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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 + + +

THE GOOD CHRISTIAN

VOL. III

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

The Happiness of a Good Conscience

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

Truly, a happy marriage-feast at which Jesus is present. Doubtless those people of Cana had learned by faith that Christ, their guest, was the true God and Saviour of the world. Now I leave you to imagine what exuberant joy and gladness they must have felt in their hearts at the marriage-feast; and meanwhile I shall continue the subject I have commenced, and wish you peace, that peace which cannot be found unless in the possession of God by a good conscience. And that peace cannot be disturbed save and except by sin alone, which drives God out of the conscience; therefore, to keep it constantly, all we need do is to avoid sin.

The peace of heart in a good conscience is a continual joyful marriage-feast for the human soul; therefore let him who wishes to taste this joy preserve peace of heart with his God in a good conscience.

Many delicate viands skillfully prepared choice wines, agreeable company, pleasant conversation, laughing and jollity, music and dancing: there you have the joys and pleasures of a marriage-feast. But many a guest, although he seems to enjoy himself, is at heart ill at ease. He whose stomach rejects the costly dishes and wines cannot have much pleasure in eating or drinking. If there be among the guests one who is unpopular, or one who is regarded with dislike, or, as is often the case, who is a disagreeable, quarrelsome fellow, the harmony of the feast is disturbed, and each one wishes he had remained at home. He who thinks of his secret domestic cross can have no joy in the conversation, music, or dancing; for while his lips laugh, his heart is weeping. And when the feast is over the pleasure goes with it, and all one can say of it is I have enjoyed myself. Even the bride and the bridegroom sometimes find their happiness gone after a few weeks, or even a few days; their laughter is turned into weeping, and one or other of them begins to sigh: ah, would that I were as I was before! Many of the guests bring home with them an uneasy conscience, a melancholy, gloomy spirit, on account of the great freedom allowed. So it is in the world; the joy it offers its friends is seldom an unadulterated one, never a perfect, true, and constant one.

Far different, more pleasant, and joyful is the marriage-feast promised by the Holy Ghost to those who keep the peace of heart in a good conscience. “A secure mind is like a continual feast” (Prov. 15:15), which is never interrupted or disturbed in its joy. But you say, how is that? For even a poor man can have a good conscience. Truly he can, and, as a general rule, he can keep it easier in poverty and want than in riches and abundance. But

what sort of a marriage-feast is that in which even a bit of bread is sometimes wanting? Where are the different dishes? The costly wines? The pleasant company? The agreeable music? The laughing and dancing, that go to make up a merry feast? Ah, answers St. Paul, you are wrong in your ideas of the matter: "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink" (Rom. 14:17). You must know that the kingdom of God consists in a pious soul and a good conscience, not in earthly follies and amusements.

Now you can easily understand what makes up that pleasant company in the feast that a good conscience prepares for the soul. What more pleasant company, or delightful society can one have than that which God cultivates with the soul, and the soul with God? Truly, God is present in all places and with all creatures; but he is present in a special manner by sanctifying grace with the soul that has a good conscience; that is, as one friend with another. By sanctifying grace, the whole Trinity dwells in the mind, according to the words: "We will come to him, and will make our abode with him" (St. John 14:23). Shut up a soul that loves God in a gloomy dungeon where it is alone day and night, and never sees a human being; still it will find pastime and consolation enough in the company of God, whenever its conscience suggests the thought: "My beloved to me and I to him" (Cant. 2:16). What better thing can I have or wish for on earth?

In that company we need not fear annoyance, quarrelling, or contradiction; we have not to weigh our words, as is the case in other company and in worldly gatherings; the more freely and intimately the soul deals with God, the more is he pleased, and the more consoling is he in return; and what perfects the joy and pleasure of this intimacy is the assurance of a good conscience, that one loves the other sincerely and is loved sincerely in return. Nothing is sweeter among the children of the world than love, which alleviates all trouble and sorrow; and consequently nothing is more agreeable than the society of the loved one, especially when there is a certainty that one's love is reciprocated. Now that certainty can rarely be had with regard to men. For instance, you may be really loved by the person to whom you have given your heart; but if you are not aware of that fact your joy is not increased thereby; and if you think the contrary, namely, that you are not loved, your anguish and melancholy increase in proportion to the violence of your passion. But if you believed that you are loved, when such is not really the case, you are happy indeed, but your happiness is founded on a false idea. Nothing of the kind have you to fear with God, if your conscience is pure; for he who loves God is assured that God loves him, as our faith teaches: "I love them that love me" (Prov. 8:17). The very love that the soul has for God is an effect of God's love for the soul: "My beloved to me, and I to him."

The testimony of a good conscience is the sweetest music. You will find that in a good conscience the hearing also is delighted by the sweet voice of the interior consoler, which testifies to the soul that it is in the state of grace, a child of God, the joy of the Angels, a comrade of the elect, an heir of the kingdom of heaven. That is the voice of which St. Paul writes to the Romans. "For the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God. And if sons, heirs also; heirs indeed of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:16, 17). It is the voice of Christ saying to his just servants: "Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven" (St. Matthew 5:12). Epicurus, that wicked and carnal man, used to give this lesson to his disciples. He who wishes to enjoy thoroughly the pleasures of the world and of the senses, must first be firmly convinced and persuaded that there is neither God nor hell. What did he mean by that? His meaning was, that a pleasure enjoyed with the fear of hell and of the divine vengeance before one's eyes is no pleasure at all, but rather a torment and a misery. From this I conclude, that if the fear of hell, with which God can punish men, is in itself enough to embitter all enjoyment, and to turn pleasure into pain; then who has not the fear of hell, possesses the greatest peace of heart, and that all the more when he is assured besides of eternal glory. This is what a good conscience says to us: I am now in a state in which I need not fear hell; I am in a state in which I have a sure pledge of eternal happiness, a pledge that I can keep as long as I will, and that no man can take from me! I can consider heaven as something that is really prepared for me, and belongs to me by right. Could more joyful notes than these possibly resound in our ears?

And what can follow such sweet music, but dancing at the marriage-feast? Not indeed the rapid moving of the feet in the midst of a laughing circle, but the exultation of the heart rejoicing in God, as the Blessed Virgin says of herself: "My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour:" that is, according to the literal meaning of the words, "has leaped with joy" (St. Luke 1:47). To this the prophet David encourages all faithful servants of God: "Serve ye the Lord with gladness. Come in before his presence with exceeding great joy" (Ps. 99:2), that is, with hearts leaping with joy.

Vain children of the world, bring all your pleasures together, and say, if you can, that no joy is ever wanting to you! You dare not, could not with truth make that boast. To make that still clearer, go with me in thought, and consider those two great men, one of whom sought happiness in the pleasures of the world, on the broad road leading to hell, and the other in the consolations of a good conscience on the narrow path to heaven: the emperor Tiberius in the island of Capri, and St. Francis Xavier in the island of Goa. Ask Tiberius how he enjoyed himself and you will hear him exclaiming: “May the gods punish me, if I do not die every day”. But is that really the case, Tiberius? Are you really dying of melancholy? Yes, I cannot conceal my disgust and weariness; daily does it seem to me as if I must die! Think of this, my dear brethren; an emperor, a monarch of the world, with the crown on his head, the scepter in his hand, seated on the greatest throne on earth, surrounded by the highest nobles of the land who wait on him, served by numerous vassals, feared and honored by foreign nations; and yet he says of himself, “I die every day! May the gods punish me, if I have not to die every day! “Yet I readily believe him; for even pleasures and delights turn to bitterness when the conscience is in a bad state. “All his good fortune, his riches, honors, and pleasures, could not save Tiberius from the tortures of his own mind, nor keep him from acknowledging his misery”.

Now turn your eyes to St. Francis Xavier. See how he pants, and cries out: “Enough, O Lord, enough! “Oh, what consolation, what joy, inundates my heart; cease, O Lord, or else I shall die of abundance; my heart is too small to hold the immense consolation thou dost pour into it! Remember, that St. Francis Xavier is a stranger among heathens, without money, servants, house, home, or bed; and yet he is compelled to cry out, on account of the exceeding great joy of his heart: “Enough, O Lord! “So great is the difference between the joy of heart in God, which a good conscience brings, and the vain delights of the world and the flesh. It is true, then, that “A secure mind is like a continual feast;” a good conscience, content with God, is a joyful marriage-feast.

Christians, do you, too, wish to taste the happiness of this feast? Do you wish to have here on earth consolation, joy, and peace of heart? Then see that you are free from sin, have good consciences, and keep in the friendship of God. But I am afraid, many will think like Nathaniel, when Philip described to him the wonders wrought by our Lord, and tried to persuade him to follow Christ. “What!” exclaimed Nathaniel; “can anything of good come from Nazareth?” “If you do not believe me,” answered Philip, “come and see.” Come and see Christ; hear his word; you will surely be so attracted by him that you will not wish to leave him. There are many who think like Nathaniel; when one speaks to them of the indescribable joy of a good conscience, they say: how can that be; it is impossible! Ah, I say to them in the words of Philip, “come and see!” If you do not believe it, then put it to the proof; purify your consciences and that thoroughly; begin to serve God faithfully with your whole hearts, and then you will see how sweet it is to serve Him. But you must be in earnest about it; for many flatter themselves that they have good consciences; but they deceive themselves, for they wish to look on everything as lawful that suits their inclinations, and are not willing to do all that God requires of them. What wonder, then, that they do not experience this consolation and peace of heart! Come and see; act honestly with God for once; begin to love Him with your whole hearts, “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is sweet” (Ps. 33:9) to them that love Him; then your own experience will force you to acknowledge that the true and only joy of the heart comes from the Creator and not from the creature, and can be had even in the midst of the trials and calamities of life. Amen.

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