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Remember that Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday this week are **EMBER DAYS**.

Observe the laws of Fast and Abstinence.

We must always pray and not lose heart. St. Luke 18-1

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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. III

THE GOOD CHRISTIAN

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

Confidence in God in Seemingly Desperate Circumstances.

“Be not solicitous about anything; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your petitions be made known to God.” Phil. 4:6.

Rejoice in the Lord, just Christians, who serve your God “Rejoice in the Lord always: again I say, rejoice.” Such is the exhortation that St. Paul gives you in to-day’s epistle. And why should you, children of God, be sorrowful? What can be wanting to you, who have an infinitely good and faithful Lord as your Father? “Be not solicitous about anything; but in all your troubles and necessities fly to him with confidence. Hope and trust in the Lord, and in the Lord alone, for he alone can and will help you. Ah, think some; there is no more hope or confidence for me; my circumstances are desperate! Desperate? Then so much the better; for on that very account you can and must place your confidence all the more firmly in God and await his help.

For just when we are in such evil plight that there seems to be, humanly speaking, no hope for us, then should our hope and confidence in God be all the firmer.

But how can one hope when affairs are in a desperate condition? And how can one hope all the more that things will turn out well? Is that credible, or possible? Hope is the expectation of some future good that is difficult to attain. But when the desired good seems unattainable, is it not more the object of despair than of reasonable hope? The farmer willingly works in the field and spares no labor or trouble as long as there is a prospect of a harvest. The sick man does violence to himself, and against his will takes the most bitter medicines and pills, as long as there is any reasonable hope of recovering his health. But if these people see that their trouble and labor will not help them to the desired end; oh, then their reasonable hope falls to the ground. The husbandman gives up his labor, the sick man refuses to take the prescribed medicines; for they have good reason to despair of success. This is true, my dear brethren, when we speak of natural hope, which is founded merely on human and natural means.

But we speak of supernatural hope and confidence in God. This should never fail, nor be wanting in the least degree, but rather increase, the more difficulties and impediments stand in the way. Nay, when we see that the natural means we have hitherto used are of no avail, and know that they will be of no avail in the future; when we have exhausted all our ingenuity to no purpose; then must that hope be all the greater, and more fervent, that in spite of former failures we shall yet attain the desired end. And why? Because supernatural hope is not founded on natural means, nor on our own industry and labor; but it rests on the almighty God, to whom nothing is impossible, whose infinite power is not limited by any difficulty or hindrance, who by an act of his

will can restore what is already despaired of. Therefore I can never have reasonable grounds to waver in a hope of this kind, no matter how slight may seem the chances of success.

Read the Holy Scriptures, and you will find that God often acted in that manner towards his servants. Thus, for instance, you will find the history of the chaste Susanna. Pure and stainless as was the life of that holy matron, yet she had to suffer from the tongue of calumny, and that, too, on the part of the judges of the people, who accused her publicly of the heinous crime of adultery and, having suborned false witnesses, caused her to be sentenced to be stoned to death. Alas, a hard and bitter fate for one so rich, noble, and innocent, who had hitherto been held in the highest esteem throughout Judea on account of her piety and holiness! And now she had to stand her trial publicly before the people, in presence of her husband, her parents, and relations, as a shameless adulteress. What was she to do? Her friends were filled with pity for her, but could not help her. So strong was the testimony of the elders against her, that she had no one to say a word in her favor: "And she, weeping, looked up to heaven; for her heart had confidence in the Lord" (Dan. 13:33). Meanwhile there was no prospect of help far, or near; the people believed the elders: the punishment prescribed for adultery in the divine law was that the guilty one should be publicly stoned to death; the sentence was pronounced, and all cried out unanimously that it was a just one. She was led away to be put to death; when they had already taken up the stones to cast at her, then Susanna, with a dying voice as it were, cried out to God "Behold, I must die, whereas I have done none of these things which these men have maliciously forged against me" (Dan. 13:43).

And now, when there seemed to be not the slightest gleam of hope for her, "The Lord raised up the holy spirit of a young boy, whose name was Daniel; and he cried out with a loud voice: I am clear from the blood of this woman" (Dan. 13:45, 46). He protected the innocent, and convicted the elders of falsehood. They were stoned, and Susanna set free, while from that time forward she was held in still greater honor and love by the people and by all posterity. See there, my dear brethren, how wonderfully God knows how to help when things seem desperate. God might have sent Daniel earlier to detect the fraud of the elders, before Susanna was brought before the tribunal; the almighty God could easily have done that; but then the wonderful manner in which he rendered assistance would not have been so evident, nor would such praise have been given him. Another example: Daniel in the lions' den (Dan. 6:3, 4, 16, 17, 22, 27).

Poor desolate orphans; you have no father or mother to care for you; you have no friend to take your part; no one to put in a good word for you; not a soul in the world to take the least interest in you; humanly speaking, there is nothing for you but wretchedness and misery. Still, do not lose courage on that account; the almighty God is your father; only present your petitions to him; cast yourselves into his lap with full and perfect confidence; he will care for you; he will feed and provide for you. Say to him: "To thee is the poor man left; thou wilt be a helper to the orphan." Sorrowing widow, your husband is taken from you by a premature death, and has left you with a houseful of little children; the business or occupation by which you managed to provide for yourself is in the grave with him. What can you do now? Humanly speaking, there is no hope for you. Poor citizen, you sit at home with your wife and children, sighing in the words of Christ when the hungry crowd was following him in the desert: "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" You work as hard as you can the whole day to try to earn enough to keep body and soul together, but it is only with great difficulty you succeed. What are you to do? Humanly speaking, your only hope is the beggar's staff. But for that very reason none of you should lose heart; only love your God and hope in him; he is the almighty Lord, who can make everything right in a moment; those trials he sends you are simply intended to prove your hope and to see if it is firm and well grounded. The Lord knows the best time for coming to your assistance and consolation; he says to you what Christ said to his Mother at the marriage-feast of Cana, when the wine failed, and She through compassion begged of Him to help: "My hour is not yet come." It is not yet time for Me to help you; but it will come, if you only continue to trust in Me.

If we only had that firm faith and trust in God, we should be almighty, as St. Bernard does not hesitate to say: "God makes those who hope in him almighty." Strengthened by a similar confidence, the young David, when the army of Israel was filled with dread, and the soldiers were hiding like mice in the holes in the earth, with nothing but his sling in his hand, attacked and overcame the huge and well-armed Goliath, and put the enemy to flight. "Thou comest to me," he said undismayed to the giant, "with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel; and the Lord will deliver thee into my hand, and I will slay thee, and take away thy head from thee; and I will give the carcasses

of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air, and to the beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel” who is able to protect us “and all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear” (1. Kings 17:45-47). Ezechias, king of Juda, had no army to oppose the great force that Sennacherib had sent against him; nor was there any help to be expected from any other king or country. Confidence in God was his only resource; he went to the Temple and with his people prostrated himself before the divine Majesty, and prayed: “And now, O Lord our God, save us out of his hand, and let all the kingdoms of the earth know that thou only art the Lord.” What was the effect of this prayer? God sent Ezechias, not any human aid, but an angel, who in one night slew a hundred and eighty-five thousand men, the whole army of the Assyrians, so that Sennacherib alone with difficulty escaped. Abias, king of Juda, and Jeroboam, king of Israel, were arrayed against each other; the latter had eight hundred thousand of the bravest and most experienced warriors. The former, too, had good soldiers, but they were only half as numerous. Yet Abias conquered, in spite of the great disparity of the forces, and slew five hundred thousand men of Israel, and put the remainder to flight. What had enabled that weak army to gain such a signal victory? “God is the leader of our army” (II. Paral. 3:3), said Abias with full confidence in God before setting out to fight. Zara, the Ethiopian king, went against Asa, king of Juda, with ten hundred thousand men. Asa had only five hundred and eighty thousand to oppose to him, and yet he gained a complete victory. How did Asa manage that? His army was indeed strong, but he did not trust in it; “he called upon the. Lord God and said: Lord there is no difference with thee, whether thou help with few or with many; help us, O Lord our God; for with confidence in thee and thy name we are come against this multitude” (II Paral. 14:11). Armed with this confidence, he attacked the enemy and conquered. “For the Lord slew them, and his army fought against them.” Strengthened with a similar confidence, Judith, a weak woman, slew Holofernes and put his army to flight, when all the citizens of Bethulia were downcast and despairing.

Let us therefore constantly rely on God, resign ourselves to his providence even in the greatest extremities, and say to him with child-like confidence, as David did when he was persecuted:

“Let not the humble be turned away with confusion; the poor and needy shall praise thy name.” Lord, thou knowest how things are with me; I cannot help myself in this extremity by any human aid; all natural means are of no avail. Behold me prostrate at thy feet; do with me as thou wilt; but remember that I place my whole confidence in thee and do not forget what thou hast promised to those who trust in thee alone. Amen.

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