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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 AFTER EPIPHANY

The Joy of a Good Conscience on Account of One's Good Works

“Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith?” St. Matthew. 8:26.

What have you to be afraid of, since I am in the boat with you? “Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith?” My dear brethren, the peace of heart in a good conscience, by which we have God as our friend, is a continual joyful marriage-feast for the human soul, and brings true joy of heart even in the midst of trials and calamities, and under calumny. Now there are souls, and even pious souls, who are never content with themselves, and are either unable or unwilling to enjoy the peace and happiness of a good conscience. They are always filled with anguish, and think that they cannot flatter themselves with having a good conscience, or else if they have no reasonable grounds for doubting that they are in the state of grace, and they try to serve God as well as they can, they imagine that they dare not admit any sense of pleasure or satisfaction in their good conscience, or in the service they render to God; and in that they are misled by a false idea that it is more pleasing to God for them to attach no value to what they do for Him and more advantageous to their souls to be always in a state of fear and trembling when working out their salvation. What a strange idea that is! “Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith!” I mean to convince you of quite the contrary.

I. He who has a good conscience, which does not reproach him with grievous sin, and who tries to serve God honestly, does what is most pleasing to God when he rejoices in the peace and satisfaction of his good conscience and on account of his good works.

II. He will derive great advantage for his soul from it.

I. God is more pleased and satisfied with a cheerful, joyous service than with a sad and melancholy one, and with a confident, child-like love, than a slavish fear. God, who loves us as a father loves his children; who wishes us to call Him Father, and to honor Him as our Father; cannot be pleased with the man who serves Him with fear and anxiety as a hard task-master, and who performs all his good works with unwillingness, distrust, and fear, and prays to Him in sadness and bitterness of heart. The servants of God must not wait on their Lord with sadness and through compulsion, but with pleasure and satisfaction: “Not with sadness nor of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2.Cor. 9:7). He is pleased with the servant who obeys Him with joy and readiness. If I love God, why should I not rejoice at having done a good work conformable to His will and law, and therefore agreeable and pleasing to Him? Could there be a greater joy for a poor mortal in this vale of tears than to please such a mighty Lord, and to think as Our Lord said of Himself: “I do always the things that please

Him?” (St. John 8:29.) What joy it must have been for David to hear king Saul say: “Behold thou pleasest the king, and all his servants love thee” (1. Kings 18:22). Urged on by those words he went at once to risk his life among the Philistines, of whom he slew two hundred, and brought the trophies of his victory to the king, to gain still more of his good opinion; but much more was David pleased to learn that he was dear to God and a man after God’s own heart. Must not a soul then have far greater satisfaction when it can think that it has pleased and gratified the King of kings by its good works? O men of the world, think and judge of me as you wish; talk of my actions as you please; hate or love me as best suits your fancies; if I succeed in pleasing my God, I should be more than satisfied; I should rejoice at it above all. And I know that this very joy is agreeable to God. Hear what He Himself says to a pious soul: Go, then, and eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with gladness: because thy works please God (Eccles. 9:7).

Can any of you deny that I do what is pleasing to God when I think with sorrow and contrition of the sins with which my conscience reproaches me for having offended against the divine law and provoked the anger of God? Is there any doubt that this sorrow is so agreeable to Him that, although He has not the least need of me, yet in virtue of this repentance, even if it lasts only for a moment, provided it is perfect, He pardons at once all my sins, no matter how grievous they are? He makes me His friend, His child, forgets forever the insults I have offered Him, and prepares for me His favors and graces in this life, and a new degree of eternal glory in heaven. Why, then, should I not please God by rejoicing with peace and consolation of heart at the good works that my conscience tells me I have done, by which I have fulfilled the divine law and shown due respect and honor to God?

Again, it is an act of the most perfect virtue and excellent charity, to rejoice when we see that others honor and love God. Now I ask any sensible man, if I cannot rejoice, and have not just reason for rejoicing, when I see that I myself have done something for the honor and glory of God? If I must be glad of the good works of others, because God is honored thereby why should I not be glad of my own, since God is honored by them too? Must I take less interest in the honor I give to God than in that given Him by others? But that would be against all rules of sound reason, and contrary to the order of true charity. My underclothing is nearer to me than my cloak; I am nearer to myself than others are, and hence it would be contrary to order to rejoice in the good of another and not in my own. The end for which I have been sent into the world is to serve God, to avoid sin, and by doing good works to gain heaven. If I have hitherto kept this before my mind, if I find in the evening that I have not committed sin during the day, that I have fulfilled the duties of my state properly and with a good intention, and borne my daily crosses with patience and meekness, and have performed other good works: why should I not rejoice and be glad that I have served God according to my duty: why should I not thank Him, and at the same time congratulate myself that He has deigned to use me as an instrument for His service, that He has helped me with His grace, that I have done something to please Him? Yes, I will say or think to myself: Thank God! This day has been well spent; there is no grievous sin on my conscience; I have loved my God; I love Him still; I will continue to love Him; and if death should come to me this night, I am prepared for it; my conscience is good, and heaven will be my portion if I die. “In peace in the self-same I will sleep, and I will rest” (Ps. 4: 9); with joy shall I lie down to rest and sleep peacefully in honor of God. Hence it is a praiseworthy thing and pleasing to God to be at peace with one’s conscience and to rejoice on account of this peace and on account of one’s good works.

II. Joy in our good works is a very useful thing, for it encourages us to serve God; but sadness hinders the Divine service. Why? You are teaching reading or writing to a little boy; the child is most diligent and does his best to make the letters according to the pattern shown him. Now stand beside him, and do nothing but shake your head and find fault, and tell him that he has done nothing but make mistakes. The poor child gets quite nervous, takes another piece of paper, begins to write again, and brings the same copy to you three, four, or five times; but you never have a word of praise for him; each time you tear up the paper and throw it away. How long do you think will that last? And what progress do you expect to make with your system of teaching? Do you think you will make the child more earnest and diligent? Not at all! The boy will lose heart at length, and despairing of ever being able to learn to write, will throw down pen and paper. If you wish to teach your pupil well and quickly, you must adopt another plan. Praise the child frequently, especially when he does his best; good! you must say; that is excellent; if you go on like that, you will soon be perfect. Then you will see how

joyfully and eagerly he will set to work. And that is quite natural, not only with children, but also with grown up, sensible people.

So too, it is with the affair of our salvation and the Divine Service. The crafty tempter is well aware of this, and he conquers by sadness those whom he cannot ensnare in any other way. How does he manage that? He tries to persuade souls that are otherwise desirous of salvation to look on all they do as useless, and to interpret all their own actions in a bad sense, to consider their devotions as no devotions at all, their piety as mere illusion, and always to condemn themselves as if they never did any good whatever, and that under the pretext of a false humility. His object is to make them anxious and despairing, to take away their zeal in the divine service, and to drive them at last to grow careless and to seek consolation from creatures.

1. On the other hand, common sense tells us that as in worldly affairs success, besides the joy it gives, inspires us also with fresh courage to continue our efforts, so also in spiritual matters a peaceful conscience that rejoices in past efforts to serve God, gives us fresh zeal and courage, and thus pushes on the pious soul, like a miser who the more he has the more he wants, to a holy avarice and greed of multiplying good works and merits, and daily adding to its stock of spiritual treasures.

Again, this joy brings also this advantage to the Christian soul, that it avoids with the utmost care, not merely great sins and their occasions, but even deliberate venial sin, that it may keep its peace undisturbed, and avoid the least offence against God, in whom it is so well pleased. By that joy the soul offers its due meed of gratitude to God for the graces received, for it takes them with cheerful heart and countenance from the hands of God; while another receives indeed the same graces, but with fear and dread because it is pusillanimous. Nay, since the latter dares not look on any of its works as good, it can neither appreciate the benefits bestowed on it by God, nor be duly thankful for them. Now if I make a present to a man, I like to see him accept it with pleasure, and thus to show that he values it.

2. That joy preserves in the soul an inward repose, contentment, and patience in all the trials and crosses of this life; for it knows that such things come from the decrees of the Lord whom it serves, no matter what their immediate origin may be. Therefore it enjoys an incomparable peace when it remembers its good conscience and good works, which comfort it with the assurance that it stands well with God, and that although it has to suffer here yet it will one day rejoice with God in heaven on account of having served Him zealously. Poor souls! who do not know how to rejoice in the Lord, who think that you ought never regard your actions or the state of your conscience with satisfaction how I pity you when the cross is laid on your shoulders! Where can you go for consolation? You find none in temporal joys for they are taken from you by trials; nor in heaven, which you are afraid of, and despair of ever reaching; nor in God, for you cannot persuade yourselves to look on Him as your well-meaning friend; nor in yourselves and your own conscience, which you always look on as bad, and never as good. Thus you deprive yourselves of all the consolation which could help you to bear your crosses with patience.

3 Finally, that joy causes in the soul the most excellent of virtues, *the perfect love of God*; for it is certain that a happy, cheerful mind is much more apt to feel the sweet affections of love than the doubting, timorous heart, which is distracted with all kinds of sad imaginings; and the soul must have a special love for the Spouse who treats it so intimately, and gives it such repose and consolation. From this comes *perfect resignation to the will of God*, with which it submits itself to his Fatherly hands in life and death, that He may do with it as He pleases. For as it is comforted by its good conscience, it has nothing to fear in life or death; and it lives and dies assured of eternal happiness, of which it has already had a foretaste in this world. Can any one doubt then that such joy is desirable and agreeable, since it brings so many advantages to the soul, and makes the way to all the virtues easy and safe?

Let pious Christians rejoice, then, in their good consciences. Let them rejoice in life and death without fear, and humbly congratulate themselves and thank the Almighty for the sins that have been forgiven them, for those that they have avoided, and for the faithful service they have rendered God. And when that consoling joy makes itself felt, let them not refuse to entertain it, but rather dilate their minds and hearts, so as to receive still more of it. Sinners, come, ah, come back! Hear the merciful Saviour crying out to you: "Take up My yoke upon you." He is most desirous of your salvation; do penance and cast from you the heavy burden of your sins, and you shall see what a great change for the better that will be. "You shall find rest to your souls." Amen.

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