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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 + + +

VOL. 5 = THE CHRISTIAN'S LAST END
SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

How to Make the Thought of Death Useful

“Behold there was a certain man before him that had the dropsy. St. Luke 14: 2.

We have seen how, when our Lord was approaching the city of Naim, “a dead man was carried out;” in to-day’s Gospel we read that “there was a certain man before him that had the dropsy;” this man was dangerously ill, and would certainly have died had not our Lord cured him. Here, again, we have a warning that we must die, a sermon and an exhortation to think often of death. In my last sermon I showed you how the frequent meditation of death is a powerful means to induce us to do good and to avoid evil. To-day I have another opportunity of treating of the same matter, and of showing in what manner we may derive advantage from the frequent meditation of death.

We must think of death seriously, and in such a way that the thought may influence our future actions.

Not every thought, of death inspires us to lead a holy life. There are many things that remind us that we must die, no matter how much we try to shun the thought of death; but the thought thus inspired is generally a superficial one, that touches only the imagination—a useless thought, that annoys without helping one to amendment of life. The recollection of death should be lively, effective, and apt to have an influence on our future actions, such as God spoke of to Moses: “Oh that they would be wise and would understand, and would provide for their last end!” (Deut. 32: 29.) That is, that they would now, during their lifetime, find out what will be good for them at the end, what will be then a source of joy, of sorrow, of terror to them, and would now try to do what they shall then wish to have done, to amend what they shall then wish to have amended, to avoid what they shall then wish to have avoided.

Our life is a passage, and a very dangerous one; for we have to bring our one immortal soul from time to eternity. Can we then afford to take blindly the first way that seems a little safe, and trust ourselves to it? No, he who wishes to act prudently and secure his soul’s salvation goes far more carefully to work. Now, he thinks, while I am strong and healthy this or that appears good and desirable to me; but how will it be hereafter? Will it bring me to the haven of salvation? What shall I think of it at the end of my life? Oh, if we acted thus, how far different would be our opinion of things from what it now is! As it is, our understanding especially in what concerns our souls, is darkened and blinded by many evil inclinations and appetites by our love for creatures and by our own self-love, so that it is almost incapable of forming a correct judgment of good and evil. But when we come to the last supreme hour; when the lighted candle is in our hand, the eyes of the body are indeed dimmed, but the eyes of the mind become all the clearer; and how our judgment, our wishes and desires will then be altered! When man begins to sleep the last sleep his eyes will be opened for the first time, and he will see what he before neither wished nor tried to see. The sins that he committed through culpable ignorance and therefore did not look on as evil, or that

he excused and palliated, or even thought nothing of, “when he shall sleep,” when he is at the point of death, they shall weigh on his conscience like a millstone. Then will he say, as the wicked king Antiochus said on his death-bed: “Into what tribulation am I come, and into what floods of sorrow, wherein now I am: I that was pleasant and beloved in my power. But now I remember the evils that I did in Jerusalem” (1 Mach. 6: 11, 12). Now I remember, will many a one cry out, now I remember the sins I committed at home, in the garden, in company, alone, which my sloth, my willful blindness concealed from me. Alas! What anguish and fear have come upon me now about things that I formerly laughed at!

Truly, now is the time to think and to weigh everything carefully in the balance of death. Now, while we are still in life and have no fear of death, we often fear and avoid what we shall at the end wish to have eagerly embraced; now we long and yearn for and look on as a great happiness what we shall then wish we had avoided as the greatest evil. Solitude, humiliation, self-denial, mortification of the senses, poverty, crosses and misery, the bare idea of such things fills us now with aversion and disgust; but how differently death will speak to us of those things!

It sometimes happens that two women of equal age and standing go to church together; the one pious, humble, modest, according to the Christian law; the other worldly, vain, light-minded, bold. In the same way two young men meet; the one quiet, well-reared, inclined to piety and the fear of God; the other insolent, proud, dissolute. You know very well that if one of two contending parties gives way voluntarily to the other the latter gains the case, and the suit is at an end even before the judge pronounces sentence. Wait now, and see which of the parties in question will be the first to yield. “When he shall sleep, he shall open his eyes.” When they come to the point of death their eyes will be opened. Then will the dissolute young man moan and sigh, if not in words, at least with the heart, if so much time shall be given him: “Therefore we have erred” (Wisd. 5: 6). Ah, what a mistake I have made! In what a wretched, immoral, godless manner I have spent my young years! What will now become of my soul? Ah, would that I had served my God better! Then will the tepid, luxurious, idle, rich man cry out, as the pious Philip II of Spain did on his death-bed: “How happy I would be now if I had spent my life in some corner of a desert.” Then will he sigh forth, like a certain dying rich man: “I have built many houses on earth; would that I had built even one small cell in heaven!” Then he will cry out with that dying courtier: “I have served a mortal king for some forty years; would that I had spent the twentieth part of that time in the service of the Emperor of heaven! I have written many reams of paper; would that I had used one leaf to write out my sins for a general confession!” Then will that vain woman, if so much grace will be given her, full of anguish and remorse, send for a confessor, and exclaim with lips and heart: Ah, would to God! Ah, if I had only lived a more pious, devout, and Christian life! If I had only made more use of my crucifix than of my looking-glass! If I had only been more zealous in going to adore God in the church, and in attending sermons and devotions, than in paying visits to mere mortals! If I had only my rosary more frequently in my hands than the pack of cards! If I had only wrapped myself up in a mantle many a time, so that no eye could see me, instead of giving scandal to others by my indecent dress! If I had only spent more time in adorning my soul with virtues than in tricking out my body with vain apparel! If I had only given to Christ in his poor what I squandered on luxuries and superfluities! Now you wish you had acted like those whose piety and modesty you used to hold in derision. So you have completely changed your judgment and why? The blessed candle that I hold in my hand to remind me that I am about to journey into eternity has filled my eyes with such a powerful light that I now can see what I before was blind to. I have made a great mistake; I must acknowledge it! Sighs of that kind and a repentance that in many cases comes too late are common enough amongst all sinners and tepid Christians who, during their lives, have seldom thought of death; they are like moles: blind during life, and able to see only when at the point of death. We should not forget this when we think of death, and should try to live as we shall wish to have lived at the last. Is the life that I am now leading one that will bring comfort or anguish to me on my death-bed? Should I like to die with the goods of others in my possession, in that dangerous intimacy, in that impure love in which I have hitherto lived? Should I like to die in that hatred and anger against my neighbor, with that secret sin

on my conscience that I have not yet properly confessed? Ah, no! God forbid! Why, then, should I wait any longer, since death may surprise me in any place, at any time? At once, therefore, I will restore those ill-gotten goods, avoid that dangerous intimacy and occasion, change that hatred into Christian charity and meekness, confess my sins candidly, and follow the humble Gospel of Christ to the best of my ability! That is the real, practical manner of thinking on death.

“Oh, that they would be wise and would understand, and would provide for their last end!” Oh, if we all frequently thought of death in that manner! No other means should we require to lead a Christian life, no other to die a happy death. This seems to be what our Lord desired to teach us when he raised the dead to life. How did he act when he raised the daughter of Jairus? “He went in and took her by the hand. And the maid arose.” This was all the ceremony he used on that occasion, and having worked the miracle he went his way. How did he act in the case of the widow’s son of Naim? “Young man,” he exclaimed, “I say to thee, arise.” The dead man stood up, “and he gave him to his mother.” That was all. He raised Lazarus from the grave. “Lazarus,” he cried out, “come forth”. And presently he that had been dead came forth. Jesus said to them: “Loose him and let him go.” Why did he do no more on those occasions? Because, when healing the sick, he generally gave an exhortation to the people, as was the case with the man born blind and of the paralytic man, to the latter of whom he addressed this exhortation before dismissing him: “Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee.” Why did he not act in the same manner when raising the dead, especially since he had such a fine opportunity of exhorting the people to good, and, besides, those whom he restored to life being still young, would require some words of warning to induce them to avoid the dangers that threaten youth? No, that was not necessary; for death itself was their best teacher. For he who has once died and knows what death is requires no other master to teach him to live well; while the mere sight of dead people was already sermon enough for the bystanders. He who meditates seriously on death needs no other incentive to amend his life and avoid sin: “For death itself is the best teacher.”

Why are we so backward in meditating on death? Why do we so obstinately close our hearts to it, although it will infallibly come to each and every one of us? How carefully we set about some temporal end we have in view, although we may never gain it! What preparations we make to entertain a dear friend, although he may never come to visit us! How eagerly you work and plan in order to leave rich legacies to your children, although they may die before you! Death is infallibly certain for all; why, then, do you not think of it? Why do you not take care that you may once die well? Once, I say; because if you make any mistake in dying, you shall never have the chance of repairing it. And why should you not think of death? Tell me, poor mortal, why do you so obstinately reject such a wholesome consideration? You must die; you may die this very moment. If death were to come to you now, and it is actually coming to many, and may easily come to you, you would go to hell for all eternity.

Now is the time to prepare. Now is the time for frequent and mature reflection. Now is the time to do that which will render the death that certainly awaits us a happy one! “In all his works let man say to himself: if you were now about to die, would you do this?” In all temptations and occasions of sin let each one ask himself: if I were now about to die, would I commit that sin? Would I speak, act, think in that manner? Would I listen to that talk, look at that object? Would I permit that person to act as he does? And if I should, at the hour of death, wish to have acted in a certain way, let me choose that way now. Perhaps death is actually very near me. Oh, happy man who has death daily before his eyes! He belongs to the number of those faithful servants of whom our Lord has said in the Gospel: “Blessed are those servants whom the Lord “when he cometh shall find watching” (Luke 12: 37). Amen.

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