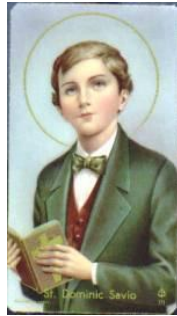


V4_1st_of_Lent= The Happiness of the Unmarried State

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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 4 - THE CHRISTIAN'S STATE OF LIFE

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

The Happiness of the Unmarried State

"The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and him only shalt thou serve."—Matt. 4: I.

This is our last end, to this all our thoughts, words, and actions must tend; namely, to adore God, and serve him alone. Now, although God wishes to be adored and served by all men, yet not by all in the same manner, nor in the same state of life; for each one must serve him in that state to which he is called. I have before now treated of the excellence of the Religious state, and the happiness of those who, being called to it, live according to its rules. To-day I will speak of those who live in the world in the unmarried state, so that those children who are still deliberating about a state of life may know something about this, and see what they have to choose by the vocation and inspiration of God. I say, therefore,

One of the most excellent and happiest states is the unmarried state, therefore, they who are called to it should readily obey the voice of God and serve him alone.

By the words "unmarried people," I do not understand all those who, being still free, have entered neither the Religious nor the married state. Nor do I include those who wish to marry, but have as yet had no fit opportunity of so doing, on account of poverty, ill-health, weakness, and other hindrances, and who, therefore, have to remain unmarried against their will. All these people are certainly unmarried, but they are not in the unmarried state, which is a state fixed for life, and to which all, of both sexes, belong, who, according to the advice of the Apostle, have once for all made the resolution of not marrying, nor of entering a Religious Order, but of remaining as they are to the end of their lives, and that, too, with a proper motive and object.

I say *with a proper motive and object*; for, to remain unmarried merely to escape the burdens, trials, cares, and annoyances of the married life, and meanwhile to live without restraint, to frequent the company of the opposite sex, to go often into society of all kinds, and to give way to sensual pleasures, which marriage alone can render lawful, and to do so without restraint whenever opportunity offers; that is no vocation from God, but an evident snare and treachery of the foul fiend, and it is a state in which countless sins are certainly committed against holy purity, a virtue that it is, humanly speaking, impossible to preserve among so many dangers and opportunities. It would be better for such people to get married, and they are bound in conscience either to do so, or to amend their lives. Oh, how many there are of this class, who deceive the world by a false appearance of chastity, and who make use of the glorious title of virginal purity as a cloak to conceal their abominations and impurities from the eyes of the world! Outwardly they are as white as doves, but inwardly they are as black as ravens that feed on stolen offal. I allude, therefore, only to those unmarried people who, for a supernatural end, that is, for the love of God, that they may serve him better, attend more carefully to their salvation, and be thus more certain of going to heaven, voluntarily renounce the lawful joys and pleasures of the married life, either by a firm resolution, or, what is still more meritorious and certain, by a vow of perpetual chastity and virginity, and who thus live unmarried, in virginal modesty and humility, rejecting, as far as possible, all society with persons of the opposite sex, and avoiding every occasion that might excite to sensuality. Such is the unmarried state in which one serves God, and God alone.

This is one of the happiest states. “Oh, how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory: for the memory thereof is immortal; because it is known both with God and with men” (Wisd. 4: 1). Oh, how glorious, noble, and happy is the state of those servants and handmaids of God, as long as they live according to it! The holy Martyr Ignatius, who lived just after the time of the Apostles, places this state, as to dignity, in the same rank as the anointed priests, saying: “Honor those who live in virginity, as you honor the priests of Christ.” They are really children of Jesus Christ, says St. Ambrose, for Christ is the Father and Source of true virginity; because, when it was unknown and despised in the world, he chose to be born of a Virgin, in order to bring it from heaven down on earth and to introduce it there. St. Bernard does not hesitate to place them, to a certain extent, above the Angels. He says: “There is indeed a difference between a chaste man and an angel, but it is a difference of happiness, not virtue.” It is natural for the Angels to be chaste, because they have no carnal desires; but for a man with a mortal body to observe chastity, in the midst of dangers, temptations, and natural evil inclinations, is, indeed, a great virtue. The Angels are chaste without difficulty; men, on the other hand, must combat and often do themselves violence, and therefore their chastity is more to be wondered at than that of the Angels. These are the most intimate servants of Jesus Christ who stand round his throne, and sing to him that canticle which no others can sing, as St. John says in the Apocalypse: “And no man could say the canticle but those hundred forty-four thousand, who were purchased from the earth. These are they who were not defiled with women: for they are virgins. These follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth” (Apoc. 14: 3, 4). But no matter how highly all those eulogies extol the unmarried state, they are all surpassed by one title of honor, which is, that that state is one of spiritual marriage with Jesus Christ, who is the lover and true Spouse of chaste souls.

St. Ambrose tells of a noble maiden whom her parents tried to force, against her will, into a marriage which the world would call a happy one. When she could no longer resist their violence, she ran to the church, clasped the altar in both arms, and said to her parents, who followed her: What do you want from me? What is it that you desire? That I should marry? Very well; be it so; but you must give me a bridegroom who is pleasing to me; otherwise I will not accept him.

You must know that I desire one who has not his equal in nobility in all the world; I desire one who surpasses all others in knowledge and ability; one whose magnificence excels that of all men; whose treasures and riches are so great that I might buy the whole world with them; one who is the most beautiful of all, whose beauty never fades; one who will give me all kinds of joys and pleasures, without the least annoyance; one who will love me always, and who will certainly be always true to me; one who, in addition to all these things, can never die. Father, mother, can you find a bridegroom of that kind for me? If you can, I will obey you, and will give him my hand at once. But if he is wanting in a single one of these qualities, then I do not care for him, I will not have him; you must not trouble me about him. You should rather rejoice and congratulate me; for see, I have already found the Bridegroom whom I desire:

Jesus Christ, the Son of the King of glory, who is here really present on the altar. To him I now vow, in your presence, perpetual chastity, and I take you as witnesses of my vow. At last I have what I so much longed for and desired. The very same thing may be said, to their great joy and consolation, by all those who serve their God in perpetual chastity, in the Unmarried state. Away with all who can love me in the world! I have chosen another Lover and Spouse, who has said to me by the prophet Osee: "And I will betroth thee to me forever" (Osee 11: 19).

But, some will think, it is, after all, an unenviable happiness. Such a rich, noble, and loving Spouse ought to bring something to the soul who thus chooses him. What marriage gift does he bring? His bride ought certainly to share in his riches. But if she has nothing of her own, nor from her parents, she will certainly not grow richer by remaining in the unmarried state. Experience teaches that many such people barely manage to live. Instead of such a bride living with her Bridegroom in joy and pleasure, all means of sensual pleasures, such as she could lawfully enjoy in the married state, are cut off from her, and hopelessly, too. Is not that a miserable kind of happiness? Yes, truly it is so, if we must judge of it by the senses alone; but Christ has said before now, when he was urging his disciples to perfection: "Not all understand this word." Our Bridegroom, they can answer, has said of himself: "I am not of this world." So also the treasures and riches, the joys and pleasures, the honor and happiness we expect from him, "are not of this world;" although they are given to us already a hundredfold in this life by the inward peace of heart and conscience, and by the merits and treasures that we can amass for our souls in our state of life. Our real happiness is on high, where our Bridegroom holds his royal court.

Meanwhile, if all carnal pleasures are forbidden to us forever, that is what we desire; because we can thus keep our hearts more free from creatures and can more easily give them altogether to God and to divine things, as St. Paul says, when praising the unmarried state: "The virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord." While others, who are bound by matrimony, are in servitude, and have all sorts of cares and troubles, the virgin lives in freedom, and beyond the trouble of supporting herself decently, she has no other care, no other thought except to serve God in peace, and attend to the salvation of her soul. While others must adorn themselves to please the eye of a mortal man, we have time to adorn our souls with virtues, so as to please the God of all beauty alone. While others, if their marriage is in the least degree unfortunate, are tormented by a hundred different trials, and lament too late the loss of their freedom, we have nothing of the kind to fear. Others, even if they have everything they wish, lose their bridegroom by death, and are left in sorrow, and often in poverty with their children: we need never fear that, for our Bridegroom can never be taken from us. Others, again, are separated from their bridegroom and from all they love, by death; we, when the hour of death comes, shall be eternally united to ours; that is what we expect and long for. Oh, what a glorious and happy state is that of the chaste servants and handmaids of God! "But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they so

continue, even as I” (I Cor. 7: 8). “Therefore, both he that giveth his virgin in marriage, doth well; and he that giveth her not, doth better” (I Cor. 7: 38). —Here I must condemn the reckless conduct of those boys and girls who throw away in their youth the treasure of their chastity—which is so precious in the sight of God, and so dear to Jesus Christ—at the first opportunity that offers, and even after that having deliberately sought out an opportunity of satisfying their beastly passions. Nay, they even rejoice and look upon it as a piece of good luck when they have a chance of losing this noble treasure, which, once lost, can never be recovered for all eternity. Foolish virgins! Unhappy souls! How I pity you! For you allow yourselves to be deceived by the flattering tongue and false words of some bird of prey, who, after he has deprived you of your best treasure, goes his way, and leaves you dishonored in the sight of God, and often in the sight of men, too! The world still wonders at the foolish gluttony of Queen Cleopatra, who, in order to say that she had eaten something costly, caused a pearl worth two hundred thousand crowns to be dissolved in vinegar, and swallowed it. Agrippina, that she might induce her spendthrift son, Nero, to amend his ways (after he had once given eight hundred thousand Roman crowns to a man who pleased him, and who had no other merit), caused vast sums of money to be heaped together, and showed them to her son. Look, my son, she said, at the trifle you gave away yesterday! Christian youths and maidens! Your foolish extravagance is much more to be wondered at, or, to speak better, much more to be deplored. If it were possible to lay before you the treasure that you squander in a few moments, when you lose your virginal purity, you would see that it is not like Cleopatra’s pearl, or Nero’s treasure, but that it surpasses all the wealth of the world; for, to preserve it, many Saints have shed every drop of blood in their veins with pleasure, while you so foolishly sacrifice it for a short-lived gratification.

And you, wicked agents of the devil, you traitors and defilers of youth, who, by your immodest language and stories, wicked teaching, provocation, caresses, invitations and conversation, betray so many innocent souls to impurity! Should you not be afraid when you think that you have taken away from God that precious treasure, not only in yourselves, but in others also, and that you have given it over to the devil! What shameless audacity it would be to insult or dishonor a queen in the very presence of the king! But you are far more shameless and insolent, for you dare to do that to one who, as long as she is pure, is espoused to Jesus Christ, the King of kings: and you do it before the God who sees all things. Woe to you if that jealous Bridegroom, who cannot even allow his spouses to bring him a divided affection, has to judge you for your sins after your death!

Finally, I speak again to you, Christian sons and daughters, whom God has called to the unmarried state. Acknowledge thankfully and humbly your great happiness, which the Lord has given to you in preference to so many others; but be careful to serve him according to your state. You have kept your freedom, not to live more freely, but to be able all the better to attend to the salvation of your soul. You have given up all idea of marriage and sensual love, and you have thereby received Jesus Christ as your Bridegroom; he will henceforth take possession of your hearts and keep them for himself alone. You are free from many domestic cares, therefore direct all your thoughts and desires to God and heavenly things. You have either vowed, or promised for God’s sake, perpetual chastity; see that you keep your resolution in the midst of the dangers and temptations of the world, and to that end, and that you may be always faithful to your Bridegroom, you must lead careful, retired, modest, and humble lives. If you are determined to do so, then I congratulate you; resolve and say with the Spouse of the Canticles: “I found him whom my soul loveth, I held him, and I will not let him go” (Canticles 3: 4). Amen.



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