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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 + + +

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FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

### The Impure Tongue

*“His enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat.” Matt. 13:25.*

What we read in the parable of today’s Gospel happens only too often amongst us, to the great injury of souls. We know and experience what a number of weeds grow up in us without any labor on our part; I mean the many temptations and solicitations to evil that come from our own wicked propensities and inclinations, and that strive to cause the eternal ruin of our souls, especially in the matter of impurity; and yet there are wicked, malicious men, who deliberately sow cockle, for the still greater ruin of souls, by placing impure objects before the eyes of others, by betraying them into sin through bad example and by impure conversation; so that they who wish to preserve chaste hearts cannot be sufficiently on their guard. Against these latter enemies of souls I mean to speak to-day.

*Of all the wicked tongues, there is none which sows more cockle to the destruction of souls, than the impure, immodest tongue. Therefore every one who wishes to avoid being led into the vice of impurity must be especially on his guard against those enemies of his soul who speak impurely.*

I. No wicked tongue leads to greater sin than the impure tongue. The ranker a weed is, and the deeper it takes root, the more does it spread itself over the ground and therefore the greater, too, is the mischief done by sowing a weed of that kind in cultivated ground. In the same way, the more wicked a vice is, the deeper and quicker it takes root in the soul, and the more difficult it is to eradicate it afterwards; so, also, the greater the injury done to the soul by him who deliberately betrays another into a vice of that kind, or brings him into the occasion of it. Cursers, who daily speak the language of hell toward each other, harm only their own souls and bring maledictions down on themselves; they cannot injure the innocent by all their curses and imprecations. Perjurers, who so often give themselves up to the devil by swearing false oaths, whom do they injure but themselves? They may now and then cause their neighbor to suffer temporal loss, but they cannot hurt his soul. Uncharitable and slanderous tongues that are given to speak of the affairs of others, and to criticize their faults, they are truly wicked and dangerous tongues; yet they attack only the good name and reputation of others, but cannot, with all their uncharitable talk, so injure them as to make them worse in the sight of God than they are. Tale-bearing tongues who secretly carry stories from one to another, relating to one what another has said or done against him, how often do they not cause enmity and strife between husband and wife, brothers and sisters,

parents and children, friends and relatives! Yet they cannot directly hurt their souls. (Blasphemous tongues vent their anger against God and his Saints when they speak slightly and disrespectfully of them, yet the only effect their wicked language has on the minds of others is to fill them with fear and dread, lest a thunderbolt should fall from heaven and strike them dead on the spot.) The impure tongue is not satisfied with bringing eternal damnation on its own soul, but it must also sow in the ears and hearts of those who listen to it the cockle, which it may take them a lifetime to eradicate; for by its impure discourses it leads many innocent souls into the greatest and most dangerous vices.

Nothing is more dangerous and more apt to lead to sin, says St. Paul, than wicked conversation: "Be not seduced; evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. 15:33). They are like a consuming canker, as he writes to his disciple Timothy: "Shun profane and vain babblings; for they grow much toward ungodliness, and their speech spreadeth like a canker" (2 Tim. 2:16, 17), that is, they creep through the ears into the heart, and keep gnawing at it until they get it to consent to a sinful pleasure. All wicked conversation and even unspiritual and vain talk has that effect. What mischief, then, must not be caused by impure tongues in the human heart, which is already of itself prone to sensual indulgence? It is hardly possible for any one to talk impurely in company without committing a mortal sin, either on account of the scandal given by such discourses, especially when the hearers are still innocent, or on account of the danger of consenting to a bad thought about the impure subject that is spoken of. And what is said of impure conversation is also to be understood of impure songs, which are all the more dangerous than mere conversation, as they are more apt to fill the heart with their poison, to inflame the imagination, and to fix the subject more strongly in the hearer's memory.

And yet, alas, how common such songs and such conversation are in the world nowadays! It seems that people imagine they can have no pleasure, nor amusement, and cannot carry on an entertaining conversation, without bringing in those filthy topics. Like unclean swine, they delight in wallowing in the mud; they are not satisfied, like other animals, with merely touching it with the soles of their feet; they must roll their whole bodies in it. There are even parents to be found who not only use such filthy language in presence of their innocent children, but actually encourage them to sing unchaste songs, whereby the children lose all sense of modesty, even before they understand the meaning of the words they use, and when they grow up they listen without shame to things that would otherwise have brought a blush to their cheeks.

What a disgrace that is! We have received our tongues for the sole purpose that we may use them as instruments to praise God, yet we misuse the noble member to turn souls away from God, and to lead them into sin by impure conversation. And our tongues are so often moistened with the sacred, virginal and spotless flesh and blood of Jesus Christ! Therefore St. Paul says that we must not even name impurity: "fornication and all uncleanness, let it not so much as be named among you, as becometh saints" (Ephes. 5:3), such as all Christians should be. We abstain as far as possible from coughing and spitting in decent company, but we do not hesitate to bespatter those who are listening to us with the mire of our impure tongues.

Oh, wicked tongues, what a fearful account you will have to render, not only for yourselves and for the sins you commit by impure conversations, but also for the souls that you have betrayed into sin! Striking was the example given by our Lord in the public street. He was surrounded by a great crowd of people, when he saw a little child passing by. Christ called the child, took him by the hand, and "set him in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:2). The people were surprised, and, expecting to hear something wonderful from him, they were all attention. Then our Lord, pointing to the child, said in earnest tones: "He that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea." Therefore, "Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh!" (Matth. 18:6, 7.) Woe, then, to you, unchaste tongues, that scandalize so many innocent souls!

In truth, if any one is marked for eternal damnation it is the man who is given to impure conversation. It is a mark of reprobation for one to have the habit of returning easily to his former wickedness, and after confession to fall again into the same grievous sins. This mark is certainly to be seen in him who is in the habit of speaking impurely, because he always falls back into sin, and bespatters every one he associates with his foul conversation. The second mark of reprobation is to love sin, and to find pleasure in it. There is many a one who sins through human frailty; but he knows that he has done wrong, and he is ashamed of and sorry for his grievous transgressions; but the unchaste man, who is given to immoral conversation, glories in his sins; he relates them for the purpose of making others laugh; he actually makes a boast of them; and therefore he has not

sorrow, or detestation, or repentance, but affection and love for his sins. The third mark of reprobation is to act as an agent of the devil by leading souls astray, and bringing eternal ruin on the lambs of the fold of Jesus Christ. The impure-tongued man, by his filthy songs and discourses, leads many an innocent soul into sin, takes it away from God, and delivers it up to the devil; so that he will have to pay soul for soul. The fourth sign of reprobation is the habit of impurity. Now, it is not a rash judgment to look upon him who is always speaking of impure things as addicted to that vice, for his heart and mind must be a cesspool of vice, since his mouth gives forth the effluvium of unchaste conversation. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34), and he is not far from committing the act who delights to speak of it. The fifth sign of reprobation is the profanation of the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, for what greater indignity can be offered to It than to allow the tongue on which It is so often placed to wallow in the filth of impure talk! How many ceremonies, prayers, blessings, and anointings the bishop uses in consecrating the fingers of the priest's hand, which are to hold the virginal body of Jesus Christ! But our tongues, when the blessed salt is put on them in Baptism, are already consecrated by God himself as altars, patens, and chalices, to receive the sacred flesh and blood of the Son of God. Now, if a person were to take the chalice in which the blood of Jesus has been even once consecrated, and to fill it with filth, the very thought of such an enormity makes us shudder! What a fearful profanation must it not then be to receive the bread of Angels in a mouth or a tongue that is always reeking with impurity.

Therefore, he who is given to unchaste conversation has all the marks of reprobation. Woe, then, to that man!

But, they say, God forbid that we should have a bad intention when we speak now and then in that way! Our only object is to amuse ourselves and others, and not at all to lead people into sin. Oh, certainly, it is an amusement that the devil takes delight in! Your intention cannot excuse you in things that are of themselves scandalous and unlawful. But we are careful not to allow those who are still innocent to hear such conversation; when we speak in that way, we do it among ourselves, in the company of people who know as much about it as we do, so that there is no danger of giving scandal. What? No danger of giving scandal? Do you know what scandal-giving is? It means saying or doing, even with signs, anything that is of a nature capable of leading others into sin, even if it were only a sin of thought. Now, when you talk impurely and describe impure actions, how can they who are listening to you help seeing in their imaginations the abominations that form the subject of your songs or conversation? And in that way, how can they and you help having impure thoughts and desires? Is not that giving scandal? But you say that the people you talk to know as much about it as you do; if so, then you do not strive to kindle a fire where there was none before; but, at all events, you add more fuel to the fire that is already burning, so that it blazes up more fiercely and burns longer. Is not that giving scandal?

But, they say again, we do not speak in coarse terms, like drunken boors in a saloon. We use polished language, and veil our meaning by allusions and similes, which the innocent do not understand. Truly, shameless as you are, you do not dare to vomit forth your obscenity in decent company without trying to hide its hideousness somewhat. And this is, unfortunately, a diabolical style of conversation that is much in vogue among ladies and gentlemen of good standing in society. But do you know what I think of it? Such artfully veiled allusions are much more dangerous, scandalous, and abominable than the coarse obscenity of the ignorant boor. And why? A violent wind sometimes extinguishes a fire, while a gentle breeze fans it into a flame. In the same way, when coarse expressions are used in speaking of impure topics, the respectable man who hears them feels ashamed, and even if he has a secret pleasure in listening, he still tries to look displeased, for the sake of outward decency; thus the other is reduced to silence, and the impure conversation comes to an end. But when similar talk is carried on by means of artful allusions and metaphors, then there is question of showing how clever one is; no one wishes to be looked on as stupid; all join in the laugh, even they who do not know what it is about; one allusion is brought forward after another, and the obscenity is protracted for hours. If an impure subject is spoken of in coarse and plain words, every one knows what is meant without further study; but when the filth is covered by metaphorical expressions, one has to set his wits to work to find out the meaning of the speaker, and so all sorts of impure images are formed in the imagination, worse sometimes than the speaker intends; the fire of impurity burns fiercer in the heart, and the artful metaphor takes fast hold of the mind.

Pious Christians, and especially you who are still innocent, if you wish to keep your purity untarnished, then fly, for God's sake, all company in which those wicked people appear, and all companions who say the least word that savors of impurity. If any one tries to head you into sin by flatteries or caresses accompanied by

impure conversation, give him the same answer that St. Francis de Sales gave a shameless woman who once assailed him in that way. And what was his answer? He spat in her face, and turned away from her. If you are not courageous enough, or zealous enough for the glory of God to do that, then at least show by your manner that you cannot bear to listen to unchaste conversation. The schoolfellows of St. Bernardine used to relate of him that his horror of immodest talk was so well known that if any of them were engaged in it and saw him approach they would cry out, "be silent; Bernardine is coming." Nor should you forget that God and your holy angel are present, and that they hear the shameful talk that is going on.

Christian parents, be careful in presence of your children! Do not, on any account, say the least thing that might tarnish their innocence and purity. Often think what it is to have immortal souls entrusted to your care, that you may lead them to God, and what a fearful responsibility you incur if by your negligence they are betrayed into the clutches of the devil! Let all remember the words of St. Paul already quoted: Let all uncleanness be not so much as named among you, as becometh saints. Let us use our tongues for no other end but that for which God gave them to us, that is, to praise and bless God; and let that be our business on earth, as it will be our only occupation in heaven. Amen.

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