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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. 4

THE CHRISTIAN'S STATE OF LIFE

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Evening Examination of Conscience

"Who art Thou?" St. John 1:19.

A very necessary question for every Christian to ask himself! If I say to myself: "Who art thou?" I must answer: I am a human being, created by a merciful God for no other end but to love and serve Him, to honor and praise Him with all my thoughts, words, and actions. Many duties and cares distract me, and continually prevent me from seeing whether I really do everything for this one end. Hence it is necessary for me to recollect myself occasionally, and examine how far I have strayed away from my true end. If I ask myself after such an examination: "*Who art thou?*" I will frequently find that instead of being the friend and child of God, I am really His enemy and the child of the devil; and that therefore I must repent of my misdeeds, do penance for them, and avoid them in future. What salutary thoughts are suggested by that question: "*Who art thou?*" It includes all the points that constitute our daily, and especially our nightly, examination of conscience. Understand, then:

*I. In what manner the true Christian should examine his conscience, every evening, before retiring to rest; and
II. What profit is derived from such a practice, faithfully fulfilled.*

1. A proper examination of conscience at bed-time consists principally in three points: In heartfelt gratitude for all the benefits we have received from God during the day;
2. In carefully examining ourselves to see whether we have spent the day well, or ill, according to our last end;
3. In exciting ourselves to sorrow and repentance for the sins we have committed, with a firm resolution to live better in future.

I. And in the first place, as far as gratitude is concerned, is it not right that we should at least, once in the day, return thanks, with all our hearts, to that Lord who has overwhelmed us with benefits during the whole day—nay, even during our whole lives? O man! "*Who art thou?*" how dost thou live? With the exception of the morning, when, as I have no doubt, you say your morning prayers, like all good Christians, you spend the greater part of the day in sleeping, eating, drinking, talking, working, and in the ordinary domestic duties that

are required by your state of life. I admit that if you do all this with a good intention and direct your actions to your last end, while you are in the state of grace, all these actions are holy and meritorious, and if, while performing them, you frequently raise your heart to God, they become an unceasing prayer. Still, ought you not to give to God, who preserves you in life, and protects you from countless dangers of soul and body, at least a quarter of an hour in the evening, after your day's work, before you retire to rest, to open your heart to Him and thank Him for the benefits He has bestowed on you? Not to do so is to be guilty of the basest ingratitude.

Suppose that you were sick, blind, deaf, dumb, or crippled, and that some one had today healed you; with what gratitude would you not think of that man, this evening, when you are going to bed for the first time with your senses perfectly free from all bodily ailment! And how can you retire to rest without thanking God, who has given you to day and always your sight, hearing, speech, your sound limbs, your health, and your life? Nay, if you give a poor beggar a piece of bread, he will not go away without thanking you: but God gives you daily abundant means for your bodily support; does He deserve no thanks for His goodness? The good God gives you rest during the night. You sleep, surrounded by His benefits; is it possible that you can go to bed without first thanking Him? If so, you would be more ungrateful than the dog, which fawns upon you before he leaves your room for the night. Behold! If the evening examen consisted of nothing else but a thanksgiving to God for all His daily benefits, would it not be an injustice to omit it even once?

The second point in this examen is the discussion of our conscience, and of our actions during the day. The careful and prudent merchant or businessman always looks over his accounts in the evening, comparing his receipts with his expenditures, his losses with his gains making every entry in his ledger with punctuality and precision. People augur ill of a businessman who does not properly balance his books, or who allows his accounts to remain in a careless or confused disorder. A gambler who has spent five or six hours in playing cards (especially if the stakes are somewhat high), counts his money when he comes home to find out whether he has won or lost. How much more careful both the merchant and the gambler would be in making up their accounts if they knew that they could thereby make good all their losses! Oh, Christian! "*Who art thou?*" A merchant whom God has sent into this world to buy for yourself eternal goods. Your last end, the great object of your life, is God and heaven. The hour will come when you shall hear the words: "Give an account of your stewardship!" (St. Luke 16:2) Show what you have gained with the talents entrusted to you. Woe to you, then, if your books are not balanced, if your accounts are not in order! Again: you are engaged in a continual game; your opponents are the devil, the world, and the flesh. The stake is not a penny, not a dollar, nor two dollars, but your own immortal, precious, and only soul, and eternal happiness which can be won or lost each moment! For God's sake, think how much depends on this dreadful game! At one time the Christian wins, at another he loses, according as he overcomes or yields to temptation, to sin. All day long you are engaged in your domestic and other duties. You are distracted with all kinds of thoughts and cares, so that you cannot give the proper amount of attention to the business of your salvation. You have seen, heard, thought, spoken, and done a great deal. May it not easily happen that you have now and then lost sight of your last end, and suffered great loss? Certainly your conscience always does its work; it warns and reproves if we do anything serious against the law of God; but during the day, amid the tumult of temporal affairs, it is with conscience as with one who tries to speak alongside a rushing torrent; he opens his mouth and says different things, but the noise of the water drowns his words. Besides that, our evil inclinations blind us at the time of temptation, so that we either take no notice of the sin we commit, or else regard it as trifling. It is only afterwards, when we enter into ourselves and take time to consider the matter attentively, that we find out its deformity and gravity. What value did Esau set on his birthright when he sold it for a mess of pottage? He came home tired and hungry; he saw the warm food which his brother Jacob was preparing, and felt such an inclination for it, that he at once and forever relinquished his birth-right, and, "taking bread and the pottage of lentils, he ate, and drank, and went his way, making little account of having sold his first birth-right" (Gen. 25:33, 34). But when his eyes were opened afterwards and he saw the effects of his gluttony, and learned that he had lost his father's blessing, "he roared out with a great cry" (Ibid. 27:34). Ah, my dear brethren, often we sell our right to heaven for a miserable mess of pottage, for a vile pleasure, or some temporal gain! Yet, like Esau, in the heat of passion, we think nothing of our loss. Afterwards, when our eyes are opened, we think more seriously of it. And that is what we should do every day, when we have got rid of the cares of business, and our evil inclinations are stilled.

Let each one nightly recall to his memory all the thoughts, words, and actions of the past day, all the duties and obligations of his state, asking his soul: "How much dost thou owe my Lord?" How have I served Him today? When and how did I rise this morning? What were my first thoughts? What did I do afterwards? With whom did I associate? What business did I undertake, and with what intention? What joys or sorrows have I had? Have my pleasures been lawful, have I borne sorrow patiently? You, my eyes, what do you owe my Lord? Have you seen, or wished to see, anything unlawful to day? You, my ears, what do you owe? Have you, perhaps, heard with pleasure something contrary to purity or charity? And you, my tongue, what do you owe? How much, where, how, have you spoken? Have you injured or lessened the good name of another? Have you given way to lying, cursing, swearing, quarrelling, or scandalous talk? You, my hands, what do you owe? Have you sinned today by impurity or injustice? You, my feet, what do you owe? Have you brought me into dangerous company, to waste my precious time in dissipation, drinking, or gambling?

3. In the same way, each one may examine himself upon his own particular duties: "How much dost thou owe my Lord," as a father, or as a mother? Have I been careful to train up my children for their last end? Have I kept them away from evil, and led them on to good? Have I punished them when they did wrong? Have I given them good example? How much dost thou owe as husband or wife? Have I always acted according to the love and respect that we owe each other? Have I, perhaps, through excessive love, done something against my conscience, or given cause, by ill temper, for suspicions, jealousy, and sadness? How much dost thou owe as shopkeeper or tradesman? Have I taken advantage of any one to day in my work or business? Have I done everything with a good intention for God's sake? How much dost thou owe as son or daughter? Have I always shown obedience, respect, and filial love to my parents? Now, if I find that I have managed matters well according to the Christian law and the divine will, I must again thank the good God for having preserved me in preference to many others from worse sins during the day, and I must heartily rejoice in the Lord and go quietly to rest. But if I find that I have done wrong, I must blot out my faults at once by sorrow and repentance, and make a firm resolution to avoid them in future. **And this last point of the examen is most important and must not, by any means, be omitted. For, will you dare to go to sleep without first regaining the friendship of God?** Suppose you were to die during the night? It has happened to very many to go to bed at night strong and healthy, and to be found dead in the morning. St. Paul warns us all: "Let not the sun go down upon your anger" (Ephesus. 4:26). Why? Because you do not know if you will live to see the sun rise again. Does not even Jesus Christ Himself warn you: "Be you, then, also ready, for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come" (St. Luke 12:40), and bring you from time into eternity? Can that not be the case with you tonight? If it were so, where would you go, unhappy man? Your body would be found dead in the bed in the morning, but your soul would be in hell! Could you go to sleep peacefully under such circumstances?

II. Do not allow that dangerous guest to remain with you any longer! Drive it away, at once, before you go to bed, by heart-felt sorrow. There is no softer pillow than a good conscience. How calmly and peaceably he sleeps who can say to himself: Now, I have squared my accounts with God, and I am quite ready to obey His will! I do not refuse to live, I am not afraid to die. We have a good Master to obey; I give Him my body and soul. I am a friend, a child of God; if I die tonight, I shall inherit the kingdom of heaven. What a consolation, Christians, to be able to say that with truth! But, sinner, think of the extreme danger in which you are! Do not go to bed until you have, through fear of death and judgment, changed yourself into another man; until, by perfect contrition and detestation of your sins, you have made matters all right. God, who before was angry with you, will no longer regard you as His enemy, but will pardon your sin, and receive you again into His grace and friendship. What were the circumstances under which Assuerus held out his scepter to Esther as a sign of his love and favor? She saw the king looking fierce and angry, and she grew pale with fright and was on the point of fainting away. Assuerus thereupon came down from his throne, supported the fainting queen in his arms, and laid the scepter on her breast. This is a symbol of a soul standing before the judgment seat of God, and trembling at the recollection of its past sins. Ah, Christians, who sin during the day, place yourselves in the evening as poor criminals before the angry countenance of your King and Judge. Trembling with fear, go down on your knees and repent of your sins, and you will appease your Judge, and turn Him into your loving Spouse, who will at once receive you with love and tenderness into His arms. Then, you may think and say, to your great consolation: Now I am again a child and friend of God: "In peace, in the selfsame, I will sleep and I will rest."

Moreover, what great advantages you can gain from your evening examen! What purity of conscience must not be the result of such a daily custom! You know what happens in a leaky ship. The water is always forcing its way in on every side, and there must be some one to pump it out now and then. If that is neglected, the ship will soon fill and sink. It is the same with your conscience. Daily, almost hourly, sins find their way into it, either in thought, word, or deed; you must, therefore, be careful to get rid of them again. Do that, at least, each evening. Pump the water out of your spiritual ship; that is, cleanse your conscience from the sins that stain it, lest it become too full of them and be miserably lost. And what a safeguard it is against future sin when you make your evening examen with a firm resolution of amendment! What little trouble you have afterwards in preparing for confession, when you thus examine your faults and failings, and imprint them on your memory! There is no doubt that many confessions are bad on account of the sins that are overlooked through culpable negligence in examining the conscience, especially in the case of those who seldom go to confession. Such persons can hardly find a sin to confess; but they would find enough if they examined themselves daily. As it is, they keep no account, they pay no attention to their actions, and live in a state of indifference, absorbed in criminal pleasures or in temporal cares. Is it any wonder that their sins should escape their memory and be forgotten? Alas! The devil will not forget those sins; he will, one day, bring them forward in judgment against those negligent people. I do not say that you are bound under pain of sin to make that examen; and therefore, you must not be anxious on that account; but think only how reasonable and how advantageous the practice is. Let no one imagine that it is fit only for religious in a convent. If these latter find the practice necessary, in spite of their multiplied devotions and regular rule of life, how much more necessary is it for lay-people, who, during the day, pay less attention to themselves and to their own thoughts, words, and actions, and have less time to spend in devotion, and recollection of spirit? There are many Christian families in which master and mistress kneel down every evening with their children and servants, to pray the Rosary or the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, and to make the examen of conscience, reciting afterwards their usual evening prayers. What joy God and His Angels must have in such assemblies! What blessings such families receive from God! In such homes, the children learn from their youth to fear God and to keep their conscience pure; the servants are encouraged to piety and devotion, and thus father and mother, master and mistress, are helped to fulfill their two principal duties. Thus the children and servants are kept out of the streets after dark, and are prevented from spending the summer evenings sitting at the door till late at night, laughing and joking, and exposing themselves to the danger of sin; for they certainly do not then say the Rosary or night prayers, or make their examen of conscience. On the contrary, a great deal of sin is committed in that way, and, humanly speaking, it would be impossible in such circumstances to avoid sin. Woe to parents who allow such things to take place! Another advantage of the evening examen is, that the children who have been accustomed to it from infancy, when they are settled in life, teach that devotion in turn to their own families, and thus piety and the fear of the Lord are transmitted from one generation to another. Holy, indeed, I repeat, are such families! If we do not wish to follow this example of family worship and self-examination (although it were much to be desired that every household should do so), at least, let each one practice this devotion for himself, and let every master and mistress often exhort their children and servants thereto, confiding in the divine promise, of which St. Paul speaks, when he declared to the Corinthians: "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (Cor. 11:31). Yes, let such be your resolution; and begin this very evening, and continue to judge ourselves daily by the evening examen, that we may not be judged hereafter. Amen.

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