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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

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Vain Excuses as to the Proximate Occasion

*“An enemy hath done this.”* St. Matthew 13:28

“A man’s enemies shall be they of his own household” (St. Matthew 10:36), says our Lord. This is especially the case with those who are the proximate occasion of sin to us, above all in the matter of impurity. Oh, what a multitude of sins are caused by such an occasion. He who is once entangled in it has his soul sowed like a field with all sorts of weeds of carnal thoughts, desires, words, and works. If he asks: “Who has done this?”, his own conscience will answer him: “An enemy hath done this,” it is the work of that person, that house, that company, that proximate occasion. But, O blindness and stupidity of man! He who is once entangled in an occasion of this kind loves nothing more than the enemies of his soul; he tries to deceive himself in all sorts of ways; he has all sorts of false arguments to prove that he is not bound to remove or avoid a certain proximate occasion of sin,

*I Because it is not a proximate occasion for him; or,*

*II. Because in future it will not be so dangerous for him.*

I. Some who try to persuade themselves that this or that occasion is not a proximate one of sin to them, plead with their confessor by way of excuse: I keep that woman in my house, not for the purpose of committing sin and offending God, but because she is useful or necessary to me in the management of my domestic affairs. I go to that house, or into that company, not to commit sin, but to visit my friends, according to the requirements of courtesy, or to pass away the time in lawful amusements. In looking at or speaking to that person, who is pleasing to me, I seek nothing but such a delight as one experiences in eating and drinking, in looking at a play, or in listening to good music. That is all I want. I do not seek carnal or forbidden pleasure, and if I feel it, it is against my will and intention. I protest that I never will voluntarily seek such pleasure, for I do not wish to offend God by a mortal sin, etc.

What wretched excuses are these! I thought that the deceit that Satan practiced in Paradise, and that has since produced such lamentable fruit in the world, was detested by all, but now I am forced to believe the words of the philosopher Seneca: “In what do we rejoice more than in deceit?” It seems, indeed, that the more crafty and cunning our deceit, the more we love it. This deplorable self inflicted blindness is the most terrible punishment that God permits our sins to bring upon us in this life.

What, in the name of wonder, is the meaning of your excuse? “I will keep in my house or, I will go to visit the person who pleases me, but not with the intention of committing sin and offending God?” Where is the sinner in the world so wicked, what robber or murderer is so abandoned, as to sin only for the purpose of offending God? Ask the thief: “Why did you steal?” He replies: “To get money, needful for my support.” Ask the assassin: “Why did you kill that man?” “To have revenge on him.” Ask the libertine: “Why did you commit adultery?” “To satisfy my passion.” Not one of these will acknowledge that his object was to offend God. To sin merely for the purpose of sinning, and through hatred to God, belongs rather to demons in hell than to men upon earth. It is nonsense, to appeal to your intention. The fact speaks louder than your intention. Suppose I set fire to your house, and then reply to your just complaints: “Oh, I did not mean to do you any harm, nothing was farther from

my intention. I only wished to see the fire and to warm myself at it!” What would you think of that? He who wills the cause, you answer, wills also the effect. Therefore, I answer that occasion is a proximate one for you, and you are not allowed either to go into it, or to remain in it, and no matter what it costs you, it must be removed.

Another, apparently more reasonable than the first, says “That house, person, or company has hitherto been a proximate occasion of sin for me; but I have never had such a clear knowledge of the malice of sin as I now have. I have just confessed my sins with such a lively sorrow, and such a firm resolution, that I feel I would bear all the evils in the world, and die a thousand times rather than commit another mortal sin. In fact, I have no longer any desire or inclination for carnal pleasures. I am fully persuaded that I run no danger now by keeping that person in my house, or by going into that company, in order to satisfy the requirements of friendship, as the law of Christian charity commands.” What a sudden change has come over you! It may be as you say, and if it is, you ought to rejoice and to thank God from the bottom of your heart. But let me give you one piece of advice: do not trust too much to your good resolutions, nor venture again on the strength of them into the occasion of sin, or you will certainly fall.

Have you done penance? Have you repented of your sins and blotted them out? If so, I congratulate you with all my heart. What are you now, stone or iron? No; you are and remain straw, as you were before. Can you, then, touch fire and not be burnt? Again: here is a lighted candle; blow it out, but immediately hold it to another lighted one, and, even before the wick touches the flame, it will take fire. So it is also with the proximate occasion of sin, especially in the matter of impurity. No knowledge on the part of the understanding, no purpose or resolution on the part of the will, is of any use. You have detested your sins from the bottom of your heart, and are firmly determined rather to die a thousand times than to commit them again. The candle is blown out; the fire of concupiscence is somewhat subdued; but if you go again into the proximate occasion, the former impure love will be awakened in you anew, the fire of impurity will burst forth into a flame. The fire of carnal desire is turned, as it were, into tears of penance; but if you go again into that evil house or company, the water will soon be reconverted into a fire which will consume your soul worse than before.

St. Paul warns us: “Give not place to the devil” (Ephes. 4:27). Even the place in which one has sinned becomes dangerous, since the mind recalls what occurred there, and thus awakens guilty desires anew. Much more, then, will the actual, living presence of the partner of one’s sin have that effect. “Adam, where art thou?” (Gen.3:9) questioned the Lord after Adam’s sin. “In the garden.” Away with you at once; the very place is dangerous for you. If you look again at the forbidden tree, the desire to eat of its fruit will again master you “And the Lord God sent him out of the paradise of pleasure” (Ibid. 23), and placed an angel with a fiery sword at the entrance, so that he might never return to the place where he had sinned. O sinner! Since you now acknowledge your guilt and repent of it, let me ask you: “Where art thou?” Where do you intend to remain for some time to come? In the house where that person is still living? In the house or company where you will often meet with that person? Ah, that is no place for you. You must never go there any more. Its entrance must be closed to you, or else the old Adam will get possession of you again.

You say that you do not feel any temptation any longer, and that all sinful desire seems to have left you. If that is the case, why are you so anxious to see that person again? Why are you so troubled when he or she is absent? Why do you find it so difficult to break off that intimacy? That is an evident, unmistakable sign that you have still something left to fight against in secret, and that the sinful desire has not entirely abandoned you. If you really feel no temptation any more, then one of three things must be true: either the devil does not know you any longer, or knowing he is sure of you, takes no further trouble about you. The house-dog does not bark at his master or friends, but only at strangers. The devil is preparing some trap to ensnare you, or he refrains from tempting you for a time, only that he may the more surely bring you in the end to destruction.

The Norman prince, Hastings, having long unsuccessfully besieged the Italian town, Luna, at last, commanded all hostilities to cease, and caused the rumor to be spread about that he, the general in chief of the besieging army, had suddenly taken ill and died. The news of his supposed death was brought to the citizens by an envoy, who made known to them at the same time the last will of the prince, namely, that his body should be carried in state to the cathedral of the town, to which he left a rich legacy, and be there buried. The citizens believed the story, and that, all the more readily, as hostilities had ceased for such a considerable time. Hastings, seemingly a

corpse, was borne into the town, accompanied by a number of courtiers and officers, and some thousands of soldiers bearing lighted torches. While the citizens were admiring the spectacle, the prince suddenly opened his coffin, and, to their greatest astonishment, leaped out into the midst of his men, who were all well armed. He was thus enabled to take possession of the unguarded gates, and allowing his army to enter, reduced the unfortunate town to subjection. O, repentant sinner! Keep the gate fast closed against your enemy. He may pretend to be dead; he may leave you for a time in peace; but if you once admit the proximate occasion within your walls, he will suddenly surprise you, fan into a more violent flame than ever the sinful desires that seemed to you to be quite extinguished, and thus make sure of bringing you to eternal ruin.

O no! "If thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee." No matter how great the change you think has come over you, pluck out the eye that has hitherto been the occasion of sin to you, and throw it far away from you. Even supposing there were no danger of your committing sin in the company of that person, how do you know that there is none for the other person? The latter you certainly place in the proximate occasion of impure thoughts and desires by your presence or conversation. Nor will I say anything now of the scandal you give the whole neighborhood, who are, perhaps, aware of the unlawful intercourse you have been maintaining. Therefore I repeat that it is not lawful for you to remain in such an occasion, nor to seek it again. You are bound, under pain of grievous sin, to remove it altogether, and to avoid it completely.

"But at all events, Father," urges another presumptuous soul "Let me go to that person once more and represent the dangerous state in which we have both been living, so that by fraternal correction I may perhaps induce him or her to do penance as I do. Thus, we may change our former unlawful love into a holy friendship, which will not hurt us. Otherwise, that poor soul will continue in the state of sin and be lost forever!" What a pious zeal for souls you have all of a sudden! I imagine the devil laughs heartily at your devotion. Do you think you can convert souls by your presence and conversation, and save them from the jaws of the hellish wolf, although it is only very recently and with great trouble that you have succeeded in escaping him yourself? You presume to attempt the conversion of a lustful soul by presenting to her the object of her passion, that is, yourself. You wish to preach penance to a soul who has so perverted you, that because of her you have often given yourself over to the devil and to the eternal flames of hell?

"Recover thy neighbor," says the Holy Ghost, it is true, but hear what he adds immediately after: "recover thy neighbor according to thy power, and take heed to thyself that thou fall not" (Ecclus. 29:27); that is: Do not attempt anything beyond your strength, and be careful that in trying to help another, you do not injure yourself. If a heavy weight is placed on a newly-built wall, the plaster of which is not yet dried, it will fall down. You are only newly-converted yet you charge yourself with the burden of converting a soul, and that, too, in such circumstances and by such means as God has strictly forbidden. Which is the more likely, that a man in good health will give strength to a sick man by his company, or that the sick man will infect him who is in good health? The latter is more likely, and is generally the case, when there is question of a contagious illness.

No, no; in such circumstances, there is no safety unless in flight. If you wish to convert the person with whom you have sinned, then, the only advice I can give you is to do it "not in word, nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth;" not with exhortation and advice, nor even by letter, but in deed and in truth, that is, by good example. Keep away from that person. Do not take any notice of her if she should salute you, or send messages to you by others. Send back her letters unopened. Shut your door in her face, and act towards her as if she were your mortal enemy. Then she may perhaps enter into herself, and say: That man is evidently quite changed; it is clear that he is really converted. I must follow his example. If she does not follow it, then, at all events, you have done what God requires of you, and have placed your soul in safety. In a word, without attempting to frame excuses, "flee from sins as from the face of a serpent" (Ecclus. 21:2). Dread the occasion of sin, as you would a venomous reptile. Why does God not tell us to fly sin as a raging lion or tiger, for such animals could do us more harm than a mere crawling reptile? Those animals, although cruel and dangerous, are not to be feared at all times. While they are young, one can play with them without running any risk; nay, they may be tamed so that they run after the person who feeds them, as if they were faithful dogs. On the other hand, serpents are always to be feared; they can never be tamed, and whether they are young or old, they can always kill a man, if they but touch him with their poisonous fangs. Therefore, you must avoid the occasion of sin as you would a serpent. If you do not wish to lose your soul, there is nothing else for you but flight. Amen.