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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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FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT.

The Company of the Reprobate in Hell

“A great multitude followed him.”—John 6: 2

It is an old saying, and a true one: “It is consoling to have a companion in suffering.” And to this fact the wicked generally appeal when they are threatened with hell. Oh, they say, if I am lost and have to go to hell, I shall not be the only one; I shall have plenty of companions, and amongst them the greatest and noblest. May God keep you and me out of that company! If there were not in hell that terrible fire that tortures both soul and body, if there were no gnawing worm of conscience to afflict the damned with the recollection of the happiness they have forfeited, if there were no darkness, nor howling and cursing, nor stench nor hunger and thirst, if there were no other pain in hell,

The company alone that the damned find there would, to my mind, make a hell in itself.

That there is comfort here on earth in having a companion when one is ailing is true enough, provided the companion is a sympathetic one. But in hell things are quite different. If there were no other torment there except having to live in the society of the damned, that alone would make an intolerable hell for souls. For, reflect a moment on what occurs here on earth. Many a one has all his pleasure spoiled, even in the most agreeable society, if one happens to be present against whom he has a grudge, especially if the two enemies, who cannot bear the sight of each other, happen to sit together. Oh, then the best meats lose their savor, the choicest drinks become in-

insipid; every word uttered by the one is a thorn in the side of the other; the hours seem lengthened into years by the efforts at enforced courtesy that have to be made to keep up appearances. And yet either, if he chose, might get up and go away.

What torment it must then be for two or more who are at enmity to have to live together, as is often the case in unhappy marriages! Infallible is the truth spoken by the Holy Ghost: "It is better to dwell in a wilderness than with a quarrelsome and passionate woman." And there is not a doubt of it. I often think with heartfelt pity of the poor man who is tied to such a disagreeable partner; he hears nothing at home but nagging and complaining, scolding and abuse; so that he is forced to go out of the house to get a little quiet, nor does he come home except with the greatest reluctance and counting the hours till it is time for him to go out again. And still greater is the pity I feel for the poor wife who, good and innocent as she is, must live with a husband who is addicted to drink, or, what is worse, is unfaithful to her, and ill-treats and beats her as if she were a servant or a dog. Deserving indeed of pity is the poor woman who, when she hears her drunken husband knocking at the door, trembles in every limb, and has to make up her mind, as she knows by sad experience, to be dragged along by the hair, or kicked, or beaten. Unhappy companions, I think with deep sympathy, when husband and wife regard each other with mutual hatred and aversion; when both drink to excess and curse and abuse each other, and fight and tear each other by the hair; and yet all have to live together.

Far greater shall be the torment caused in hell by the society of the damned. According to Job, it is a land "where... no order, but everlasting horror dwelleth" (Job. 10: 22). Just as in heaven the blessed, united by an eternal and perfect love of God, rejoice in each other's happiness, and thus receive an accidental and continual joy from the company in which they are, so, on the contrary, in hell, the dwelling of disorder and confusion, the damned shall regard each other with hatred and aversion, and thus add to the torments they have to suffer. Now, if it is reckoned as a hell for two married people to live together in strife and hatred, what must that hell be where there are millions of damned together, who regard each other with the utmost rage and hatred, where the presence of the one is intolerable to the other, and yet they have no hope of being separated for all eternity, but must live together, amidst incessant cursing and imprecations, tearing, biting, and rending each other in their fury?

But shall not those boon companions, those jovial souls who spent the time so pleasantly together on earth, shall not they find some alleviation of their misery in being together in hell? And they who were inflamed during life with an impure passion so that they could hardly bear to be separated for one hour, and were ready to share all they had, nay, to give up their very lives for each other, shall they have no consolation or pleasure in being together in hell, in seeing that their torments are shared between them? For we know that people of that kind are wont to comfort each other in sorrow, and thus to lessen considerably the weight of the blow. Shall it not be so, I ask, in hell? Nothing of the kind! All this intimacy and friendship, this love and confidence, shall disappear amongst the damned, or, to speak more correctly, this former love and confidence, intimacy and friendship, shall rather increase their mutual hatred and aversion, their madness and despair, their curses and imprecations. A certain prince who was taken prisoner in battle, seeing his captor standing before him, cried out with averted countenance: take away that man out of my sight, or else have pity on me and strike me dead! Unhappy sinner! How many thousand times you will wish to die in hell; or, since death will then be an impossibility for you, what a great alleviation you would think it to have that person removed from your sight whom you now call your treasure and the idol of your heart! But all in vain; you will be able to curse and revile that hellish fury, but her society you will never be freed from for all eternity.

How will it be, then, with those who lived together on earth in lawful, honorable, dutiful love, such as should exist between man and wife, father and son, mother and daughter, brothers and sisters, friends and relations? Will not these, at least, if they are together in hell, console each other somewhat in their misfortunes by mutual sympathy? No; in that place, where there is no order nor reason, but eternal confusion, all friendship and relationship, all love and sympathy, shall lose their names and be changed into bitter anger and hatred, especially if one of the formerly beloved persons was the occasion of sin to the other. Accursed wife, the husband will cry out in rage and hatred, must I have you always at my side to increase my torments? Would that I had never seen you, for then I should not perhaps be here; for your sake I often forgot my duty to God and my own conscience; to save you trouble or to retain your affection I have often done what I knew to be unlawful; to maintain you in idleness, frivolity, wasting your time paying and receiving visits, gambling, and amusing yourself, extravagance in dress, I have had recourse to unlawful means to make money, and have been obliged to withhold from Jesus Christ, in the persons of the poor and needy, what belonged to Him by right. And you, accursed husband, the wife will exclaim, you are the cause of my eternal damnation, because you allowed me too much liberty, or encouraged me to lead a vain, unchristian life; for your sake I have neglected many acts of devotion, indulged our children in all kinds of vanities and pleasures; the drunken and debauched habits that led you so often into leaving me alone at home with the children, the cruelty with which you acted toward me, as if I were your servant or your dog, drove me to sadness and despair, and to many sins that sprang there from, and finally into this abyss of hell!

Accursed son, a father will say, it is on your account that I am damned, for I often sacrificed my conscience in my anxiety to provide for your future; frequently had I made the resolution of restoring ill-gotten goods to their lawful owners, as I was bound to do by the divine law, but my inordinate love for you deterred me each time, and I am now in hell. Accursed father, the son will reply, you, rather, are the cause of my ruin; if you had kept me under better restraint, and led me in my youth to fear God, and kept me away from sin and dangerous occasions; if you had taken more care of my spiritual and less of my temporal needs; if you had not prevented me from following my religious vocation, I should now be in heaven. Accursed daughter, a mother will say, my foolish love for you has been my ruin; I allowed you to spend your time in idleness, vanity, and worldliness, and did not chastise you for your bad and scandalous conduct! Truly, accursed mother, the daughter will reply, you should have kept me in check; it was your duty as a mother; if you had been a good mother I should not now be in hell; the bad example you gave me, the dangerous company into which you brought me, the pride you inspired me with, the vanity in dress that you encouraged or permitted in me, has brought me to eternal ruin.

The Catholic Church permits married people who have a great aversion for each other to be separated as far as living together is concerned, although the marriage-tie can never be dissolved; and she does so through a compassionate desire of saving them from the heavy cross they would have to carry in being in each other's company. Oh, if the damned had that consolation, and could separate themselves from their hated companions, and hide away in some crevice of the earth to suffer their hellish pains by themselves, they would be freed from one of their worst and most bitter punishments! But for all eternity the reprobate shall behold his hated companions, and gnash his teeth against them with rage and despair, and be filled with unconquerable loathing for them; but all his desires to be freed from them shall be unavailing, for "the desire of the wicked shall perish."

How foolish to comfort one's self with the thought of the company to be met with in hell! Do you talk and mock in that style when, for instance, a fire breaks out and consumes a whole street,

and your own house is burnt with the rest? Then every one of you would run out at once and leave everything for the sake of saving dear life, regardless of the poverty and distress that must ensue from the loss of property. Now, in such circumstances why do not people say or think: what is it to me? Even if I do lose my life by fire, I shall not be the only one; I shall have many companions in misfortune. It is only when there is question of the eternal ruin of the immortal soul, of the eternal loss of the joys of heaven, of an eternal fire with the demons in hell, that men can laugh, and joke, and comfort themselves with the thought of the companions who are to share in their damnation, and who must suffer the same loss, the same ruin, the same eternal pains. Then they can say: I am not the only one. Truly, sinner, you shall not be alone in hell; for many, very many, nay, the majority of men, shall be there with you; if you were there alone there might still be some consolation for you; but as it is, the society of so many shall be a new and an intolerable hell for you; the multitude of the damned increases the pain of each one of them.

Reflect on this, oh, you who are now in the proximate occasion of sin, so that the fear of being condemned to that unhappy company may urge you to give up that sinful intimacy. Reflect on this, you who by unchaste songs and conversation, or impure books, or diabolical teaching, or vain and scandalous dress, or by giving bad example, are in any way the means of leading the innocent astray, and are thus actually adding to the number of the reprobate, to your own greater future torment. Reflect on this, you who are now so fond of dancing, debauchery, drunkenness, and gambling.

Reflect on this, oh, parents! When you take with you or allow your sons and daughters to go into dangerous society. Reflect on this, you married people who have lost your mutual love for each other, and have thus embittered your lives! Reflect on this, all you who have to live or deal with any persons to whom you have an aversion; think, I say, in order to preserve yourselves in Christian meekness and humility, and to turn to the good of your souls the annoyance you experience from such persons: ah, why should I trouble myself about these people? They are not by any means as bad as the society of the damned in hell. May God keep you and me from that terrible fate, that we may never know by experience what a fearful torment, what an intolerable hell is the company of the damned in hell. Amen.



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