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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 + + +

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TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Duty of Feeding and Supporting Children

“Lord, my daughter is now dead; but come, lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live. St. Matthew 9: 18.

Would that all fathers and mothers had as great a care and interest in the eternal life of the souls of their children as most parents nowadays have for their children's temporal welfare; if that were the case, many children would be better brought up and would save their souls! There is still another duty that parents owe their children with regard to their temporal welfare, according to which they are bound to support and look after them as well as possible.

- I. Parents are bound to support their children, and to take the greatest care of their temporal welfare.*
- II. Many are not careful enough in this particular, and sin by neglect and omission.*

I. It is useless to ask whether parents are bound to support their children and to look after their temporal welfare. If one were to lose all parental instincts and love for his children, if he were even dead to all human feeling, so that he could have a doubt of this, such a person ought to be sent to learn from the wild beasts what nature itself teaches them. What desert ever contained a wild beast so cruel as to neglect its young, and to allow them to die of hunger? It is wonderful to see how the little birds, when their young at last come out of the shell, fly to and from their nests the whole day long, bringing food to their young in their beaks, although they themselves may be suffering from hunger, so that during that time they become quite thin. It is wonderful to see how a hen scratches and tears with her beak to feed her chickens. As soon as she finds a grain of corn she does not eat it herself, although she may be hungry enough, but commences to cackle, until her chickens are all about her, when she gives them the precious morsel, and then she begins to scratch and tear afresh. And that care continues on her part until they are able to look after themselves, and leave her.

Man, endowed with reason, is bound to do this, too, not only by the law of nature, but also by the law of charity and justice. The law of charity requires all to help their neighbor who is in extreme necessity when they can, and to save his life, if he cannot help himself. How much more, then, does it not require parents to have that care for their own flesh and blood, whom they have brought into the world? For who would be bound to support children if parents were not? And this is not to be understood merely of little children, and of the parents' obligation to feed and clothe them; but also, according to the same law, the father and mother are bound in conscience to support their children when they are grown up, according to their condition, and to see that they leave them enough to live on decently.

What a great responsibility parents incur by forgetting the obligations of charity and neglecting this duty! Who does not know by experience the misery, sin and vice that are caused by want and poverty? Into what sins, injustice, theft, impurity, and shameful actions could Satan not lead children by his temptations when he knows that they suffer from hunger! Would to God that the world had not such experience of crime committed by children through poverty and want! And, alas! How many sins of which we know nothing, come from the same cause, nor shall we know anything of them until the great day of reckoning comes, when they shall be declared to the whole world! Children, indeed, commit grievous sins and are not to be excused, when they try to procure, by unlawful means, the necessaries of life, that their parents left them without. For, as far as possible, they should endeavor to find some lawful occupation, and trust in divine Providence to supply them with what is needful. But, at the same time, woe to those parents who do not perform their duty by providing for and supporting their sons and daughters as well as they can! All the sins and evils that follow from their neglect are to be attributed to them, and they must answer for them in judgment.

The law of justice binds parents to perform their duty in this respect to their children. Children belong to their parents, under God, and therefore these latter, and no others, are bound to do their best to feed and support them properly. In a word, it is a general rule that he who gives life to a thing is bound to preserve that thing, and to supply it with what is necessary to its natural existence. A tree receives its life from the earth, and from the earth it also gets its nourishment; the fruit has its life from the tree, and must be supported by the same tree until it is ripe. Father and mother have, under God, given life to their children, and therefore they are in justice bound to support those children as well as they can. So that there can be no doubt that parents are obliged to take this care of their children, for the law of nature, the law of charity, the law of justice, and even reason itself prove this.

II. The first great fault committed against this duty will seem strange indeed to you, and it is common enough amongst those who are least to be suspected of it, namely, the rich and wealthy, who can leave their children money enough.

1. That fault is committed by those mothers who, without sufficient cause, or through exaggerated fears, do not nurse their own children, but entrust them to the care of strangers, that they themselves may have less trouble. God himself complains of such people by the Prophet Jeremias: "Even the sea monsters have given suck to their young; the daughter of my people is cruel, like the ostrich in the desert" (Lam. 4: 3). Of this bird Job says: "She leaveth her eggs on the earth. She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not hers" (Job 39: 14). Unnatural mothers that you are, unless you are prevented from performing this duty by real illness or weakness, or other reasonable cause! Why has your Creator given you children, if not that you may attend to them? How can children have a natural, proper, and childlike love for you if you neglect them in their tenderest years?

And how many great evils are often the consequence of that which you would try to ignore altogether if you could! For how do you know the character of the people to whom you entrust your children? Do you know their dispositions and inclinations? Whether they are well or ill-reared? Whether they are inclined to sin and vice? If this latter is the case, your poor children will be infected with their wickedness and vice, and be boorish, rude, and uncultivated in their manners, and utterly unlike their parents; for experience shows that children easily copy the manners and dispositions of those who take care of them. Hence, Titus, the son of Vespasian, was always sickly and delicate, because his nurse had a secret malady. Tiberius Nero, who was called Biberius Nero, on account of his drunken habits, was brought up by a nurse who was much given to wine. On account of these and other similar evils, there have been great queens, and princesses, and ladies of the highest rank, and there are some still, who would never allow others to look after their children, no matter how troublesome they themselves might find it to do so. "The daughter of my people is cruel like the ostrich in the desert." Unmerciful as ostriches are those mothers who, through sheer love of their own comfort, neglect the children that God gave them to look after, and entrust them to the care of strangers?

2. Another class who do not support their children properly consists of those parents who, without just cause, do not treat their children alike, as far as the care of their temporal welfare is concerned. Sometimes a son or a daughter takes complete possession of the father's or mother's heart. When that is the case no trouble or expense is spared to dress them nicely, to educate them well, and to give them a position in the world, while the other sons or daughters, because they are not so beautiful, or have some natural defect, cannot get any share in their parents' affection, are treated with indifference, and are allowed to get on as best they may. Unjust father, unjust mother, do you know what you are doing? This favoritism is a torch that will kindle the fire of dissension in your family and your descendants. It will sow the seeds of jealousy, of envy, vindictiveness, lawsuits, and disputes between brothers and sisters. Are they not all your children? Has not the one, as well as the other, been left with you by God as a deposit? Why, therefore, should you care more for one than for the other? Your children have an equal share of your flesh and blood; let them also share equally in your affection. It is frequently the case that, by a just judgment of God, the children who are idolized as favorites of their parents are often the very ones who give least comfort and consolation, and who cause the most grief and sorrow to their parents.

3. The third class consists of those rich but avaricious parents whose only care is to be able to leave a large sum of money to their children at their death, while during their lives they either allow their children to remain idle, or do not make them learn a trade or profession. What a wretched way that is to provide for children! That is not the way to support them according to their condition. What good will your money be to them after your death? They will be ill-mannered, boorish, and ignorant, fit for no important office. No, Christian parents, the best inheritance you can leave your children is some honest trade, business, or profession, which you must have them taught in their youth, so that afterwards they may be able to provide for themselves, although you cannot leave them anything. This is also meant for those misers who, when their children have chosen a state of life, either refuse them the promised sum of money, or do not help them to get on, although they could easily afford to do so. That is often the reason why children secretly look forward to and long for the death of their old father or mother.

4. The fourth class of those who do not provide for their children as they ought consists of those parents who dress themselves and their children above their means and condition. What a frightful abuse that is in our days, even amongst Christians, who renounce formally the pomps and vanities of the world in holy Baptism, and profess to follow the standard of the humble Jesus on the narrow way of penance and of the cross! What a fearful abuse is that accursed luxury in dress! How many respectable families, who could otherwise live decently according to their state, are thereby brought to poverty, because they wish to put on as good an appearance as others, and do not wish to dress differently from the rest of the world! To such a degree of arrogance have people come that it is enough to excite laughter. Many, when they go out, carry their whole property on their backs, so that when they come home again they have hardly bread and meat enough to eat, and to feed the bodies that they deck out in such a costly manner. When Attila, the king of the Goths, sent one of his officers, dressed up in royal robes; to St. Benedict, the holy man said to the latter, as soon as he saw him: "Put off what you are wearing, my son, for it is not your own." The same might be said nowadays to many children of the world, who strut about in fashionable clothing: Sir, madam, that dress is not your own. Those precious ear rings, that silver or gold lace, that velvet or silk cloak, that damask robe, belong to the merchant, who has entered all your magnificent dresses in his book of debts, and who must, perhaps, wait a long time before he is paid. Put it off; it is not yours. Such is the case with many people in the world.

And what can be the result of this in the long run but poverty? Thus children are often driven to unlawful means and dangerous plans in order to be able to dress as well as before. Oh, if every one profited by the exhortations of St. Paul: "But having food, and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content" (I Tim. 6: 8). The fashions and customs of the world must be followed, and many think that it is better even to suffer hunger and poverty rather than to appear less than others through Christian modesty and humility! Cruel, heartless parents that you are, who thus foolishly squander what should be employed

to bring up and support your children decently!

5. Finally, the most heartless, and, as far as this matter is concerned, the most wicked parents, are those fathers, and those mothers even, who are given to gambling and drinking, and who either shorten or destroy, by their drunken habits, the lives that they are bound to preserve for the good of their children, or make themselves unable to attend to their business, employment, or housekeeping as they ought, or, as is, alas frequently the case, by constant tippling, spend on Sundays and holydays what they earn during the week, nay, even what their wives and children earn by their labor; and meanwhile the poor mother and her wretched children must remain hungry at home, feeding themselves with bitter tears, and not having any decent clothes to cover themselves with. What an injustice crying to heaven? The very men to whom God has given wives and children to look after, are the ones who rob them of what belongs to them, and bring them to poverty! It is a sin against Christian mercy not to defend and support poor widows and orphans when one can; what a fearful cruelty it must then be to take from one's own family what they have, and to reduce them to beggary! And to do that by drunkenness, that is to say, by committing sin, and offending God! What sins follow from that! How those children must hate and curse their father! How desperate the mother must become, so that the whole family are likely to exchange temporal for eternal misery! Poor children, how I pity you who have such parents! It were better for you to have been born in the desert, with wild beasts for your father and mother.

Think of this, and ponder on it, Christian parents! Attend, as far as you can, and in the first place, to the eternal salvation of your children, and next to that, see that you provide for their support and temporal welfare with all possible diligence.

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