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Just a reminder that Ash Wednesday begins the 40 days of Fasting during the Holy Season of Lent. Ash Wednesday is also a day of complete abstinence.

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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 + + +

*VOL. I = THE BAD CHRISTIAN*

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY

Many, During Shrovetide, Prefer to Follow the Devil Rather Than Christ

*“Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all this shall be accomplished which were written by the Prophets concerning the Son of Man.” St. Luke 8:31*

How do these two things harmonize, the Gospel of today and the present season? The change in the ceremonies of the Church and the change in the manners of the world during these days? Jesus goes up to Jerusalem, and speaks of nothing but the bitter torments and death that await him, but the perverse world speaks of nothing but the amusements of Shrovetide. A fortnight ago the Catholic Church showed her grief by suspending the recitation of the joyful Te Deum and the Alleluia; but the world now, more than ever, indulges in dissipation and revelry. How do these things harmonize? Does not the Holy Ghost say: “A tale out of time is like music in mourning”? (Ecchus. 22:6.) Singing and music on one side silence and weeping on the other; there is surely little harmony there. Not without reason does the Catholic Church in her sorrowful silence, and omitting the usual signs of joy, appoint for this day the Gospel that I have read for you; for her object is, partly to show the sorrow that afflicts her motherly heart at seeing so many of her children following the customs of the vain world, nay, the abuses of the godless heathens, and thus taking sides with the devil during these days, and partly to exhort and encourage her faithful children to remain true to their crucified Redeemer during these days by living in a pious and holy manner.

During these days, especially, each one has to choose between following the devil with the children of the world, and following Jesus Christ with the children of God.

Represent Lucifer to yourselves as sitting on a high throne in a large plain near Babylon, with a terrible countenance and eyes darting fire, and surrounded by smoke and flames and great numbers of devils and human beings, holding in his hands a standard, on which are painted the vain pomps of the world, the lusts of the flesh, the greed of riches and the pride of life. And represent Jesus Christ to yourselves as standing modestly and humbly on the ground, in a large plain near Jerusalem, with a mild and friendly countenance, holding the standard of the Cross and accompanied by his Angels, Apostles and those who work for the salvation of souls. Lucifer is near Babylon, a word which signifies confusion; Jesus Christ is near Jerusalem, the city of peace and

rest; thus showing how the wicked, who take sides with the devil, are full of uneasiness and trouble, while the just, who follow the example of Christ, enjoy eternal peace and consolation. Lucifer appears with a terrible, Christ with a friendly countenance, in order to distinguish between the cruel slavery of the devil and the sweet yoke of Christ. Lucifer sits on a lofty throne as a sign of pride; Jesus stands on the ground as a sign of humility.

Both invite men to follow them. "Come to me, all you that labor and are heavy-laden," says Christ in winning accents, "and I will refresh you. Take up my yoke upon you and learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart; and you shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is sweet and my burden light" (Matt. 11:28-30). Go, my Apostles and servants, throughout the world; try to win over souls to my side; persuade them to enlist under my standard, to obey my law, and to imitate me; preach to them contempt of the world and of all temporal and perishable things. The daily pay that I will give in this life to those who serve me truly will be eternal joys with me in the kingdom of heaven. Go, ye devils, cries out Lucifer in a terrible voice, go through the world and compel souls to enter my service, to enroll themselves under my banner; leave them neither rest nor peace by day or night until they yield to you; attack them by your evil suggestions and temptations; make use of wicked men to help you to corrupt and lead the innocent into sin by their bad teaching and example; inspire them with the love of worldly honors, of money and riches and of sensual pleasures; promise them, in my name, if they serve me truly, a comfortable, luxurious, pleasant and happy life. Oh, the madness and folly of most men in allowing themselves to be deceived by the devil and to be led astray by him, for the sake of an imaginary breath of honor, a worthless piece of money, or a brutish passion, so that they crowd after him and are hurried into hell; while only a very small number prefer to enlist under the standard of Jesus Christ, and to take on themselves his sweet yoke.

But at no period is this deplorable folly more evident than during the present season of Shrovetide. At other times we might compare the devil to a dog, tied up with a strong chain, who can bark, but cannot bite any, unless those who, of their own accord, approach too near him. But in these days it seems as if he had broken his chain, and is running raging through the world, attacking every one, without distinction of age, sex, or condition, so that he drags away from the side of Jesus Christ, and over to his own, by sin, many who were before pious, innocent souls, who loved God with all their hearts. Is it not so? Do not many live during these days as if they knew neither God, nor heaven, nor hell, nor Christ crucified, nor Gospel law? As if there was full and free permission for them to commit what sins they please? Thousands of souls run, without being asked, to enlist themselves under the standard of the devil; the gain is all on the side of the devil, who betrays souls to destruction. Jesus Christ, exposed on the altar under sacramental veils, cries out to his children: "Come to me, all of you, and I will refresh you;" remain with me, keep the faith you so solemnly swore to me in Baptism, and I will reward you eternally! But in vain; the loss is all on the side of Christ, who gives life. Most people refuse to listen to him during these days; many who have laid aside the burden of their sins in the Sacrament of Penance during the morning, and entered into a fresh compact with their God and Saviour by receiving him in the Holy Communion, banish him again from their hearts during the afternoon with the greatest ingratitude, by going into dangerous company and into the occasion of sin, and thus burden their consciences anew with sins which they will have to repent of again and to confess during Lent.

And what are you now going to do? "If it seems evil to you to serve the Lord," I say to you in the words in which the heroic Josue addressed the Israelites just before his death, when he was exhorting them to persevere in the service of the true God, "If it seem evil to serve the Lord, you have your choice; choose this day that which pleaseth you, whom you would rather serve, whether the gods which your fathers served in Mesopotamia, or the gods of the Amorrhites, in whose land you dwell;" you can do as you please, but you must know that, "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josue 24:15). In the same way, Christians, I say to you, "you have your choice;" take whichever side you please; make up your minds as to whether you will join the rabble who are following the devil, and serve the false gods of the vain worldlings among whom you are living; or whether, with your holy ancestors, who so bravely shed their blood for Jesus Christ, you will remain faithful to the true God. But consider first which of the two has the greater claim on your love and service. You are quite free; make what choice you please.

Christians, can one of you hesitate for a moment as to which side he should join, Christ's or the devil's? Your God who has given you all that you have or that wicked spirit from whom you cannot expect anything that is good? Your God who through excess of love, gave up his life for you, to save you from eternal death, or the

devil, who, if God allowed him, would at once hurry you into hell as a reward for having served him? Your God, who gives himself to you as your food and drink, that you may have eternal life, or the devil, who tries to give you a poison that will cause your eternal death? Your God in whose service you now enjoy the sweetest repose, the greatest interior consolation and comfort, the cruel demon, in whose slavery your wretched conscience will be unceasingly tortured and afflicted? Your God who has promised you the eternal joys of heaven as a recompense, or the devil, who is already fanning the flames of hell, that he may torture you therein for serving him faithfully? Think well before you decide!

Vain children of the world, I say with Josue, do as you please; “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,” and serve him alone. I am sure that you, too, will make the same determined answer that the Israelites made to Josue: and the people answered and said, God forbid we should leave the Lord, and serve strange gods. The Lord, our God, he brought us and our fathers out of the hand of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; and did very great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the ways by which we journeyed. Therefore we will serve the Lord, for he is our God” (Josue 24:16, 18). My dear Christians, I am afraid that the servants of the world and the wicked followers of Satan, in whose company you will perhaps be during these dangerous days, may lead some of you astray by their seductive and bad example, so that you will become like themselves and abandon the way of the children of God. Will you do so? No, cried out the people of Israel unanimously to Josue; “No, it shall not be as thou sayest, but we will serve the Lord.” So, too, must you think and say. No, what you are afraid of will never come to pass; we will serve the Lord our God, and remain faithful to the standard of Jesus Christ.

During the rest of the year every good Catholic at least knows that the first and chief command must be exactly observed: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart,” and with all thy strength and above all things; that the exhortation of St. Peter must be observed: “Be sober and watch; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist ye strong in faith” (1 Pet. 5:8, 9); that the exhortation of St. John must be exactly fulfilled: “Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world” (1 John 2:15), much less the abuses introduced by the world; that the law of Christ must be obeyed to the letter: “If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee” (Matt. 5:6); if it is an occasion of sin to thee, away with it at once; for it is expedient for thee to go into heaven with one eye, rather than to go to hell with two eyes. Then good Catholics can keep their feast-days by a true service of God. Oh, let me say it again, what a joyful sight that is for God and his Angels!

But it is Shrovetide, say the vain children of the world and the partisans of the devil. And what then? Oh, one must enjoy one’s self! And so you can enjoy yourselves, but in a manner befitting Christians and children of God; that is, you can rejoice in the Lord, as St. Paul says: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice. Let your modesty be known to all men” (Philip 4:5, 6). But is it rejoicing in the Lord and acting as becomes the children of God to go into places and company in which Christian modesty and humility, as well as the purity of the heart, if not of the body, are exposed to certain danger? And here I allude not only to those nightly meetings in dance-houses, but also to all assemblages in which persons of both sexes spend the night amusing themselves. Is it rejoicing in the Lord like children of God to mask and disguise one’s self in such a way as to provoke the Almighty to disgust? Is it rejoicing in the Lord like children of God to rob one’s self deliberately of reason by excessive drinking, and, as is the custom in these days, to indulge in all sorts of immodest buffooneries and liberties?

Therefore, it still remains true that if you wish to act as true Christians and children of God, you will have nothing to do with such pleasures. You may enjoy yourself, but “in the Lord.” Others may act as they please; you must remain true to your God. The whole world may side with the devil; you must never desert the standard of Jesus Christ, even during Shrovetide. The soldier is always bound to perform his military duties; there is no Shrovetide in which it is lawful for him to desert his post, or to rebel against his officer; if he is caught in the act of committing any such transgressions even during Shrovetide he is punished at once. The civil and criminal laws are always binding on subjects, and no Shrovetide can excuse from punishment those who are guilty of robbery, murder, coining false money, and rebelling against their lawful sovereign. And therefore no thief dares to steal openly; if he were to do so, the fact of its being Shrovetide would not excuse him from being brought before the judge. The law of holy matrimony is always to be strictly observed, and no husband or wife is allowed during Shrovetide to be guilty of conjugal infidelity. Now the Christian law is a military law; you are a soldier who in holy Baptism has publicly sworn fidelity to the standard of Jesus Christ, and thus you have

renounced forever the devil, the world and the flesh. The Christian law is a just one; you are a subject and owe homage to God as your only sovereign Lord, and to him you have promised obedience. The Christian law is one of spiritual matrimony; your soul is the bride, God the Holy Ghost is the bridegroom, and to him you have promised perpetual love and fidelity. Did you perhaps, as a soldier, when promising to be true to the standard of Christ, make an exception in favor of Shrovetide, as a time during which you could with impunity rebel against him? When you were espoused to the Holy Ghost by sanctifying grace, did you look on Shrovetide as a time during which you might commit spiritual adultery with the devil? No; every agreement you made is for all time; all these laws are binding on you forever.

Far be it from you to desert the Lord, even during these days of Shrovetide, and to serve strange gods. If you see people running off in crowds to join the side of the devil, think of the exhortation that Jeremias gave the Jews, when he forewarned them that they should dwell among the Babylonians, and should see people adoring gods of gold, silver, and stone: “Beware, therefore, that you imitate not the doings of others. But when you see the multitude behind and before adoring them, say you in your hearts: Thou oughtest to be adored, oh, Lord” (Bar. 6:4, 5), Remember the fidelity you owe the standard of Jesus Christ, and act as Catulus the Roman general did in former times. Catulus was once engaged in a battle when the tide of success seemed turned against him, and he was on the point of being deserted by his soldiers, when he suddenly seized the standard, held it up on high, and cried out in a loud voice: “See what you are fighting under;” remember the oath you have sworn under this standard. These few words reanimated the drooping courage of his soldiers, so that they returned boldly to the attack, and fought with the greatest bravery, until they put the enemy to flight. If during these days you find it hard to pray while others are dancing and amusing themselves, hard to appear at the Table of the Lord while others are indulging in gluttony and drunkenness, hard to remain in solitude at home while others are enjoying themselves with heathenish pleasures; or if you perhaps go into company which is dangerous to Christian modesty and purity, at once take courage and ask yourself, under whom am I fighting? And answer: “I have sworn an oath of fidelity to Christ; how, then, can I desert to the army of the devil?” Amen.

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