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JMJ

U.I.O.G.D.

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
SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Human Frailty in Dangerous Occasions

“And Jesus also was invited, and his disciples to the wedding.” John 2:2.

Truly that was a happy marriage-feast, at which Jesus, the Son of God, and Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and the Apostles of our Lord appeared among the guests. Ah, Christians, would that all our social gatherings, conversations, meetings, entertainments and marriage-festivities were so arranged that we could invite Jesus without scruple to be present at them. But alas! How many there are in such assemblies who cannot hope to have Jesus as their friend and companion. I allude to the danger and occasion of sin. For, be it known to all:

- I. That he who does not carefully avoid dangerous company and occasions cannot long remain in the slate of grace; and this,*
- ii. Because human weakness, already great enough of itself, becomes still greater in such company and such occasions.*

I. If a man runs quickly on icy ground without necessity, and falling breaks his limbs, people are more likely to call him foolhardy, than to pity him. So with a certain kind of company. When occasion is given by it to drunkenness, to opportunities of unjust gain, of anger, quarrelling, fighting, cursing, swearing, calumny, and detraction, to sins against holy purity, bad thoughts, imaginations, and desires, such company is dangerous, and must be most carefully avoided, if we wish to keep Jesus Christ, as our friend and companion. A person of weak and delicate constitution will not expose himself needlessly to danger of contracting a loathsome and highly contagious disorder. A good soldier never actually throws down his weapons of defense, much less deliberately gives them into the hands of his enemy. Sin should be avoided as a mortal and highly contagious sickness. “The life of man upon earth is a warfare” (Job 7:1). Yes, a continual warfare with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

O my God, who can consider himself safe in the midst of so many foes! The child walking on slippery ice is not as likely to fall as we are to sin, even when all dangers and occasions are far removed from us. True, indeed, are the words of the Apostle, “we have this treasure that is, sanctifying grace, in earthen vessels” (2 Cor. 2:7), vessels which an imprudent step or sudden fall, may shatter to pieces.

Reflect on Adam in Paradise. In a state of innocence and justice, richly endowed with great graces and perfect knowledge, nevertheless, falling deplorably at a single word from a woman, and that, too, for such a wretched thing as a mouthful of fruit, from which he could easily have abstained in a garden filled with the choicest kind

of fruit. Adam, I say, whose flesh was not yet rebellious against the spirit, whose desires were not, like ours, opposed to right reason, and who was yet so weak that he allowed himself to be overcome by a slight temptation! Oh! What great reason have we not to fear and to be on our guard, when we are so weak compared with him, subject to so many violent temptations, even when we do not seek them? And what was it that led Adam to commit such a grievous transgression? It was not so much the desire to taste of the fruit, as the example and persuasion of his wife. For he saw how eagerly Eve had eaten the apple, although she was forbidden to do so under pain of death; he saw, too, that she did not die at once, and when she held out the fruit to him and asked him to taste it, he yielded immediately, and acted without hesitation against the divine command and against his own better lights. Oh! Behold the irresistible power of bad example!

King David, too, a man after God's own heart, inflamed with divine love, and a model of perfection, was perverted by a chance look at a woman whom he saw far off, and whom he was not at all seeking; perverted to such an extent, that he rushed headlong into the most abominable crimes, and for long years forgot his Creator, whom he had formerly loved with his whole heart, and never remembered him till a messenger from heaven opened his eyes!

Had not St. Peter, the prince of the Apostles, sworn that he would rather die than leave his divine Master? Nevertheless, he not only left him, but denied him three times running on oath, not forced thereto by soldiers with drawn swords, nor by a judge threatening him with the stake or the gibbet, but by a few words of a wretched maid-servant. Considering all this, I am forced to cry out in amazement: Alas! Poor weak mortals that we are "he that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). If cedars have fallen, how shall the frail reeds stand before the storm of temptation? If those beautiful stars were extinguished which have shed their light on the world, how easily may not our feeble light be blown out?

And yet, alas! How little people think of the danger! How many Christians there are, even amongst those who are reckoned good and pious, who not only have no fear of bad company, but make an almost daily habit of frequenting it! Persons of both sexes, boys and girls, men and maid-servants, neighbors, men and women, stand and sit, walk, laugh, and joke together, even with the parents' consent, in the one room, or at the door, or in the street, in the evening, till it is quite dark, or else they go for a walk together outside the town, and in the parks and public gardens. Persons of both sexes, married and single, habitually squander away the precious time given them by God for the sole purpose of saving their souls, playing cards, talking, singing, and dancing until late in the night, as if they were made of different materials from other people; as if they had received from heaven a written assurance, confirming them in grace.

And on what, in God's name, do they ground this fancied security? Perhaps, on their firm purpose never to sin against God and holy purity by thoughts or desires, words or deeds? Ah, how wretchedly they deceive themselves! Is there then, no danger of sin even in thought and desire, in hazardous company? Why should we, poor mortals, trust so much to our purpose of not offending God when our forefather, Adam, and later, David and Peter, had once the same purpose; yet, when the danger and the occasion came, they, all three, fell most disgracefully. It is one thing to have the purpose of not sinning, and another to carry out that purpose when circumstances conspire to offer a gentle violence to our inclinations and appetites.

The hardest and heaviest piece of iron can be attracted in any direction by the power of the magnet. Did not Henry VIII., king of England, seem to have had a heart of iron, when, surpassing all the other princes of his time in understanding, knowledge, and zeal for the Catholic faith, he wrote so forcibly against the heretics that he received from the Pope the title of "Defender of the Faith"? Who would have imagined that he would have changed so suddenly and so completely; that he would have forgotten the fear of the Lord, have divorced his lawful wife, lived in open adultery, renounced the Catholic faith, which he had before heroically defended, bathed his hands in the blood of Catholics, and brought all England under the cruel yoke of heresy? Who, I ask, could have foreseen that? And yet, such was really the case with him. And what was the cause of that terrible change? The company and familiarity with a woman who was publicly looked on as of doubtful reputation, Anne Boleyn, for whom he entertained an impure passion. Have you ever read in the History of the Church of what such tyrants as Nero, Diocletian, Maximian, Lucinius, and others, did to overcome the constancy of the early Christians? What were the most powerful weapons by which they succeeded in inducing some to apostatize? Perhaps the rack, the sword, the spear, the gallows, and the gridirons with which they threatened them? Ah, no, says St. Cyprian; no torments were capable of subduing those Christian heroes, who only laughed

and mocked at them. What then overcame some unhappy souls? The flattery and caresses of the women who were sent into their prisons. Lust effected what neither rack nor torture could do, made them deny Christ and adore false gods. And what must be the consequence when one often seeks company of that kind? When the desire of seeing this or that person increases more and more? Finally, what must be the result, if two persons thus attached to each other are in the habit of meeting in secret?

II. Therefore I repeat my proposition: if we wish to have Jesus Christ as our constant friend and companion, and to keep free from sin, we must most carefully avoid all such dangerous company, unless necessity or the ordinary laws of courtesy sometimes compel us to go into it. Ah! Fly, the danger! As the wise Ecclesiasticus warns us: “Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent; for if thou comest near them, they will take hold of thee” (Ecclus. 21:2). Mark those words; we must fly sins, not merely as we would the poisonous bite of a serpent; but we must flee from them as from the very appearance of a serpent. We must keep them as far off from us as possible.

Not without astonishment do we read in Holy Scripture of so many most valiant heroes flying from their enemies in order to avoid a contest with them. We find Jacob flying from his brother Esau; Moses flying from Pharaoh; Elias flying from Jezabel; Urias flying from Joachim; David flying from his son Absalom; David himself flying twelve times from King Saul. In the same way, the Apostle St. Peter takes to flight out of his prison; St. Paul escapes by means of a basket from the walls; Jesus Christ, the almighty God, flies from Herod, and he warns his disciples to fly also “And when they shall persecute you in this city, flee into another” (Matt. 10:23). Flight was not a disgrace to these heroes, for they sought honor and glory therein. Certainly David boasted of it more than once, for he indicates, for instance, his third psalm as: “The Psalm of David, when he fled from the face of his son Absalom; “and the title of the fifty-sixth is “For David, when he fled from Saul into the cave.” So, too, in the spiritual combat we must often take to flight, if we wish to overcome our enemies and to gain the victory. In every society, or company, or friendly conversation, there is perhaps a cruel Esau, a ferocious Saul, who can easily conquer you. There is perhaps a beautiful Absalom, who can ensnare you in the meshes of his curly locks; there is a tricked-out Jezabel, who can bewitch you by her caresses. Perhaps there is a Herod, who is meditating an attack on your virtue, and has already often made you his prisoner; there may be an Aretas, who tries to inveigle you by his presents and to win your heart. Oh, woe to you, Christian soul, if you come too near to any one of these! If you do not wish to be overcome, you must avoid the combat by flight. Flight alone can save the life of your soul. “O God,” says David, “I have declared to thee my life” (Ps. 55:8, 9), or, as the Hebrew text has it, “I have declared to thee my flight,” I have made known to thee that I took to flight, for to flee from such occasions is equivalent to preserving the life of the soul.

Acknowledge, my dear brethren, I implore you, each by your own sad experience that you have often been overcome in dangerous company and occasions! Should you not, then, be constantly on your guard against them? Ah, how often do you not complain of your inherent weakness and frailty, alleging them as an excuse for your faults and sins? But it is not that weakness that will condemn you at the divine judgment-seat. If your frailty is so great that even when alone, it is only with difficulty you can resist temptations, why, then, lessen the little strength you have, by going needlessly and recklessly, into such company? Ah, in future be more cautious; try to guard your soul. You have but one, and if you lose it, it is lost forever. Let men think and say of you what they please; it is a matter of little importance. If they ask you why are you so bashful? Why do you not do as others do? Why do you not go to parties, like others of your age and condition? Answer them, as Demosthenes answered, when asked why he took to flight: “I am saving myself for my country.” “I am saving myself for my true fatherland, for paradise,” I will say. “Heaven is too dear for me to run the danger of losing it!” If I deprive myself of dangerous pleasures here below, I shall have the consolation and great happiness of possessing Jesus, my God, as my friend and companion during life; and after death, I may hope to possess him as my eternal reward in the joyous company of the Saints in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

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