both circumstances, the truth of my proposition is made evident at all events, namely, that the virtue of that man is certainly the greatest who, being proved in both ways, always remains faithful to God, so that he is neither elated by prosperity nor cast down by adversity; who serves his God as zealously when things go according to his wishes as when everything turns out a failure with him. For, he shows that he has a right appreciation of God and created things; he proves that he esteems nothing outside of God; that he looks on God as his only true Good, with whom alone he is satisfied; that he does not desire temporal goods, health, comfort, pleasure, riches, honors, or the esteem of men, nor use them, unless in so far as they help him to offer to God an acceptable service. Hence it is a matter of indifference to him whether he has those things or not, whether he gains or loses them. If God gives them to him, he accepts them with gratitude; but his whole heart and love still belong to God. If his health is taken from him by sickness, his joy by some trouble, his money by misfortune, his good name by disgrace, his pleasure by the death of some good friend, he is still satisfied with his God, and continues to serve him with as much zeal as ever. And that is the way to keep the chief commandment of the law: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind." Not to become perverted from the service of God by the caresses of prosperity, nor to be deterred from it by adversity, that is to love him with our whole heart and soul and strength.

So it was with Job, who, when he was the richest and greatest man in all the East, was looked on by God as his most faithful servant, who had not his like upon earth, and when he lost his children, his property, and his wealth at once, and was stricken with a grievous ulcer from head to foot, abandoned and mocked at by his best friends, still remained faithful to God. "In all of these things Job sinned not by his lips, nor spoke he any foolish thing against God" (Job 1:22). In all his troubles, not a word of sinful complaint escaped him; all he had to say was: "If we have received good things at the hand of God, why should we not receive evil?" (Job 2: 10) "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away; as it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done: blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1: 21). So it was with the saintly king Louis of France, who in the midst of royal honors and riches led a pious and holy life. He was once routed in battle by the Saracens, and taken prisoner; and what do you think he did, my dear brethren, when this great misfortune befell him? When he was brought to the room he was to occupy as a prisoner, he took his breviary into his hand, and without the least change of countenance, just as if he were in his own palace in Paris, began to read the office which he had not yet finished for the day.

But how is it with us in this respect? The Holy Ghost says "*A holy man continueth in wisdom as the sun*" (Ecclus. 27: 12); he who loves God sincerely continues to love, whether he is prosperous or the reverse; he is like the sun, that never changes his light, whether it is thrown on dung or on gold. But "a fool is changed as the moon."

Astronomers tell us that when the moon shows her dark side to the earth, she throws all her light upwards towards heaven; on the other hand when her dark side is turned towards heaven, we enjoy all her light here on earth; thus she never sheds her light equally on heaven and on earth, but as her light is withdrawn from us it increases in heaven, and as it is withdrawn from heaven it increases on earth. "A fool is changed as the moon; is it not so with the greater number of us, my dear brethren?"

When some find the star of their fortunes darkened by trials and calamities, so that they are deprived of all earthly joy and consolation, they send the rays of their love to heaven they seek God and adore him. But when darkness vanishes, when their trials come to an end and the full light of prosperity shines on them, oh, how they then withdraw their light from heaven! They forget their Creator; their love, which now attaches itself to creatures and temporal things, grows cold towards God and heavenly goods. Many a one living in lowly poverty, and working hard to support himself and his family, is truly humble, meek, merciful, modest, fervent in prayer, diligent in the performance of his morning and evening devotions, in frequenting the Sacraments, in hearing sermons and in the practice of all the other virtues; but if fortune begins to smile on him, if he grows rich, then, humility, where art thou? Modesty, what has become of thee? Devotion, where hast thou vanished to? Ah, how soon those things are forgotten, and how quickly the usages of the world are and its vanities and practices adopted! Nay, you will see many a one who after marriage fixes all his love on a creature, and hardly ever makes his appearance in church; as if he were one of the guests mentioned in the Gospel, who said: "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." "A fool is changed as the moon." So inconstant and fickle are we.

Others act in a way quite opposite to that. In the time of prosperity they are cheerful, and resigned to the will of God; they praise and bless him, and say with joyful hearts: Lord, thy will be done! But if they are visited by some affliction, if the husband or wife is attacked by illness, if a dear child dies, or if they have some other trial to bear, then there is an end of their resignation and contentment. God is no longer pleasing to them. Their trouble and chagrin are so great that they cannot pray. O what a heavy cross! They exclaim. How have I deserved it from God? They think no more of their former prosperity and of the blessing that God bestowed on them so richly in preference to many others. "A fool is changed as the moon." Whence comes this inconstancy? Ah, from the want of true virtue and a sincere love of God. We have not yet given ourselves to him without reserve; we do not love him with our whole heart and soul and strength above all things. Otherwise we should be the same to him in all circumstances, in prosperity and adversity, no matter what he does with us; so that if we were asked; what do you wish, what do you desire on earth? We should be able to answer with truth: I wish and desire nothing else but what God wills, and how God wills.

We must endeavor to learn this virtue to remain faithful to God in both circumstances, and we can learn it, if we frequently think of our last end, of the reason why we are on this earth, which is none other than to love God and be happy with him forever. Therefore we must look on it as certain that all created goods, whatever be their names, such as riches,

honors, pleasures, health, the love and friendship of men, are not real goods; and we must be fully convinced that all adverse circumstances, whatever they may be, such as sickness, natural sorrow, poverty, loss of good name, abandonment by men, have not the least particle of true evil in them; but that our true good, for which we have to strive, is the possession of God here on earth by grace, and hereafter in heaven by vision. This one supreme Good we can possess whether we are healthy or sick, poor or rich, joyful or sorrowful; therefore we have nothing on earth to fear, hope for, or love but God; and in all circumstances God must be the object of our greatest love and esteem. Let us keep this in mind in the daily alternations of joy and sorrow to which we are exposed, and accept those trifling changes from the hand of God, offering them up to him, in conformity to his will. Thus we shall gradually learn how to be the same towards God even in changes of greater importance.

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