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Remember that Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday this week are EMBER DAYS.  
Observe the laws of Fast and Abstinence.

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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 + + +

*VOL. I = THE BAD CHRISTIAN*

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

### The Lying Tongue

*“He confessed, and did not deny.”* John 1:20.

Of all men, without exception, the Sacred Scripture says: “Every man is a liar” (Ps. 115:11); not in the sense that every one must lie, or is accustomed to lie, for all lies under any circumstances are forbidden by God; but the meaning of those words is that all men can lie and knowingly violate the truth. Would to God that lying never went further with us than the bare possibility, and that what the Gospel of to-day says in praise of St. John the Baptist, “He confessed and did not deny,” might be said with truth of us all; that the spirit of falsehood had no influence over us! But, alas! What is more common than lies? Most people, in fact, make a habit of it. Yet it is hateful and degrading in the sight of God and man, as I shall show.

*I. The habit of lying is a shameful and disgraceful vice in the eyes of the world.*

*II. It is a shameful and disgraceful vice in the eyes of God.*

1. It is a great honor for a man when people say of him what Jesus said of Nathanael: “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile” (John 1:47); and when he is looked upon as an honest, upright man, whom one can trust without fear of treachery, and whose word can be relied on. On the other hand, there is nothing more degrading to a man than to have the name of being false, of acting deceitfully, so that one cannot trust him or believe what he says.

I. Now, the habit of lying is almost the only vice which gives a man that bad name. To be caught in a single falsehood is quite enough to give one that bad name, so that he is not believed afterwards, even when he speaks the truth. If a man has lied to me once, I can never trust him again. Even they who have the habit of telling lies, and who seldom speak the truth, cannot bear to be looked on as liars. It is considered a most grievous insult to be accused of an untruth, and people often take satisfaction for it by an appeal to arms, for there is many a one who would rather shed his blood and endanger his life than rest quietly under such an insult. And how ashamed one feels who is convicted of a falsehood! Fathers and mothers, even if you are too indulgent to your children in other things, yet you daily warn them against the vice of lying. Be careful, my child, you say, never tell a lie;

woe betide you if I ever catch you telling an untruth; I will punish you most severely, for he who lies will also steal.

2. And this is one of the chief reasons why God has forbidden lying as sinful, so that even a jocose lie is never lawful, under any circumstances; that, namely, the social relations of men with each other may not be disturbed. Now, these relations could not be maintained at all if it were ever lawful to lie, because then no one could trust his neighbor, and every one would always be in dread of deceit and treachery; so that there would be an end of mutual trust and confidence. Hence, if the law of God and the law of nature did not prohibit lying, all spiritual and civil authority would be forced unanimously to prohibit it under severe penalties, for the general welfare. The Emperor Claudius caused the dead body of a certain Pamphilus to be exhumed and to be thrown to the dogs and carrion birds, while all the property he left behind was confiscated, and his wife and children were banished, because it had been reported to the emperor that Pamphilus had been a habitual liar. Artaxerxes, king of Persia, having once convicted one of his soldiers of a falsehood, ordered his tongue to be pierced with three nails. The emperor Trajan had deposed the king of Thrace on account of rebellion, and placed the son of the latter on the throne; but because the son once told him a lie, by saying that he was coming home from school, whereas he had been in the garden eating fruit, Trajan, full of anger, took the crown from him again. "You are a liar," he said, "and therefore unworthy to reign; nor is it right that Rome, the mother of truth, should have a lying son."

But, hateful and hated as the name of a liar is, yet that vice is only too common amongst all classes, for, as Jeremias says: "They will not speak the truth, for they have taught their tongue to speak lies" (Jer. 9: 5). To conceal one's meaning in every possible way; to utter truth as falsehood, and falsehood as truth; to know how to hide one's feelings, and to speak friendly words with a heart full of falsehood and bitterness; to make grand promises which one has not the least intention of fulfilling; to hide by falsehoods the envy, hatred, vindictiveness, usury, and injustice; to seek profit by lying in the public prints, in buying and selling; that, says St. Gregory, is the wisdom and prudence of the cunning world. He who is ignorant of this art, who speaks as he thinks, and acts honestly and uprightly in all things, is laughed at as a simpleton, and as one who knows not the ways of the world.

3. You know what happened to Giezi, the servant of the prophet Eliseus, who tried to enrich himself by a falsehood? Eliseus had refused the rich presents offered him by Naaman, whom he had cured of leprosy, and Naaman was already on the way back to his own country, when the thought occurred to Giezi that his master was over-scrupulous not to take what was offered to him, and that it would not be a bad plan if he were to try to secure something for himself. With this idea he ran after Naaman, who, as soon as he saw him coming, descended from his chariot in token of respect to Eliseus his master, greeted the servant kindly, and asked him what he wanted. "My master hath sent me to thee," answered Giezi (count all the lies he told; there is one of them, for Eliseus had not given him any such commission), "saying: 'Just now there are come to me, from Mount Epimraim, two young men of the sons of the Prophets. (That was the second lie, for there was not a word of truth in all he said.) Give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments!'" (The third lie.) But Naaman was ashamed to give so little. "It is better," said he, "that thou take two talents;" and he forced him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, and two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants, and they carried them before him (4 Kings 5:22, 23). Naaman then continued his journey. Giezi, full of joy at the success of his trickery, returns home; but he little knew what a misfortune was in store for him, nor what a calamity his ill-gotten treasures were to bring upon him. So far he had succeeded; he stored away the silver and the clothes carefully in his house; no one knew anything of his good fortune, and his thoughts were busy about the vineyards he intended to buy, the number of servants he would have, and the choice of food he could enjoy every day. Full of these thoughts, he presents himself before his master, who asks him, gravely: "Whence comest thou, Giezi?" He answered: "Thy servant went nowhither." That was the fourth shameless lie he told. What! Said his master, you went nowhere? And who was it that overtook Naaman, and received from him two talents of silver and two changes of garments? And who is it that has concealed those gifts, brought by two servants, so that I might not see them? "Was not my heart present when the man turned back from his chariot to meet thee?" (4 Kings 5:25, 26.) Eliseus, who knew the deceit Giezi had been guilty of, said to him: "So now thou hast received garments, thou hast received money to buy olive-yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants." But see what good it will do you. "The leprosy of Naaman shall also stick to thee, and to thy seed forever; and Giezi went out from him a leper as white as snow" (Ibid. 26:27). If

God were to punish lying in that way there would be a great number of sick people in the world; but at the same time the number of those who are not afraid to lie would decrease considerably. But even if the Almighty in his merciful goodness deals gently with us in that respect, there are still greater punishments in store for those who willfully violate the truth. For if the habit of lying gives one a bad name before the world that is the least of the ill effects that follow from it. What should most of all deter us from this habit is the fact that it makes man hateful to God.

II. Mortal sin alone is able to draw down the divine anger on the sinner. Venial sin, although displeasing the holiness of God, does not deprive the soul of his friendship. A lie is in itself but a venial sin, unless it is foreseen to be the cause of a great injury, or of quarrelling and strife, or of grievous harm to our neighbor's honor, or of sacrilege in the holy Sacrament of Penance; for in any of those cases one may commit a grievous sin by a trivial lie. Yet Holy Scripture condemns willful falsehoods so strongly, and so much more vehemently than any other venial sin, that we could almost say that every lie is a mortal sin and most hateful in the sight of God. Thus we read: "Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity; thou wilt destroy all that speak a lie" (Ps. 5:7). And again: "The mouth that believeth killeth the soul" (Wis. 1:11). And once more: "A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape" (Prov. 19:5). What conclusion are we to draw from all this? That every lie is a mortal sin? No; but that lying must be extremely hateful to God.

1. Lying is opposed to truth, consequently to "the God of truth" (Ps. 30:6). "I am the truth" (John 14:6), says the Son of God of himself. "For this was I born, and for this came I into the world, that I should give testimony to the truth" (John 18:37). On the other hand, the Holy Scripture calls the devil the father of lies; so that he who is in the habit of lying cannot be of God, but of the devil, because they who love lying are children of the devil.

2. It is never lawful to tell even a jocose lie. It is forbidden, under pain of grievous sin, to take away man's life; yet I may do so in self-defense. But not even to save my life would it be lawful for me to tell a lie. Stealing is forbidden under pain of grievous sin; yet under certain circumstances I may, without sin, take what belongs to another, namely, if I am in extreme necessity and have no other means of preserving my life. But it never would be lawful for me to procure necessary sustenance by telling a lie. But, you will ask, is lying, then, worse than murder and theft, since the latter are sometimes lawful, but the former never? No; by murder we mean taking away a man's life unjustly, an act that is always sinful in itself, and can never become lawful. Theft means taking away another's property unjustly, which is always sinful, and can never become lawful. Therefore, to take away a man's life or his property unjustly is certainly a greater sin than to tell a simple lie. The idea I wish to convey to you is this: Under certain circumstances God can give me the right over the life or property of another, so that if I kill a man I shall not be guilty of murder, or if I take away my neighbor's property I shall not be guilty of theft. On the other hand, God can never give us a right to tell a lie, nor can he counsel, much less command or approve of lying. As God can never under any circumstances make blasphemy or idolatry lawful, so he can never make even the smallest and most advantageous lie lawful.

3. It is foolish, then, to say that by concealing the truth by a trivial lie one can often do a great deal of good or avert a great misfortune, or prevent himself or others from being put to public shame; and that under such circumstances lying is lawful, especially when it does no wrong or harm to others. Again, there are some who maintain that they must often tell a lie in their families for the sake of preserving peace; for if they told the truth they would give rise to quarrelling, dissension, and hatred, which might be the occasion of many grievous sins. If you, by telling a trivial lie, could put an end to all the wars that devastate so many countries, and are the cause of so many fearful sins, and if you could thereby restore peace to the whole world, it would not be lawful for you to tell a lie; much less for the sake of keeping peace in a household. And if you could save your own life, or that of another, by telling a lie, you must rather sacrifice your life, or that of your neighbor, than be guilty of the lie; much less, then, is lying lawful merely for the sake of some temporal profit.

4. What a divine work it is to gain a soul! If it were necessary thereto that all men should sacrifice their worldly goods, their honor, their comfort, their lives even, they should all joyfully make that sacrifice for the sake of gaining one soul for God and for heaven. And yet, if you could gain all souls by one small lie, it would not be lawful for you to tell that lie; no, that lie would be a sin. The reason of it is clearly laid down by St. Paul: "Let us not do evil that there may come good" (Rom. 3:8). Let those who imagine that lying is sometimes necessary make a note of that. I have told lies, they say, but I could not help it. It was for the sake of preventing quarrels at home, or to keep my husband from drinking too much. No; it is never necessary to commit sin, and

therefore it is never necessary to tell a lie. From this it is evident that there is no excuse for those who order their children or domestics to lie for some trivial reason, telling them to say, for instance, that their masters or parents are not at home; or who lie by way of a joke, or for the sake of amusement.

5. But, some will say, am I, then, always bound to declare the truth to every one who asks me? By no means; that is not at all necessary, nor would it be always advisable. For there are circumstances in which I might commit a grievous sin by making known the truth; for instance, if I reveal an important secret, or disclose anything injurious to my neighbor's good name, or to the charity I owe him, even if I am asked to make the disclosure. It is one thing not to disclose the truth, and another to speak contrary to the truth or to lie; the former I may be often bound to do, the latter can never be lawful. Therefore, when such indiscreet questions are asked, or when by concealing the truth I can prevent sin or hinder people from quarrelling, I must either hold my tongue and refuse to answer, or I must go away or otherwise show that I do not wish to answer, or I must give an evasive reply, or answer in such a way as to leave the other in doubt as to whether I mean yes, or no. Once for all, to speak deliberately against one's knowledge is a lie, and that is never lawful, no matter what advantage may be derived from it.

I conclude with the words of St. Paul: "Wherefore, putting away lying, speak ye the truth, every man with his neighbor; for we are members one of another" (Ephes. 4:25), and we must deal uprightly with each other. "Let your speech be yea, yea; no, no" (Matt. 5:37), as our Saviour tells us, and speak candidly, without deceit, and you will have God as your friend, and men, too, will be your friends when they know that you are truthful. Amen.

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