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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 4 - THE CHRISTIAN'S STATE OF LIFE
SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY

The Happiness of the Religious Life

“Go you also into my vineyard.” Matt. 20:7.

The householder is God; the vineyard, the true Church; in which all men are called to labor during their lives, that when their task is done in the evening, that is, after their death, they may receive an eternal reward in heaven. Now, as we see in today's Gospel that the work is unequally divided, the first laborers having the longer and more difficult part to perform, the last the shorter and easier, so also God requires different services from men, according to the different states of life which he has appointed in his Church. He requires one thing from a Religious, another from a layman, another from a single man, another from a married man. Each one must work and serve God according to his state, in order receive a reward in heaven. All states are holy, and are means of gaining heaven. To whichever of these God calls you, go and work in the vineyard of the Lord according to your state. That you may know something of what you have to select, I shall give you a slight sketch of them, beginning to-day with the Religious state. I say:

In the Religious state, when one lives according to it, he finds a happiness, than which there is none greater on earth.

A real happiness awaits those who are called by God to the Religious state, and who live according to its rules. A happiness which blind worldlings, who measure everything by their senses, cannot appreciate. A happiness that is not derived from creatures, but from the Creator himself, and which resembles the great happiness of the Angels and Saints in heaven. In what does the happiness of the Blessed in heaven consist? It consists in three things:

I. In the eternal contemplation of God;

II. In the eternal love of God, and

III. In the eternal joy that comes from this contemplation and love.

I. With regard to the first thing, the constant intercourse with God, walking always in his presence, never leaving him out of the thoughts, that is an easy matter, nay, almost one of necessity, for every Religious. All that

is left outside the convent, and all that is found in it, helps and even compels the Religious to this with a kind of gentle violence. It is an unusual thing for a layman to think often of God during the day, for his attention is distracted by a thousand other thoughts, so that it is next to impossible for him to think deeply of God and heavenly things. If God sometimes speaks to him inwardly by inspiration, there comes a swarm of worldly and domestic cares about the children, the servants, clothing, food, and a host of troubles connected with his business, which, like a gloomy cloud, darken the light and take God away from his sight. But, tell me, of what could a Religious think, if not of God and heavenly things? He has by his vows renounced all worldly care; by chastity, all care for his body; by obedience, all care for his own will; by poverty, all care for money and wealth, so that he can neither lose nor gain by such things, nor can a thief break into his cell and rob him. It is nothing to him whether bread is cheap or dear, where the stuff for his habit is bought, and whether it costs much or little; what he eats or drinks, and a hundred other things of the kind are matters of imperfect indifference to him. What can and must he then occupy himself with? It is a difficult thing to think of many things at the same time, and to think of nothing at all is impossible for a human being who has the use of reason. Our minds must be always occupied with something, either with God and heavenly things, or with the world and temporal things, or with ourselves and our bodily wants. Now, a good Religious, who has made his profession, has no more business to think of the world, or of his own bodily wants, and so it follows as a matter of course, that he is compelled to think of God.

Again, almost everything that one sees and hears in the bustling world hinders communion with God; the eyes and ears should be kept constantly closed, if the thoughts are to be always turned to God. On the other hand, almost everything that one sees and hears in a well-ordered convent, helps to the recollection and remembrance of God; the eyes and ears should be kept constantly closed, if one does not wish to think at all of God. The religious habit, the general silence, the rules of the Order, the pious pictures that are hung up in all the rooms and corridors, the modesty, zeal, and good example of the brethren, or of the sisters, all these things raise the mind to God. All the duties that are performed according to the daily rule, are only so many occupations performed with God: in choir the praises of God are sung, God is visited in the Blessed Sacrament, he is read about in spiritual books, nay, even during meal times there is spiritual reading; there is constant intercourse with God by frequent confession and Communion, by hearing holy Mass, by the daily examen of conscience, and by the prayers that are to be said every day according to rule; all manual and other labor is done for God with a pure intention. I will not speak of the wonderful lights and inspirations that the good God, who never allows himself to be outdone in generosity, plentifully bestows on the soul which has given itself to him, and sacrificed for his sake all that the world can give. Again I say, happy and heavenly state, in which the soul is always united with God, and God with the soul!

II. Just as our understanding cannot but think of something during our waking moments, so our hearts cannot be without loving something; and as the understanding is always occupied with what the heart loves, so our hearts must most love that on which our thoughts turn oftenest. Do you wish to know what you love, then see what you think. Is that so? Then I have done enough to prove that the Religious state is that in which God is most loved, for I have shown that it is the state in which God is most thought of. I grant that one must love God, even in the world, in every state ordained by God; I acknowledge that there are many zealous servants and friends of God in the world, so that I am sometimes covered with confusion when I visit such people, especially the poor and afflicted, and see how resigned they are to the divine will, and how peacefully and contentedly they live in the Lord, amidst all their afflictions. But all must agree with me in one thing that the perfect, true, and constant love of God cannot be near so easy nor so general in a state of life in which the thoughts are seldom directed to God, because they are filled with worldly cares. How difficult, how rare, how almost impossible it is to love God always and God alone, where a hundred things assail the eyes, ears, and other senses daily to induce them to love something besides God; where a hundred occasions and dangers seduce one into loving things that are against God and his law! It would be a wonder to touch pitch and not be defiled; a wonder to have free intercourse with all creatures and not to have any love for them! In a word, experience shows that, if God is loved in the world, there are a thousand things loved besides God, or not for God's sake; the heart is divided, and, by a great injustice, the smallest and worst part of it is generally given to God.

The pure, undivided love of God, if it can be found anywhere on earth, must surely take up its dwelling in the soul of him who, living of his own accord and through love for God, in a poor cell, away from all dangers and occasions of sin, occupies himself with God alone. If he sometimes thinks of the world and its goods, he looks upon them as only things that he renounced in his profession forever, as things that he would now be prepared to renounce, if he had not done so already. Under such circumstances, can we believe that the Religious can love the world? How can he love anything but God alone? And since his holy resolution grows stronger every day, and he is determined never to change it, how can he ever cease to love God? Therefore, his is a pure and constant love; it is an imitation and forerunner of the love which the Angels and Saints in heaven have for God.

III. If the Religious thinks of God, what a consolation it is to have in him a dear Friend, a Saviour, a Father, a Spouse, and one who will repay every service rendered him! If he thinks of himself, what a consolation to find himself in the house of God, in the vestibule of heaven, amongst the servants of God! What a consolation to think: God has done me the honor, in preference to so many thousands, of selecting me as one of his privileged servants, to be constantly occupied with him, and to devote myself in a special manner to his service. What a consolation to think that God has freed me from the many cares and anxieties of the world, and from so many dangers and occasions of sin. He has placed me in a house in which I have so many companions to encourage me by their good example, to instruct me by their good advice, and to help me in the divine service by their prayers, so that I am almost compelled to save my soul; in a house in which Jesus Christ himself has fixed his dwelling, for he is present in the Most Holy Sacrament, and I can visit him as often as I will, whenever obedience allows; and, when I die, death can take nothing away from me, except the life that I have spent in the service of God, and that life will then be changed into a far better one. What a consolation to hear the testimony of one's own conscience assuring one that he may believe without presumption that he is serving God as God wishes; that all his works from morning till night, performed in obedience, are pleasing to God; that he is on the narrow path to heaven; that he loves God and is loved by God, and that it is no presumption for him to hope that he will enjoy God forever.

Finally, if the Religious thinks of the world, and of what takes place therein, what consolation it is for him to consider: the world may do as it likes; I have nothing to hope and nothing to fear from it. I can sit down peacefully, like a bird in its nest, and sing a joyful hymn to my Lord and my God, by whose fatherly hand I am fed, and allow him to dispose of me as he pleases. Oh, what greater happiness can there be?

Now, is there anything that can disturb the joy and peace of such a state? Perhaps the subjection and chastisement of the body, and the self-denial and mortification required by the Religious state. Alas, how far men go astray who think that! The very mortifications, the tears and sufferings of pious souls, are a thousand times sweeter than all the pleasures of worldly societies and banquets. These are what they seek, and their joy is to be able to suffer and to die with their suffering Spouse. Happy souls, who will one day have the grace of being called to this state, when that day comes, I would wish to say to you, in the words of the Archangel Raphael to Tobias' family, after he had declared to them that he was the guide who accompanied the younger Tobias on his journey: "Bless ye the God of heaven, give glory to him in the sight of all that live, because he hath shown his mercy to you" (Tob. 12:6). Ah, if you should have a longing for this state, do not repress it; look upon it as a scout sent out to see how your heart is toward God, and whether he can speak still further to it, without any fear of his voice being neglected. But, reflect on the matter seriously; for they alone who are called by God to that state, and who desire to live always according to its rules, enjoy the happiness that I have described. Once more I say to you, think well of the matter; first with God, by earnest, humble prayer; then with a pious confessor who knows your soul; and finally with your parents, who are not to be passed over. At least, all of you may learn from this that you are not to expect to find a paradise of happiness in the married state alone, as is generally the opinion among young people, who look upon the first feeling of love they experience as a vocation, and rush blindly into marriage, on the first favorable opportunity. Of course, such people pay little attention to the call of God. So that we may apply here the terrible words of today's Gospel: "Many are called, but few are chosen." Many are called by God to the Religious state, but few are chosen for it, because they think they will find some wonderful degree of happiness in some other state, and some fearful misery in the religious state, and so they reject the call of God.

God calls all men to true happiness and to their eternal salvation, though not in the same way. Meanwhile, whatever state we are in, our principal business is to know God, to love him, and to serve him. If your duties and occupations do not allow you to think of God constantly, at least do not forget him. Think of him often during the day by renewing your good intention, by which you offer up all your ordinary acts to his honor and glory. If you cannot have a constant, perfect love of God, at least love him so constantly as never to offend him by a deliberate mortal sin, for the sake of money, pleasure, or other creatures. If you do not feel that inward consolation and joy of the heart in God, give him at least the consolation of knowing that you will bear patiently, through love of him, your daily trials, difficulties, and cares. The more dangers threaten your soul in your state of life, the more careful must you be in avoiding occasions of evil, to which no evident necessity compels you. If your state of life fills you with many cares, let your greatest care be the business of your salvation, so that you may keep yourself and those under your care in the grace of God, and that you and they may attain eternal happiness. Think often: what good is everything in the world to me, if I do not go to heaven? Go, therefore, into the vineyard of the Lord; fulfill the duties of the state in which God has placed you, work till evening, when the steward of the vineyard will call the laborers, and pay them the penny of life everlasting. Amen.

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