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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

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY

Confidence in the Divine Assistance in Unavoidable Dangers

“Many are called, but few chosen.” Matt. 20:16.

“Many are called” to the eternal possession of the kingdom of heaven; “but few are chosen” actually to possess it. And why? The fault does not lie with the Almighty God. He has called all men, without exception; all men, as far as he can, he has chosen for heaven. But we need not long consider to find out the cause. If we only look at the lives led by most people in the world, we must acknowledge that they are not chosen; for every day, they close the gate of heaven faster against themselves by their sins. And whence come those manifold sins? Not only from an inborn weakness and propensity to sin; but from the bad example of others, from dangerous associations, from a non-avoidance of the proximate occasions of sin. This is why, if many are called, so few are chosen. Alas! I seem to hear some men of good will sighing: Who then can be saved? Who can shun all the daily unavoidable occasions of sin? That such may not despair of being chosen for heaven, I say to them:

I. That if there are many necessary dangers and many unavoidable occasions of sin that daily beset us against our will;

II. God will not abandon him who trusts in him, and co-operates with his grace.

I. Ah, God help us, is the cry of many! We would willingly bear with everything, if we were not daily and hourly exposed to the danger of sin wherever we go! What else is married life, but an unceasing source of trouble and annoyance, of impatience, of cursing and swearing, of quarrelling and dissension? “My husband is bad-tempered and given to drink!” says one. “My wife is fond of idleness and an easy life,” cries another. “My children are disobedient,” claims a third. “The neighbors pry into everything, and put the worst construction on every act!” declares a fourth: “I cannot even trust my best friends at all times, for more than once they have deceived me!” How can one practice Christian patience and meekness under such circumstances? Who can be so well grounded in virtue, as not sometimes to sin by anger and impatience, by cursing and swearing? What else is my secret poverty and the hard work I must do, but a source of inordinate sadness, and almost of despair, as well as of the sins that arise from it? What is my office or employment, but a snare laid to entice me to

commit sins of injustice, unless I am very careful? I have to deal with all sorts and conditions of people, to hear all kinds of talk, to see dangerous objects continually! Who can be on his guard so as to keep his senses under control in such circumstances? Must he not now and then break out into unseemly language, or at least sin in thought and desire? In a word, wherever you turn, there are occasions of sinning in thought, word, and deed, and of losing your soul.

I acknowledge the truth of all this; but do you think you are the only one whose salvation is exposed to so many risks? By no means. There is no state so holy, no household so pure, as to exclude temptations. He who wishes to avoid them all, must leave this world altogether, as St. Paul says: "Otherwise you must needs go out of this world" (1 Cor. 5:10). Divine Providence allows temptations to assail men in every state of life, as a means of combat and victory; and they who wish to serve him zealously are even more exposed to such assaults than they who live in sin. "Let no one, then, be surprised, nor give utterance to a complaint that is common enough, if he finds that, after having done true penance and freed himself from the state of sin, and commenced to love God sincerely, he is more vigorously assailed by temptation than formerly; for that is an evident sign that he has escaped the snares of the devil, who is now attacking him more fiercely, in order to lead him again into sin. The more the devil sees that we oppose him, the more trouble does he take to overcome us; for he leaves alone those whom he knows he has peaceable possession of; but his attacks against us become more violent, when he sees that we have driven him out of our hearts, which he wishes to look on as his own property." And after a man by true penance has overcome the first temptation, God allows the combat to be renewed more vigorously after his conversion, that we may not be too sure of ourselves or look on ourselves as already holy, lest a deceitful security should cause our downfall after we have gained the victory.

Now, if God has placed you in a state in which you are more exposed to danger, if he has ordained that you should have greater difficulties to contend with, and have to use more violence than others to gain heaven, dare you, nay, can you complain of that, or ask why he has dealt with you so? He can offer you his heaven at whatever price pleases him; and if he required you to overcome a thousand times more difficulties in order to gain it, certainly heaven is worth striving for, even on those terms. Can he not give a penny to those who come at the last hour to work in his vineyard as well as to those who have borne the heat and burden of the day? Now, by an all-wise decree of his Providence, he has placed you in the state in which you are. He has arranged, too, all the circumstances of that state. He knows, and has known from all eternity, all the occasions, allurements, and temptations to sin that are to beset you, or that under any circumstances can come in your way. He knows your strength, too, and how much you can bear; and moreover, as St. Paul says, "He is a good and faithful God, who will not allow a heavier burden than you can bear to be placed on your shoulders, nor permit a temptation to assail you that you cannot overcome; nay, he will even make temptation profitable to you" (1Cor. 10:13). Besides all this, he is the almighty Lord, who will not allow you to fight alone, but will take the greater share of the work and trouble on himself, and will help you with his grace, so that, if you only will, you may easily overcome the temptation. The observance of the commandments of God is called by Christ our Saviour, who knew well the difficulties and dangers of every state, "a yoke," and in fact he calls it "My yoke," giving us thereby to understand that we are not alone in bearing the divine law, but that God, who helps us, bears it with us; and by his help, that which otherwise would be difficult becomes sweet. For the same reason, he calls the burden of the commandments, "My burden," because he shares it with us, so that it becomes easy and light.

II. Once more, I say that it is, and remains certain, that the good God has prepared powerful graces and helps for men to enable them to avoid sin in the dangers that are inseparable from their state, provided they work with his grace as they ought. The Holy Scripture gives us abundant proof of this in the conversation that God had with Moses on Mount Horeb. Moses was sent by God as ambassador to Pharaoh in Egypt, to persuade him, or, if necessary, to compel him to allow the Israelites to go out of slavery. "Come," said God, "and I will send thee to Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (Exod. 3:10). Learned and prudent; brave and courageous as Moses was, the thought of the dangers he would run in such a mission, made him shrink from undertaking it. Therefore, he humbly begged God to spare him and to send some one else, who was better fitted for such a task. "And Moses said to God: Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" (Ibid. 11) I am too weak for a task like that. In order to encourage him, God told him to throw on the ground the rod which he held in his hand, and it was immediately changed into a serpent. See, Moses, what you can do with such a weak

instrument! Are you still afraid on account of your weakness and incapacity? But Moses was not yet satisfied. "It is true," he thought, "I have worked a miracle; but it was done in the desert, where God is with me to help me!" To work miracles when there is no occasion for them, and when God is there to help, is one thing; but to work them when there is really necessity and danger, is another thing! He then put forward his want of eloquence: In order, then, said the Lord, that thou mayest lay aside all fear, and mayest look on thyself as safe even in the midst of danger, I tell thee, "Go therefore, and I will be in thy mouth; and I will teach thee what thou shalt speak" (Exod. 4:12). "Behold, I have appointed thee the God of Pharaoh" (Ibid. 7:1); thou shalt exercise over him, not a human, but a divine power. At last Moses was convinced. He went, and performed the duty entrusted to him with the greatest success. Peter was once out in his boat, fishing with his companions, when they saw Christ coming towards them on the water. "Lord, if it be thou," cried out Peter, "bid me come to thee upon the waters" (Matt. 54:28, 29). And Christ said to him: "Come!" and Peter, getting out of the boat, walked on the water as if it were dry land; but a storm arose and he got afraid: "But seeing the wind strong, he was afraid; and when he began to sink, he cried out; and immediately Jesus, stretching forth his hand took hold of him" (Ibid. 30:31). On another occasion, Peter heard John saying that their Master was on the shore, whereupon he "cast himself into the sea" (John 21:7) Mark the difference! On the first occasion, he walked on the water, but now he goes swimming to the land. But why so? If his love for Christ was so strong, his faith and confidence so great, why did he not walk on the waters on this, as on the former occasion? If he succeeded in doing so before, and that, too, in the midst of a storm, why should he not do it now, when the sea was calm? Ah! Yes, thought Peter: but the first time the Lord called me, and when I was in danger of sinking, he stretched forth his hand to save me. Now, he has not called me; it would be presumption for me to expect him to help me; hence I will swim to the shore. In the same way, if God's Providence has called you to the state, office, or occupation in which you are, if you have entered on it after due deliberation with God, and with a reasonable motive, oh, then be comforted and have courage! Even if a violent storm should trouble the waters, if many dangerous occasions and temptations should assail you in that state or employment, you will not sink under them. Only have confidence in the Almighty power of God. Call out to him often with Peter: "Lord, save me, or I perish!" and he will stretch out his hand and help you with his grace that you may pass safely through the danger without any injury to your soul.

Many, says St. Augustine, are neither conquered nor assailed, and yet they are sinners; for they fall into sin without inducement or temptation; sin does not offer itself to them, nor stretch out its hand to them, but they seek it themselves and go out to meet it, when they rush into the dangerous occasion. Is it wonderful, then, that in punishment of such presumption, God should withdraw his helping hand from those souls even in the dangers incidental to their state, and allow them to fall miserably into sin? A dissolute soldier, who had gone some distance away from his comrades, and was walking about in a field, saw a girl on a hill, herding sheep. He went up to her, but the innocent girl was afraid of him, and, as she was quite alone, and there was no one near to help her, she ran off at once and left the sheep behind her. The soldier drew his sword and pursued her, until she came to the top of a steep rock, and there was nothing left for her, then, but either to cast herself down and break her neck, or allow the soldier to work his wicked will on her. Either fate was hard. She reflected for a few moments as to what course she should follow, but the love of purity and the fear of offending God sank so deeply into her heart that she resolved to sacrifice her life rather than lose her virginal chastity. Abandoning herself to divine Providence, she cast herself from the rock, at the foot of which flowed a deep river. But see how God protects virtue even in extreme danger! Her guardian angel bore the maiden up, so that she came down gently on the bank of the river, quite unhurt. On another occasion, the same girl was on the rock with her sheep, when she thought to herself: "How easily I came down here the other day! I must try it again." And she actually leaped from the rock, but before reaching the ground, she broke her neck. She succeeded the first time, because necessity and love of holy purity compelled her to go into evident danger, and therefore she was helped by the hand of God. But the next time she was influenced only by curiosity and childish daring, and hence, lost her life. So it is also with us in the dangers of sin; when we go into them out of necessity and on account of the requirements of our state with a good end in view, we may well rely on the special help of grace, but not when we wantonly seek the danger.

“Help yourself, and God will help you,” says the proverb. Oh, how many fail in this respect! They toil and moil the whole week in the state, duty, trade, of employment, in which they know they have occasions enough of sin, and yet they hardly know what spiritual weapons are, or how they are to arm themselves against temptations. They seldom go to confession or Communion; they think it enough to receive those holy Sacraments once a year (And would that even then they received them properly!) They hear nothing good for a whole week at a time, seldom read spiritual books, hardly ever think of God during the day, rarely come to a sermon, which would encourage them to do good, deter them from evil, and remind them of the duties of their state. They practice no morning devotions, make no examen of conscience, and do not guard their senses during the day. Their whole occupation, nay, their whole hearts, are directed to temporal things. What wonder is it then, that, as such people forget God, they are forgotten by him in turn, so that, when the occasion presents itself, they fall into sin, and finally lose their souls?

We must arm ourselves in all our undertakings with the remembrance of God, and of his holy presence. Even in the midst of our work and of weighty occupations, we can do that, by a passing thought, or a so-called aspiration. For God must be excluded from the memory before the will can consent to sin. It is almost impossible for a good Christian, really desirous of saving his soul, to commit a mortal sin, so long as he retains a lively recollection of God’s presence. Another means is the frequent reception of the Holy Sacraments, for they are the channels by which divine grace flows into our souls. More especially, we should be careful to confess frequently to a learned and prudent confessor, not changing him without necessity. Nor should we omit the evening examen of conscience, in which we can discover the sins and faults committed during the day, repent of them, and make a resolution of amendment. A garden cannot run wild when one pulls up the weeds daily; and a bad habit cannot help but be gradually gotten rid of when the conscience is daily cleansed and purified. Hear the word of God in sermons as frequently and attentively as possible. Experience teaches that sermons fill the mind with good thoughts, and encourage and strengthen us to persevere in the divine service. This is as necessary for the well-educated as for the illiterate; for the end and object of preaching is not merely to instruct us in what we are ignorant of, but also, and especially, to move and incite us to do what we know to be advantageous for the salvation of our souls. Finally, we must be careful when we awaken from sleep, each day, to give the first fruits of the morning, to God, for to him alone belong the first fruits of all our undertakings. Generally speaking, the manner in which we spend the day depends on its beginning. They who begin it by zealously performing their morning devotions may notice that during the course of the day they feel a special impulse to good, as well as a consolation and spiritual joy in God during their work.

It would be well, too, after having made the good intention, to bring before one’s mind the occasions of sin that are apt to arise during the day; the places in which one has to go; the persons he has to deal with; the business he has to do; the troubles and annoyances he has to contend with; the faults and sins he generally commits; and then to fortify his mind and will by a firm resolution, saying to himself: I must be careful not to commit sin on this or that occasion; I must see that I meet with meekness and charity those who are apt to contradict me; that I bear this or that cross with patience for God’s sake, etc. I am prepared rather to die than offend God by sin this day. But if you break your good resolutions, for instance, if you get angry and curse, you must at once strike your breast, or say to yourself: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” and then, renew your good resolution. In order the better to carry it into effect, we must recommend it every day to God with child-like confidence in some such ways as these: Behold, O dear Lord, thou knowest the state in which I am, the dangers and occasions of sin that surround me; therefore thou must help me! Help me, then, since thou hast promised to do so! I will co-operate with thee as well as I can. Grant me to fulfill thy holy will in all things, and to persevere in thy love to the end. Amen.

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