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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. 4 = THE CHRISTIAN'S STATE OF LIFE

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Married People Must Be in the Friendship of God That They May Not Lose their Souls.

“Lord, save us, we perish.” Matt. 8:25.

The disciples of Jesus were in great danger of losing their lives! The wind howled; the waves of the stormy sea rose mountains high; their little vessel was almost covered by the foaming billows. But what had they to fear? They had with them Jesus, who placed bounds to the sea, and gave the winds their power, whose least command both elements must obey at once. It is true that Jesus was asleep, but they had only to awaken him and ask him to help them, and they would be at once freed from all dangers, as was really the case; for they cried out: “Lord, save us, we perish! Then, rising up, he commanded the winds and the sea, and there came a great calm” (Matt. 8:25, 26). Happy the man who has Jesus at his side, and God as his Friend and Helper! But woe to him who is in danger, without the grace and friendship of Jesus! To my mind, the married state is like a tempest-tossed vessel; but do not be afraid, you married people, who have Jesus at your side!

If the marriage is to be a happy one, especially as regards the salvation of the soul, Jesus must always remain with the married couple, even after their wedding.

No state in the world is so holy and perfect as not to have its special and manifold spiritual dangers and occasions of sin. In all places, at all times, snares are laid to entrap souls. The solitude of a convent, even, is not free from them. Religious in their cells, hermits in the remotest forests, living in caves, although always engaged in prayer, meditation, fasting, and works of penance, yet had enough to do to combat the suggestions and temptations of the devil, and the desires of the flesh that all men are subject to, and to preserve their innocence unsullied. How many of them, wearied with the fight, gave way to their weakness, and allowed the enemy to overcome them! How often has not the Church of God, to her great sorrow, seen those who shone like stars in her firmament fall down in disgrace! Miserable mortals are we, indeed! Not one of us can boast of being certain of salvation. Wherever we are, as long as we live, we are exposed to countless dangers; wherever we are we require the special help and assistance of God; wherever we are we must always keep Jesus before our eyes, have him as our Friend, and cry out to him, humbly and fervently: “Lord, save us, we perish!”

Meanwhile, it is certain that the state of marriage is more dangerous in itself than other states. To have a true friendship and tender love for creatures, and at the same time to love God with all one's heart, soul, and strength; to be bound to work with all possible diligence for money and temporal goods, and still to preserve poverty of spirit and detachment from earthly things, these are the duties of which we might say, humanly

speaking, that they run counter to each other and that they cannot be performed together. Nevertheless, you married people are obliged to perform them, or you will not be among the elect in heaven.

1. As far as purity of state is concerned, the married state is, in its own degree, a state of continence and chastity, as well as the state of celibacy and virginity, although not in such perfection as the latter; and even on this account it is much more dangerous, since it is more difficult to moderate and restrain ourselves when we are conceded a partial satisfaction for our desires, and the occasion of them is always present, than when we keep away from such satisfaction altogether, look upon it as absolutely forbidden, and keep the occasion at a distance. There are many who can remain altogether continent in the unmarried state, more easily than they could use matrimony with due restraint. Not everything is allowed to you married people: there are many things which reason and conscience would make you reprove as vicious.

Of course the unmarried are exposed to the same danger, but it is not so great, nor so serious for them. Not so great, because we have less desire for that which we have no experience of, than for that to which we have become habituated; nor so serious, because if an unmarried person sins against purity in thought or in action, he commits but one mortal sin, unless there are other circumstances which increase his guilt; but a married person commits a twofold sin in such cases: one against purity and the other against conjugal fidelity; and if these sins are committed with other married people, even by an efficacious desire, then each time a threefold guilt is contracted: one against purity, and the other two against the conjugal rights of two individuals. Oh, Christian married people, keep God as your Friend always! Pray every day humbly, acknowledging your weakness, and with childlike confidence: "Lord, save us, we perish!"

2. In addition to this, there is another and a more common danger, and one more difficult to be overcome, which arises from the indissolubility of the marriage tie, and from the fact that married people must be always in each other's society.

The effect of the bond of marriage should be such a perfect union of hearts, such a tender mutual love of the husband and wife for each other, that the one would be ready, if circumstances required it, to give up possessions, home, and property, and everything in the world, for the other's sake, and even to leave father and mother, brothers and sisters, according to the express word of Jesus Christ: "A man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife" (Matt. 19:5), and that he must do with a pure and true love. "Husbands, love your wives" (Ephes.), whom God has given you; wives, love the husbands to whom God has joined you; and the rule you have to follow is to love each other, "as Christ also loved the Church." That is to say, with a love that is true and constant even to the death of the Cross, that he endured for the Church. There, Christian married people, you have a pattern and example of the love that you must have for each other.

But do not forget that a very necessary and delicate distinction must be made here between this love and the love of God; for the union of your hearts must never interfere with your union and friendship with God, and you must hate and detest whatever is asked or required from you against the law of God. In this sense are to be understood the apparently harsh words of our Lord: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). And how is that? Must a man hate his wife? Does not the Apostle, at the command of Christ, say that he must love her tenderly? Nay, are we not commanded to love even our worst enemy? "Can we love and hate the same person?" Yes, he answers, we must do both together. We must love that person as a friend and neighbor, but we must hate and avoid him as our worst enemy if we find him hindering us in the service of God. It is right for a wife to try with all diligence to please her husband, to obey him, to follow his advice, to adapt herself to his humor, and to do his will in all lawful things; she must do so, for it is her duty and obligation. But if he desires her to do anything unlawful, to take part in immodest conversation, or to frequent dangerous company, then she must use all her courage and strength to oppose and disobey him.

The married state is a most dangerous one, in many respects, unless Jesus is always at hand to help with his grace. This is what St. Paul alluded to when he wrote to the Corinthians about the happiness of the unmarried, who are not obliged to please men, and who can have God alone as their Friend: "And the unmarried woman and the virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit" (I Cor. 7:34). And further: "He that is without a wife, is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please God." On the contrary: "But he that is with a wife, is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided... But she that is married, thinketh on the things of the world, how she may please her husband" (2 Cor. 7:32-34). And still, both must retain the favor and grace of God. Both must strive to please

God, as well as husband or wife; and there are hundreds of occasions on which it is impossible to please one, without displeasing the other. And that is a fruitful source of uneasiness and trouble. But the greatest danger and difficulty in this respect is that of displeasing God, for the sake of husband or wife.

Nothing has more power over us, for good or evil, than the example of those with whom we are in daily contact. "With the holy, thou wilt be holy; and with the innocent thou wilt be innocent. And with the elect, thou wilt be elect; and with the perverse, thou wilt be perverted" (Ps. 17:26, 27). How much more true is not that of the married state, in which two become one body and one heart? It is certainly true that a wife's virtue and piety can do much to make her husband pious, and that the holy example of a good husband can help the wife to practice virtue. But unfortunately, experience tends mostly in the contrary direction, and proves that we are more easily inclined to evil than to good, and that married people imitate each other's vices far more readily than they do each other's virtues.

If a young woman who has been piously brought up, and has preserved her baptismal innocence, was a weekly communicant, and was much given to prayer, meditation, and mortification, marries a man who is totally different from her as far as piety is concerned, and who is given to pride, vanity, idleness, and all sorts of vices, who seeks for nothing but sensual gratifications, and who follows all the customs of the world in his conversations and amusements; she is like an innocent lamb that is given over to a ravening wolf! What a temptation is there for a pious soul! She requires a powerful grace and help from God to preserve her innocence, piety, and tender love of God under such circumstances. For, without that help, she would soon experience a complete change in herself: the spirit of piety, which she brought to her marriage, would grow cold little by little; she would lose her taste for spiritual things, and, following her husband's example, which she has constantly before her, she would lead an idle, vain, careless, and unchristian life.

It would seem as if men were in little danger of being led away and perverted by the bad example of their wives, because they are the masters and heads of their families, and besides, they have more courage and strength of mind to avoid the effects of bad example. But is that really the case? Adam in Paradise had all his inclinations under the full control of reason, and yet he was weak enough to give way to the solicitation of his wife; a word of Eve's was enough to cajole and betray him, so that, to his own ruin and that of his posterity, he transgressed the divine command. Solomon was the wisest of all men, but he allowed women to befool him to such an extent, that he turned his back on the true God and bent the knee before idols. A bad and unchristian woman is worse in a house than a wicked man, and, generally speaking, pious men are more frequently perverted by their wives than pious wives are by their husbands. A wicked woman can easier destroy the virtues of her husband, than a pious man can reform a wicked wife. In a word, both are in danger of sinning grievously for each other's sake. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary always to have Jesus as a Friend and Helper, if the soul's salvation is to be secured.

You who think of getting married should learn from this how careful you must be in selecting the person with whom you intend to pass your lives. Do not consider, first of all, as most people do, whether that person is rich or beautiful, or of a good family, or experienced in the world; your first question should be, is that person pious, virtuous, and well brought up; and whether by living with that person you can serve God, save your soul, and gain heaven without difficulty. But to find one of this kind, you must pray to God for help, for a good and prudent wife is a special gift of God. To deserve that gift, you must lead a virtuous life. "A good wife is a good portion" (Prov. 19:14). And to whom is that portion given? "She shall be given in the portion of them that fear God, to a man for his good deeds" (Ecclus. 26:3).

3. The third danger arises from the cares of housekeeping and providing for children. Who does not know how difficult it is to work hard for money and temporal goods, and still to remain poor in spirit, and to fulfill those two duties without exceeding in either? If you married people neglect your housekeeping, and do not work with all possible diligence to feed your children and educate them according to your condition, you will be held responsible for your negligence and will be punished for it. And if you allow yourselves to be too much taken up with worldly things, for your children's sake, you will fall a prey to the devil and will lose your souls, according to the words of St. Paul: "They that will become rich, fall into the snare of the devil" (Tim. 6:9). It is not allowed for you who are in the married state, as it is for other unmarried persons, to follow the counsel that Jesus Christ gave to the young man who wanted to know what he must do to gain heaven: "Go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor ... and follow me" (Matt. 19:21). No, that perfection is not for you; if you have temporal goods, you must keep them, you must look after them carefully, and increase them by just means; but

in the care, possession, and increasing of money and property, you must not allow your hearts to be attached to them. Hear what the Apostle says of this: "This, therefore, I say, brethren: It remaineth, that they also who have wives, be as if they had none." They must keep their hearts and minds as free as if they were completely their own masters. "And they that buy as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as if they used it not" (I Cor. 7:29-31). And why? Because the care that you can and must have for worldly goods does not dispense you altogether, nor except you from the general law of Christ: "Every one of you that doth not renounce all that he possesseth, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33).

This is law for all, without exception: "Every one of you." It was not for the Apostles alone that it was made, but for the crowd of people of all sorts who were following our Lord. "For there went great multitudes with him, and turning, he said to them: Every one of you that doth not renounce all that he possesseth, cannot be my disciple." But we must not understand that of the real leaving of all worldly goods, for otherwise every one would be really poor; but of the inward detachment of the heart and will; namely, that each one who possesses or works for earthly goods, must be as ready and willing to lose them, if it pleases God, as to keep and increase them.

Ah, you think, if that is really the case with us, how is it possible for us to save our souls? I give you the same answer that Jesus himself gave to a similar question that his disciples put to him, when he said that it is exceedingly difficult for a rich man to enter heaven. They asked, in consternation: "Who then can be saved? With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:25). For those who enter the married state without being called to it by God, or who consider temporal things alone, or who think seldom of God, go rarely to Church, who seldom receive the Sacraments, and do not concern themselves about having God as their Friend, for such as these it is difficult to escape the dangers that threaten their salvation; but for pious Christians who are zealous in the service of God, and who often ask him for help and assistance, it is quite possible, nay, even easy. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Tobias, Job, and many others in the Old Testament, as well as numbers in the New Law, were married; they had to provide for their families; they had riches and worldly goods in abundance; and yet they conquered the dangers of their state, and became great Saints in heaven. In our days, too, there are many Christian married people who lead upright, pious, and holy lives. The more numerous and the greater the dangers of a state are, the more frequent and powerful are the helps that God gives to men, so that the dangers may be easily overcome; but he gives these helps only to his friends, who strive to please him.

Therefore I again conclude that if the marriage is to be a happy one, as far as the soul's salvation is concerned, Jesus must be with you continually, even after the wedding. And woe to you, married people, if Jesus abandons you, or ceases to be your Friend, or leaves you to your own unaided powers! Therefore, whatever cares you may have, whatever you do, or undertake, see first that you keep God before your eyes, and that he is your Friend; do not lose his grace and favor by mortal sin, nor make yourselves unworthy of his help and assistance by a vain and tepid life! One mortal sin would open the door to many sins, and often to eternal ruin, for it would deprive you of the friendship of God, and leave you without his help in so many dangers. Call upon the Lord by a frequent reception of the Sacraments, and by living in the constant love and fear of God. Call upon him as the disciples did, when they were in danger of death, saying: "Lord, save us, we perish!" and so use the goods of this life that you may not lose eternal goods.

And God will certainly keep the promise he so often made: "Ask and you shall receive." He abandons no one who does not first abandon him; he will command the stormy winds to be still, and will direct everything for your greater advantage and merit. Is God your Friend and Helper? Oh, then be comforted! Then you may well say with David: "For though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for thou art with me" (Ps. 22:4). Amen.

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