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Remember Christmas Eve is a day of FAST and complete 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. III - THE GOOD CHRISTIAN

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Continual Confidence in God

"*The crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways plain*." St. Luke 3:5.

I have hitherto spoken of Christian hope; that in all our necessities we must first have recourse to God, confidently believing that we shall find help with Him, because He alone has the power and the will to help us; that we must not put this confidence in any creature, nor in natural means, although we can and should make use of them, but in God alone; because it is from Him that natural means, as mere instruments, receive the power of helping us: and when we see that no means that we have used hitherto have been of any avail, and we foresee, moreover, that they will not help us in the future; nay, when, humanly speaking, affairs are in a desperate state, then we must not allow our trust and confidence in God alone to waver, but rather be all the more hopeful of help from Him; because this supernatural confidence is founded on the God of infinite power, goodness, and fidelity, who is able to help us even then, and who for the most part allows our affairs to become desperate, that He may then help us, and that we may ascribe the help received to Him alone. There you have in a nutshell the subjects treated of in the last three sermons; it may be of some good to those who have not heard them. But there is still another point. When we see not only that we cannot do anything with natural means, but that there are obstacles in the way which runs directly counter to the end we have in view, must we then still continue to hope for success, if it is for our good? Certainly.

We must not waver in our confidence in God; because nothing can resist His almighty power.

It seems impossible to us to attain an end by contrary means: to use means that run directly counter to the end proposed, with a view of gaining that end! How can that be? Who can understand such things, to our weak understanding seemingly absurd, incomprehensible, nay, impossible? God can easily do that and He cautions us not to judge rashly of what we cannot understand:

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are my ways exalted above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts" (Is. 4:8, 9). God is infinite wisdom; He is able to bring about the desired result by means that, tend in quite a contrary direction. He is almighty, to whom nothing is impossible; hence we must believe that He can cause temporal prosperity by misfortune; that He can exalt by humbling, protect by persecution, enrich by poverty, give true peace to the soul by first depriving it of consolation, and turning the instruments that were prepared for our destruction into the means of bringing us happiness and prosperity.

How many have not been helped by God, preserved in life, and raised to most honorable positions by the very means that seemed best adapted to bring about their utter destruction! Moses was to be as a god for king Pharao in Egypt; what were the means used to effect that? The very means that were employed to destroy him and all the Hebrew people. Pharao decreed that all Hebrew children should be drowned as soon as they were born. Such was the fate in store for Moses; he was put into a basket and laid by the bank of the river. Was that a way to raise him to the dignity for which he was intended? Truly, it was the means that the all-wise providence of God selected, by whose decree the daughter of Pharao happened just then to come down to the river. She saw the beautiful child on the bank, and through a natural feeling of pity had it taken up and given over to a Hebrew woman, who was Moses' own mother, to be nursed. The mother took the child with joy, "and when he was grown up she delivered him to Pharao's daughter. And she adopted him for a son" (Exod. 2:9). Thus Moses was brought up in the court, until by God's command he became a ruler over Pharao, and the savior of his own people. Before Moses' time, God had, resolved to make Joseph viceroy of Egypt; what means did He use to that end? Those which seemed best adapted to ruin Joseph. His brothers could not bear him, because He had prophesied that they should one day prostrate themselves before him; and animated by hatred and envy, they determined to put him out of the way. They "cast him into an old pit," and finally sold him as a slave to the Ishmaelites. Now, said they with sardonic laughter, "it shall appear what his dreams avail him." This very act on the part of his brothers helped Joseph to come to Egypt, where after many wonderful adventures he was at last placed on the throne, and his brothers, driven by hunger, were obliged to come and bend the knee before him.

The three holy kings were led from the East by a star to find and adore the new-born Saviour of the world; when they came near to Jerusalem, they lost sight of the star, so that they knew not where to go. Why did God deprive them of the guiding star at that time? Who was to show them the place in which they would find Christ? Herod was to do that. He who would not tolerate any other king in Juda except himself, whose only object was to slay Christ and all those who adored Him, "Where is He that is born king of the Jews?" (St. Matthew 2:2.) was filled with rage and confusion? And king Herod, was he the man to point out the place where Christ was born? Yes, it was Herod who against his will helped the kings to find the place and to adore their Lord. "And assembling together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where Christ should be born. But they said to him: In Bethlehem of Juda" (St. Matthew 4:5). Whereupon Herod called the Wise Men, "and sending them into Bethlehem, said: Go, and diligently inquire after the child" (St. Matthew 4: 5). Thus does God bring the ship into the desired haven even with a contrary wind; for where God's providence works, all obstacles lose their efficacy. How did the Christians after the preaching of the Gospel increase so rapidly in every part of the world? By the very means that were used to prevent that increase; namely, by persecution, by the slaughtering and murdering of Christians in almost every country of the world. The more they were persecuted, the more numerous did they become. The blood of the martyrs was the seed from which Christians sprang.

But why? God does that to show his unlimited power, which nothing can successfully oppose, nor frustrate; to purge our confidence in Him of all natural and human hope, so that we may ascribe our success in all cases to Him alone, when we consider that natural means have been rather a hindrance than otherwise, and, to strengthen all the more our confidence in Him alone, so that even in the most desperate circumstances we may never lose the hope of success, provided it is good for our souls. That want of courage is very common amongst us when we fail in our attempts, or when the contrary to what we have desired happens. For instance, the children fly to God for help during the dangerous sickness of the father or mother, that they may not be deprived of their chief means of support; meanwhile the father or mother grows worse, and dies. There is no hope for us any more, think the children. Good parents have a wicked, disobedient son, with whom they have fruitlessly tried exhortations, threats, and punishment to bring him to his senses; they appeal to God, and confidently leave their son to Him. Meanwhile the latter becomes more wicked and dissolute day by day. Ah, think the parents, all our trouble is in vain!

No, that is not the way to have confidence in God. Our confidence in God should never waver. Put your unshaken trust in that almighty Lord, who uses the most contrary means to attain the wished-for end, and is wont thus to act that our hope in Him may be all the firmer. He can and will provide for the children, if they but trust in Him, even by the death of their father or mother, and provide for them better than if their parents were

alive and in good health. He can and will convert that wicked son, even after he has grown worse, and when the parents least expect it.

Who had more reason to give up all hope and confidence, nay, to despair of having any posterity, than Abraham? God had promised to increase his descendants by his son Isaac beyond all peoples. "And God said to Abraham: Sara, thy wife, shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name Isaac, and I will establish my covenant with Him, and with his seed after Him… and he shall become nations, and kings of peoples shall spring from Him" (Gen. 17:19, 16). And yet soon after Abraham was commanded by God to slay his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham might easily have thought; Isaac is to continue my family, and now I must sacrifice Him? That is the very way to destroy my hopes of posterity and to put an end to my family. Yet Abraham set out with his dear son. When they came to the place pointed out by God, he laid his son on the altar; "and he put forth his hand, and took the sword to sacrifice his son" (Gen. 22:10). Did Abraham then despair of having posterity by Isaac? No, he still remained firm in his hope. What God promised, he thought, must be fulfilled. God has assured me that Isaac shall continue my family; therefore it will be so, even after I have slain him, although I cannot imagine how it will be brought about. "In the promise also of God, says St. Paul of him, he staggered not by distrust, but was strengthened by faith, giving glory to God: most fully knowing that whatsoever He hath promised, He is able also to perform. Who against hope believed in hope" (Rom. 4:20, 21, 18). Why against hope? Because, humanly speaking, he could not hope under the circumstances to have descendants by Isaac; and yet he hoped, relying on the divine promises. That is the meaning of the words of the patient Job: "Although He should kill me, I will trust in Him." That is, although God acts towards me in such a way as to seem to leave me without any hope, yet will I hope and trust that things shall go well with me. What shall be the consequence? "And thou shalt be fed with its riches" (Ps. 34:3). "Delight in the Lord;" that is, treat so confidently with Him, that you actually enjoy yourself with Him. And what then? "And He will give thee the requests of thy heart" (Ps. 34:4).

But there is one thing you must not forget: You must distinguish between the petition of your heart and the petition of your sensuality. Many hope for money from God; many hope for fleeting and perishable honors. Such people despair and think their hopes in God put to shame if misfortune brings them from a high to a lowly position, in which they cannot live as before in abundance; and now the object of their desires is to be restored to their former affluence. They hope for and desire wealth and honorable position, that they may enjoy the esteem of the world and live in idleness, comfort, and extravagance, indulge in gluttony, conform to the vanity of the world, and gratify their sensuality. Such desires come not from the reasoning heart, but from the unreasoning flesh. No, God has promised to give what is necessary to the support of the body, but not superfluities that are injurious to the soul.

Place your hope, then, in God, and ask Him for what is necessary, and for other things too, whatever they may be, but with this condition, if they be conducive for your salvation; and be constant in this hope, not wavering, but certain and assured that your wish will be granted. Say to yourselves, like Abraham: What God has promised must infallibly be done; He has promised to give me all that is good and useful for me if I trust in Him alone; so that I may be certain of it, even if all the men, all angels, and all demons stood in the way. Therefore I will continue to hope, and with that hope in all present and future necessities of soul and body I will first fly to God; with that hope I will be consoled in all trials and crosses, being assured, that, since all things are God's, he who has God is in want of nothing. Amen.

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