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Please read the following sermon! I suggest you print this sermon and often read it. It seems that if people actually believed the message of this sermon, far more people would LISTEN to many sermons. Many find time to converse with others, watch television, listen to music and talk shows, spend hours on the internet, and spend much time in recreation, leisure, and amusements. Are such things a sure sign of predestination to heaven? Never forget: "To hear the word of God in sermons with a good and very good heart is a sure sign of predestination to heaven."

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JMJ

U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love Thee, save souls

O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

*VOL. V THE CHRISTIAN'S LAST END*

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY

The Frequent Hearing of the Word of God

*"But that on the good ground are they who in a good and very good heart, hearing the word, keep it."* (Saint Luke 8:15)

Five times did the Lord on different occasions use the expression: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." But never before did He cry out, as the Gospel says of Him today. "Saying these things, He cried out: He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." What was He then speaking of? "The seed is the word of God." It is sowed so often from the pulpit, and yet it bears so little fruit. Some do not listen to it because they never come to a sermon; others listen, but the devil takes it out of their hearts, so that they do not believe; others believe for a time, but when temptation comes they fall away; in others, again, the word of God bears no fruit, because the multiplicity of worldly business and cares, and the riches and pleasures of life, distract them, so that the word of God is preached in vain to most men. It was this consideration that pressed that loud cry of complaint from the lips of our Lord. He was afterwards buffeted, scourged, crowned with thorns, and nailed to the cross; but He did not cry out, "but held His peace." Now, when there is question of hearing His word, He cries out. Therefore much, very much, must depend on that hearing. And truly such is the case. "Blessed are those who in a good and very good heart, hearing the word, keep it."

*To hear the word of God in sermons with a good and very good heart is a sure sign of predestination to heaven.*

What does it mean to hear the word in a good heart? It means to hear sermons willingly, with a zealous desire, with real earnestness, just as one who is hungry longs for the hour of dinner. Now this is not the case with those who seldom come to sermons, or if it happens to suit them to come once, stay away two, three, or four times without urgent necessity; nor with those whom wind, or rain, or heat, or cold, or the desire of sleeping longer can keep at home. All these show clearly they have no appetite or hunger for the food of the soul. A hungry man will not come too late to meals if he is warned in time. A hungry man will not go away from the table after he

has taken a few mouthfuls of soup. Still less does a hungry man remain away from table altogether, if his place is marked for him.

What, then, does it mean to hear the word of God in a very good heart? It means to come constantly to sermons, with a very good intention; to pay attention to what is said, with a genuine desire to draw some spiritual profit from it, and after the sermon to do one's best to put into practice what one has heard. Oh, here I might well cry out with our Lord: "Many are called, but few chosen!" Many are called on every Sunday by the sound of the bell to hear the word of God; and sometimes many come, but there are few who hear the word in a good and very good heart.

They who hear the word of God in sermons with a good and very good heart have a certain mark, or predestination that they shall one day see God in heaven, and love Him in eternal joys. The holy Fathers and spiritual authors are unanimous on this point. For the sake of brevity I will quote only a few of them. "To have a good appetite," says St. John Chrysostom, "is a sign of good bodily health; so, too, it is a sure sign of a future eternal life when one is eager and desirous of hearing instructions and exhortations." St. Augustine says: "He who willingly hears the word of God need not doubt that he has received a document from his heavenly country assuring him of the possession of it." Again: **"There is no surer sign of predestination than to hear the word of God willingly."**

This doctrine is founded on the infallible testimony of Eternal Truth. Could our Lord speak more clearly of it than He has done? "He that is of God heareth the words of God" (St. John 8:47). He compares His elect to sheep whom the Angels shall separate from the goats on the last day and place on the right hand. Now, who are the true sheep of Christ? Let Him tell us, for He knows best: "My sheep hear my voice." Do you wish to know who they are? Then see whether they hear my voice willingly; from that you will know whether they belong to Me or not. "I give them life everlasting: and they shall not perish forever, and no man shall pluck them out of My hand." When the woman lifted up her voice to the Lord, saying: "Blessed is the womb that bore thee," "Yea, rather," replied He at once, "blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it."

**There is no more powerful means of bringing men to eternal salvation than to hear the word of God in sermons.** In two ways does the hearing of sermons work the salvation of souls: in the root and in the sign. In the sign, because it is a sign that heaven shall be their dwelling. Every man is willing to speak of his fatherland; he who is a native of Ireland, although he may live thousands of miles away from it, will talk of its glories with every mark of inward and outward pleasure. In the same way, one can see from what you hear with eagerness and pleasure what countryman you are; what is your fatherland; whether you are lovers of God or not; whether you belong to heaven or not. "He that is of God, heareth the words of God." When I see one who is constant and eager in hearing the word of God explained in sermons, although I cannot see his heart, yet I unhesitatingly come to the conclusion that he is a pious soul and must have a good will; for fervor and eagerness in hearing divine things is a sure sign that a man loves God, and that heaven is his fatherland, since he is so pleased to hear it spoken of. And if I am deceived in my opinion, that man must have been able to disguise his feelings in a most remarkable way.

Again, the hearing of sermons works the salvation of the soul "in the root." That is, just as the root brings to the tree and all its branches the sap which makes it grow, so souls receive in the hearing of sermons the spiritual nourishment whereby they are strengthened against temptations, maintained in good, and further impelled to produce worthy and copious fruits of salvation. For in what does preaching consist? Let that wonderful preacher, St. Francis of Sales, tell us, who by this means converted countless sinners to true penance, and brought seventy-two thousand heretics to the true faith. Preaching, he says, is the revelation and explanation of the will of God in regard to men, drawn from the divine word to instruct and exhort men to serve the divine majesty in this life, that they may be happy in the next. This is the two-edged sword, as St. Paul says, which can pierce the heart of the most obdurate sinner, if he only wishes to hear it, and impel him to surrender at last to God by true repentance: "The word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword, and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit" (Hebrews 4:12). The prophet David calls it a bright light, which shines in the darkness, so that we may not fall amid the dangers that surround us, or wander away from the true path to heaven. "Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths" (Ps. 118:105). Our dear Lord calls it sometimes a seed: "The seed is the word of God;" sometimes a net. The word of God is a

shield, by which Christians who hear it well and properly defend and protect themselves against the enemies of their souls. It is a fertilizing rain, that moistens and bedews the heart, so that it may not grow dry in the love of God. It is the bread of the strong, the milk of the weak. Hence there have been at all times so many wonderful conversions of sinners, so much progress in others to a high degree of sanctity, who otherwise would hardly have thought of their salvation or perfection, if they had not by chance or the effect of some inward inspiration from God come to hear a sermon. I appeal to all who are accustomed to frequent sermons to testify to the truth of this. Do they not always feel some good movement in the heart, which urges them to avoid this or that vice, to practice this or that virtue, a movement that they would not have felt so keenly otherwise, that they would perhaps never have thought of had they remained away from the sermon? Nor can it be otherwise; no matter what is the subject treated of, a soul desirous of salvation can always find some good thought in it, and God is forced by His own promise to give on such occasions a grace that is bound to work good in the hearts of the hearers. With reason has a certain author left us these remarkable words in his writings: I have, he says, for more than fifty years looked for three sorts of men in the world, and never found them, nor even heard of them; an industrious man in want of bread, a sober man whose life was shortened, and a diligent hearer of the word of God who did not lead a good and Christian life. Sooner will you see a miracle than see a man who comes regularly to sermons with a good will live wickedly or be addicted to great vices. We cannot doubt the words of St. Augustine: **“There is no greater mark of predestination than to hear willingly the word of God.”** What am I now to think or say of him who for a whole year seldom or never, or only by chance, hears a sermon; either because he does not like it and has no relish for the word of God, or because he despises it and imagines he is learned and clever enough, and so has no need of being instructed, or through a most mistaken idea that he can live piously and gain heaven without hearing sermons, or through laziness and sloth, which makes him unwilling to mortify himself so far as to sacrifice an hour’s sleep for God’s sake, one hour on Sundays for the good of his soul, or through fear lest the truth should be told to him, and his way of life found fault with? What am I to think of him? I must only leave him to God, who will judge us. If Saints Chrysostom, Bernard, Augustine, Gregory, speak the truth, he is in a bad way. Oh, it is a bad sign and the beginning of rebellion against God to have no desire to hear His word, “which a soul that loves God always hungers for.” No wisdom or learning is so great as not to stand in need of the enlightenment and impulse of the Holy Ghost, who, generally speaking, has in the present dispensation of His Providence attached the granting of His light to the hearing of His word for those who have the opportunity of hearing it. Ordinarily speaking, they who imagine they are not in need of sermons are more in want of them than others, as those sick persons are in a more dangerous state who think they are well. It is not easy to be pious and remain so when one neglects the opportunities of hearing the word of God. A clock, no matter how well it is made, will soon stop and strike no more if it is not wound up. A man, no matter how pious he is, since his corrupt nature is always inclined to evil, will soon decrease in piety, or, at all events, not lead the life that God desires, unless he is at certain times encouraged to good. If they whose hearts are sunk in and attached to earthly things can derive little profit even from sermons, because, as our Lord says in today’s Gospel, the seed is choked by thorns, that is, by the cares, riches, and pleasures of life, how will it be with him who, occupied the whole week with temporal things, never comes to hear anything good about heavenly and eternal riches?

The terrible words of our Lord are well known. After having said, “He that is of God heareth the words of God,” He turned to the Scribes and Pharisees and said to them: “Therefore you hear them not, because you are not of God.” Alas, what a terrible sentence! But, after all, are they not as badly off who never come to sermons? One thing I should like to whisper in the ears of such people, namely, the prayer of the Church: Dear souls! Souls purchased at such a high price! Souls created for heaven alone! “Let us so pass through temporal goods as not to lose eternal riches!” If you are busied the whole week with temporal concerns, at least give to your souls one hour of rest and refreshment; if you seek so eagerly the comfort of the body, at least grant your souls their necessary nourishment. “What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul” (St. Matthew 26:26). Amen.

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