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Remember that Christmas Eve is a day of FAST and complete ABSTINENCE.

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JMJ

U.I.O.G.D.

U.I.O.G.D. is used to remind us to live by the motto of the great St. Benedict. His motto in *Latin* is: **Ut In Omnibus Glorificetur Deus**. When translated into *English*, it says: **THAT IN ALL THINGS GOD MAY BE GLORIFIED**.

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 +++

Volume two = The Penitent Christian

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

The Penance of the Innocent and the Just

“And he came into all the country about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of penance for the remission of sins.” St. Luke 3:3.

The heroic St. John the Baptist was a model of innocence and justice of whom our Lord said that there never was a greater born of woman; yet he goes about publicly preaching the baptism of penance. What kind of a baptism? Not that of our holy Sacrament of Baptism, which now cleanses our souls from original sin. What kind of a penance? Not that of our Sacrament of Penance, in which, after having confessed our sins with true sorrow, we are absolved from them; for both these Sacraments were afterwards instituted by Christ. What was the penance, then? St. John himself explains it when he says to those who came to him to be baptized: “Bring forth fruits worthy of penance” (St. Luke 3:8). In these words he alluded to the sorrow they should have for sin, as well as to the penitential works they should voluntarily undertake in order to satisfy the divine justice. But suppose, my dear brethren, that one has paid to the last farthing the debt incurred by sin, or that one has never sinned; even in that case, I say,

The innocent and the just must do penance, because they may sin in future.

There are two classes of men who are in the friendship, grace, and favor of God. The first consists of those who have sinned grievously, but have done penance, and have become reconciled to God; and they constitute the greater number of the just. For how many adults are there who dare use the words of the innocent Job? “My justification, which I have begun to hold, I will not forsake; for my heart doth not reprehend me in all my life” (Job 27:6). Who is there who can say, with truth, that his conscience does not reproach him with any sin? Alas! few are they who have still preserved their baptismal innocence, who have never offended God, at least mortally and deliberately! O happy souls! If envy could find place in heaven, how many of the greatest Saints, whose feasts the Catholic Church celebrates every year, would envy you your great happiness!

Those who belong to the first class are like a servant who has robbed his master, or whose carelessness with fire has caused the latter to suffer loss. Confidence in him has been shaken, his fault is remembered even after it has been repaired. You, O sinner, have deliberately robbed your Lord and master of his glory when you contemned his Commandments! Consider what a dangerous conflagration the careless servant, that is, the flesh with its senses and members, has caused; a conflagration that has destroyed all the merits of the soul, and exposed it to the eternal flames of hell. Now you are saved from the danger. By true sorrow and contrition, by the tears of repentance you have shed, you have completely extinguished that otherwise eternal fire. You may even have repaired all the damage caused by your theft or carelessness, having completely wiped away all the punishment due to your sins, by the perfection of your sorrow, or by works of satisfaction, so that you owe nothing more to the divine justice.

But should you, therefore, give yourself no further trouble about the matter? How about the master of the house, I mean the soul, which has had such great difficulty in extinguishing the fire? How about the insolent servants, the senses, who by their wantonness and carelessness have injured their master, and caused that dangerous fire? Must they now be allowed to go unpunished and to do as they please, seeking only their own comfort and convenience? Can the soul altogether restrain its just indignation against them, or refrain from carefully watching and restraining them? Ah! believe me, that there is reason enough for fearing that they will again attempt their former mischief; they are still reckless their evil inclinations are not yet completely subdued. The strong man armed must keep his court, he must keep in check the enemy within the walls.

As to those who are still innocent, they are like the good horse they have kept up their pace, and, as David says, they have run on without delay in the way of God's commandments, but alas, for the weakness and instability of man, how many there are who have begun well, but ended most disgracefully! David made an excellent beginning, but he became a murderer and an adulterer. Solomon, his son, also began well; but afterwards, he gave way to his carnal desires; he adored gods of stone, to please his concubines, and offered incense to them. Saul, who preceded these two, also began very well. "Saul, a choice and goodly man," such is the testimony the Holy Scripture gives of him, "there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he" (Kings 9:2). And yet, how obstinate and rebellious he became, because he did not restrain his evil inclinations. He was rejected by God on account of disobedience, and killed himself in despair. Reason enough, therefore, have we to take to heart the warning of St. Paul: "He that thinkest himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12).

In a word, no matter how innocent we are, we are still capable of committing sin. Although the horse has been good hitherto, he must be made to feel the bit and the spur frequently, so as to prevent him from lagging or stumbling. The most innocent bodies are in need of works of penance and mortification, lest, by unrestrained indulgence in even lawful pleasures, they rebel against authority. But you ask: Is it not cruelty to treat an innocent person with severity. Cruelty, indeed! A cruel kindness! Our God is not cruel or unjust, but is infinitely good and merciful, and yet he allowed the devil to torment most cruelly the innocent Job. He is a God who always means well to his children, and yet he visits even the holiest of them in this life with various trials and crosses. But these latter know well his paternal goodness, and therefore, they meekly kiss the rod, saying with holy Job: "Blessed be the name of the Lord;" he knows best what is good for us, and if he does not send us those trials to atone for past sins, his intention, then, is to save us from future sins.

This is what should impel even the most innocent, as well as those who have sinned grievously, to mortify themselves frequently; the former, that they may not begin to sin; the latter, that they may not relapse into it. For as the Council of Trent says, there is nothing that can better preserve one free from sin than voluntary penances and mortifications. The remembrance of the pain we have suffered, and for which our fastidious nature has only dislike and disgust, will deter us from doing what is followed by such sharp retribution. St. Augustine declares that satisfaction is required for sin, after its guilt has been remitted, lest we should think little of sin if punishment were to cease as soon as its guilt is taken away. Thus the body must be made to feel something, if it is to be frightened from falling into sin; hence the innocent may argue in the following manner: If I have to do penance to keep myself from offending God, what would I not have to suffer were I actually guilty of mortal sin? If I deny myself even lawful pleasures and gratifications for the love of God, will I not be far more ready to abhor illicit ones, and embrace bitter trials to avoid offending God?

Besides, no matter how innocent or pious one may be, he has inherited from our first parents, evil inclinations and desires, which never wholly die out in him. No matter how sincerely one repents of his sins, or how thoroughly he has atoned for them, the evil habits and relics of sin still remain to entice him, like a second nature, to commit the same sins, and it requires a long time to eradicate these. Penitent Christian, you have been truly sorry for your sins and have duly confessed them; the good God has forgiven you and admitted you to his grace and friendship; I will even imagine that all the punishment due to your sins has also been remitted. Rejoice, then, with all your heart, and thank God; “the father is dead;” the cause and origin of your guilt and punishment are taken away; but be not, therefore, too confident; “he is as if he were not dead;” he still lives on in his children, in your evil desires and inclinations. The tree which has borne such bad fruits has been cut down; but its roots are still in the ground, and it can easily begin to grow again. Your mortal illness has been healed by the Blood of Christ, which has been poured over you in the Sacrament of Penance; but the strength of the soul is not yet by any means fully restored; the inordinate desire of the former forbidden pleasures is not yet fully extinguished, and may easily bring on a relapse.

Hear king David, crying out to God after his sin was repented of and pardoned: “Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin” (Ps. 1:4). I still feel the force of old habit and evil inclination; the relics of my former sins still inflame my desires, and try to drag me, as if by violence, into forbidden pleasures; therefore “wash me yet more from my iniquity.”

Now, my dear brethren, how are these evil effects of sin to be destroyed? By often renewing our sorrow and contrition? By gaining the indulgences granted by the Church? By constant and earnest prayer, and the practice of good works? Yes, these are all very powerful means of obtaining remission of the punishment still due to sin, and of increasing our merit and glory in heaven but they are not able to destroy at once the relics of sin and the evil habits of the sinner. The old, bad habit must be opposed by a new and contrary one; immortification of the eyes must be amended by checking their curiosity and not allowing them to gaze on lawful delights; pride is corrected by voluntary humiliations; gluttony and drunkenness, by fasting and abstinence; slander, backbiting, and detraction, cursing and swearing, by the rather difficult remedy of silence; while the wantonness of the flesh is chastised by the use of different instruments of penance and by bearing patiently the trials sent by God. “Every valley shall be filled,” cried out St. John the Baptist, when he was publicly exhorting the people to do penance; “and every mountain and hill shall be brought low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways, plain” (St. Luke 3:5). Herein, he describes the wonderful effects of true penance. What appears more difficult than to fill up deep valleys, level lofty mountains, and make crooked ways straight? And yet that is what is done, in a moral sense, by penance and mortification. “The valleys are filled,” that is, the soul, that has been completely emptied by sin of its merits and virtues, becomes filled up again by penance. “Every mountain and hill shall be brought low;” that is, the pride which dared to lift itself up against the Almighty God shall be humbled by penance. “The crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways plain;” that is, inordinate desires and inclinations must be tamed by mortification and self-denial, and the bad habits that have been contracted must be abandoned, in order to live according to the law and teaching of Jesus Christ.

Besides, (we know by experience), that he who wishes to avoid sin must diligently avoid its occasions. “He that loveth danger,” says the Holy Ghost, “shall perish in it” (Ecclesiasticus 3:27). How many dangerous occasions are there not, in unrestrained liberty in seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and speaking, while mortification and self-denial cut off the occasion at once!

Finally, there is nothing so likely to move the already most generous God to bestow his graces liberally on man, and to provide him with special helps to keep him from further sin, than to see him humbly chastising himself, and keeping a strict watch over himself, even in lawful enjoyments. Thus man, by being severe to himself, vies, as it were, with God, and compels him to be more merciful and more generous. Worn out by fasting, we assail heaven by envy, and compel God to show us his favor and mercy. Ah! my dear brethren, if you ask the Saints, especially those who always retained their innocence, why they chastised their bodies so unmercifully; if you ask holy Job how he was able to bear with such astounding patience the trials that God allowed him to be afflicted with, and, why he declared that he did “penance in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6); if you ask the sinless John the Baptist why he wore the rough camel’s-hair garment, and why he fasted so strictly; or St. Bernard, why he scourged himself so severely, and observed such rigorous fasts, although he was so weak in body, that he more resembled a walking skeleton than a living man; or St. Aloysius, St. Edmund, or the royal

saint, Eleonora Teresa, why, though innocent and holy, they disciplined themselves to blood, they would answer you in the words that St. Bernard used when speaking of St. John the Baptist: “Although we had not sinned, yet we were but mortal, and were capable of sinning so that we had to keep our bodies in check, in order to preserve our innocence.”

“I chastise my body,” says St. Paul, “and bring it into subjection” (I Cor. 9:27). He does not say, I chastised my body in the beginning of my conversion, or for some years after, in order to atone for my sins; but, “I *chastise* it” now, whilst I am preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and enduring many great trials and countless persecutions. “I chastise my body”, and why, O great saint? “Lest, perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a cast-away” (Ibid. 26). But, how could you be afraid of that? Your own conscience bore testimony to you that you were a child of God and a co-heir of Christ? Why should you dread eternal damnation, after your repeated protestations that “neither death, nor life . . . nor things present, nor things to come - nor any other creature should be able to separate you from the love of God?” (Ibid. 27.) How is it that, in spite of all you did for the glory of God and the good of souls, you were afraid of losing your soul, unless you chastised your body?

Alas, how will it then be with me and others? With me, who am so careful in looking after my own comfort; who cannot endure the least bodily inconvenience, unless for the sake of worldly vanity; nay, who pamper my body so that it becomes for myself as well as for others an occasion of sin? How shall it be with me, who am so ready with all kinds of empty pretexts and excuses, in order to obtain permission to gratify my sensuality by eating meat during the Lent; who cannot bear any trouble, and act in those trials that I must bear in any case as if I had the torments of hell to suffer? Alas, what will become of me? Now I see how it is that I have so often fallen into sin, in spite of the good resolutions I made in confession. I was unwilling to use violence against myself, and I indulged my body and its outward senses too freely, so that they became too strong for me. But I shall in future keep a more watchful eye on those careless servants. I will make that stubborn horse feel the bit and the spur, so that I may be armed against temptations, keep my soul free from sin, and be surer of gaining the endless joys of heaven. Amen.

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