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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 + + +

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SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY

The Disgrace of the Season of Shrovetide

“Why stand you hear all the day idle?” Matthew 20:6.

If there are any days in the year on which most men lead an idle, or rather an unchristian and sinful life, it is on these days of Shrovetide. For there are now many Christians who might be asked, with holy anger, the question: “Why stand you here all the day idle?” Why do you spend the day and night in such a licentious and unchristian manner? What season are we in now? In the season of Shrovetide, that is to say, the time that immediately precedes the Lenten fast; a time that, according to the vicious custom of the world, is supposed to begin almost on Christmas day, as far as revelry and dissipation are concerned. It is Shrovetide, then. Many imagine that the Christian law is abrogated for the time being, so that dissipation, wantonness, and all kinds of vices may be indulged in freely. If a sin is committed during this season, people say that it does not matter; it is Shrovetide now; we must enjoy ourselves. To show how false, erroneous, and unchristian this view is, is my object today, and I say:

I. The days of Shrovetide belong to God as well as the other days of the year; therefore it is as unlawful to sin on those as on other days.

II. The days of Shrovetide should by right be kept more holily than other days; therefore it is even more unbecoming to sin on them.

I. The Catholic Church, from the very beginning, never showed greater zeal than in the utter extirpation of all the remnants and abuses of heathenism. When a city or country was converted to Christianity, the first question was: What are those idolatrous temples doing here? Away with them! But what harm is in them? They are mere buildings, which have cost a great deal of money. Would it not be better to allow them to remain, and after having destroyed the images of the false gods, to devote them to the worship of the one true God? No; they are relics of heathenism and must not be tolerated! They must be burnt to ashes, so that not a vestige of them remains. That was what the early Christians did in the reign of the great emperor Constantine: “Constantine destroyed everywhere the most beautiful temples of the gods;” and St. Augustine testifies that throughout the whole of Africa the images of the gods were broken in pieces, and trampled under foot, and the very stones of their temples were held in such abomination that no one would use them for building purposes.

Now, if the Christian religion shows such zeal in extirpating and abolishing the dead relics of heathenism, is it likely that it will tolerate its living abuses and scandals, I mean the dissipations of Shrovetide? No; the Catholic Church condemned all kinds of plays, dances and other abuses when she abolished idolatry. Certainly there were Christians in former times, and perhaps there are many nowadays, too, who imitate the blind heathens in those abuses; but the holy fathers always reprov'd their conduct with the greatest zeal. St. Ambrose, seeing those customs carried on in Milan, ascended the pulpit in his episcopal vestments, and began to complain most bitterly as follows: "I have a great complaint to make of many of you, namely, that you keep the festivals of the heathens." What a crime that is! Are we Christian's? If we are the living temples of God, why do we keep the feasts of false gods in the temple of the true God? Souls consecrated to God, where is your faith? Do those heathenish customs suit the religion you profess? St. Augustine also writes against the dissipations of Shrovetide. When the plague has left the town, he says, the inhabitants burn all their clothing, no matter how costly it is, so as to destroy every germ of the pestilence. In the same way the Church of God acts; she cries down the poisonous remnants of heathenism, and warns her children against them. Water! Water! She cries out; bring some water to throw on the smoldering ashes of this hellish fire!

The days of this season belong to God, as well as the other days of the year, and must be kept sacred to him alone. It is never lawful to do evil. The vain children of the world say: Shrovetide comes only once a year and we must have a little pleasure, as if they could not enjoy themselves without indulging in sinful, impure, forbidden, unchristian and heathenish pleasures! No, there is no day in the year on which such things are lawful. I read in the Holy Scriptures that there is a time for every human occupation: "All things have their season," and in their times all things pass under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted. A time to weep, and a time to laugh. A time to keep silence, and a time to speak" (Eccies. 3:1, 2, 4, 7). And he goes on to give a list of twenty-eight different times; but the words, "a time to sin," a time to behave in an unchristian manner, a time to imitate heathenish abuses, I cannot find any mention of. When there is question of keeping the commandments of God, all the times in the year are alike; Shrovetide or not, black remains black, and sin is always sin and offensive to God. What would you think, married men, if one of you were to find out that his wife had been unfaithful to him, and if she said in excuse of her crime: oh, it is Shrovetide; it does not matter; I was only amusing myself; it will be all right again when Lent begins? What! The justly enraged husband would say, you faithless wretch, did you not promise to be true to me till death? How can you excuse yourself by saying that it is Shrovetide? And why should I tolerate now what can never be lawful? Let a thief try to excuse himself to the judge: I have robbed and stolen, it is true; but it is now Shrovetide, and we can venture to infringe the law a little. Shrovetide, indeed, the judge would say; to prison with you, and keep Shrovetide there! Now, if men do not allow any difference to be made between this and other seasons of the year as far as unlawful things are concerned, how could the God of infinite justice and sanctity tolerate such a difference? "Jesus Christ," says the Apostle, "yesterday and today and the same forever." What he was yesterday, he is to-day; what he forbade yesterday under pain of hell, he forbids to-day under the same penalty, and will forbid it at all times.

II. A truly affectionate friend has no better opportunity of showing his love and fidelity than when his friend is in difficulties and wants consolation. "If thou wouldst get a friend, try him before thou takest him; for there is a friend for his own occasion, and he will not abide in the day of thy trouble" (Eccies. 6:7, 8). For there are friends who remain faithful for a time, that is, as long as things go well with their friend; but when the day of trial and calamity comes they turn the cold shoulder to him. A friend in need is a friend indeed. Amongst the dying injunctions that David gave to his son Solomon there was the following: "Show kindness to the sons of Berzellai the Gaiadite, and let them eat at thy table" (3 Kings 2:7); this is the last request I, thy father, make of thee, my son. Why? "For they met me," he says, "when I fled from the face of Absalom, thy brother." When my greatest friends abandoned me, they came to my assistance; when the greater part of my subjects revolted against me, they remained faithful and proved their fidelity to me in the time of need; therefore I now commend them to your favor and protection; let them eat at your table like your own children. So highly is true friendship and affection prized in time of difficulty and trial; while the friendship of words alone, that is shown merely in prosperity, is thought nothing of.

If what St. Paul writes to the Hebrews is true: "Crucifying to themselves again the Son of God, and making him a mockery," I say, if it is true that they who commit a mortal sin crucify anew their Saviour Jesus Christ,

and make him a mockery as far as they can, then it is quite certain that of all the seasons in the year the present is that in which Jesus Christ suffers most, and he would really feel it if, in his glory, he were capable of suffering—and that, too, from his own children, from those who are co-heirs to heaven with him. Are there not, in fact, many Christians who carefully avoid mortal sin during the rest of time year, but at this season, under the pretext of enjoying themselves, abandon the path of virtue, and offend the good God, who is worthy of all love, by the most shameful transgressions? Is not Christ again given over to the gentiles, since heathen practices are again indulged in? Is he not mocked in nightly assemblies, in dancing-houses and in impure plays? Is he not blindfolded by indecent masquerading, in which men appear disguised as women, and women as men? Is not our Lord scourged and crowned with thorns by deliberate drunkenness, by uncharitable and impure talk, and by indecent liberties? And finally, is he not nailed again to the Cross by the many sins which arise from dangerous company and nightly carousing? “And you, too, Brutus,” said the dying Julius Caesar, when he saw his dear friend Brutus amongst his assassins. Are you also one of my murderers? Must I, then, die by your hand? In the same way might Christ address you if he saw you taking part in the dissipations of this season? And you, my clear child, are you, too, among those who crucify me again?

You have doubtless heard the story of Jonas, the jester of the Roman Emperor, Ferdinand II. Jonas was always expected to make his appearance at the Emperor’s table; but during Shrovetide he was not to be seen. They sought for him for a long time, and at last found him in the church of St. Stephen at Vienna. Being brought before the Emperor and asked why he absented himself in such an unusual manner, he answered: during the whole year the Almighty God is busy giving audiences to great lords and to the common people, and we poor jesters can hardly have a chance of appearing before him; but in these days, when others make fools of themselves, we can afford to be wise and to do homage to God, who is readily present in the Blessed Sacrament, and who is now abandoned by the greater number of his friends. Truly, that was not a foolish answer, and the example of this jester might well be followed by all Christians who deserve the name; and since the majority of people lay their reason aside and abandon their God during this season, those who wish to remain faithful to him should redouble their zeal in his service. There is not much in being pious when every one is so; but to be pious and faithful to God in the midst of the wicked, as Tobias was in Ninive, Daniel in Babyhon, Joseph in the court of Pharaon, and Abraham among the Chaldeans, that is a certain sign of a real, sincere love of God.

Cry out with Mathathias: “Although all nations obey King Antiochus, so as to depart every man from the service of the law of his fathers, and consent to his commandments, I and my sons and my brethren will obey the law of our fathers. God be merciful unto us; it is not profitable for us to forsake the law and the justices of God. We will not hearken to the words of King Antiochus, neither will we sacrifice, and transgress the commandments of our law, to go another way” (1 Mach. 2:19-22). Let us resolve to serve faithfully God, who, even during Shrovetide, deserves to be constantly loved and praised by men above all things. Amen.

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