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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

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY

The Great Grace of a Vocation to the Religious State

“To you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God.” Luke 8:10.

To you, who have left the little you had for my sake; to you, who still follow me, is given, in preference to others, something special, a special light, knowledge, grace, and hope of the kingdom of God. Thus said Christ to his Apostles. To you it is given, I can also say, in his name, to all of you who are called by God to the Religious state, and who obey the call. To you also a special grace is given to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God, and to have, even in this life, a foretaste of the happiness that awaits you in that kingdom. But you ask: Can we have heaven twice, here in this life and in eternity also? No, that cannot be. St. Paul says: “Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:21). All must travel by the rough and difficult way of the Cross in order to get there. But if, in the midst of these tribulations, crosses, and sufferings, God can give to the souls that love him such sweet consolation that heaven is opened to them, then I must say, yes, a Religious who lives according to his rule in a well-ordered convent has two heavens; one in this life, by the constant contemplation, love, and enjoyment of God; and another in eternity, which, according to the divine promises, must necessarily follow the first.

I. The vocation of the Religious state, when it is faithfully accepted, is a certain pledge, a sure sign of future happiness in the kingdom of God.

II. Parents, rejoice if that great happiness is given to your children.

III. Children, do not reject this grace, if God offers it to you.

I. The Religious vocation is a sign of salvation. For where, as a general rule, does one live with a purer heart and conscience, than in a Religious Order? It is a holy, pure and sublime state, in which one lives more purely, falls more rarely, repents more quickly, and advances more cautiously. To commit a deliberate mortal sin, what a terrible misfortune that would be for a soul devoted to God! The very thought of it makes one tremble.

The holy Fathers compare this state to martyrdom. He who dies as a martyr for the faith, or for some other virtue, is so certain of his salvation that it is not allowed to pray for him. Now, the Religious life is a martyrdom, and a far more difficult and daily martyrdom of body and soul, than to keep the faith and one's conscience pure.

Almost everything that the martyrs have to suffer, and almost everything that they have to console them, the Religious has to suffer and to enjoy. See, now, if that is the case. As far as the sufferings of the martyrs of Christ are concerned, they have four things to undergo: they are deprived of all their temporal wealth, they are dragged away from house and home and from all their friends, even the nearest and dearest, their bodies are tortured in various ways, and finally they are deprived of life. There you have a sketch of the seeming cruelty with which the love of God treats a Religious. In the first place, what is the vow of poverty but an innocent thief, who robs him at once of all his property and leaves him only enough to buy a small room, as his prison during life, and a grave after death? And not only does it take away everything from him that he really possessed, but it does what no other thief could do, and deprives him of everything that he could inherit, and leaves him no hope of ever possessing anything. Again, the Religious is driven out of house and home into poverty; he is torn away from all he loved on earth, from all who loved him in the world, from friends and acquaintances, from brothers and sisters, from father and mother, and that forever. If he is occasionally allowed to see them, he is then like St. Alexius, who lived concealed as a poor stranger, under the steps of his father's house; he can see his parents for a short time, but he has no longer a mere natural love of flesh and blood for them, for his love is now supernatural and directed to God alone. Again, to watch while others are sleeping, to fast and abstain when others are eating and drinking, to treat the body as an enemy, with the greatest severity, always to resist sensuality, to renounce all the comforts and delights of the flesh, to desire and seek for nothing but crosses and sufferings with his crucified Redeemer, is not that a protracted martyrdom, by which the body is tortured?

Finally, the principal and most necessary part of martyrdom is death. In the same way the principal and most necessary part of the Religious state is death. The Religious can truly say with St. Paul: "For we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. 4:6). And what is, in reality, the Religious profession of poverty, chastity, and obedience, if not a kind of death by which a man dies to all the wealth, honors, and joys of the world, and to himself and his own freedom, by which, too, he buries himself between the four walls of his cell, so as not to live henceforth for any creature, but for Jesus Christ, whom he has selected as his Spouse?

The Religious state is a more difficult martyrdom, for martyrs offer up their lives but once; they can suffer only one death. But a true Religious must offer up his life a thousand times to the same death; as long as it pleases God, he must live so as to die every day, and daily to offer himself as a holocaust. The martyrs in the midst of their torments could almost grasp their eternal crown, for the end of their sufferings was not far off. But in the austerities of the Religious life, the crown of eternal life is seen only at a distance; it must be striven for, and suffered for, and no one knows how long.

Christian sons and daughters, what think you of all this? What do your hearts say to you? Does it not seem as if I described the Religious state in such vivid colors with the intention of frightening you away from it, and depriving you of all inclination and courage for it, instead of urging and exhorting you to it? Oh, no! Such is not my intention; but I must tell you candidly what that state is in itself, so that each one who feels that he is called to it by God may know what he has to choose. Still, for one who is really determined to follow the call of God, I am not afraid that he will be in the least frightened.

Meanwhile, they who receive the grace of vocation experience that the Religious life, which has its share of the torments of the martyrs, has also its share of their unspeakable consolations and joys. We sometimes shudder with horror when we think of how terribly some of them were slowly tortured to death; but if we could have beheld them in their sufferings we should see them, like St. Ignatius, exciting the lions and wild beasts to attack them more fiercely; or with St. Lawrence, laughing on the glowing gridiron, as if they had lost all feeling. We should hear them say that they find it more difficult to bear the great consolation and inward joy they experience, than the torments inflicted on them.

In the same way, they who love the vain world, who are inexperienced in the path of virtue, and who have never found out how sweet the Lord is, have a fearful idea of the Religious life when they hear of its austerities. How great a mistake they make! Look at Religious themselves and ask them about it, and they will not be able to conceal their contentment, and their inward joy and peace. Nor do I wonder at it; that generous and merciful God, who can make the sufferings of the martyrs sweet to them, who even grants pleasures to sinners, his sworn enemies, can he not also fill with exquisite sweetness far surpassing worldly delights, the hearts of his dearest

children, who, through love of him, have left all the pleasures and joys of earth, and who care for nothing but to love him and to please him? Certainly, he can do so! The words of the psalmist are literally true: "Better is one day in thy courts, above thousands" (Ps. 83:11). Better and more pleasant is one day in thy house, oh, Lord, amongst the children devoted to thee, than a thousand years in the tumult and false happiness of the world!

Christian parents, for God's sake do not be troubled or disturbed, as is often the case, if one of your children, even the dearest, or the only one, is called by God to that high state. Rejoice, rather, that you can give and sacrifice your child to God, and thus insure his temporal and eternal happiness. Rejoice that you can place your child where he can best pray for his own salvation and yours. There was in Italy, in the year 1715, a nobleman, whose eldest son disclosed to him (as a good child ought), in several letters, the fact that God had called him to the Religious state. The nobleman sent an answer to his son, of which the following is a short extract: "My dear son: I did not determine to give my consent to your request at once, because I thought it necessary to prove your resolution, and to know what moved you to it. But now, since your letters prove it, I cast myself at the feet of Jesus Christ, and give my hearty consent to your request, and, in the name of God, I bestow on you my fatherly blessing. You have received a great and special grace from the divine mercy. I heartily rejoice that nothing in the world can become your master, and that you have so soon heard the divine inspirations that so lovingly call you to the Religious state. Oh, what a grace for you, that God selects you in preference to so many others for his service! Go on, then, my son! Do not allow any earthly thing to come between you and your God! It is my duty to remind you of this; it is yours to fulfill it. Rest in peace, my son. I resign you into the loving hands of your heavenly Father. Although the separation cost me many tears, yet I shed them on account of the unspeakable joy I feel in seeing that you are chosen by the Holy Ghost for such great happiness. Therefore, my son, take leave of me and all belonging to you for the last time. God bless you! 'Bless the Lord, live joyfully; and because thou hast heard the voice of thy God, all blessings shall come upon thee.'" Such was that father's answer which plainly proves that he was influenced, not by flesh and blood, or by the false maxims of the vain world, but by the Spirit of God. Christian parents, have you the same dispositions? Oh, if all fathers and mothers were thus well disposed toward God and the salvation of their children, how many sons and daughters would be called to that happy state by the voice of God?

III. But you children to whom that great grace is offered by an interior inspiration from God, rejoice in the Lord with all your hearts, and do not reject the proffered grace, or incur the danger of losing temporal as well as eternal happiness. Be careful, especially when you are deliberating about a state of life, not to make yourselves unworthy of such a grace by imitating the vanities of the world, by associating with persons of the opposite sex, or by consenting to grievous sin; and do not allow that grace to be taken away from you through want of opportunity to correspond with it; but prepare your hearts by the practice of virtue, and chiefly of Christian humility and modesty, that you may all the better hear and obey the call of God. You are bound to honor father and mother, and to show them the most humble love and obedience; that is true; but if your parents, knowing that you are called to the Religious life, and after you have declared your holy purpose to them, and when you have the opportunity of carrying it into effect, they not requiring your help for their support, if they, in any way, try to hinder you, then obedience to them would not be obedience to God, and with all childlike respect you must absolutely refuse to do what they ask of you. Remember how David acted when he went to fight the giant Goliath. How many reasons were brought forward to deter him from his purpose! One of his brothers accused him of putting forward this as a pretext for leaving home and gratifying his curiosity by seeing what was going on in the camp: "I know thy pride and the wickedness of thy heart that thou art come down to see the battle." When he presented himself to Saul and said: "I, thy servant, will go, and will fight against the Philistine," he was laughed at, for he appeared too young and weak:

"Thou art not able to withstand this Philistine, nor to fight against him, for thou art but a boy" (1 Kings 17:28, 32, 33), said Saul. Nevertheless David repeated: "I will go." And he went against the giant, with his staff in his hand, trusting in God, in whose name he attacked Goliath, slew him and returned victorious. Christian sons and daughters, in the same way your friends and acquaintances, your brothers and sisters, your fathers and mothers may perhaps try to keep you from entering Religion. They will say to you: You have no vocation, but only

curiosity to see what is going on in the convent. Sometimes they will express pity for your youth! What are you thinking of? You are only a child; you have not strength enough for such a life, etc. Sometimes they will try to frighten you with the difficulties and trials of the Religious life; but do not mind their empty talk, say boldly: I will go. God calls me, I will go. He who places the burden on my shoulders will also give me strength to bear it. My mind is made up to follow the call of God. Remember the words of our Lord in the Gospel: "If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).

Finally, you who, knowing the will of God, have really determined to enter Religion think and say with joy what Samuel said to the High Priest: "Thou hast called me, oh, Lord, behold me!" (1 Kings 3:6.) I know whereto and wherefore thou callest me to a state of humility, poverty, crosses, and mortification. But that is the very state that I willingly embrace, in order to become more like my poor, humble, crucified Redeemer. I desire no other reward but thee, oh, God; no other treasure but thee; no consolation or happiness but in thee alone! If the hundredfold reward promised in this life should fail, yet thy word cannot fail; therefore I desire nothing more than to possess thee, oh, God of my heart, in eternal life. Amen.

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